

Polish (Post)Transitional Cinema: 1989-2004

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*Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy*

May 2005

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Summary

In 1989 the Polish People's Republic collapsed. The next 15 years were marked by social, cultural, political and economic shifts. These shifts were paralleled by changes in Polish filmmaking, which attracted little international attention in that period. Examining filmic developments during significant political, economic, social and cultural transitions offers an opportunity to trace the ways in which a cinema industry and filmic texts react and represent such transitions in a particular national context. Following from that assumption, this dissertation surveys the most potent transitional shifts and changes in collective identity as represented in Polish cinema.

The sample of films under discussion is limited to productions with significant box-office success (400 thousand to 7.2 million viewers) or films that provoked sharp critical debate in Poland. Patterns of transitional continuities and discontinuities are examined in films about the mythical Polish past, the People's Republic (PRL), films focused on the realities of transitions, and film comedies. In the historical period examined in this dissertation (1989-2004), transformations of cultural and collective identification are evident in filmic representations of nationhood, masculinity and femininity, especially in relation to the (pre-transitional) ethos of Polishness, which has its roots in Polish Romanticism and its symbols, myths and narratives.

The survey of Polish film texts and industry indicates that the period between 1989 and 2004 encompasses three stages. After the chaos of industrial destruction and cultural distraction of the first stage (1989-1994), there came a period of more conscious separation from some pre-1989 socio-cultural paradigms and more critical evaluation of the first years of Western-style democracy and capitalism (1994-1999). The third stage involved a re-examination and re-assertion of Polish collective and individual identities (1999-2004).

Submission declaration

This is to certify that
the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps,
bibliographies and appendices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my relentless supervisors Dr Noel King and Dr Catherine Simpson for their direction, expertise and encouragement, Dr Kathryn Millard and the Department of Media for their ongoing support, and Dr Elżbieta Ostrowska for her incredible generosity in commenting on the earlier drafts of this dissertation.

I am grateful to Andrzej Wajda, Jan Jakub Kolski, Jerzy Domaradzki, Jerzy Stuhr, Gosia Dobrowolska, Tadeusz Sobolewski, Mateusz Werner, Lew Rywin, Jacek Fuksiewicz, Professor Małgorzata Hendrykowska and Professor Mirosław Przyłipiak for taking time to talk to me about Polish cinema.

I thank Laura Fragiacomio and Tamara Plakalo for their proofing help and continuous support, and my other friends (Kamilcia, Elwirka, Dominiczka, Val, Bartek, Simon, Grażka and Asia) for cheering me on unceasingly. My gratitude also goes to my Mum and Pan Zygmunt for their help with locating difficult to find Polish films and befriending an incredibly helpful librarian in the Public Library in Głogów.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank Misiu for providing welcome distractions, and especially warmly my partner, Jasiu Bernard, for all his love, patience, being himself and reminding me that there is life beyond the thesis.

A note on translations

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Polish language material are my own.



Preamble or redesigning Poland: 1989-2004

The following dissertation is motivated by two factors. One is the scarcity of work that analyses overall developments in Polish cinema during and after the period of political and economic transitions initiated in 1989. Another is the belief that tracing these developments should constitute a valuable record of the ways in which cinema and its particular products reflect such transitions. Polish cinema, like any other, does not exist in a vacuum. It has its base in social, cultural, political and economic structures. Its shape and products are also reflective of these structures. The argument that underpins my treatment of Polish cinema between 1989 and 2004 is defined by the social and cultural changes of the period, which are intertwined with changes of a political and economic nature. At the same time, it is the Polish cinema that is the focus of this work, rather than the plethora of Polish transformations. Thus, in order to stay within boundaries of this dissertation, and also to equip the reader with the transitional basics helpful in navigating

the complexities of filmic and cultural trends, this preamble lays the contextual foundations for what follows. Its aim is to offer a basic outline of the transformations, and to do so from the perspective that motivated my research pursuits.

The first fifteen years of democracy and newly found capitalism after 1989 changed significantly Poland's political and economic landscapes. Less remarkable on the international media scene, marked with cultural self-validation and fashionable topicalities, is that the internationally applauded democratisation and capitalisation were accompanied by a myriad of social and cultural shifts, which redesigned Poland's appearance and that of its social and cultural structures. The general principle of these shifts is similar to that of the other Eastern European states in transition. It involves the initial reformative chaos and dismantling of old structures, desperate but also enthusiastic attempts "to catch up to the West," often realised in rampant consumerism, and then painfully slow systemic consolidation and stabilisation, which goes hand in hand with the reassertion of collective identities defined in relation to Western structures and cultures, internationalisation and post-nationalism, as well as various (national) pasts.

As a Polish émigré to Australia, since 1993 I have been observing these changes from afar as well as during my annual visits to Poland. From that perspective, their staggering pace seemed to be even more exhilarating in their initial phase. On the ground level, they were visible in the evolving landscape of the streets in my hometown, Głogów, an industrial town in southwest Poland, and in Warsaw and other larger cities I visited. Freshly painted facades of commercial and residential buildings, the first Western supermarkets, the first ATMs, new television channels beyond the two available before 1989, and the absence of queues, were all signs of the new times. Changing attitudes to these transformations manifested in changing topics of conversation among my family and friends. At first, almost

univocally they embraced the transformations. Then, around 1995-1997 a schism in their attitudes to the new Polish reality became apparent. Some continued on the path to commercial and financial success, while others became increasingly disillusioned with what the new Poland had to offer them, and their lack of access to the easy life-style which only a few years back seemed a certainty.

One other way of placing myself within the political and cultural history covered by this dissertation would be to say that I spent the first 19 years of my life in the People's Republic under the leadership of Edward Gierek (1970-1980) and Wojciech Jaruzelski (1981-1990). At the time of the political shifts of 1989, I was in London working in a restaurant, learning English and being blissfully unaware of the significance of these changes. Before I emigrated to Australia in December 1993, I spent four years in and out of Poland and Australia, periodically soaking in the early achievements and failures of Polish capitalism and democracy.

A 2000 survey by the Central Bureau of Public Opinion Research (CBOP) reflects that schism. In it, 42 per cent of respondents nominated full shelves in the shops and no queues as the positive changes since 1989, while 59 per cent expressed their dissatisfaction with the growing rate of unemployment. The other sources of disappointment included increasing crime rates, general poverty, and low wages. Freedom of speech and of international movement, as well as economic and political freedoms were nominated as the best aspects of the new system.¹ In 1990, the official unemployment rate was approaching 5 per cent. In 1995, it increased to around 15 per cent, where it stabilised for about five years, to culminate in around 20 per cent between

¹ Zdzisław Pietrasiuk, "Odkurzony Peerel," *Polityka* 30, 22 July 2000, 9.

2002-2004.² What the year of 1989 brought to Poles, however, was hope fuelled by a political change of an unanticipated magnitude.

As a result of an unexpectedly overwhelming electoral victory in 1989, Poland gained its first non-communist Premier since World War II. The ease of the victory by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a main figure of the opposition, an activist of the semi-legal workers' union, Solidarity, came to the Poles as a surprise. The unpopularity of the old regime was apparently underestimated. The structure of the next year's first free presidential election worked to the advantage of a Solidarity negotiator and leader, Lech Wałęsa. In another unexpected political development, an unknown Canadian-Peruvian émigré, Stanisław Tymiński single-handedly destabilised what would have been a race between moderate Mazowiecki and revisionist and ostensibly Catholic Wałęsa. Preying on the electorate's hunger for the material benefits of capitalism, Tymiński rose on false promises of commercialised bliss to the second two-candidate stage of the elections. Instead of choosing between Wałęsa and Mazowiecki, Poles had no real choice. Wałęsa was the only option. That development could be seen as a factor in another surprising outcome of the next presidential election, when ex-Communist Aleksander Kwaśniewski was elected the President of the Third Polish Republic in 1995. The Polish peoples' gratitude to Wałęsa, once an inspirational if not revolutionary leader of Solidarity, had worn thin. At that stage, his linguistic and diplomatic aptitude inspired another type of gratitude; that his patois, which was documented in copious volumes of humorous publications, was not easily translatable into foreign languages. More significant in the political about-turn of 1995, however, was that Poles grew tired of the magnitude of the first phase of economic transformations.

² Data from Central Statistical Office of the Polish Government [Główny Urząd Statystyczny], *Information by Category*, 23 February 2005, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.stat.gov.pl/english>>.

The first years of economic and market reforms initiated in 1989 by Leszek Balcerowicz resulted in hyper-inflation, hyper-recession, with the budget deficit increasing 16-fold and retail prices rising by 244 percent in 1989 alone.³ These reforms also led to the opening up of the Polish market place to Western products and services, as well as a rapid privatisation of state assets, which involved laying off workers, and the adopting of entrepreneurial drives that frequently crossed legal boundaries. The rhetoric of these “shock-therapy” reforms borrowed from the communist “two-stage approach” that argued the interim period of economic hardship to be a necessary stage in the transition to an economically (or, in communism, ideologically) superior state of collective well-being.⁴ Yet, as with the ideal of communism, as time progressed the expected abundance for all seemed to become a more and more illusive (and elusive) goal. Instead, Poles experienced a rapidly growing disparity between the rich and the poor as well as experiencing increasing crime rates. Various mafia connections with the world of Polish politics started to shape political gossip in all strata of Polish society, and execution-style killings of curious journalists or of uncooperative witnesses were an unwelcome addition to news reports.

The growing schism between the poor and the rich was accompanied by other social or sociological shifts. Traditionally, wealth in Polish culture is not a virtue. That attitude to it permeates Polish literature and the poorer strata of Polish society.⁵ A comprehensive study by Hanna Palska on poverty and affluence and the associated new life styles in Poland at the end of the 1990s, segments the poor and the rich by their attitudes. In her analysis, Palska

³ Ben Slay, *The Polish Economy. Crisis, Reform and Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 86.

⁴ Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 89.

⁵ Grażyna Skąpska, ed., *Bieda i bogactwo w polskiej kulturze i świadomości* (Cracow: TAIWPN, 2003).

notes that the only consumer-based choice available to the poor in Poland is that of what food to give up first. Their life conditions were “unhygienic”, most families visited by researchers lived in constant fear of the future. To them, illness was simply a fact of life rather than an outcome of malnutrition or poor health care. The affluent, depending on their formative years and current professional standing were either cautious and distrustful of their affluence, or hedonistic and careless, especially if born in or after 1980 and working in advertising or media related industries. Yet, the scarcity of the employment situation means that even for the well-to-do, life evolves around work and its stresses and anxieties.⁶ Even though 73 per cent of Poles declared themselves to be “quite happy”,⁷ freedom to consume in Poland rarely translates into a relaxed or enjoyable lifestyle.

Another freedom, that of speech, was cemented by the first bill passed by the new Polish Parliament abolishing censorship in 1990. Together with the transition to a market economy, the abolition of censorship allowed for freedom of publishing, which in turn produced a new generation of popular Polish writers, many of them women, for instance Olga Tokarczuk, Magdalena Tulli or Manuela Gretkowska.⁸ Although generalisations cannot reflect the full scope of the literary world of post-1989 Poland, the new Polish fictional prose may be said to be characterised by attempts at emancipation from the tradition of religiosity and the critique of the emancipation offered by the newly-adopted capitalist system.⁹ At the same time, its attitude to Polish

⁶ Hanna Palska, *Bieda i dostatek: o nowych stylach życia w Polsce końca lat dziewięćdziesiątych* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IfiS PAN, 2002).

⁷ From NationMaster.com, *NationMaster.com*, 29 December 2004, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.nationmaster.com>>.

⁸ Interestingly, Andrzej Wajda attributes of the reasons of the poverty of Polish film scripts on the proliferation of women writers who write for the screen.

⁹ Kinga Dunin, *Czytając Polskę; Literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylematów współczesności* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2004), esp. 213-294.

history, and literary history is ambivalent,¹⁰ a phenomenon also emphasised in a widely publicised popular media proclamation from Maria Janion on the death of the Romantic ethos, which is discussed more extensively in Chapters 2 and 4 of this dissertation, and which, for over 150 years, had been the driving force of Polish national identity and its longings for an independent national state.

All the circumstances described here so far lead to a relative post-transitional economic, political and cultural stability towards the end of the 1990s. While the unemployment and crime (especially robbery and bribery) rates remained high, that new stability of democratic and free market systems facilitated Poland's inclusion in NATO in 1999, and in the European Union (a limited membership) in 2004. These developments resulted in the increased popularity of questions of national identity and culture in political spheres, and also the increased visibility of nationalistic parties. At the same time the notions of "national culture" or "national heritage" lost the appeal they held for Poles in the old regime and earlier.¹¹ This loss was what could be credited to a cycle of heritage filmmaking analysed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

In 2005 Poland remains one of the most homogenous countries of Europe with 95 per cent of its almost forty-million population consisting of ethnic Poles and around 97 percent Catholics, statistics which have remained consistent for over half a century. Such homogeneity would seem to eliminate the forms of problematisation of collective self-identification found in more obviously multicultural or multiethnic societies. Yet, if we consider that in 1921 ethnic Poles constituted 70 per cent of the population of Poland,¹²

¹⁰ Przemysław Czapliński, *Świat podrobiony; Krytyka i literatura wobec nowej rzeczywistości* (Cracow: Universitas, 2003).

¹¹ Mateusz Werner, "Pułapka fałszywej wolności," *Kino* 352 (1996): 8-9.

¹² The remaining 30 percent comprised 14 percent of Ukrainians, 7.8 percent of Jews, and about 4 percent of Germans and 4 percent of Byelarussians. In M.B. Biskupski, *The History of Poland* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 83.

and Roman Catholics comprised 65 per cent of the population,¹³ the contemporary absence of heterogeneity in Poland could easily constitute an interesting if not desirable complication in any discussion of Polish culture and social structure of the first 15 years after the end of the People's Republic. The following dissertation, however, focuses on the (relatively) homogeneous majority and this is where it positions Polish cinema of the period under discussion. In this context, the new class divisions and changes in social values constitute the emphasis, rather than the ways in which the new Poland positions its current and past minorities.

Without problematising the position of minorities, the most significant societal changes of the first fifteen years include the slow disintegration of the dominant standing of the intelligentsia in Poland,¹⁴ corresponding changes in the composition of social elites, and the redesigning of social value systems. In the reality of the new democratic and capitalist Poland, economic wealth rather than levels of education is what demarcates the new elite from the non-elite majority. In this situation, the old intelligentsia, which was the engine of the changes that facilitated post-communist transitions, split between those ready and willing to embrace capitalism and its ethos of success, and the "public service intelligentsia" (Polish "*budżetówka*"), whose financial advancement remained limited by public service budgets.¹⁵ Telling here is the difference in the new and old elites' attitude to democratising factors and their outcomes, as analysed in a 1993 survey.¹⁶ While the new elites adhered

¹³ Uniates, Orthodox and Jews formed each about 10 percent. In Biskupski, *The History of Poland*, 83.

¹⁴ Polish intelligentsia is credited as the social class that initiated and facilitated changes that led to the end of the communist system.

¹⁵ Jarosław Gowin, 3 March 2001, "Inteligencji żywot pośmiertny," *Rzeczpospolita*. On-line access (18 June 2001) <<http://arch4.rp.pl:80/a/rz/2001/03/20010303/200103030107.html?pokaz+14255-10%2014267-7>>.

¹⁶ Jacek Wasilewski, "Elite circulation and consolidation of democracy in Poland," in *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, eds. John Higley, Jan Pakulski and Włodzimierz Wesołowski (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998) 172-173.

more closely to the values of the “economic liberalism model”, in which individuals are responsible for their well-being, the old elites emphasised some negative outcomes of the transition, including the social injustice of poverty. This emphasis was, in general, on a better alignment with the “socialism model” of a socio-political system of values.¹⁷ At the same time, general support for the ideals of democracy kept increasing. In 1992, 52 per cent considered democracy the superior form of government. A year later, it was 63 per cent, and in 1995 75 per cent. Here, it is significant that 37 percent of respondents, most of whom belong to the higher income brackets, listed freedom as the principal democratic value, and social justice, which came second in terms of its importance for democracy was nominated as the most important value by predominantly lower income groups.¹⁸ Although a definite conclusion based on these findings is premature, they do indicate that the concern with social justice is correlated more closely with lower economic and political power status.¹⁹ At the same time, the only two “traditionally” Polish or rather “mythically” Polish values that persevered in the transition from the communist to the capitalist system are said to be that of the importance of family and individualism,²⁰ which might translate into neo-liberal individual economic responsibility. The significance of these societal changes in the context of this dissertation lies in my positioning of certain filmmakers within them. Apart from a few people, most filmmakers described and analysed in the following chapters started their filmmaking careers before 1989. To remain successful, and especially commercially so, they too needed to readjust their value system to suit the new Polish reality, and the

¹⁷ Wasilewski, “Elite circulation,” 172-173.

¹⁸ Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej, *Spółeczna wizja ustroju demokratycznego* (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej, 1995) 18.

¹⁹ Supporting this argument is also the results of a 2004 campaign to provide financial support for the victims of the children massacre in Beslan in Chechnya. Widely publicised in Polish media, it was groups from lower economic brackets who proved to be most charitable, while the charity boxes placed for the occasion in the building of the Polish Parliament [*Sejm*] collected only a nominal amount in the vicinity of 100 dollars.

²⁰ Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, “Wartości w polskiej reklamie telewizyjnej lat dziewięćdziesiątych,” *Zeszyty prasoznawcze* 3-4 (2001): 58-75.

new decision-making elites, which is an issue taken up in Chapter 2 of this work.

One last contextualising aspect of this dissertation is that of my fit in the structures and transitions described above. Although I did observe the first stages of these changes in Poland first hand, it was already done from the perspective of an outsider. When the agreement of the Round Table was signed to allow Mazowiecki to be the first non-communist Premier, I was living in London. It was in the Warsaw airport just before leaving for Australia that I heard of Tymieński and Wałęsa progressing to the second stage of presidential elections. Furthermore, even my familiarity with the old system is limited to my childhood and teenage years, which were defined by my high-school educated working class parents, left-affiliated grandparents running a successful small private farm, and - after 1983 - a stepfather whose considerable entrepreneurial business drive during the communist period ran aground soon after 1989. Therefore, the ideological setting of my growing up is of mixed heritage. It is marked by both leftist and rightist longings, and the mixture of an entrepreneurial and a public service ethos.

The temporal setting of my childhood and teenage years places me in an unpredictable generational zone of the first cohort of Poles whose adult lives started in the Third Republic of Poland. The immediately preceding generation, the so called “rupture generation” born in the 1960s, understood better the nonsense and hopelessness of living in the People’s Republic, and were more imbued with the belief in public good, and a responsibility for public matters, which is what shaped their formative years in the Solidarity period of the 1980s.²¹ The generation that followed has different points of

²¹ Paweł Śpiewak in an interview with A. Franaszek, “W wieku Chrystusowym,” *Kontrapunkt* (supplement to *Tygodnik Powszechny*) 2-3 (2002): 1.

reference from that of the “rupture generation”. The first experiences of adulthood for us were in the atmosphere of political and economic instability and uncertainty of the avalanching transformations. Unlike the “rupture generation”, people born in the early 1970s are said to be particularly un-rebellious, which is sometimes attributed to our great hopes for normality.²² Given that “normality” is exactly what we had not been exposed to, a more plausible explanation for my generation’s relative quietude is that rebellion in a time of momentous political, social and cultural changes is futile, if indeed possible at all. The communist regime was gone, the new one was shaky and undefined, as were the potential targets for a rebellion. While generational divisions themselves are fluid and unstable, in the context of significant and rapid systemic change the validity of these divisions is easier to demarcate than in other cases. This point is evident in some films by Polish filmmakers born in the late 1960s, and analysed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.²³ Their films are less concerned with the Polish past, be it imagined or one still fresh in the memory of those alive. They relate to their current internationalised and commercialised context rather than attempting to search for various kinds of national continuities. At the same time, and for that reason, they seem to be unable to escape that past, which defines their current condition.

As a closing remark for this preamble, it has to be said that searching for any patterns to human activity, including filmic activity, is an illusive task punctuated by dead ends and mirages that disintegrate when touched by one piece of evidence that does not confirm them. This dissertation does not claim to present a theory of all cultural or filmic activity in Poland between 1989 and 2004, but it does point to patterns whose visibility makes them less

²² Piotr Szczepański in an interview by Magda Łebęcka, “Pokolenia nie ma,” *Kino* 7-8 (2004): 20.

²³ It will be interesting to see whether that “generation” of filmmakers will produce a different body of work to the previous ones. Also, compare with Peter Hanson’s book on *The Cinema of Generation X: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC and London: MacFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002).

susceptible than others to paradigmatic instabilities. It is clear that the real import of the last stages of the period under analysis in this dissertation will only be unveiled by future developments and consequences. At the time of writing this preamble (early 2005) Poland's position within Europe and its Union is still newly found and awaiting further redesign. Polish military and economic alliances might need re-evaluation once Poland becomes a full member of the Union, and through that, its "return" to Europe would be complete. Only then, would the period of post-communist change reach its destination.

1

Introducing Polish cinema

*What will be born, what could be born in Poland in the souls of people
ruined and brutalised, when one day this new [communist] order
disappears, the order that strangled the old one and Nothing will follow? ...
[A] hive of grey little human creatures, who can't shake their surprise off ...
Where to hide? What to worship? Whom to pray to? Whom to be afraid
of?²⁴*

For those well versed in the exotic paths of world cinema, Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polański, Agnieszka Holland, and Krzysztof Zanussi are synonymous with Polish filmmaking. The Polish School (1956-1961) and the Cinema of Moral Concern (1976-1981) speak volumes to filmmakers and critics in Europe and, to an extent, in the United States. Yet, these are the directors and the concepts of filmmaking that were established when the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall obscured the view of the socialist other, making it into a

²⁴ Witold Gombrowicz, *Dzienniki 1953-1956* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1982) 33. In his *Diaries 1953-1956*, exiled Gombrowicz questioned the idea of Polish nationhood, its idols, products and their superficiality, at the same time expressing patriotic longing for the “real” and non-communist Poland.

more desirable commodity for a cinematic voyeur. Since the transition of 1989, however, the visibility of the new Polish cinema outside Poland has been limited, despite, and maybe also because of, freedom of speech within Poland and freedom of communication between Poland and the rest of the world. The only new Polish name added to the international filmic landscape after 1989 is that of Krzysztof Kieślowski, recognised for his co-productions executed mainly from French soil. In the first years after 1989, if it received any international attention at all, the state of East European cinemas was described as abominable, and this was based mainly on the poor shape of film industries in the region and on their films' insignificant presence and reception on the film festival circuits of the early 1990s.²⁵ Although correct at the time, that negative evaluation of Eastern European cinemas, and Polish cinema specifically, is no longer justified 15 years after the collapse of communism in the region. Furthermore, tracing developments of Polish cinema throughout that period constitutes valuable evidence for understanding the mechanics of cultural and social changes in a nation undergoing significant and multi-layered transitions, especially when they occur in the climate of increasing internationalisation, regionalisation, but also fragmentation of collective identities.

In the context of the general international interest in the political and economic changes in Poland, it is unusual that so few commentators have endeavoured to provide a systematic analysis of Polish cinema after 1989. Even fewer have sought to place it within the context of changing Polish nationhood. While such discussions were also neglected pre-1989 in the only two significant works published in English on the entirety of Polish cinema,²⁶

²⁵ For instance, Katherine F. Cornell, "After the wall: Eastern European cinema since 1989," *Cineaste* 19:4 (Fall 1992): 43-47.

²⁶ That is Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1986), and Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj, *Modern Cinema of Poland* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

after 1989, the only monograph that attempts that task is Marek Haltof's *Polish National Cinema*. However, Haltof focuses on a much-needed comprehensive and succinct study of Polish cinema's history, including its post-communist years, rather than the factors situating that cinema within a particular national specificity. In *Polish National Cinema* the definition of Polish national cinema is limited to "works made in Poland", "in the Polish language", and "by Polish filmmakers", and/or "international coproductions with a significant (director and part of the crew) Polish contribution."²⁷

In four chapters of his eleven-chapter book, Haltof addresses various aspects of Polish filmmaking between 1989 and 2000. He describes some industrial changes that came about between 1989 and 2000, as well as groupings of films that deal with the recent past, comedies, the personal films of Jan Jakub Kolski, Andrzej Barański, and Andrzej Kondratiuk, and some female filmmakers. When discussing the portrayal of Stalinism in another chapter, Haltof can only rely on a limited sample of such films made after 1989, most notably Krzysztof Zanussi's *In Full Gallop*²⁸ [*Cwał*] (1996). Haltof also addresses filmic treatments of Polish Jews post-1989, and he explores more comprehensively the recent cinema, while focussing on its commercial endeavours, that is, "Polish films with an American accent."²⁹ Haltof's work serves an important expository function to anyone interested in Polish cinema. However, due to the limitations of its publication's format, it stops short of delivering a more detailed and contextualised study of Polish cinema after 1989. Interestingly, the Polish translation of *Polish National Cinema* omits the word "national" from the title due to its unpopular connotations with various nationalistic rather than national political and historical factions.³⁰

²⁷ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002) xii.

²⁸ Note that all translations of film titles in this dissertation rely either on the translations from the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) or Marek Haltof's *Polish National Cinema*.

²⁹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 243-258.

³⁰ Mirosław Przyłipiak, personal interview, 15 September 2004, Gdynia (enclosed in Appendix 2).

Marek Haltof also co-edited with Janina Fałkowska a collection of articles on *The New Polish Cinema*,³¹ which originally was to be published in 1999, and came out in 2003 comprised of the texts submitted for publication before the initial publication date. The focus of the tome is on the comparison of the pre- and post-1989 filmmaking in Poland, rather than the nuances of transformations that the film industry and culture underwent after 1989. Thus *The New Polish Cinema* contributes to the general discussion of national memory, religious themes and women in Polish cinema, but the unfortunate exclusion of the post-1999 developments (necessitated by the delayed publication of the book) deprives its authors of an opportunity to take a stand on one of the most prominent cluster of heritage films that came between 1999 and 2003, as well as other significant developments of the post-1999 period addressed in this dissertation.

Other significant texts in English on post-1989 film in Poland include detailed analyses of works by internationally acknowledged Polish directors, with prominence given to Krzysztof Kieślowski and Andrzej Wajda. Kieślowski's international recognition and his place within a European rather than specifically Polish context, attracted a sizeable body of critical work. For example, Slavoj Žižek uses Kieślowski as a pretext for exploring certain psychoanalytical paradigms and some of their contexts, including Christianity.³² Geoff Andrew's *The "Three Colours" Trilogy*, in the BFI's Modern Classics series, focuses on a detailed description of Kieślowski's three films, and – by the constraints of the series – does not venture beyond

³¹ Janina Fałkowska and Marek Haltof, eds., *The New Polish Cinema* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2003).

³² Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski: Between Theory and Post Theory* (London: BFI, 2001).

that.³³ A more multifaceted analytical approach is taken up in the collection, *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski* edited by Paul Coates. There, Coates and the contributors to the volume provide their readers with a thorough consideration of Kieślowski's work seen from a Polish and broader perspective.

Most importantly, Coates' introduction touches on the construction of duality (Poland/Europe) in Kieślowski's life and work.³⁴ A more recent offering by Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski: The Liminal Image*, not only analyses Kieślowski's work, but also places it within broader economic and socio-political contexts.³⁵

Less useful in the context of this thesis is Annette Insdorf's work *Double Lives, Second Chances: The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski*, as it focuses closely on the director's oeuvre without attributing much value to the Polish cultural and identity-forming context of Kieślowski's work.³⁶

Andrzej Wajda's Polish specificity and the limited number of co-productions that would take his work outside a specifically Polish context seem to have deemed him a less popular choice than Kieślowski as the subject of book publication in this (post)transitional period. Although earlier Wajda had received major coverage both in Poland and internationally, the only significant post-1989 collection of critical English texts on Wajda, *The Cinema*

³³ Geoff Andrew, *The "Three Colours" Trilogy* (London: BFI, 1998).

³⁴ Paul Coates, *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999).

³⁵ Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski: The Liminal Image* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004).

³⁶ Annette Insdorf, *Double Lives, Second Chances: The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski* (New York: Hyperion, 1999). However for the most insightful, yet not necessarily academically rigorous work on Kieślowski, see Danusia Stok, *Kieślowski on Kieślowski* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993).

of *Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance* was edited by John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska and published in 2003. In it, there is only one article concerning in its entirety Wajda's post-1989 production of *Pan Tadeusz* (1999) by Lisa Di Bartolomeo, who brings together the tradition of Polish Romanticism and its significance to the construction of Polish nationhood in Wajda's adaptation of one of the most significant Polish 19th century classics, namely *Pan Tadeusz*,³⁷ which is also analysed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The co-editor of the volume on Wajda, Elżbieta Ostrowska has also published a selection of articles on Polish cinema, which centre on various factors in (national) identity formation, including gender issues and national symbolism.³⁸ Next to Ostrowska's English publications, Ewa Mazierska's and Michael Stevenson's articles are the most significant and specifically dialectical resource for this dissertation. Mazierska focuses on a feminist analysis of Polish cinema,³⁹ the cultural spaces created in popular Polish films,⁴⁰ the construction of Jewish-Polish relations in Wajda's films,⁴¹ while Stevenson explores aspects of masculinity in selected Polish post-1989 films.⁴² Yet, in general, apart from the texts mentioned above, and a handful

³⁷ Lisa Di Bartolomeo, "'Ojczyzna moja.' Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*: adapting Polish culture," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, eds. John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003) 172-189.

³⁸ Elżbieta Ostrowska, "Filmic representations of the 'Polish Mother' in post-second World War Polish cinema," *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (1998): 419-435; also a paper presented at the Society of Film and Media Studies conference by Elżbieta Ostrowska, *Ethnoscapes in the Films of Andrzej Wajda*, Minneapolis (2003); and Elżbieta Ostrowska, Elżbieta Oleksy and Michael Stevenson, eds., *Gender in Film and the Media: East-West Dialogues* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

³⁹ Ewa Mazierska, "In the land of noble knights and mute princesses: Polish heritage cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21: 2 (June 2001): 167-182; and Ewa Mazierska, "Witches, shamans, pandoras – representation of women in the Polish postcommunist cinema," *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, 1 May 2002, (6 March 2005) <<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/witches-shamans-pandoras.htm>>.

⁴⁰ Ewa Mazierska, "Any town? Warsaw in *Girl Guide* and *Killer* by Juliusz Machulski," in *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema*, eds. Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 95-114.

⁴¹ Ewa Mazierska, "Non-Jewish Jews, good Poles and historical truth in the films of Andrzej Wajda," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 20: 2 (June 2000): 213-228.

⁴² Michael Stevenson, "I Don't Feel Like Talking to You Anymore': Gender Uncertainties in Polish Film Since 1989: An Analysis of *Psy*," in *Gender in Film and the Media: East-West Dialogues*, eds. Elżbieta Ostrowska, Elżbieta Oleksy and Michael Stevenson (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 138-149; also a paper presented at the Society for Film and Media Studies

of other academic articles spread across a broad range of academic publications,⁴³ the story of Polish cinema after 1989 in both English and Polish remains a fragmented one, as does its national contextualisation. Before attempting to consolidate the fragmented picture of the first 15 post-communist years in Polish cinema, this introduction maps out the concept of national cinema and, after that, considers some developments in pre-1989 Polish cinema, finally laying out the main arguments underlying this work in the last part of this introduction. While developments in Polish cinema before 1989 serve as an anchor for determining the continuities and discontinuities of the post-1989 transitions, the examination of the notion of national cinema clarifies this dissertation's positioning in relation to one of the dominant ways of conceptualising cinemas of particular nations.

National cinema, or cinema of a nation

National cinema as a concept is a contested territory. On the one hand, the beginning of the 21st century brought a renewed interest in various national cinemas, which manifests itself in a growing number of publications on cinemas of particular nations. On the other hand, cinema analysts speak of internationalising tendencies of film co-productions and post-national or regional film identities. For instance, Dina Iordanova in her comprehensive study of East Central European cinema suggests that transnational filmmaking makes developing new theories of national cinema redundant, and

Conference by Michael Stevenson, *Polish Cinema's Exit into History*, Dług: Krzysztof Krauze 1999, Minneapolis (2003).

⁴³ For example, Alexandra Sosnowski, "Cinema in transition: the Polish film today," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 24: 1 (Spring 1996): 10-17; Mark Haltof, "A fistful of dollars: Polish cinema after the 1989 freedom shock," *Film quarterly* 48: 3 (Spring 1995): 15-26; Maria Kornatowska, "Polish cinema," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 47-51; Barbara Quart, "A few short takes on Eastern European film," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 63-65; Katherine F. Cornell, "After the wall: Eastern European cinema since 1989," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 43-47; and Catherine Portuges, "Border crossings: recent trends in East and Central European cinema," *Slavic Review* 51: 3 (Fall 1992): 531-536.

– at best – cinemas may be talked about in terms of regionalisation.⁴⁴ Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice propose that cities and their filmic spatiality are a more poignant point of reference for cinemas than national specificity.⁴⁵ However, even if the notion of national cinema lost its clarity faced with a growing number of productions and co-productions marked by ambiguous national belonging, that in itself would indicate the need to re-examine the concept and its manifestations.

The majority of texts on the history of cinema point to the historical coincidences between the rise of cinema and the growth of nationalism (as well as consumerism and developments in psychoanalysis).⁴⁶ In the words of Mike Featherstone,

...the possibility of a nation [...] depends upon the development of the book and the newspapers alongside a literate public capable of using these sources throughout the territorial area and thus able to imagine themselves as a community. The development of the film industry facilitates this process even better, as film provides a sense of instantiation and immediacy which is relatively independent of the long learning process and institutional and other supports necessary to be able to assimilate knowledge through books.⁴⁷

Although this statement suggests seeing (national) cinema in terms of its function as a support system and instigator of nationalism, films made within

⁴⁴ This view has similarities with a pan-Slavic trend in Czechoslovakian cultural and literary thought as outlined by Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest, London and New York: Central European University Press, 1994), esp. vii-ix.

⁴⁵ Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, eds., *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

⁴⁶ For instance, Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 19.

⁴⁷ Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 2000), 109.

a particular national or cultural context can be said to communicate the fears and desires of the collective national psyche. This psyche is an abstract and unstable, and empirically elusive notion, yet also one that can be defined in terms of – willing or not – belonging to a particular national collective.⁴⁸ In this way, the notion of the “national psyche” may be seen as a creative force of, as well as a reflection of, the lived social and cultural realities of a (diverse) collective. It is subject to state policies, yet it is also subject to the economic condition of a national industry, which includes its cinema. So, its existence occurs on many levels and intertwines with many areas of the collective activities that may define a nation, and national identity even more than nationalism itself. From this it follows that an analysis of a national cinema must include contextual, textual as well as industrial considerations.⁴⁹

Most analyses of national cinema or cinemas address the concept either in terms of its correspondence to social, cultural and historical realities,⁵⁰ the limitations and opportunities offered by a film industry’s economic condition, and/or genre or auteur systematisation of the filmic output of a given country.⁵¹ Variables taken into consideration within any of these levels of analysis include the sovereignty of a national cinema’s productions (textual and economic) and often comparison and relationship with other national cinemas, most notably Hollywood.⁵² The apparent and longstanding

⁴⁸ Compare with Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, “The second cinema: a doubled industry,” in *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, vol. 2 (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), esp. 11-26.

⁴⁹ Audience also constitute a valid analytical focus and a secondary one in the context of this dissertation.

⁵⁰ For instance, James Chapman, “The Emergence of National Cinemas,” in *Cinemas of the World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 76-94. Chapman defines the rise of national cinemas in terms of the modernist project as well as in terms of its opposition to Hollywood. Also, Hamid Dabashi in his *Close Up Iranian Cinema: Past, Present and Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2001) examines Iranian cinema in terms of its social and cultural condition.

⁵¹ For instance, Thomas Elsaesser combines the economic condition of New German Cinema with the systematisation of its output in his *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

⁵² For instance, Jill Forbes and Sarah Street, *European Cinema: an Introduction* (Handmills and New York: Palgrave, 2000); also Tom O’Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Although, of course, it remains problematic whether Hollywood may be conceptualised as a national cinema.

domination of Hollywood productions over European ones, both in terms of their distribution and international accessibility,⁵³ is frequently given as a *raison d'être* for the policy push to encourage domestic productions.⁵⁴

In his seminal article on the concept of national cinema, Andrew Higson proposes that it should be examined against the national cultural identity and the means of producing it.⁵⁵ So, not only must a national cinema be placed within the context of its film industry, which includes the means of production, distribution, exhibition, and patterns of consumption, but it must also be considered in the broader context of specifying national identity and its internal and external coherences and conflicts.⁵⁶ Interestingly, even in his more recent treatment of the concept of national cinema,⁵⁷ Higson continues to adhere to Gellner's modernist version of nationhood and its filmic manifestations, focusing again on the role films play in supporting the notion of nationhood within or without a state, an approach common to many expositions of various national cinemas, and he makes no reference to the aesthetic dimensions of national cinema's productions.⁵⁸

Wimal Dissanayake, on the other hand, in the introduction to surveys of Asian national cinemas, insists on the ways of valuing national cinemas in terms of their films' unique content, style and the indigenous aesthetics or visions they

⁵³ For a comprehensive review of the role Hollywood played, especially, in Europe, see Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), or this work's updated edition of 2005 by Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell and Ting Wang, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005).

⁵⁴ This seems to be universally true of European cinemas, especially French, but also Australian, New Zealand and British cinemas.

⁵⁵ Andrew Higson, "The concept of national cinema," in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 52-67.

⁵⁶ Higson, "The concept of national cinema," 52-67.

⁵⁷ Andrew Higson, "Limiting imagination of national cinema," in *Cinema and Nation*, eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 63-74.

⁵⁸ Higson, "Limiting imagination," 63-74.

carry,⁵⁹ to at least partial neglect of the influence of economic condition. Opposing this approach is Thomas Elsaesser, for whom such a focus stands only if seen in terms of the marketing, thus economic, drive behind the creation of “director-myths”, which - in the case of Germany - support *Autorenfilm*. To Elsaesser, neglecting a film’s economic viability, which for a national cinema is usually in conflict with the cultural motivation behind it, is a misunderstood way of looking at it. He specifically denounces the marketing drive behind the creation of director-myths which support *Autorenfilm*, thus focusing his own analysis on the economics of the film industry, and more precisely on the economics of production, distribution and exhibition. Although this approach provides for a much needed counterbalance to the textual modes of discussing national cinema, it might be taking the analysis too far in its neglect of the cultural motivation behind the policy push. That approach also neglects the tacit and often significantly diversified understanding and empathy for individual directors for their own national identity and its expression in their work.⁶⁰

One point by Elsaesser that defines part of the focus of this dissertation is his insistence on the conflict between a film production’s economic viability and the cultural motivation inherent in any national cinema.⁶¹ In the case of Poland, it means examining the types of productions that made for box office successes over and above those of popular Hollywood productions after 1989, for instance popular literary adaptations of the Polish national canon, but also those that achieved considerable acclaim in Poland, and – to a

⁵⁹ For example, Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections on Films from Japan, India, and China* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), esp. 1-13.

⁶⁰ For instance, Jan Jakub Kolski asserts in a personal interview conducted for this dissertation and included in Appendix 2 (25 June 2003, Wrocław) that his films are Polish “to their petticoats”, yet he refuses to define their Polishness by denying its ideological layer, and insisting on the intuitive, osmotic way of perceiving it.

⁶¹ Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 1.

limited extent – abroad. As was the case in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, films made in Poland between 1989 and 2004 do not come from well-defined groups, yet it is still possible to analyse them for the Polishness of their different aspects, including the economic, textual and cultural levels. In fact, the greatest challenge posed to any analysis of a national cinema is that outlined by Susan Hayward, namely the diversity and flux of the concept of nationhood and a cinema that is attached to it.⁶² Determining national continuities in a cinema that constantly evolves to the point where at times it is said to have disappeared, also makes problematic the task of systemising all elements into a coherent analysis.

Rather than conceptualising the ensuing analysis around Polish national cinema, this dissertation approaches Polish transitional cinema as one divorced from *a priori* nationalistic or nationalising tendencies. This approach is closest to Hayward's conceptualisation of national cinema in that cinema is assumed to belong in the culture of a society or a nation in flux. It consists in its changing industrial conditions, and the claim laid to it by a given nation, but it is not limited to it. The basis of that claim is defined by the films' resonances with the nation's social condition, which includes ideological considerations, as well as historical discontinuities and continuities, real or imagined, with a nation's and its cinema's past. For this reason, the coherency of the consequent analysis of Polish cinema between 1989 and 2004 requires that this introduction contextualises Polish cinema in its earlier developments.

⁶² Susan Hayward, "Framing national cinemas," in *Cinema and Nation*, eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 88-102.

Polish cinema as it was

The Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern are often seen as mini-traditions that define the existence of Polish cinema before 1989. Despite the arbitrariness of the stylistic or otherwise unity of the films produced within these two cinematic periods, their film festival successes brought Polish cinema to the view of international audiences. Because of this visibility, these two periods and their themes and issues serve as the main anchor points for the following treatment of post-1989 Polish cinema. However, the following exposition's role in this dissertation is to highlight those moments and spaces that have a bearing on the main arguments of this dissertation. Therefore only those aspects of both "schools", but also of the times "in between", which help define the changes in Polish post-1989 cinema, or lack thereof, are explored here.⁶³

Polish patriotic, melodramatic, and communist cinemas (1895-1956)

One paradox of Polish cinema is that its beginnings lie in a Europe in which there was no place called Poland. The first films, and Polish films for that matter, were made when Poland did not exist as a state or country. Yet, as with any other communication or art form, film was soon used to maintain the sense of cultural unity amongst Poles living under partitions by Russia, Prussia and Austria. The first documentaries made in different cities under occupation⁶⁴, and films based on Polish literary work⁶⁵, together contributed to the idea of what a Polish nation, culture and Polishness in general were, even

⁶³ For a more thorough treatment of the history of Polish cinema, see Marek Haltof *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002).

⁶⁴ Małgorzata Hendrykowska gives many examples of that phenomenon, including, for instance, the promotion in 1912 of Galicja, which was the part of Poland under Russian occupation, as a tourism destination, in her *Kronika kinematografii polskiej: 1895-1997* (Poznań: Ars Nova, 2000), 49.

⁶⁵ Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* (1913), an example quoted by Hendrykowska, is one such film based on a Polish novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, that integrated Polish people under the three partitioners. In Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 52.

despite the absence of a state that could give geographical and institutional boundaries to these concepts.

Before World War I most films made by Poles were melodramas, sensational love stories and crime films.⁶⁶ Within five years of the creation of the Polish state in 1918, the emphasis of the film industry in Poland moved onto what was referred to as patriotic⁶⁷ or “grudge”⁶⁸ films, depending on the vantage point of the commentator. Their main preoccupation was the rebuilding of the Polish State and the obstacles that had to be overcome in order to regain independence, themes that would also be directly and indirectly explored in the Polish cinema of the last decade of the 20th century. Those films received financial backing from the State that came in the form either of production money or a tax concession system for cinema tickets.⁶⁹ Ticket concessions were what in turn attracted audiences to the limited number of not very well maintained cinemas. According to some film historians, the establishment in 1925 of the House of Polish Film [Dom Filmu Polskiego] for “all those for whom a national film industry matters”⁷⁰ marked the beginning of the Polish national cinema, in a market which was at that time dominated by American films,⁷¹ another point of similarity with the early 1990s state of Polish cinema.

Apart from “patriotic” or “grudge” films, the 1930s brought a series of adaptations of then recent literary works, some films in Yiddish, and a myriad

⁶⁶ For a list of films made every year since 1895, see Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*.

⁶⁷ Some titles quoted by Marek Haltof include *For You, Poland* [*Dla ciebie, Polsko*] (Antoni Bednarczyk, 1920), *Heroism of a Polish Boy Scout* [*Bohaterstwo polskiego skauta*] (Ryszard Bolesławski, 1920), *Miracle of the Vistula* [*Cud nad Wisłą*] (Ryszard Bolesławski, 1921). In Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 11.

⁶⁸ Frank Bren, on the other hand, refers to the same films as “grudge films”, aimed at “setting scores with the oppressors”, that is Russians, and, less frequently, Germans. In Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 11.

⁶⁹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 10; also Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 11.

⁷⁰ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 91.

⁷¹ Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America and the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 136.

of farces and musical comedies favoured by Polish audiences. Unfortunately, given the shape of the Polish films that survived, the bulk of the Polish film industry output of that time was either destroyed or lost during the Second World War. The most significant heritage of that time for the later Polish cinema remains the tradition of adapting Polish national literature for the screen, as well as the first international film festival successes of Polish films.⁷² At the same time, Polish film criticism and theory established its point of difference from its Western counterparts by focusing on the social and cultural role of cinema, rather than the specificity of cinema as an art form, which was the focus of Western film criticism and theory.⁷³ Written on mainly by literary critics, Polish film was defined in relation to literature, and Polish literature's function, a view which reverberated well into 20th century.

The first years after the Second World War brought about the nationalisation of the entire film industry, which was producing mainly unmemorable socialist realist films, some of which enjoyed popularity until the introduction of television towards the end of the 1950s.⁷⁴ At that time there were almost no

⁷² For instance, Adam Krzeptowski's *White Trail* [*Biały ślad*] (1932) was highly praised for its visual style during the first Venice Festival; Józef Lejtes's *Day of the Great Adventure* [*Dzień wielkiej przygody*] (1935) in Venice; and Stanisław Wohl and Eugeniusz Cekalski's *Three Studies* [*Trzy etiudy Chopina*] (1937) won an award in Venice in 1937.

⁷³ Karol Irzykowski and Bolesław Matuszewski, the latter of whom had been published mainly in France, were the two names at the forefront of Polish film criticism and theory at the time. While Matuszewski receives a sporadic mention in histories of European cinema, Irzykowski remains a well-guarded treasure of Polish film theory, virtually unknown outside of Poland. According to Paul Coates, it is because of Irzykowski's aphoristic writing style, the linguistic hegemony of the film criticism worlds, and Polish unwillingness to share him with the outside (in Paul Coates, "Karol Irzykowski: apologist of the inauthentic art," *New German Critique* 42: 3-4 (1996): 277-303. Also, Danuta Palczewska, *Współczesna myśl filmowa* (Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź and Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1981).

⁷⁴ Some of those films, however, did win international recognition. For instance, Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* [*Ostatni etap*] (1947), or Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* [*Ulica Graniczna*] (1948), a Polish-Czech co-production. At the same time, Polish films easily attracted 3 million viewers per film to the cinema before the introduction of television (after Edward Zajiček, "Szkoła polska. Uwarunkowania organizacyjne i gospodarcze," in *Szkoła polska – powroty*, eds. Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska and Bronisława Stolarska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 177 and 180.

Western European films screened in Poland and not one American film on Polish cinema screens.⁷⁵ Despite the centralised control of distribution and access to Western and American films, the newly established (1948) Film School in Łódź, an industrial city not far from Warsaw, managed to organise closed screenings of some films from the West for “educational purposes”. Thanks to those screenings, Italian neorealist films managed to influence the first internationally renowned school of films from Poland; the Polish School.⁷⁶

Polish School (1956-1961) and its heroes

The term Polish School was coined as early as 1954 by the film critic and scholar Aleksander Jackiewicz, who wanted to see a Polish School of filmmaking replicate the great traditions of Polish art. Jackiewicz called for Polish films to confront local history and address social and moral problems. A filmmaker and an influential professor at the Łódź Film School, Antoni Bohdziewicz later employed the name Polish School when referring to Andrzej Wajda’s debut film, *A Generation* [*Pokolenie*] (1954).⁷⁷ Despite the disparity of styles and themes within it, the term Polish School is a prevalent term of reference for the films produced in Poland between 1956 and 1961,⁷⁸ a period of relatively relaxed censorship, which was a result of social unrest in Poland in October of 1956.⁷⁹ It was also a time of establishing “Film Units”, which were structured collectives of experienced and inexperienced

⁷⁵ Jerzy Płażewski, “Film zagraniczny w Polsce,” in *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku*, ed. Edward Zajiček, (Warsaw: Instytut Kultury i Komitet Kinematografii, 1994), 433.

⁷⁶ Andrzej Wajda, *Lekcja filmu polskiego* (Poland, 2002), videorecording; also in Bolesław Michałek, “Polska przygoda neorealizmu,” *Kino* 1 (1975): 30.

⁷⁷ Aleksander Jackiewicz, “Prawo do eksperymentu,” *Przegląd Kulturalny* 51/52 (1954), and Antoni Bohdziewicz, “Czyżby cyprysy i pinie na Powiślu?” *Łódź Literacka* 2-3 (1955), quoted in Stanisław Ozimek, “Konfrontacje z Wielką Wojną,” in *Historia filmu polskiego 1957-1961*, vol. 4, ed. Jerzy Toeplitz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1969), 14.

⁷⁸ Although some film historians would include in the Polish School films made as early as 1954 and as late as 1963.

⁷⁹ For this reason, that period of Polish cinema history is at times referred to as “post-October cinema”.

filmmakers. In the Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, Film Units were an unparalleled attempt at producing independent, although nationalised, cinema in Poland⁸⁰. Some of the Units managed to survive rudimentarily until the end of the 20th century and beyond, but in a changed, commercialised form.

The Polish School is most often seen as employing “the strategy of the psychotherapist”⁸¹ to deal with the “Polish hell of good intentions”,⁸² which denotes an alleged Polish willingness to exercise positive power over the course of history and grander societal forces, and an inability to carry it all through. It is also a response to the trauma of war, and helplessness in relation to the forced erasure from the public sphere Polish history uncomfortable in the new communist reality, for instance, of the positive role of the Home Army (AK), the anti-communist resistance force in Poland. The pessimistic underpinning of films of the Polish School reflects one undercurrent of Polish social thought and it carried through to other productions addressing social maladies with no hope of a solution that would alter the undesirable condition. This type of social commentary found its more positive counterbalance in the films of a new generation of filmmakers in the early 2000s. At the time of its dominance, the Polish School is also said to have broken away from and/or confronted aesthetically and thematically the shallowness and illusions of socialist realist filmmaking. This also meant that most literary adaptations of the time focused on then-recently published

⁸⁰ Bren, *World Cinema* 1, 47

⁸¹ Tadeusz Miczka, “Cinema under political pressure: a brief outline of authorial roles in Polish post-war feature film 1945-1995,” *Kinema* 4 (Fall 1995), (6 March 2005). <<http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/micz952.htm>>. Also, compare this with Dina Iordanova’s treatment of *Trummerfilme* (“films of the ruins”) in the region in her *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002), 60. She classifies Wajda’s Polish School trilogy of *Canal* (1957) *A Generation* (1954) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) as *Trummerfilme*, which are also written into the narrative of the “burden of history” common to the region and a founding block of the Polish School.

⁸² Wajda, *Lekcja polskiego kina*, videorecording.

short stories and novels, with only an occasional departure to produce a historical spectacle based on an older literary version of Polish history.⁸³

Ironically for a “school”, there is no agreement on the parameters of the Polish School’s programme. For some commentators, the Polish School encompasses exclusively films concerned with war. Others include in it a broad range of filmic output characterised by differing themes, incompatible poetics, edginess in terms of style and ideology, as well as by an unashamed pursuit of entertainment value.⁸⁴ Just like the films made after 1989, the Polish School films dispute Polish Romantic mythology, and they include few historical epics, as well as comedies, black comedies, war and Holocaust dramas, psychological and (questionably) metaphysical dramas, and the “new wave experiments”.⁸⁵ However, apart from the name, the majority of films made under the aegis of the Polish School have in common a predominant concern with the darker side of life, and themes of social and/or moral problems that more often than not would result in anti-heroic behaviour from either protagonists or antagonists, or both,⁸⁶ especially in the films of Andrzej Munk, whose anti-heroes provided a blue-print for the main failed male heroes after that. These films’ “attack on heroism” stands out from the cinematic treatment of characters in Eastern Europe, where war and post-war heroism, rather than anti-heroism, was a preoccupation of filmmakers at that time.⁸⁷

The most significant heritage of the School is its major focus on the social and cultural realities of the time, including the preoccupation with the recent war

⁸³ For instance, Aleksander Ford’s *Teutonic Knights* [*Krzyżacy*] (1960) based on a 19c novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz.

⁸⁴ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 74-75.

⁸⁵ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 75.

⁸⁶ Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska “Czarny realizm. O stylu i jego funkcji w filmach nurtu współczesnego,” in *Szkoła polska – powroty*, eds. Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska and Bronisława Skolarska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 33-47.

⁸⁷ Dina Iordanova, *The Cinema of the Other Europe*, 60.

trauma, and with a marginal but enduring focus on the metaphysical.⁸⁸ Although the universalist tendencies of the latter place them on the margins of the focus of this dissertation, this type of filmmaking was continued beyond 1989 by film directors such as Krzysztof Kieślowski, Jan Jakub Kolski, Jerzy Stuhr and to some extent Piotr Trzaskalski and Andrzej Jakimowski, whose films are analysed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. The focus on metaphysical issues after 1989 would prompt nostalgia in the old guard of filmmakers for the fulfilment of social responsibilities towards the Polish nation said to be neglected by the younger generation of filmmakers. Andrzej Wajda indicates this disappointment when he comments on the new generation of post-1989 filmmakers, in an interview conducted for this dissertation.

Young film-makers can't fight for their films. They are not interested in filmmaking legislation, although they know that without it nothing can be done. They wouldn't lift a finger regarding that. This again, in my opinion, is a new phenomenon of the inertia of film circles, which used to be for years the most active politically.

The strength of the earlier Polish cinema was in the unity of a group of film-makers who worked together in their common interest. Perhaps, that kind of unity will be created again. Wojciech Marczewski and I very much strive for that in our school,⁸⁹ because we think that it would point new people in the direction of the cinema of social issues. This is the only tradition in Polish cinema that carries strength. There is no other artistic tradition in Polish cinema apart from that of a 19th century artist with the social responsibility to participate in all its problems. In short, this is our artistic

⁸⁸ For instance, Wojciech Has was one director who refused to comment on social realities, being more concerned with the timelessness of human existence.

⁸⁹ Master School of Directing was set up by Andrzej Wajda and Wojciech Marczewski in Warsaw in 2002.

tradition. Artists should pry into what happens socially. They should be displeased about the current state of affairs, in the name of what should be. If that tradition returns, if young people understand that this is not only their responsibility, but is also a filmic topic, then Polish cinema will regain its distinctive shape. It won't imitate other patterns, just like our old films didn't.⁹⁰

The temporary relaxation of censorship, which allowed for increased independence of Film Units, also proved to be a nurturing ground for Polish film culture in general. By 1961, there were around 170 vibrant cine-clubs in Poland playing a major role in propagating international cinematic art, because they were allowed to screen films from the West not available in open cinematic distribution.⁹¹ That tradition of public fora for film discussions, which continued beyond 1989, towards the end of the 1990s became an audible means of commenting not only on filmic art, but also on the ways it relates to the contexts and realities around it.

The end of the Polish School is attributed to the displeasure that the communist authorities found in the dark portrayals of the realities of the time.⁹² That "displeasure" prompted a tighter control of Film Units and various other ways of limiting filmmakers' freedoms, which included control of

⁹⁰ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

⁹¹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 77.

⁹² Ewa Gębicka, "Partia i państwo a kino. Przypadek 'szkoły polskiej.' O ideologicznym stylu odbioru filmów i jego konsekwencjach," in *Szkoła polska – powroty*, eds. Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska and Bronisława Stolarska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 129-144; Alina Madej, "Bohaterowie byli zmęczeni?" in *Syndrom konformizmu? Kino polskie lat sześćdziesiątych*, ed. Tadeusz Miczka (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1994), 10-26; and the analysis of the end of the Polish School in a volume of the most comprehensive series on the history of Polish cinema, Rafał Marszałek, *Historia filmu polskiego*, vol. 5 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1985), esp. 20-23.

distribution and more vigilant censorship of film scripts.⁹³ While that control put an end to the social commentary exercised in many films of the Polish School, it also invited filmmakers and their audiences to be more creative in their construction and reception of the portrayals and metaphors of communist realities.

Popular cinema and depoliticising politics (1961-1975)

After the post-war generation of Wanda Jakubowska and Aleksander Ford, and the Polish School of Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and Wojciech J. Has came what Haltof refers to as the “third Polish cinema”.⁹⁴ Janusz Majewski, Henryk Kluba, Krzysztof Zanussi, and arguably Roman Polański and Jerzy Skolimowski, are only a few of the names of a new breed of Polish filmmakers that surfaced between 1961 and 1976. They were the first after the Polish School to propose new filmic aims and aesthetic values, as well as the focus on an individual rather than society. In general, the renewed political restrictions of the fifteen “in-between-schools” years produced three main trends of filmmaking in Poland, all of them seemingly apolitical and/or politically disengaged,⁹⁵ yet still carrying a subtle yet powerful critique of the political and social realities of those times.⁹⁶ One of them involved treatments of the human condition portrayed with significant artistic merit and at times attempting to venture into the territories of metaphysics, as in *Identification Marks: None* [*Rysopis*] (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1965), *The Life of Matthew* [*Żywot Mateusza*] (Witold Leszczyński, 1968), or *The Structure of Crystals* [*Struktura kryształu*] (Krzysztof Zanussi, 1969). Another was a set of comedies with tendencies to subtle caricatures of the past and the present, as

⁹³ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 111.

⁹⁴ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 125.

⁹⁵ For instance, Marek Haltof insists that all of the filmmakers listed here were uninterested in politics, preferring to concentrate on a universal, metaphysical existence (Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 125)

⁹⁶ For a more extensive argument, see Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 93-102.

in the popular, if not populist, *All Among Ourselves* [*Sami swoi*] (Sylwester Chęciński, 1967), as well as comedies stemming from the strong Polish tradition of the absurd, for instance *I Hate Mondays* [*Nie lubię poniedziałku*] (Tadeusz Chmielewski, 1971) and, in particular, *The Cruise* [*Rejs*] (Marek Piwowski, 1970), whose cult status after 1989 attests to the significance of that current of Polish cinema.

The third cluster of films involved adaptations of Polish canonical literature, some of which could also be read as metaphors for the social and political realities of the time, for example Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *The Pharaoh* [*Faraon*] (1966) based on Bolesław Prus's novel of 1896, and some films made as grand historical spectacles seemingly divorced from the present time, for instance (arguably) Jerzy Hoffman's *Colonel Wołodyjowski* [*Pan Wołodyjowski*] (1969) and his *The Deluge* [*Potop*] (1974), both based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's trilogy of 1884-1888, whose third (or first) part was realised by Hoffman in 1999. Interestingly, despite their focus on Polish national literature of the 19th century and its treatment of a grand Polish militaristic past, Hoffman's films attracted criticism for not addressing national issues with the force they deserved.⁹⁷ There were also a few war films made at that time, offering a more optimistic treatment of heroism than those of the Polish School, and a few Western-style productions placed within a Polish context, which enjoyed a relative but short-lived popularity, mainly due to the absence of Western cinema on Polish screens.⁹⁸

In his early films made between 1961 and 1976, Krzysztof Zanussi, whose *Camouflage* [*Barwy ochronne*] (1977) is the trademark of the Cinema of Moral Concern, already explored themes of death, the conflict between the

⁹⁷ For instance, Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, in his *Próba sensu czyli notatnik leniwego kinomana* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1974), 174-181 advances this kind of criticism.

⁹⁸ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 123.

individual and his/her social obligations.⁹⁹ One film that deals with death and social alienation, which deserves special attention here,¹⁰⁰ is Witold Leszczyński's *The Life of Matthew*. Beautifully filmed, carefully paced and greatly assisted by Arangelo Corelli's haunting musical background, *Life of Matthew* is often referred to as a non-Polish film of the period, yet its thematic preoccupation with the individual, his/her choices and motivation for these fits in with that of Zanussi, Skolimowski and others at the time. This preoccupation also prompts the consideration of universalism or specificity of such explorations in later films by, for instance, Piotr Trzaskalski, whose *Edi* (2002) is discussed in Chapter 6. Such an inquiry unravels in the context of direct and indirect influences from the outside of a national cinematic tradition, as was the case with the role Ingmar Bergman's and Michelangelo Antonioni's films played in the shaping of Polish post-war cinema.¹⁰¹

Although Polish cinema is not renowned internationally for its comedies, there is a strong comedic tradition in Poland. This tradition runs in two parallel streams, one stemming from a Polish literary and theatre tradition of the grotesque and the absurd, already alluded to earlier in this introduction, and another including more populist behavioural and character-based comedies. Overall, Polish comedies constitute a sizeable output during the years in between the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern, and after 1989. Between 1961 and 1965, there were 24 comedies amongst 119 productions released in Poland.¹⁰² Most of the comedies produced at the time convey

⁹⁹ For a succinct exposition on Krzysztof Zanussi's filmmaking of the time, see Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj, "Krzysztof Zanussi: The Cinema of Intellectual Inquiry," in *The Modern Cinema of Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 173-195.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Jakub Kolski, one of the most interesting *auteurs* who emerged after 1989, in a personal interview (25 June 2003, Wrocław, included in Appendix 2) listed *Life of Matthew* as one of the most significant influences on his filmmaking.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of the foreign influences on Polish filmmaking of the time, see Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 94-95. Also Peter Cowie refers to various types of international influences throughout his *Revolution! The Explosion of World Cinema in the 60s* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

¹⁰² Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 141.

subtle ironies on the social and economic realities of the Polish state, and a few ridicule the (Polish?) brand of naivete about the West and the propensity for familial conflicts.¹⁰³ As already mentioned here, one comedy that, almost 25 years after its release, still enjoys cult status amongst audiences and young filmmakers alike is Marek Piwowski's *The Cruise* (1970). Its absurd elliptic humour and the script (at times improvised by the cast of professional and amateur actors) became part of the Polish "cool" vernacular after 1989.¹⁰⁴

While, broadly understood, "heritage cinema" (as distinct from "costume drama") could be seen as a relatively new genre in the West,¹⁰⁵ in Eastern Europe it was a staple of film industries that started in the early 1960s. Iordanova proposes that in this context Poland deserves special attention owing to its state's consistent efforts to produce at least several adaptations of literary classics every decade starting in the 1960s, with this trend continuing past 1989.¹⁰⁶ The film that can be seen as something of an exception in European filmmaking, especially given its surreal imagery and an "art" cinema classification, is Wojciech Has's *A Saragossa Manuscript* [*Pamiętnik znaleziony w Saragossie*] (1965) based on Jan Potocki's 1804 metaphysical novel, *Manuscrit Trouvé à Saragossa*, written in French and translated into Polish in 1847. It was the first adaptation of a literary classic outside the school canon to attract a mass audience in Poland, and although it falls outside the heritage cycle as such, its significant box-office success warrants it a mention in any introduction on Polish film.

¹⁰³ Some comedy titles include Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Where is the General?* [*Gdzie jest generał?*] (1964), *How I Unleashed World War II* [*Jak rozpętałem drugą wojnę światową*] (1970), *I Hate Mondays* [*Nie lubię poniedziałku*] (1971), Sylwester Chęciński's *Our Folks* [*Sami swoi*] (1967), *Take It Easy* [*Nie ma mocnych*] (1974), *Love It or Leave It* [*Kochaj albo rzuć*] (1977), and Stanisław Bareja's *Wife for an Australian* [*Żona dla Australijczyka*] (1964).

¹⁰⁴ *The Cruise* is one of the most often quoted "cult" Polish films which Polish actors and the youth in general list as their favourite.

¹⁰⁵ Ginette Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage* (London: BFI, 2001), xvii.

¹⁰⁶ Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 49.

The wave of literary adaptations of the 1960s was the second such cycle, preceded by that of the 1920s-1930s, to enjoy immense popularity, and it was followed by the third wave between 1999 and 2003, which is the focus of Chapter 4 of this dissertation. As is the case with the third cycle of heritage literary adaptations, the first one came at the time of the uncertainties associated with the creation of the Polish independent state in 1918, and the second fell on the period of social and political unrest that culminated in the purges and bloody demonstrations of 1968 and 1970. In the climate of social and political insecurity, Jerzy Hoffman's *Colonel Wołodyjowski* (1969) sold 10 million tickets, and Jerzy Kawalerowicz's Oscar-nominated *Pharaoh* (1966) eight and a half million.¹⁰⁷ Yet, even though these productions provided a point of reference for the shaken Polish identity, they also attracted criticism for being the product of indecisiveness, opportunism, political escapism and a bad climate for film production,¹⁰⁸ precisely the type of criticism advanced towards the third wave of such productions in the period between 1999 and 2003. While under socialist censorship the grand spectacles were seen not to be a straightforward treatment of a literary work, but part of a public sphere debate veiled in an adaptation, and a parable on contemporary Poland,¹⁰⁹ that particular reading completely lost its impetus in the third cycle, created under the newly acquired freedom of speech, which made such veiling all but redundant.

Despite the box-office successes of historical adaptations in the 1960s and 1970s, the Polish film market was not in the best of shape in the mid-1970s. In Europe, in the 1970s only Albania had fewer cinema seats per capita (21.1 people per seat) than Poland. At the same time, and given that the popularity

¹⁰⁷ After Edward Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Kinematografia polska 1918-1991* (Warsaw: FilMOTEKA Narodowa and Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992), 190.

¹⁰⁸ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 255.

¹⁰⁹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 113-114.

of television grew exponentially within 20 years of its introduction in Poland, the successes of the Cinema of Moral Concern after 1976 might come as a surprise. After the fact, it was attributed to the expertise and esteem of the top financial and administrative management of the film industry in Poland,¹¹⁰ with television contributing significantly to film production, as continued to be the case after 1989. For instance, it was television that allowed Krzysztof Zanussi's medium length film *Death of a Provincial* [*Śmierć prowincjała*] (1966) to be made and, consequently, to win awards at the Venice and Mannheim film festivals, as did many other films produced with the help of television in the 1970s,¹¹¹ bringing Poland to the view of international film circles, and facilitating the delivery of the Cinema of Moral Concern.

The Cinema of Moral Concern and its troubles (1976-1981)

Commentators on the Cinema of Moral Concern¹¹² differ in their evaluation of its importance in Poland. In some cases they blame it for the neglect by critics of literary adaptations and other genres not concerned with moral issues, which continued to be a significant output in Polish cinema between 1976 and 1981.¹¹³ For some, the Cinema of Moral Concern is just another phase of Polish film, and no more significant than the others.¹¹⁴ For some, it is what contributed to the political and other changes in Poland after 1981.¹¹⁵ Many commentators viewed it as an underestimated part of the regional film-

¹¹⁰ Michałek and Turaj, *The Modern Cinema*, 50.

¹¹¹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 113-114.

¹¹² The phrase "Cinema of Moral Concern" is attributed to Janusz Kijowski, a film critic and director. (after Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 134), and it was delivered by Andrzej Wajda in his public speech at the 1979 Festival of Polish Films in Gdynia (after Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 147).

¹¹³ Czesław Dzondziłło, *Młode kino polskie lat siedemdziesiątych*, (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1985), 92. Also Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 160-162.

¹¹⁴ For instance, Krystyna Janda, who gave a powerful performance in one of the most renowned achievements of the Cinema of Moral Concern, *Man of Marble* [*Człowiek z marmuru*] (Wajda, 1977) as well as many other films of the "school" is quoted in Bren saying that she had no understanding for the significance attributed to those films (Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 112).

¹¹⁵ For instance, Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

scape of Eastern Europe, practically all of whose countries at the time explored in their filmmaking similar themes of the realities of an “unlovable but liveable” socialism.¹¹⁶ Its Polish brand focuses on processes of manipulation and corruption that were an inescapable part of the Polish socialist reality, in which a moral and/or ethical conflict between the individual and the state, and the state’s dissolute practices was unavoidable.¹¹⁷ Established filmmakers like Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi, as well as younger ones such as Feliks Falk, Piotr Andrejew, Janusz Kijowski or Agnieszka Holland, and – most importantly because of his later international and national standing – Krzysztof Kieślowski, all explored in their films choices made by individuals confronted with conformism and corruption in a specific socialist social condition of the time.

Although the term “Cinema of Moral Concern” is the most popular translation of the original “kino moralnego niepokoju”, it is not the most faithful one¹¹⁸. It loses the original possibility of an implied social action. “Niepokój” in Polish is not only an intellectual “concern”, but also indicates a visible physical reaction, which gives even more force to the tradition of a filmmaker as the bearer of a social consciousness and responsibility that is to be fulfilled by an artist in Poland. Despite allegations that such a role is neglected in the cinema after 1989, this dissertation argues that it is not the case, and that this tradition, especially powerful in the Cinema of Moral Concern, carries through to films made after 1989. That argument permeates the entirety of this dissertation, and it is in the foreground of the analysis of the films critiquing the new reality of post-1989 Poland, namely Władysław Pasikowski’s *Pigs* [*Psy*], Krzysztof Krasucki’s *Debt* [*Dług*] (1999), Mariusz Treliński’s *Egoists*

¹¹⁶ Jordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 108.

¹¹⁷ Jordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 108-109; and Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 147-155.

¹¹⁸ Other terms of reference to the Cinema of Moral Concern include the “Cinema of Moral Dissent”, “Cinema of Moral Anxiety”, and the “Cinema of Moral Unrest”.

[*Egoiści*] (2000) and Robert Gliński's *Hi Tereska* [*Cześć Tereska*] (2001), which are discussed in Chapter 6.

One film that is often said to have set the tone for the Cinema of Moral Concern is Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* [*Człowiek z marmuru*] (1977). In its treatment of contemporary reality and its connection to the Stalinist past, *Man of Marble* has at its centre a young female documentary filmmaker, Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda), whose initiation into the world of journalism¹¹⁹ takes a wrong turn when she decides to follow the story of a star worker of the Stalinist period. In her attempt to unveil the masquerades of the past, she also uncovers the corruptions of the present. The film uses documentary techniques and frequently employs handheld camera and authentic newsreels as well as black-and-white pseudo-documentaries, one of which lists Andrzej Wajda himself as one party responsible for producing the version of old reality in line with the political dictum of the Party. *Man of Marble*'s sequel, *Man of Iron* [*Człowiek z żelaza*] (Wajda, 1981) was finished just in time for its release to escape the severe restrictions of martial law introduced on 13 December 1981 and it went on to win the Palm d'Or in Cannes, just like its predecessor *Man of Marble*, and despite protestations by the Polish government of the time. In *Man of Iron*, Agnieszka evolves from an independent female journalist, to become a strong-willed and supportive wife of Maciej Tomczyk (Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz), whose father's story she investigated in *Man of Marble*. These two films and the shift of the main female character are a frequent point of reference for commentators on Polish cinema, and its gender roles, and they are especially important in the context of the film analyses in this dissertation.

¹¹⁹ Such an initiation is a frequent motif in the Cinema of Moral Concern. For more detail, see Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa, "Fałszywa inicjacja bohatera. Młode kino lat siedemdziesiątych wobec założeń programowych Młodej Kultury," in *Człowiek z ekranu: Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, ed. Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa and Mirosław Przyłipiak (Cracow: Arcana, 1996), 108.

Apart from stylistic experimentations with the documentary form,¹²⁰ one of the main reasons for the Cinema of Moral Concern's lasting acclaim is its conflicting relation to the versions of reality proposed by television screens of the time. Tightened censorship and the "socialist propaganda of success" of the time were tacitly encouraging audiences "to practice allegorical Aesopian reading"¹²¹ of media contents. In this way, censorship may be credited with the domestic and international successes of the films of the Cinema of Moral Concern. Ironically, the abolishment of censorship is also blamed for the initial difficulties of the post-1989 Polish cinema, as is highlighted in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The period of tightening censorship between 1976 and 1981 also brought a gradual elimination from the Polish screens of films from the West, which throughout the post-WW2 period enjoyed cycles of visibility in Poland. While in 1975 there were 55 films from the West shown in cinemas, in 1981 that number fell to 14, a trend that explains the initial hunger for American productions in the Poland of the early 1990s.

In general, the Polish film industry infrastructure at the time of the Cinema of Moral Concern was sliding into disarray despite the international acclaim given to its productions. This decline was not eliminated by the opening of a new Film School in Katowice in 1978, which at first was intended to educate television professionals,¹²² and where soon many filmmakers, who were no longer welcome in the Łódź Film School, people such as Kieślowski, Zanussi

¹²⁰ The emphasis on exploiting documentaries in features originated already at the Cracow Festival of Short Films in 1971, when Krzysztof Kieślowski, Tomasz Zygadło, Krzysztof Wojciechowski and Grzegorz Królikiewicz presented their manifesto advocating this emphasis. (After Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 135.)

¹²¹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 147.

¹²² Płażewski, "Film zagraniczny," 348.

and Wajda, found refuge.¹²³ In post-1989 Poland, both Film Schools remained significant film education centres, while many Film Units, once-central to Polish filmmaking, lost their significance or simply disappeared from the Polish filmic map.

The most significant heritage of the Cinema of Moral Concern for the purpose of this dissertation is its take on the dominant tradition of the Polish filmmaker's social responsibility. Another significant development of the Cinema of Moral Concern was that its representations of women, although still to some extent adhering to the national dictum described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, started to be less univocally positive, a trend that gathered more force in the 1990s. Another significant development of that period was the rise to stardom of Bogusław Linda, actor of "morally concerned" films,¹²⁴ and who also appeared in Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron*. His departure from the "morally concerned" roles, most notably in Władysław Pasikowski's *Pigs*, is symptomatic of the social changes and the changes in thematic foci of the films of the early 1990s, which are addressed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Last years of the People's Republic (1981-1989)

Martial law introduced in 1981 by the Government, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, put a symbolic end to the Cinema of Moral Concern. The emergency state lasted till July 1983, and it meant restrictions to the freedom of movement, the internment of 5,000 people, drastic censorship, suspension of various publications and the limiting of other media outlets. The Association of Polish Filmmakers, the principal industry body, was suspended. Some Polish filmmakers, including Agnieszka Holland and

¹²³ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 171.

¹²⁴ For instance, *A Woman Alone* [*Kobieta samotna*] (Agnieszka Holland, 1981), *Shivers* [*Dreszcze*] (Wojciech Marczewski, 1981), *Top Dog* [*Wodzirej*] (Felix Falk, 1978), and *Blind Chance* [*Przypadek*] (Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1981, released in 1987).

Ryszard Bugajski, left Poland for exile. “Uncomfortable” films were withdrawn from any form of distribution and “shelved” to be released later – in some cases, as late as 1989,¹²⁵ by which time they also became a relic of the past with no contemporary social or political significance.

Despite the banning of films from the West, and most Polish political films, pirated copies were still in illegal circulation during martial law and into the late 1980s. However, during that time the only critique not frowned upon by the increased censorship was that of the Stalinist past of Poland, not any other part of communist or socialist histories.¹²⁶ This prompted a move away from the socially responsible and system-specific filmmaking and brought to the fore more commercially minded films by, for instance, Juliusz Machulski, whose *Kiler* (1997) and *2 Kilers [Kiler-ów 2-och]* (1999) brought the first box-office successes to Polish comedy after 1989. These films are analysed in Chapter 7 as examples of internationalised, pastiche-based comedy.

Machulski’s motivation for making his commercially successful comedies was a search for an international professional standard for Polish productions, which could take them outside the realm of Polish national cinema.¹²⁷ Unsuccessful in his internationalised longings, in 1984, Machulski’s *Seksmisja [Sex Mission]*, a science fiction film about a post-apocalyptic world in which only women survived, brought 13 million viewers to Polish cinemas and remains a cult film after 1989. In the same year, Krzysztof Gradowski’s children’s fantasy *Akademia Pana Kleksa [Mr Blot’s Academy]* (1984)

¹²⁵ Some of the “shelved” films include Ryszard Bugajski’s *Interrogation [Przesłuchanie]* (1982), Janusz Zaorski’s *The Mother of Kings [Matka królów]* (1982), Jerzy Domaradzki’s *The Big Run [Wielki bieg]* (1981), Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Blind Chance [Przypadek]* (1981), Agnieszka Holland’s *A Woman Alone [Kobieta samotna]* (1981).

¹²⁶ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 211.

¹²⁷ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 165.

attracted 10 million viewers, even though the general cinema attendance was on a steady decline.¹²⁸ Literary adaptations continued to be popular, but were mainly broadcast on television.¹²⁹ And, in the absence of political cinema, the practice of allegorical reading of different filmic texts continued until the end of socialism in Poland, but not beyond it. Wajda's *Danton* (1983) made as a Polish-French-German co-production was seen in relation to the myth of Polish Romanticism, with Danton (Gerard Depardieu) perceived by Polish audiences as Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity, and Robespierre (Wojciech Pszoniak) as standing for socialist General Jaruzelski.¹³⁰

Commercialisation as well as a move towards psychological rather than social cinema were the two trends that crystalised after 1981 and continued beyond 1989. This period also brought a change in Krzysztof Kieślowski's filmmaking. Kieślowski's travels to Western Europe were helpful in a continuing examination of issues of universal or metaphysical rather than system-specific ethics.¹³¹ Both changes signified different movements away from the Polish tradition of seeing the role of an artist as the bearer of social responsibility, and both fed the growing commercialisation of the Polish film industry. The social-conscience auteur productions of the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern evolved into studies of individual moral and ethical choices, which were framed not within political or social but individual systems of psychology, with only a sporadic attempt at examining the relationship between the two. After 1989, the two significant trends of the period between 1981 and 1989 continued, yet – despite arguments to the contrary – the tradition of social responsibility evolved rather than disappeared.

¹²⁸ Edward Zajiček, *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku* (Warsaw: Instytut Kultury i Komitet Kinematografii, 1994), 91.

¹²⁹ For instance, *Nad Niemnem* [*On the Niemen River*] (Zbigniew Kuźmowski) was the most popular film in 1987 (after Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 171).

¹³⁰ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 167.

¹³¹ Danusia Stok, *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 143.

Polish cinema in transition 1989-2004

This dissertation aims to present the evidence for the argument that the transitional cinema of the first 15 years of post-1989 Poland developed in three definable stages paralleling those described in the preamble to this dissertation, and which are as much subject to continuities as to discontinuities of sorts. The first stage is that of the chaotic industrial and thematic restructuring characterised by strong commercialising and Americanising drives,¹³² and attempts to come to terms with the trauma of the recent past.¹³³ The second phase brings disappointment with the ethos of the intelligentsia as well as that of capitalist success, which crystallised in the first stage, and it culminates in the heritage cycle of 1999 analysed in Chapter 4, as well as films critical of the outcomes of commercialising changes, which resulted in the excesses of the newly rich classes and the destitution of those with no access to the spoils of the new system, all points which are given prominence in Chapter 6. The third phase occurs in films of the early 2000s, in which individuals are bestowed with the responsibility for their own fate and in which they – with varied levels of success – attempt to break with the Polish ethos of Romanticism and to present universal solutions to the problems these films present, solutions nevertheless dressed in the specificity of the contemporary Polish condition.

The three stages described above parallel broadly understood social shifts in Poland after 1989, as outlined in the preamble. Their boundaries are at times fluid, and the trends at the centre of these different phases spill over to the next one. For instance, Americanised films continue to be made beyond the

¹³² This stage is exemplified in Chapter 6 by Władysław Pasikowski's *Pigs* (1992) and in Chapter 7 by Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler* (1997).

¹³³ That trend is analysed in Chapter 5.

mid-1990s. If such a spill-over happens, however, a given trend becomes marginalised by the others that come to prominence in the next phase, as is described in Chapter 3. In general, all these phases are open to commercialising. In fact, the greatest commercial success of the Polish cinema between 1989 and 2004 belongs to the heritage cycle, which came into being in response to the commercialisation resulting from the internationalisation of Poland. Most of the films of the cycle, as well as their filmmakers, remain in dialogue with the earlier Polish traditions of filmmaking, including that of the social responsibility of an artist, and the national myths, which mostly have their origins in Polish Romanticism. That dialogue often places them in opposition to these myths and traditions, yet at times, such an opposition is only apparent and indicates an evolution rather than a departure, as it is the case with Pasikowski's *Pigs*. On one level, iconoclastic and rebellious, on another its protagonist is a continuation of a tragic Romantic hero and of the Polish School's anti-hero.

The structure of this dissertation is inspired by the “need to view the screen through twin theoretical prisms”, which advocates the positioning of the screen and therefore cinema as a “culture industry” as well as contextualising it within “ideas of patrimony and rights that sits alongside such traditional topics as territory, language, history and schooling.”¹³⁴ Although the prominence here is given to cultural and textual considerations, the industrial aspects of Polish cinema between 1989-2003 are also given considerable attention. The few aspects of Polish cinema's continuities and discontinuities outlined above are treated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, which elaborates on their origins and manifestations in – mostly post-1989 – Polish film. Chapter 2 also constitutes the background for the further discussion of the dominance of Polish traditional representations of Catholicism, masculinity, femininity and landscape, as they transfer and transpire in Polish transitional

¹³⁴ Miller et al., *Global Hollywood*, 15.

cinema, while Chapter 3 grounds the three stages of Polish cinema developments between 1989 and 2004 in their industrial, cultural and film criticism contexts. The function of these two chapters is to provide a focused yet reasonably comprehensive background for the analyses included in the following parts of this dissertation. The four chapters that follow after them examine thematic and generic clusters of Polish cinema through the prism of arguments presented in the previous two chapters. That means first investigating post-1989 Polish cinema's relation to the past and then to the current social and cultural issues that concern Poles.

To this end, Chapter 4 concentrates on the significance of the commercially successful cycle of heritage films of 1999-2003 and on its representations of mythical national pasts contextualised in the Polish contemporariness of that period. The underlying argument of that chapter is that heritage films, despite their various shortcomings and the criticism they attract, provided a much needed point of reference for the destabilised national identity, even if its function was to present the possibility of rejecting such an identity. After addressing the mythical pasts as they are represented in the heritage cycle, Chapter 5 examines the representation of the recent, socialist past in several films made in and after 1989. This chapter argues that the discomfort and trauma associated with dealing with the times of helplessness remain unresolved at the beginning of the 2000s, due to collective unwillingness to assume responsibility for the excesses of those times. Ironically, that unwillingness is also a direct outcome of the learned helplessness that was part of the socialist experience in the Polish People's Republic. Despite these films' attempts to differentiate between the uncomfortable past and the superior current situation, rather than being resolved, the trauma is re-represented, denied or commodified as a commercially viable filmic product.

Chapter 6 traces most directly the transitional stages of post-1989 cinema, and given the breadth of the material it covers, it is also the most expansive of

the four analytical clusters of this dissertation. While Chapter 4 focuses on the representations of the mythical national past, and Chapter 5 on those of the recent uncomfortable past, Chapter 6 examines the direct relationship between the social and cultural changes and their filmic representations. In so doing, it positions them in the context of continuities and discontinuities of Polish traditions of representation discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, and it revolves around the axis of the ethos of success, which is said to have replaced a dominant Romantic ethos. The Romantic ethos is addressed in Chapter 7, which gives prominence to the most critically neglected type of popular filmmaking in Poland, namely Polish comedy. The two comedies analysed there exemplify a commercialising and internationalising tradition of popular Polish comedy (Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler*) and the subversive intellectual tradition of the Polish grotesque (Marek Koterski's *Day of the Wacko*). That chapter's main argument lies in the patterns of generic continuity residing alongside the direct and literal rejection of the Romantic ethos after the period dominated by the heritage cycle.

Although television in general played a significant role in the production of Polish films after 1989, this dissertation focuses on films that were either produced specifically for cinema or had cinema release between 1989 and 2004. This approach is based on the assumption that cinema constitutes a particular case of filmic experience for the audience who need to make a conscious effort to expose themselves to it. Coincidentally, films with cinema release tend to have more readily accessible associated industrial data, thereby allowing for a more accurate and multifaceted analysis, which is especially significant given the scope of the filmic texts analysed. Furthermore, the sample of films chosen for more detailed analysis is skewed towards the end of the general period under scrutiny, the years between 1998 and 2004. This bias is motivated by the even greater paucity of writing on the most recent developments in Polish cinema than is the case with the cinema of the early or mid-1990s.

Conclusion

The preceding introduction evidences the need for a coherent work on the subject of Polish transitional cinema of the period between 1989 and 2004. That need is grounded in the scarcity and fragmented nature of published work on the topic. Although this dissertation does not address Polish cinema in the strict terms of a national cinema, but rather as the cinema of a nation in transition, this shift of perspective requires the clarification outlined in this introduction. The prominent space given to debates on the notion of national cinema, could easily imply placing this work in their context in a manner that is not unintended here. As explained above, this dissertation considers some industrial, textual and cultural conditions of Polish cinema, but its aim is not to determine the existence or the scope of Polish national cinema; rather, the nature and sources of the transitions it underwent in the analysed period. Although including the historical delineation of Polish cinema in its introduction is not an orthodox choice for a work of this type, it serves here as a valuable point of reference for the ensuing discussion and analyses, and especially so for the consideration of the continuities and discontinuities of filmic representations undertaken in the following chapter.

2

Of (post)transitional Polishness and film

Polishness is about being in perpetual conflict with one and the other side, always being in between. This is Polishness. We have wonderful collective traits, and awful individual characteristics. We have to have a common enemy to bring us together. We are always in a quarrel with the neighbour, and at the same time we are gallant and full of good manners. We are also devoted to the cult of the Virgin Mary. We adore women in any guise, in Catholicism, in erotica and everywhere else. Don-quixotism with a Polish sword... These are the basics of Polishness.¹

The historical journey of our loss of independence, regaining independence and then again falling into dependence, shaped us in the way that we cannot simply reject and say that we are starting everything anew on Monday because it happens that on Monday we become a free country. We carry that past with us, whether we want it or not.²

¹ Lew Rywin, the President of Heritage Productions, co-incidentally also at the centre of the bribe media scandal and convicted at the beginning of 2005, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

² Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

Polishness, like any other socio-cultural identity, does not lend itself to clear-cut definitions. It is a complex and evolving conceptual entity, which nevertheless marks patterns of one type of belonging for between 50 and 60 million individuals in Poland and abroad. Despite its elusiveness, it is also one of the qualities ascribed to Polish films, either by the filmmakers themselves or by these films' audiences. As discussed in the Introduction, the Polishness of Polish films has its points of reference in industrial concerns, and in the cultural and social conditions represented in them. These conditions derive from the sense of historical and cultural continuity that binds national belonging. Outlining the way in which these continuities evolve, especially in times of transitions, and the manner of their representation in film is the aim of this chapter. Its main argument is that the current state of Polish filmic texts, in all its contemporariness, is in dialogue not only with the current realities of Poland, but also with past traditions, narratives and symbolisms, even if that type of dialogue is not immediately apparent.

To achieve its aim, this chapter first introduces the problems inherent in determining the Polishness of films based on their means of production or legislative concerns, which become meaningful only if combined with cultural or textual considerations, especially as is the case with Polish co-productions. Then, the chapter lays out the general boundaries of the concept of nationhood, finally narrowing them down to the traditions, narratives and symbolisms significant to Polish cinema and its products as outlined in the Introduction and analysed in the ensuing chapters of this dissertation. The Romantic ideal of independent Polish statehood, the myths and symbols that derive from it, most notably that of Polish landscape, the Polish Mother and a tragic male hero, as well as the social responsibility of the artist are the main traditional themes of that discussion. Once these are outlined, the remainder of this chapter places in their context the themes of commercialisation and

internationalisation, as well as their effects, for instance the crisis of gender representation, the linguistic poverty and generic systematisation (or ambiguities) of Polish films.

Polish co-productions?

Establishing the existence of a national cinema defined as an industry is deceptively simple. Its parameters are usually defined by film-specific legislation, which may but need not point to the means of production, distribution, exhibition and possibly even patterns of consumption. In the Polish case, these parameters are determined in the Bill on Cinema that, after almost 15 years of disputes about its shape and implications, was voted on by the Polish Parliament on 17 February 2005. After some adjustments to the document proposed in the Parliament to accommodate the requests of film distributors, it is expected to become a legally binding document on 1 January 2006, and it is to regulate the boundaries of a film's Polishness, and – since Polish cinema may be seen as a sum total of all Polish films – the Polish cinema in general. According to the version of the Bill voted on in February 2005, a film would be considered Polish only if it had a producer residing in Poland or in the European Union, and fulfilled one of the following conditions:

- 1) The script writer (or the author of an original literary text adapted for film), director and the lead actor/actress are citizens of Poland or the European Union, or are associated with Polish culture, and the Polish-registered producer pays for 100 percent of film production costs and 80 percent of those are spent in Poland, and the master copy is made in Polish, unless the script demands otherwise; or
- 2) The script writer (or the author of an original literary text adapted for film), or director or the main actor/actress are citizens of Poland or of the European Union, or are

associated with Polish culture, and its producer, residing in Poland or in the European Union, pays for at least 20 percent of production costs in the case of co-production with two parties, and at least 10 percent with more co-production parties, and the proportion of production costs spent in Poland is at least 80 percent, and one of the main copies is made in Polish, unless the script demands otherwise; or

3) The film is a co-production realised in accordance with the legally binding international agreements on co-productions.³

Compared with the previous version of the Bill circulated in 1995, the 2004 copy widened the possibility of institutional support for a broad range of co-productions. According to the previous version of the Bill, a film would be considered Polish, only if it were either produced by a Pole, or by a Polish registered producer, and not only would it have to be filmed in Polish, but the director or script writer would have to be Polish, or the film subject would have to be Polish, or most shooting would have to be done in Poland.⁴ In the new version of the Bill, it is possible that a French filmmaker would make a French film in French, which would be legally referred to as Polish as long as she or he declared an association with Poland, and as long as the film's producer spent at least 80 percent of production costs on Polish soil, regardless of whether Poland was represented in the film.

³ Piotr Gadzinowski, *Sprawozdanie podkomisji nadzwyczajnej o rządowym i poselskim projektach ustawy o kinematografii (druki nr 2055 i 2598)*, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej IV Kadencja, 21 January 2005, (10 February 2005). <<http://www.sfp.org.pl/projekty/>>.

⁴ From a version of the Bill on Cinema that according to the commentators was to be submitted to the Parliament in 1995. ("Projekt ustawy o popieraniu sztuki filmowej," *Reżyser* (supplement to *Kino*) 2 (1995): 1-6.

Polish filmmakers protested the redefinitions of what could be considered a Polish film for various reasons, most of which had to do with access to funding, but their protests can also be seen in terms of protecting the boundaries of Polish filmic output. Despite the clearly prescribed designation linking the nationality of a film to its means of production and its financial contribution to the Polish film industry, this legislation's definition of the Polishness of films is instrumental in attracting more funds to the Polish film industry, but it neglects textual or cultural points of filmic reference, which are what often determines the national affiliation of a film for its audiences.

One familiar case of confused or under-determined national identification is that of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Red* [*Trois couleurs: rouge*] (1994), whose nomination for the Best Foreign Film Oscar in 1994 was rejected due to its insufficient "Swissness". The decision of Oscar judges was motivated by their belief that the film involved too high participation loads of co-producing Polish and French partners. An unpopular judgement, protested by Robert Altman, Lauren Bacall, Glenn Close, Oliver Stone, Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, it none-the-less demonstrated that mixed nationality of the means of production of a particular film might be contentious to those in favour of binary opposites, according to which something is (Swiss or Polish) or is not.

An even more problematic case is that of Roman Polański's *The Pianist* (2002), a Polish-French-German-British co-production, which was awarded three "straight" Oscars rather than receiving awards in the "foreign film" sub-category, but which was also claimed, sometimes decisively, and at other times with a significant degree of mistrust, as a Polish film. Set in Poland, shot in Poland and Germany, directed by a Polish émigré director, based on a book by a pianist, a Polish-Jew, with only one Polish lead actor, and – importantly – spoken in English, *The Pianist* (Polański, 2002) is a film with high production values packaged for international sale. The film gracefully

courts audiences who may be connected to its story and its production by the ties of collective belonging, to the point that it becomes close to impossible to refuse its courtship and identification, or at least an empathy, with its narrative. This, despite numerous Polish critics accusing Polański of using too many Hollywood clichés.⁵ The film's producer, Lew Rywin quotes Polański as saying that his 2002 Cannes Gold Palm is for a Polish film.⁶ If so, why is this film's Polishness questioned by some, and ignored as a possible point of reference by others? Are other co-productions with a significant Polish component Polish? Is it possible for Wajda, or Kieślowski, to make a Polish film abroad, in a foreign language, using foreign actors, based on a non-specifically Polish story line, and still have that film claimed as Polish? Are Jerzy Skolimowski's British films Polish? Are Jerzy Domaradzki's Australian films Polish?

The two cases described above are a good indication of the difficulties inherent in national questions concerning filmic production. Clearly, it is not the means of production or a contribution to the financial well-being of the film industry that determines a film's Polishness for their audiences. Rather, it is that film's belonging to the Polish cultural sphere, which in the first 15 years of post-communist democracy became fragmented as well as internationalised, while still retaining its specific national character. Hence, and as already pointed out in the introduction, any examination of Polish cinema must take into consideration the evolving nature of the social and cultural conditions, including the issue of nationhood, and its implications for the filmic texts.⁷ Furthermore, and following Andrew Higson's dictum mentioned in the

⁵ Jerzy Płażewski lists a myriad of comments to that effect in his report from Cannes, "Z polskiej perspektywy," *Kino* 7-8 (2002): 26-31.

⁶ Lew Rywin in an interview with Iwona Cegiełkówna, "Nie strzelać do 'Pianisty'," *Kino* 9 (2002): 12-13.

⁷ For instance, Susan Hayward, "Framing national cinemas," in *Cinema and Nation*, eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 88-102.

Introduction, Polish films belong to the Polish cultural sphere, and their belonging exists within the complex tapestry of determinants of national identity as lived within the cultural and social realities of a particular time.⁸ Yet, to address the specificities of Polish identity and its transitional permutations in Polish film, it is also necessary to refer to the general conceptualisation of that particular type of belonging; namely national identity.

Serendipities of national identity and film

However much one might want to do away with the concept of nationhood, be it out of a globalising (neoliberal?) desire, idealistic longing for a common humanity, or regionalising particularism, nationhood and national identity are far from being atavistic. They reappear in various conscious and not so conscious discourses. They unite, separate and identify spheres of cultural, political and economic influences. Even if their boundaries no longer comply with the requirements first established by the industrialising processes,⁹ they give a way of systemising and possibly understanding the worlds of collective and individual similarities and differences.

While definitions of national identity may differ in detail, they have in common an emphasis on the cohesive properties of the organising concept. National identity serves to bind together a group of people and institutions that form or used to form a nation, which is understood either as an “imagined community”,¹⁰ or as a political entity.¹¹ Whatever level of definition is taken

⁸ Andrew Higson, “The concept of national cinema,” in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 52-67.

⁹ Compare with Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. 163-191; also Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), esp. 99-122.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹¹ Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos, *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 11.

into consideration, it is axiomatic that national identity is supported by a common language, a shared history or culture, a sense of religious, territorial, ethnic or “racial” distinctiveness and/or assertion of difference from other communities.¹² Flags, architecture, works of art and “treasured histories” are expressions of national identity, which is stored and disseminated by various institutions, including schools, universities, the Church, broadcasting organisations and also cinema.¹³

On the one hand, the formation and transformation of national identity may be seen as driven by a nation-state. According to Etienne Balibar “the fundamental problem” for a state is “to produce the people. More exactly, it is to make the people produce itself continually as a national community. Or again, it is to produce the effect of unity by virtue of which the people will appear, in everyone's eyes, ‘as the people’, that is, as the basis and origin of political power.”¹⁴ Or, as Toby Miller sums up his definitional extrapolations on the nation, a nation is “a spirit-in-dwelling” articulated by the state to ensure the latter's legitimacy, and bound by popular culture.¹⁵ On the other hand, national identity gives meaning to human existence, “particularly in times of depravation”,¹⁶ and can be seen as a constant and instantaneous adaptation of variants of collective belonging proposed by state institutions, and commercial and international organisations. However, most importantly, the process of determining one's belonging is shaped by individuals in their daily socialisation practices and their expression in customs and self-

¹² Jenkins and Sofos, *Nation and Identity*, 11.

¹³ Monroe E. Price, *Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 40.

¹⁴ Etienne Balibar, “The nation form: History, and ideology,” *Review: Fernand Braudel Center* 13: 3 (1990): 329-361.

¹⁵ Toby Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship; and the Popular Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 28-29.

¹⁶ Balibar, “The nation form,” 343-344.

perpetuated expectations of cultural specificity, which are also perpetuated in the cultural artefacts of a given nation, including films.

On the formal, semiotic, level, the format of the expression of national identity is uniform across nations. It includes symbols of nationhood referring to a nation's historical, and cultural (including ethnic/racial/religious) uniqueness, but also to its unique social condition in a given historical time. These symbols are generated either by their adornment by the state or national institutions, or they are sustained by the popular (national) discourse and imagery. They are also part of the memory industry that ensures the survival of a nation and its identity. They do so by propagating loyalty and nostalgia for the past and the narratives and symbols that support present fears and aspirations, a trend realised in the films analysed in Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 of this dissertation. If Eco's taxonomy of objects¹⁷ is extended onto images that can be turned into objects, we can say that any object or image circulating in a given national culture is bound to contribute to the overall idea of a collective identity. In this way, the taxonomy of institutionalised symbols and narratives of national belonging co-exists with the taxonomy of customs and "ways of life" that work together to constitute a nationhood, yet their hierarchies remain fluid.

The concept of national identity can be also derived from the sense of cultural uniqueness as a product of historical continuity or discontinuity. As any other linguistically and culturally complex term, culture is not a definitionally stable concept. In the context of this dissertation Following Miller and McHoul's categorisation of most common definitions of culture, culture is taken not to

¹⁷ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 27. An object according to Umberto Eco can be considered in five ways: 1) as a material or physical object; 2) as a tool with a functional value; 3) as a commodity with an economic exchange value; 4) as a sign of social position; and 5) as a semantic entity that can become a part of a greater cultural whole.

be limited only to “artistic output”¹⁸ of a particular group. It is understood as an “all-encompassing concept about how we live our lives, the senses of place and person that make us human,”¹⁹ as well as “values, systems or reasoning and other cognitive attributes [and their material artefacts] shared by the members of the collectivity and not shared generally by the members of other collectivities.”²⁰ It is also the main determinant of a collective and therefore – more specifically – national identity, as “a symbiotic relationship that exists between a group as a whole and the individuals who comprise the group.”²¹ Furthermore, national identity encompasses other collective identities that are not in direct conflict with it. This is reflected in a 2000 survey, in which Poles were found to identify more readily with the local region of Poland they lived in rather than with Poland in *toto*.²² Therefore, on one level, the alignment of Polish cinema with Polish national identity can be defined in relation to existing national symbols and narratives, which include the traditional themes of historical and social uniqueness. On another level, contemporary Polish identity, and its filmic representations, is fragmented into other macro and micro-identities of belonging to Europe (and the European Union) rather than Eastern Europe,²³ or belonging to a particular region of Poland, or being part of the *nouveau riche* class, or of the impoverished class of blocks of flats [*blokowiska*] dwellers, or belonging to a successful professional stratum, or affiliation with Polish crime circles. Furthermore, the Polish national identity

¹⁸ Toby Miller and Alec McHoul, *Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 5.

¹⁹ Miller and McHoul, *Popular Culture* 5.

²⁰ Edward C. Stewart, “Outline of intercultural communication,” in *Intercultural and International Communication*, ed. Fred L. Casmir (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 294.

²¹ Marshall Singer, *Intercultural Communication: A Perceptual Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1987), 53.

²² 57 percent identified most with their local community while 22 percent with whole Poland.

Agnieszka Cybulska, ed., *O tożsamości Polaków* (Warsaw: CBOS, c.2002). (6 March 2005) <<http://www.cbos.com.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2002/KOM062/KOM062.HTM>>.

²³ Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) 181.

gains a new and higher level of cohesion in the case of Polish emigrants.²⁴ All these types of belonging find their representation in film, while converging on the one common national belonging, with its historically and culturally derived modes of signification.

Polish characters, landscapes, idea(l)s

Polish nationhood, as with any other, is reflected in two groups of signification: national imagery and national narratives. The first comprises various symbols of Polish statehood, including the national flag, hymns, art, architecture and landscape circulated in the context of its national significance, the Polish literary canon, national heroes, and Catholic symbolism. The latter consists in the identification of Polishness with Catholicism and narratives of the struggle for a Polish independent state and the suffering associated with it, which Monroe E. Price defines as a treasured history helping to establish the “choseness” and uniqueness of a particular nation.²⁵ As is evident from this dichotomy, Catholicism is a constant in this context, a point taken up in more detail later in this dissertation. Traditionally, the majority of these symbols and narratives have their roots placed within the tradition of Polish Romanticism,²⁶ and – to a smaller extent – Polish Realism, which is commonly referred to in Poland as Positivism. Both these traditions encompass slightly different concepts of Polishness. For Romantics, Polishness was formulated in linguistic-ethnic terms. Polish Positivism placed the ethos of independence in the Polish Enlightenment, which centred on a

²⁴ Emigrants of a particular national origin are usually a more cohesive and less differentiated group than the population of their original home country.

²⁵ Price, *Television*, 49.

²⁶ See, for instance, Barbara Rornquist Plewa, *The Wheel of Polish Fortune: Myths in Polish Collective Consciousness during the First Years of Solidarity* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University, 1992).

politically responsible-citizenry model.²⁷ Romanticism as well as Positivism developed in a nation without a state that was under partitions by Russia, Prussia and Austria from the end of the 18th century. Both these traditions were realised in a double culmination of 1918 and 1989. In 1918, Poland regained its independent state after 123 years of non-existence, only to be subjected in 1924 to dictatorship by the leftist national hero, Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935).²⁸ In 1989, it escaped the sphere of Soviet influence, once again regaining sovereignty.

Great Romantics, sensible Positivists, persistent Catholics

Polish Romanticism generated the ethos of a messianic artist bestowed with social responsibility to propagate the plight of the enslaved mother country. The figures of Polish Romanticism in popular circulation were mostly those of emigrant writers and artists who took the Polish plight outside Poland, and suffered the Romantic longing for their motherland. Of all of the significant figures of Polish Romanticism, Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) takes the most prominent position on the international stage. His standing in the “Great Tradition” of Romanticism is described accurately by Zdzisław Mach, when he says “for Poles, Chopin is a national hero and a national prophet, (...) one of the greatest creators of the heroic romantic period of struggle, tragedy and fame.”²⁹ For many Poles the emotional appeal of Chopin’s music lies in a

²⁷ Andrzej Walicki, *Idea narodu w polskiej myśli oświeceniowej* (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 2000). For an English version, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). The relative merits of both models of nationhood are also discussed by Janusz Gockowski, “Stać się społeczeństwem obywatelskim: ‘bogactwo narodów’ i ‘postęp umysłowy’,” in *Bieda i bogactwo w polskiej kulturze i świadomości*, ed. Grażyna Skąpska (Cracow, TAIWPN Universitas, 2003), 67-93.

²⁸ Although Piłsudski’s “leftism” is usually not included in the narratives of his heroism, and most often resides in the untold parenthesis of the popular histories.

²⁹ Zdzisław Mach, “National anthems: The case of Chopin as a national composer,” in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford and Providence, US: Berg, 1994), 65.

Polish-specific reading of it as an expression of nostalgia for the Polish landscape and the motherland in general. In their state-sanctioned use, Chopin's polonaises and nocturnes mark the solemnity of national events to the point, where "a prominent Polish intellectual" quoted by Mach says "whenever I hear Chopin on the radio, I fear something horrible has happened."³⁰

Although not as renowned internationally as Chopin, writers Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), and, more problematically so, Aleksander Fredro (1793-1876) are synonymous with the Polish Romantic patriotic tradition. Both wrote "to strengthen [Polish] heart" in a time of need, when the Polish state did not exist. In doing so, they adopted different strategies. Mickiewicz was a psychotherapist, whose work was a projection and repetition of the Romantic trauma and suffering, and of the helplessness of failed longing for an independent state. Unfulfilled longings characteristic of Polish Romanticism, as expressed by Mickiewicz, influenced the timbre of the Polish popular narrative for a long time to come, and they still resonate, arguably with less force, in Poland after 1989. Aleksander Fredro, on the other hand, in perceiving himself as a Polish patriot, a claim disputed by some of his contemporaries, assumed the role of an entertainer, whose works use the guise of comedy to point to the historical and cultural continuities of the Polish nation.

Chopin, Mickiewicz and Fredro are the three Romantics who enjoy being frequently taken up by Polish cinema. Chopin's film score credits are countless, including Roman Polański's *The Pianist*, and he is the subject of three significant (in the context of this dissertation) Polish productions. One, *Young Chopin* [*Młodość Chopina*] (Aleksander Ford, 1952), came before the

³⁰ Mach, "National anthems," 69.

Polish School. Another, *The Blue Note* [*La Note Bleue*] was filmed in 1991 as a French-German co-production by Polish émigré director Andrzej Żuławski. The third, *Chopin. The Desire for Love* [*Chopin. Pragnienie miłości*] (Jerzy Antczak, 2002), is part of the post-1989 cycle of heritage films. Other films of the post-1989 heritage cycle include adaptations of Mickiewicz's grandest epic *Pan Tadeusz* (Andrzej Wajda, 1999) earlier attempted by Ryszard Ordyński in 1928, and Aleksander Fredro's *The Revenge* (Andrzej Wajda, 2002), which is also a re-adaptation following the popular version of Fredro's play directed by Antoni Bohdziewicz and Bohdan Korzeniowski in 1952. While these films, and other adaptations, provided the most direct connection with the idea(l)s of Romanticism and its concepts of Polishness, that tradition in general resonates beyond its historical boundaries, and finds its manifestation in the failed heroes of the Polish School, and the torn and conflicted characters of the Cinema of Moral Concern, as well as in the cultural dialogue undertaken by Polish films made after 1989, for instance *Day of the Wacko* [*Dzień świra*] (Marek Koterski, 2002), discussed in Chapter 7, or *Debt* [*Dług*] (Krzysztof Krauze, 1999), discussed in Chapter 6.

Positivism and its ideas and ideals have also left a lasting impression on Polish traditions and the ways in which they are realised in cinema. Its empirically inspired stern evaluation of Polish national aspirations and failed pro-independence uprisings advocated the importance of "organic work", which would most of all ensure the survival of Polish nationhood by scientific and objective education of all social groups. Although chronologically placed in different literary periods, the writing of Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916) as well as Stefan Żeromski (1864-1925) and Władysław Reymont (1867-1925) relied heavily on both, the Positivist as well as Romantic traditions. Chronologically speaking Sienkiewicz belonged in Positivism although he rarely is classified as such, and Żeromski and Reymont wrote in the literary period of the "Young Poland", which fell on the beginning of the 20th century.

All three authors became part of the Polish literary canon taken up for film adaptations in communist as well as post-communist Poland. Of the three, Sienkiewicz is most commonly associated with Romanticism, despite his historical placing within Positivism, which came after. Of the three, his books have also been the most popular source of literary adaptations. Jerzy Hoffman filmed three out of a total of at least 14 film adaptations of Sienkiewicz, which - as mentioned in the Introduction - include *With Fire and Sword* (1999), *The Deluge* (1974) and *Colonel Wołodyjowski* (1969). Andrzej Wajda created a masterpiece of Polish cinema based on Reymont's *The Land of Promise* released in 1975, and re-edited and re-released in 2000. Wajda also filmed Żeromski's politically engaged *Ashes* [*Popioły*] (1965). Two other, out of at least 11 adaptations of Żeromski, were filmed after 1989, including *Sisyphus Labours* [*Szyfowe prace*] (Paweł Komorowski, 2000) and *The Spring to Come* [*Przedwiośnie*] (Filip Bajon, 2001).

One of the most significant shifts between Romanticism and Positivism is the loosening of the strong connection that Romanticism had with the tradition of Polish nobility [*szlachta*]. Norman Davies refers to the Poland of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries as "a Nobleman's Paradise".³¹ For most of that time, Poland's political system could be described as "*szlachta* democracy", in which *szlachta* elected kings of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, and enjoyed a significant range of statutory privileges. *Szlachta* at the time considered themselves to be a people superior to the peasants and townfolk. They spoke a mish-mash of Latin and Polish and believed themselves to be descendants of the ancient warriors, Sarmatians, who inhabited the Black Sea steppes in antiquity. The statute passed in 1573 proclaimed religious tolerance in the Commonwealth of Lithuania and Poland, the most progressive act of this type in Europe. Yet, at the same time, the most

³¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 201-255.

significant proportion of *szlachta* were Catholic, and they considered themselves the cradle of Polishness.³² Their ideology of nationhood was later taken up to some extent by the intelligentsia, and *szlachta* are also the focus of the majority of Romantic literary works realised in film, for instance that of *Pan Tadeusz*, *Zemsta*, and also Sienkiewicz's *The Deluge*, *Colonel Wołodyjowski* and *With Fire and Sword*. This is one of the reasons why Sienkiewicz is said to continue the Romantic rather than Positivist tradition.

In both these traditions, that is Romanticism and Positivism, Catholicism served as the point of identification for Polish nationhood predominantly for its role in propagating Polish language and culture in the partitioned Poland. Hence, its symbolism, including its places of worship, art, and the iconic images of Madonna and crosses became part of Polish imagery still circulated in Polish film before and after 1989. The Catholic Church's role as a facilitator of national survival continued in the post Second World War Poland. Before 1989, it was said to be "the only truly independent institution functioning in the totalitarian regime, the advocate of Polishness in a world of sovietisation, advocate of sovereignty in a world of enslavement; the advocate of historical continuity in the destructive nihilism of the practices of totalitarian revolution."³³ The church, alongside the underground press, political clubs and discussion groups, most of which existed under the aegis of the church, was the marker of "civic religion" and a main facilitator of change in Poland, much more so than any weakening of Soviet power.³⁴

³² Andrzej Walicki, "Intellectual elites and the vicissitudes of 'imagined nation' in Poland," *East European Politics and Societies* 11: 2 (1997): 227-254.

³³ Adam Michnik, *Diabeł naszego czasu. Publicystyka z lat 1985-1994*, ed. Andrzej Romanowski (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1995), 75.

³⁴ Nigel Hawkes, ed., *Tearing Down the Curtain: The People's Revolution in Eastern Europe by a Team from The Observer* (London, Sydney, Auckland and Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 20.

At the same time, however, the church became a political entity interested in insisting on its own brand of Catholic Polishness. In the words of Cardinal Wyszyński, who is also the subject of *The Primate – Three Years from a Thousand* [*Prymas – trzy lata z tysiąclecia*] (Teresa Kotlarczyk, 2000) discussed in Chapter 5, in his sermon of 1973, “we [the Church] wish that the voice of the overwhelming majority of our Nation meant more than the voice of a few hundred people who make decisions which are at variance with the convictions, desires and aspirations of almost all the christened Polish nation.”³⁵ Although the church’s political significance evolved after 1989 into a state-endorsed institutional existence, and Catholic symbolism changed both its form and expressions, the inseparability of its presence from the Polish ideascap is unshakeable. Yet, the manifestations of this presence and variations in interpreting it for the screen are a worthwhile point of consideration throughout this dissertation, especially given the Polish claim to being “a Christian nation for over one thousand years”,³⁶ a claim which disregards the periods of Polish history in which Poland was multicultural and multiethnic.³⁷

Catholicism and its symbolism have not always been so uniform. They remain an ambiguous occurrence in the art and literature of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), also known as Witkacy, or Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969), or Sławomir Mrożek (1930-). All of them are part of the literary canon, mainly as a result of their iconoclastic tendencies, and the first two are readily filmed by Polish directors before (but mainly after) 1989. Their

³⁵ Stanisław Wyszyński, *Prymat człowieka w ładzie społecznym* (London: Odnova, 1976), 112.

³⁶ George Blazyca and Ryszard Rapacki, *Poland into the 1990s; Economy and Society in Transition* (New York: St Martins Press, 1991), 7.

³⁷ For instance, in the 14th century, Poland was considered to be one of the most liberal and tolerant countries of Europe and a safe haven for Jews, who were persecuted elsewhere, and for other ethnic and religious denominations.

iconoclasm in most cases is directed at Romanticism and often at its ideology of nationhood. Witkacy's *Insatiability* [*Nienasycenie*] (Wiktor Grodecki, 2003) and *Farewell to Autumn* [*Pożegnanie jesieni*] (Mariusz Treliński, 1990) both followed their literary sources in addressing the decline of Polish aristocracy, their decadence, homosexuality, excessive wealth, infidelity, alcoholism and the use of drugs. Jerzy Skolimowski's surreal version of Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* in *30 Door Key* (1991) was followed by Jan Jakub Kolski's adaptation of Gombrowicz's *Pornography* [*Pornografia*] (2003), a film that attempts to untangle surrealism weaved by the author of the literary text. Witold Gombrowicz's prose, Witkacy's writing and art, and Mrożek's theatre scripts belong in the Polish tradition of the absurd and the grotesque, which came to the fore at the beginning of the 20th century, and which is also present in Polish film comedies, for instance in *Day of the Wacko* (Marek Koterski, 2002), discussed in Chapter 7. All three absurdists share with the great Romantics a dominant theme of self-imposed exile. Gombrowicz spent 1939 to 1963 in Argentina, Mrożek lived in Italy, France and Mexico from 1963, returning to Poland in 1996, and Witkacy exiled himself from life at the news of the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. Yet, their mocking attitude to Polish and any other absurdities, divorced them from the patriotic pathos of Romantic longings realised in "typically" Polish imagery realised in art and film.

Mythical landscapes, Polish Mother and doomed heroes

Much Polish art, especially that created during the partitions, is "a manifestation and a source of national consciousness, a verdict and disquiet of national conscience, a guide to lofty life," expressed through historical symbols, "typically" Polish landscapes and models of patriotism and service to

the nation.³⁸ As such, this strand of art is not unique to the Polish nation, neither is its literal use by some filmmakers before 1989, for instance Andrzej Wajda's reference to patriotic paintings by Jan Matejko (1838-1893), Artur Grottger (1837-1867) or Wojciech Kossak (1857-1942), also quoted by other filmmakers before and after 1989. "The stereotypical, almost kitschy, emblems of the 'old Poland': an old country manor and an equally stereotypical image of a village; a girl from the manor bidding farewell to her soldier; picturesque *ułans* [light cavalry] parading to face their earth; the typical Polish countryside bathed in gold and green"³⁹ were represented in Polish heritage films as well as other types of film.

The urban landscape of Warsaw, Cracow and Łódź also served as the canvas of many Polish films, whose repertoire of urban landscape expanded after 1989 beyond the three cities to include Wrocław and other small town settings. The domination of Warsaw as the backdrop for Polish film action started before the war⁴⁰ and continued throughout Polish film history. However, after 1989 Warsaw lost its place as Polish films' urban core, and the urban setting of Polish films underwent pluralisation. Other cities and towns of regional Poland, such as Wałbrzych, Łódź or Zielona Góra, were used much more than before as a backdrop for Polish films. At the same time, however, idyllic rural settings, with birch woods, manors and golden-haired female beauties, maintained their stable position in heritage cinema as well as in some auteur productions, including those of Andrzej Kondratiuk and Andrzej Barański, ensuring thereby the continuity of the motifs of Romantic allegoric imagery.

³⁸ Maria Suchodolska and Bogdan Suchodolski, *Poland: Nation and Art: A History of the Nation's Awareness and Its Expression in Art* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1989), 10-12.

³⁹ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (London: Berghahn Books, 2002), 95.

⁴⁰ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 26.

One other narrative mythologised in Polish Romanticism is that of the Polish Mother who stood guard to preserve Polishness in the times of the partitions, and who weaved her way through the national ethos of the Poland also represented in film. In Polish iconography, the Polish Mother, and for that matter the Polish female, traditionally stand for suffering, pain and devotion to the heroic son/man, and country.⁴¹ The symbolic Polish woman is a Madonna-like martyr, whose holiness is realised in her self-sacrifice, and whose daily routines transcend the realm of *profanum*.⁴² In the symbolic terrain of the Romantic paradigm, it used to be the private sphere occupied by women that carried the sanctified burden of upholding nationhood, while Polish masculinity found its expression in the public domain, where it existed under the physical threat of oppression.⁴³ In this way, the successes of nation building, which ordinarily belong in the public sphere, occur in the private spaces, which are structured by women. In words of Jan Prokop, a prominent literary scholar:

the Polish home, as a “channel” through which national identity [was] transferred, [taking] over the functions which are performed by public institutions in independent countries. [...] [In the 19 century, during partitions of Poland] the Polish home was a fortress and national temple inaccessible to the partitioning powers, but not a place where an individual found familial refuge from his/her compatriots.⁴⁴

⁴¹ More on that in Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Obraz Matki Polki w kinie polskim: mit czy stereotyp?” *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 17 (1997): 131-140; and Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Filmic representations of the ‘Polish Mother’ in post-second world war Polish cinema,” *European Journal of Women Studies* 5 (1998): 419-435.

⁴² Rafał Marszałek, *Filmowa pop-historia* (Cracow: Wydawnictwa Literackie, 1984), 344.

⁴³ Haltof makes a similar point (*Polish National Cinema*, 7) although his emphasis is not on the shape of masculinity at this instance.

⁴⁴ Jan Prokop, *Universum polskie. Literatura, wyobrażenia zbiorowa, mity polityczne* (Cracow: Universitas, 1993), 23-24.

To emphasise the Catholic site of Polish nationhood, a historian of Polish culture, Bogdan Suchodolski speaks of the intersection of Catholicism and the ethos of the Polish Mother, which – according to him - derives from the role of the Mother of God transcribed onto the role of the Polish woman in the Middle Ages.⁴⁵ Paul Super in his 1939 work on Polish culture and tradition explains the preoccupation with the Holy Virgin/Mother disarmingly, when he says:

In Poland the pictures and figures of Jesus represent Jesus as suffering on the cross or bearing the cross in great suffering to Calvary. It is not an attractive representation. The Madonna, on the other hand, is all that the art of great painters and sculptors can bring forth in beauty and loveliness. No wonder the devout worshipper is drawn to one so lovely as the Holy Virgin of the Ostra Brama.⁴⁶

That transcription points to a high ideal of Polish womanhood, which in the popular Polish vernacular of the beginning of the 21st century is still defined by self-sacrifice and the almost super-human capabilities of a woman who works, rears children, is a portrait of health and beauty and a divinity for her (male) partner. This is the ideal of a Polish woman alluded to by Lew Rywin, the producer of *The Pianist* and *Pan Tadeusz* in the opening epigraph of this chapter. That ideal is symbolically expressed in the cult of the Virgin Mary and her statues and paintings generously spread across Polish interiors and landscape, and used to convey an array of messages in Polish film before and after 1989. Many a time, it is their absence or displacement that marks a dissonance in the filmic world.

⁴⁵ Bogdan Suchodolski, *Rozważania o kulturze i przyszłości narodu* (Szczecin: Glob, 1989), 141.

⁴⁶ Paul Super, *The Polish Tradition: An Interpretation of A Nation* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939), 71-72.

The sacred Polish Mother (martyr/Madonna female) has her place in the cinema of the Polish School. Her elevated standing is as ineffectual as that of the Polish School's male. That place is only partially sustained beyond the Polish School, with the Cinema of Moral Concern mainly questioning the female ability to understand a protagonist who was both conflicted and threatened by corrupted realities. Yet at the same time, towards the end of the cycle, the Cinema of Moral Concern returned to it in, for instance, Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981).⁴⁷ The holiness of a Polish woman is most often preserved provided she fulfils the role of the pillar of masculine strength. Rarely, if ever, would an independent woman be able to maintain her sanctified position in Polish film without fulfilling her role as a superior supporter of masculinity. One example of that process was mentioned in the previous chapter. Agnieszka in Wajda's *Man of Marble* (1977) and *Man of Iron* (1981) makes a transition across the two films from an independent journalist to a strong-willed and supportive wife.⁴⁸ Another example is described in Chapter 6 through an analysis of Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler* (1997) and its sequel, in which the main female character is de-sanctified when, in the sequel, she is portrayed as incapable of providing the strong-willed support for the main male character.

In post-1989 the general trend of de-sanctifying the Polish sacred female found its strongest expression in action films that followed American cinematic patterns. For instance, in Władysław Pasikowski's *Pigs [Psy]* (1992), a male protagonist is betrayed by his young female lover, who leaves him for his friend motivated by that friend's superior financial standing, as analysed in Chapter 5. Another significant film often criticised for its

⁴⁷ For instance, Agnieszka in Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* [*Człowiek z marmuru*] (1977) and *Man of Iron* [*Człowiek z żelaza*] (1981).

⁴⁸ Barbara Limanowska, "Pretensje do gwiazdy," *Biuletyn*, 1998, (6 March 2005) <<http://www.oska.org.pl/biuletyn/b2/prestensje.html>>.

misogynist tendencies is Maciej Ślesicki's *Dad [Tato]* (1995), in which the mother is considered a parody of the Romantic (national) ideal of Polish Mother. In general, a woman in the public domain is usually in transition between private spaces, where she belongs. A man in Polish cinema belongs in the public domain. Domestic spaces and the women who inhabit them are the stabilising points of masculine identity, and provide moments in which men can gather strength to fight the world in their quest to state and re-state their masculinity. Men's presence in the domestic space is transitional as is a Polish woman's venture into the public world. However, the domestic setting for men is the site when they are open to exhibiting their weakness, and their prolonged stay in these spaces signifies a prolonged state of weakness. Women, on the other hand, remain strong in public, and they either have to be returned to their domesticity as in Jacek Bromski's *Of Children and Fish [Dzieci i ryby]* (1996) where a successful female advertising executive decides to continue her pregnancy, the result of a one-night stand after a high-school reunion with her old love, a failed provincial teacher. Or, their fate becomes suggestively tragic, as is the case with the central female characters in *Hi Tereska* (Robert Gliński, 2001) and *Egoists* (Mariusz Trelński, 2000), two films analysed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.⁴⁹

Interestingly, gender imbalances in Polish cinema started to receive noticeable attention only after 1989, yet such discussions are limited to film critics and scholars, with filmmakers quick to remove themselves from any such deliberations. For instance, Dorota Kędzierzawska, one of the most acclaimed new female directors of the post-1989 cinema, denied any associations with feminism, when asked about the way she portrayed the

⁴⁹ This is true of all films analysed in this dissertation, although Polish film, and post-1989 film, has exceptions from this rule. For instance, the personal cinema of Andrzej Kondratiuk has both male and female protagonists, portrayed by Kondratiuk and his real-life wife, a renowned actress, Iga Cembrzyńska, residing with equal success mainly in their domestic and idyllic rural setting in *Time Spindle [Wrzeczono czas]* (1995) or *Sundial [Słoneczny zegar]* (1997).

main female character in her *Nothing [Nic]* (Kędzierszawska, 1998). She insisted that the victimisation of the woman by her husband in the film and also her social context were only accidental in their gender-specificity, and a similar situation could also involve a male.⁵⁰ Whether this is a remnant of one of communism's tenets of unquestionable gender equality⁵¹ may be a fascinating ground for inquiry, but feminism continues to be an unpopular point of reference in Polish cultural debate outside academic and critical circles. For instance, when Maciej Ślesicki was interrogated about his anti-feminist portrayal of female characters in his *Dad*, he rebutted by saying: "If being anti-feminist means disliking feminists, then I admit, yes, that's me. This film is a litmus test. It identifies wise women. I don't listen to those who squeak that it is an anti-feminist film, because I know this is not the case."⁵² Although this comment may be read as anti-feminist, before giving such an evaluation an air of finality, one would have to pay some attention to the Eastern European circumstances to which Western brands of feminism are applied. As Iordanova points out, under the socialist regime men and women were not only equal in the light of official ideology, they were also placed on the same side of the struggle against the injustices of the system.⁵³ The main social conflicts were defined in that way, rather than in terms of gender inequalities. The most pertinent question in this context is what demarcation lines should be followed when considering the gendering of the Polish (post)transitional nation, and to what extent Western brands of feminist theory

⁵⁰ Dorota Kędzierszawska in an interview with Manana Chyb, "Sama na huśtawce," *Film 10* (1998): 84-85.

⁵¹ Although Dina Iordanova points out that despite that "unquestionable" tenet, women in Eastern Europe, including Poland, used to and still make films addressing the darker side of women's existence in relation to men. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 119.

⁵² Maciej Ślesicki in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz, "Śmiech i łzy obok siebie," *Film 12* (1995): 38-40.

⁵³ Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 124.

may serve as a useful point of reference in such considerations. This question is closely connected with that of the validity and, indeed, survival of another ethos of Polish art, literature and film; that of the socially responsible artist.

Guarding the nation and authorial strategies

Traditionally, the role of a Polish artist, and a filmmaker, is defined in terms of the social responsibilities that the role carries. Borrowing from the Polish Romantic tradition of struggle for an independent and idealised national and social state, the Polish School as well as the Cinema of Moral Concern are founded on the premise of Polish filmmakers' social responsibility to their compatriots. This premise has its strong grounding in the prevalent treatment of film as art rather than entertainment in Poland, and in Polish film theory, which - as mentioned in the Introduction - from its beginnings emphasised the social role of films. In the words of Marek Haltof:

Given the complexity of Polish history, cinema – and, for that matter, all Polish art – has generally been regarded as more than just entertainment. The artist's "mission" was that of a prophet and teacher bringing a message to society. Film and other art forms acted as safety valves in the controlled corrupt political system. Filmmaking was a platform on which political debates were sometimes argued openly, and sometimes in an Aesopian language. Politically active filmmakers were always at the foreground of Polish life. The artists felt an immense responsibility. Conversely, they were also accustomed to a situation in which their

voices were heard and analysed by the people and by the authorities.⁵⁴

As is argued in more detail in the next chapter, the end of communism meant the end of a certain type of political filmmaking in which the centre-stage conflict was between an individual and grander historical or systemic forces. The grandiose theme helplessness in the face of the adversities brought by powerful turns of history explored in films made in the 1960s and 1970s seemingly vanished after 1989, to the great regret expressed by, for instance, Krzysztof Zanussi or Jerzy Kawalerowicz.⁵⁵ However, this shift should not be confused with the end of the ethos of a socially responsible filmmaker. Despite arguments to the contrary (quoted in the next chapter), the tradition of social responsibility evolved to accommodate the new reality, where blame for the social and cultural malaise of the time could not be directed solely at the “system”.

While the general tone of disappointment in the pre-1989 productions may be said to constitute one point of identity for Polish cinema, that tone persists in Polish film after 1989, although its direction and its accusatory powers are less univocal. For instance, prominent film critic Bolesław Michałek is not alone in his complaint about the inability of a Polish protagonist to find a direction in addressing any social or cultural issues highlighted in Polish cinema after 1989.⁵⁶ In the general atmosphere of complaint about the inability of Polish cinema to address its contemporary reality, Krzysztof Krauze's *Street Games* [*Gry uliczne*] (1996) and his *Debt* [*Dług*] (1999) are often criticised for depicting younger generations as incapable of acting on the strength of their ethical and moral convictions, and this supposedly

⁵⁴ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 180.

⁵⁵ Krzysztof Zanussi and Jerzy Kawalerowicz quoted in Peter Cowie, *Revolution! The Explosion of World Cinema in the 60s* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 244.

⁵⁶ Bolesław Michałek, “Co się w kinie zmieniło, co się nie zmieniło?” *Kino 2* (1997): 9-11.

constitutes a departure from the older generation's capacity for heroic acts.⁵⁷ Yet the helplessness of the main characters when faced with stronger forces, be it communist corruption in *Street Games* or criminal structures in *Debt*, is a continuation of the narrative in which a (usually male) protagonist is destined to fail.

The other two points of pressure that need to be considered when examining the ways in which the ethos of the socially responsible filmmaker continues in the Polish cinema after 1989, are commercialisation, and democratisation and its cultural implications. These implications found their principal manifestation in a pre-1989 statement by a Polish prominent art and culture critic, Zygmunt Kałużyński:

Freedom has a full human value when it has to be won and when it requires risk-taking, not when it is passed on at school as a regulation. Institutionalised freedom loses its value and becomes a hygienic routine. Furthermore, it does not enrich a person who exercises it. It is not a lived human victory, but simply an everyday routine.⁵⁸

The cultural implications of democracy for film in the context of the ethos of a socially responsible filmmaker are expressed by Wojciech Marczewski, a Polish director of the younger “old guard”, in his address to the students of the Danish Film School in Copenhagen. In it, he says:

You are awfully smooth, you and your heroes. Even your dogs don't bite each other. Your democratic system tries to smooth you out. And your school does the same. You

⁵⁷ For instance, Ernest Bryll, “Jaka jest gra?” *Film 7* (1996): 52.

⁵⁸ Zygmunt Kałużyński quoted in Joachim Glensk, ed., *Współczesna aforystyka polska: antologia 1945-1984* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1986), 177.

have to defend yourselves, protest against it. The role of an artist is to live in a conflict.⁵⁹

To gloss this statement, in the world in which mass media reflect a sufficient approximation of reality and there is no obviously identifiable “oppressor of the people”, finding a conflict susceptible to filmic treatment should be the driving force for a filmmaker. And, it is a filmmaker’s responsibility to pursue that drive, yet that pursuit is more difficult in the context of apparent freedoms and democracy; at least in the eyes of Polish filmmakers who belonged to the generations born well before 1970. For younger ones, the site of the conflict deemed necessary for film narrative resides within the protagonists, not in their external circumstance, a shift described in more detail in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Traditionally, according to Tadeusz Lubelski who originally employed that mode of systematisation in relation to the Cinema of Moral Concern and later extended it beyond that Cinema, a socially responsible Polish filmmaker employs one of the following four filmmaking strategies; that of the witness, psychotherapist, film professional or dramaturge.⁶⁰ A filmmaker as a witness preserves a particular social condition on film, very much like a documentary filmmaker, for instance Polański in his *The Pianist*. A psychotherapist, as already mentioned in the introduction, works to deal with a particular trauma and preferably provide its catharsis, as was the case with many films of the Polish School. A film professional is mainly concerned with making a commercial filmic product of international quality and usually relies on generic specificities. A dramaturge borrows from all of the above, and the resulting product brings contents and significance different from any one particular

⁵⁹ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Joanna Pogorzelska, “Wojciecha Marczewskiego dreszcze i zmory,” *Film 6* (2003): 72-75.

⁶⁰ Tadeusz Lubelski, *Strategie autorskie: w polskim kinie fabularnym lat 1945-1961* (Cracow: Rabid, 2000).

strategy described above, yet usually more powerful.⁶¹ In another version of the same systematisation applied to post-1989 cinema in Poland, Lubelski does away with the strategy of a dramaturge, and replaces it with that of the filmmaker as an artist,⁶² a replacement not entirely justified given that many films of the post-1989 period escape a clear-cut systemisation and would more easily fit this all-encompassing category. For instance, the heritage cycle and the films about the realities of the People's Republic carry traces of the psychotherapeutic session, as do films addressing the more acute aspects of Polish capitalism, for instance films analysed in Chapter 6. Many of these films employ the strategy of a film professional, some that of a witness, and others that of an artist or an entertainer.⁶³ In the context of this dissertation, Lubelski's systematisation is useful in so far as it points to Polish filmmakers' motivations and *modus operandi*, and their intersections after 1989.

Generic and thematic continuities

Polish cinema is not known for its genre-specific approach to filmmaking, as is indicated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Yet, Polish cinema was, and continues to be, dominated by films that can be categorised into genres, although different from those accepted and expected by Hollywood. Those films that continue the older traditions of filmmaking in Poland include the heritage and historical literary adaptations, comedies, and "grudge" films or films juxtaposing the current state of affairs with a traumatic history. The new heritage cinema is an heir to the state-funded attempts at providing Polish

⁶¹ Lubelski, *Strategie autorskie*, 175-178.

⁶² Tadeusz Lubelski, "Wzlot i upadek wspólnoty, czyli kino polskie 1975-1995," *Kino 1* (1997): 17-20.

⁶³ Note that a filmmaker's motivation to entertain is different from a motivation to produce professional filmic products, and different from a filmmaker as an artist. The difference lies in a film professional's dependence on generic conventions. Of course, in reality it is also possible that a filmmaker would be motivated by a number of reasons at the same time.

viewers with histories that would help create a sense of the nation's historical continuity. They usually show nationalistic themes exemplified by struggles against a real or imagined enemy, parallel with a romantic theme of lovers separated by their historical or familial circumstances and usually (re)united at the end. Their plot usually gets complicated by cases of mistaken or mysterious identity, which would also find a resolution in the third act of the story, and it all plays out against the background of Polish landscape. The popularity of these films is indisputable throughout the history of Poland and of Polish cinema, with - for instance - Aleksander Ford's adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Teutonic Knights* [*Krzyżacy*] (1960), attracting more than 33 million viewers across forty years of repeated screenings.⁶⁴ As was mentioned in the Introduction, at various stages of Polish history, recurring heritage cycles suggest a demand for the Romanticised mode of national identification. In the case of the 1999-2003 cycle, according to Wajda, Romanticism provides an antidote for the Americanised "linguistic cesspool" of many contemporary Polish films.⁶⁵ Also, in his words, "[The adaptation of] *Pan Tadeusz* (Wajda, 1999) came out of the desire to show where we came from, who we are, what we are called, what we like, what kind of human characters are born amongst us."⁶⁶

While heritage films usually deal with national literary or cultural icons and imagined pasts, another cluster of films made in post-1989 Poland refers to the more recent and therefore more "real" past of the People's Republic. This kind of film is analysed in Chapter 5, and is situated within the tradition of "grudge films", in which the oppressor is the communist system, and the protagonist is either coming to terms with his dissatisfaction with that system

⁶⁴ Krzysztof Kucharski, *Kino plus: film i dystrybucja kinowa w Polsce w latach 1990-2000*, (Toruń: Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, 2002), 388.

⁶⁵ Andrzej Wajda in an interview with Manana Chyb, "A to my właśnie," *Film 10* (1999): 34-35.

⁶⁶ Andrzej Wajda in an interview with Chyb, "A to my właśnie," 34-35.

(Marczewski's *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* [*Ucieczka z kina "Wolność"*] 1989), or learning to live with it, although she considers herself outside of it (Zanussi's *In Full Gallop* [*Cwał*] 1996) or else the hero is placed in the position of the victim of the system, who bravely resists it (Kotlarczyk's *The Primate* (2000), and Wójcik's *There and Back* [*Tam i z powrotem*] (2002).

Although not the focus of this dissertation, war films play an important role in Polish cinema. Popular before 1989, they lost their prominence in Poland after 1989, when the People's Republic became a more significant traumatic reference point. However, there still remain points of unresolved war trauma awaiting filmic treatment. For many years, the Soviet murder of Polish officers and intelligentsia in Katyń in 1940 beckoned Polish film directors, including Andrzej Wajda, yet not with enough force to result in the making of a film, although during the 2004 Festival of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia, Robert Gliński insisted he would be able to finish the already started Katyń film. This phenomenon is part of the larger scale revival of scientific historiography in Poland, whose history during communism was written within a teleological framework that pointed out the reverse determinism leading to the inevitable establishing of communism.⁶⁷

While other war stories remain relatively unexplored in film after 1989, a few directors filmed Holocaust stories, which could not have been told before 1989. For instance, the story of Szpilman was to be released in 1948 with the title *Warsaw's Robinson* [*Warszawski Robinson*] (Jerzy Zarzycki, unreleased), but at the intervention of the censors, the Jewishness of Szpilman had to be omitted. Co-authors of the script, Czesław Miłosz and Jerzy Andrzejewski

⁶⁷ For a more elaborate discussion, see Henryk Sosnowicz, "Myths that die hard," *UNESCO Courier* (May 1994): 23-26; and Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, "In search of usable pasts," *Society* 30: 2 (Jan-Feb 1993): 32-37.

withdrew their credits, and the film became a propagandist *Unvanquished City* [*Miasto nieujarzmione*] (Jerzy Zarzycki, 1950). However, the result of re-filmed history usually has more to do with the Romanticised tradition of a Polish nationhood.⁶⁸

[They] seem preoccupied with either presenting nostalgic images of the past, of an almost harmonious world of multiplicity and peacefully coexisting cultures, or showing the martyrological aspect of Jewish history. Open discussions on Polish-Jewish relations are generally avoided because they are considered politically “delicate”.⁶⁹

The degree of interest in portraying the Holocaust and its stories is fascinating given the scarcity of a Jewish population in the post-1989 Poland, and also given the uncomfortable relations between the two nations. The bipolarity of the Polish side of these relations is manifested in Polish anti-Semitism, but also in a newly found Semito-philia, which seems anxious to see Polish history through the prism of rediscovering the locus of Polish Jews within it. Andrzej Wajda’s *Korczak* (1990) and *Holy Week* [*Wielki tydzień*] (1995) have been the most visible examples of Holocaust films that came from post-communist Poland. More interestingly, Radosław Piwowarski’s *March Almonds* [*Marcowe migdały*] (1990) focused on another parenthesis of Jewish-Polish history, the persecutions of 1968, when, following student protests, the government deprived thousands of Polish Jews in high positions of their jobs and, in many cases, their citizenship.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ For a more elaborate discussion on how that Romanticised tradition of Polish nationhood is realised in post-communist political life, see Frances Millard, “The failure of nationalism in post-communist Poland 1989-1995: an historical perspective,” in *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 201-221.

⁶⁹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 228.

⁷⁰ For instance, Zygmunt Bauman, the cultural theorist, was expelled from his university position and effectively was forced to leave Poland.

Comedy is one type of Polish filmmaking, whose presence is usually underestimated by film critics before and after 1989. Internationally, Polish comedies are not perceived as a legitimate part of Polish cinema, which is known for its more “socially responsible” and “serious” filmic matters. Domestically, they used to be popular with audiences, but distrusted by critics and governments of the time. That distrust translated into the lack of any effort to promote them to international audiences, whose taste for politically and socially responsible Polish filmmaking had already crystallised. Polish post-transition comedy, despite its domestic success, still remains within its national parameters, and until the early 2000s rarely is it released with subtitles, which would facilitate its international viewing. Nevertheless, the strong tradition of the comedy of the absurd and grotesque, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, continues in Polish filmic comedy after 1989, popular as well as highbrow. For this reason, Chapter 7 draws a tentative topography of Polish (post)transitional filmic humour and its significance for the maintenance of and changes in Polish self-perception.

Freedom, commercialisation and gender

The transitions begun in 1989 in Eastern Europe are popularly defined in the West as “democratising”, a term that in this context has an intimate relationship with broadly understood freedom. That idealistic, if not ideological, level of perception from afar does not include the other less desirable aspects of those transitions. One example of this is the widening gap between the poor and the rich, which gives a new sharpness to the previously non-threatening dangers of poverty or unemployment, which are

perceived by the Poles to be two greatest threats in the post-1989 reality,⁷¹ as already discussed in the preamble. Two other significant socio-psychological trends of post-1989 Poland are described in more detail in the following chapter: soaring crime rates and – especially pertinent in the early 1990s – communism-inspired “learned helplessness”,⁷² which is now presented in Polish films in a new context and with a new focus. In the late 1990s, individualism and the breakdown of familial proximity,⁷³ which in the past provided a support mechanism in times of need, ran parallel to an increasing pragmatism and a drive to accumulate wealth, even though in 1997 “family” was still nominated as one of the most important cultural values for 56 percent of surveyed Poles.⁷⁴ In the climate of the Polish social condition being transformed by democratic freedom, commercialisation and internationalisation, the 1990s fuelled calls for literary⁷⁵ and filmic treatments of Polish specificity. These calls, discussed in more detail in the next chapter, were answered, although not always to the satisfaction of film critics and the intelligentsia displeased with a populist turn in Polish cinema.

Points of new identity: whose language?

In a survey on the national self-identification of Poles conducted in 1988, the most important criterion in determining a person's Polishness was her or his

⁷¹ Małgorzata Szpakowska, *Chcieć i mieć: samowiedza obyczajowa w Polsce czasu przemian* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo AB, 2003), 148-167; also Grażyna Skąpska, ed., *Bieda i bogactwo w polskiej kulturze i świadomości* (Cracow: Universitas, 2003).

⁷² For a more elaborate discussion, see Halina Grzymala-Moszczyńska, “Unlearning ‘learned helplessness’,” *The Christian Century* 111: 9 (16 March 1994): 281-283; or for a particularly surprising manifestation of learned helplessness, Zbigniew Czwartosz, “On queuing,” *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* 42: 1 (2001): 177-185.

⁷³ Natalia Szczucka-Kubisz, “O czym marzymy?” *Wiedza i życie* 7, 1997, (17 June 2001). <<http://www.wiedzaizycie.pl/temat64.htm>>.

⁷⁴ Szpakowska, *Chcieć i mieć*, 136-147.

⁷⁵ For instance, Przemysław Czapliński laments the creation of a non-likeable literary hero, who carries no resemblance to Polish contemporary reality. Przemysław Czapliński, *Świat podrobiony; krytyka i literatura wobec nowej rzeczywistości* (Cracow: Universitas, 2003).

general sense of being a Pole, followed by the ability to speak Polish. Knowledge of Polish culture was the fifth on the list of criteria determining Polishness. Observation of the Polish customs was seventh, and Roman Catholic faith was tenth.⁷⁶ A similar survey conducted in 1994 placed the Polish language as the most important criterion, while the Roman Catholic Church advanced to seventh position.⁷⁷ Although the Catholic Church's ascent in the later survey may signify the increasing importance of Catholicism as the point of identification with Polishness, at the same time, it also suggests a less prominent role than the one implied by the mythicised tradition of Polishness. Traditionally listed as one of the primary values of Polish nationhood (alongside patriotism, pessimism, family, Romanticism and distrust of the government)⁷⁸ Catholicism remains an assumed property of a Pole. However, the importance of the Polish language in the process of identifying an individual as a Pole, or a film as Polish, is not surprising. In the words of Andrzej Wajda:

National cinema can be defined most of all by its language. It is spoken in the language used or understood by its audience. This is the cinema that by default addresses the audiences that speak a particular language. Why does there exist a global American entertainment industry, but there isn't an equivalent coming from France or Italy? This is the case simply because the English language opens the whole world to the American cinema. We exist in that world also, except that for us the necessary condition of a national cinema lies in creating films in our language. (...) Our films

⁷⁶ Based on Ewa Nowicka's research quoted in Janusz Mucha, "Polish culture as the nation's own culture and as a foreign culture," *East European Quarterly* 34: 2 (Summer 2000): 217-230.

⁷⁷ Czy jesteśmy dumni ze swojej polskości? (Warsaw: CBOS, September 1994).

⁷⁸ A. Podgórski, *Spółeczeństwo polskie*, (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo WSP, 1995), 134. Also in Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, "Wartości w polskiej reklamie telewizyjnej lat dziewięćdziesiątych," *Zeszyty prasoznawcze* 48: 3-4 (2001): 60. (58-75)

speak only to 40 million Poles in Poland and a few more millions abroad.⁷⁹

In this statement, Wajda positions Polish against other languages, and thus nations, without giving much consideration to its internal differences and points of separation. Most likely, what Wajda refers to as “our language” is a language different from that practised by Polish films seeking new and/or young audiences of post-1989 Poland.

Starting in the early 1990s, excessive use of vulgarisms became a stable part of the Polish cinema-scape, first for their shock value, but then to accommodate the audience’s expectations and increase the commercial potential of a film, as is the case with some films by Juliusz Machulski, and Władysław Pasikowski’s *Pigs* (1992). The schism between some of these audiences and the “educated and well-bred” Poles is best described by Mateusz Werner, son of a film critic, and a film critic himself of a generation whose teenage years fell in the last decade of the People’s Republic.

If you went to the cinema in 1992 in [provincial towns of] Przemyśl, Sanok, Ciechanów, Siedlce, you could see the audience laughing their heads off, tooting, trampling and grunting during Pasikowski’s film. These were two-bit market traders from Warsaw’s Ten-Thousand-Year Stadium market,⁸⁰ who came with their beer and popcorn to see how a popular actor says “fuck”. In doing so, they could validate who they were themselves. Their attitude, their lack of standards in everything, in the way they were brought up, in

⁷⁹ Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

⁸⁰ A setting for one of the biggest markets in Warsaw and Poland, with pirate copies of games, CDs, VHSs and DVDs, as well as a plethora of stolen goods for sale.

the way they thought, in their everyday lives, was gaining validation and legitimisation on the big screen.⁸¹

In the context of this description of “cultural pauperisation”, which found its way into Polish cinema, Marek Koterski’s *Day of the Wacko* [*Dzień świra*] (2002), analysed in Chapter 7, constitutes an interesting case, because it offers an amalgamation of that trend of cultural pauperisation with what previously stood for the higher ideals of the Polish intelligentsia, as well as the Polish tradition of the grotesque. To Krzysztof Kłopotowski, one of the most vocal critics of the older generation, *Day of the Wacko* signifies the beginning of the rise of Polish cinema.⁸² Kłopotowski refers to that film as a “turning point in the culture of the transition period”, which “put an end to the mission of the intelligentsia and exhausted the Romantic stand. (...) Ending the film with the envy-filled ‘prayer of a Pole’ speaks of the failure of Catholicism, which did not manage ‘to make [Poles] into angels’ which was what another Romantic dream aspired to.”⁸³

In the light of the social responsibility of the Polish filmmaker and their ability and willingness to comment on Polish reality, the most controversial cultural texts are the action films based on American patterns. Yet, for Jarosław Żamojda, his *Young Wolves* [*Młode wilki*] (1995) and its 1998 pre-quel, *Young Wolves 1/2* [*Młode Wilki 1/2*] (action films about young people living fast at the edge of the law) show one aspect of Polish contemporary reality and that is why they speak to their young audiences.⁸⁴ The same sentiment is shared by

⁸¹ Mateusz Werner, personal interview, 11 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

⁸² Krzysztof Kłopotowski, “Jutrzenka wielkości,” *Film* 11 (2002): 64-66.

⁸³ Kłopotowski, “Jutrzenka,” 64-66.

⁸⁴ Jarosław Żamojda in an interview with Małgorzata Sadowska, “Kino to jest przemysł,” *Kino* 1 (1998): 28-30. Such a stand goes against the predictions of 1990s that American form would not fit the Polish reality. (Anita Skwara, “Film stars do not shine in the sky over Poland: The absence of popular cinema in Poland,” in *Popular European Cinema*, eds. Richard Dyer and Ginnette Vincendeau (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 220-231. Such predictions did not take into consideration that the form may evolve, as may the reality within which it is placed.

Bogusław Linda, a leading actor of the Cinema of Moral Concern, and also of the “pasikoid”⁸⁵ genre: “if national identity is to consist of complexes, I don’t give a damn about it.” Linda prefers to have positive role models implanted onto the Polish soil from elsewhere, if needed.⁸⁶ Reminiscent of the tradition of social responsibility, that statement refers to films, whose heroes’ positive traits are widely disputed. On the other hand, Maciej Ślesicki, a director who has worked successfully within that mode, openly admits that he “does not give a fuck about social problems” and only cares “about an interesting story that would make a viewer leave the cinema with some emotions,”⁸⁷ which is an approximation of an earlier claim made by the first successful precursor of the Polonised American action films, Władysław Pasikowski. One theme common to many comments, including some of the above, is the need for a new kind of hero to replace the traditional conflicted male or the morally questionable and wrought with weaknesses “tough guy” of the Americanised genre.⁸⁸

Heroes and heroines of transitional trauma

Masculinity, however dominant in Polish cinema, is not devoid of crises of sorts. As already described in the Introduction to this dissertation, a Polish male has rarely been depicted as a creature of victory or any other type of

⁸⁵ “Pasikoid” combines “Pasikowski” with “oid” from Greek “eidos” which means “kind, type, shape.” A term coined by Mateusz Werner to signify Polish action films following the Americanised pattern established in 1992 by Pasikowski’s *Pigs*. In Mateusz Werner, “Przyzwoci do kin,” *Film* 4 (2000): 20.

⁸⁶ Bogusław Linda in an interview with Maciej Pawlicki, “Łykam powietrze,” *Film* 11 (1993): 61 and 83.

⁸⁷ Maciej Ślesicki in an interview with Jakub Gieralt, “Jeszcze nie raz was zaskoczę,” *Kino* 5 (1997): 14-15 and 50.

⁸⁸ For instance, Mirosław Przyłipiak highlights these weaknesses of the traditional and new Polish cinema in his article on “Piszczyk’s complex” (“Kompleks Piszczyka,” *Kino* 12 (2002): 17-20). Also, see Ewa Mazierska, “The redundant male: representations of masculinity in Polish postcommunist cinema,” *Journal of Film and Video* 55: 2-3 (2003): 29-43.

glory. This situation is further problematised after 1989. Izabela Kalinowska argues that transitional masculinity is subject to three stages, all of them with their roots in the transitional trauma. First, the demise of the traditionally patriotic and patriarchal order of the old Poland placed masculinity under the pressure of redefinition, which at that stage resulted in the filmic representations of tough and alienated guys with or without guns. The second stage brings what Kalinowska refers to as “the death of the intelligentsia”, exemplified most strongly by Marek Koterski’s *Day of the Wacko*. In the third stage, a new “man of transitions” is born. His life starts with the premise that he lives in a reality that is not perfect, but acceptable, and that he can adjust it to his own individualistic needs.⁸⁹

If Koterski established the disjunctive rupture between the transition and the new Poland of relatively stable realities by ridiculing the intelligentsia, as is demonstrated in Chapter 7, then according to Kłopotowski, it will be Piotr Trzaskalski and his film’s protagonist, who – in the role of a Messiah – will lead the new middle class to enlightenment through, broadly understood, renunciation. Interestingly, according to Kłopotowski, Trzaskalski will do so by renouncing the pursuit of the stories of the life on the margins with its virtue of poverty, which he depicted in *Edi* (2002).⁹⁰ Opinions such as Kłopotowski’s not only borrow, ironically in the context of its constant denials, from the Romantic ethos of Messianism, but they are also a counterbalance to the voices bemoaning the loss of social responsibility of a filmmaker and their inability to address the new reality.⁹¹ At the same time, however, *Edi*

⁸⁹ Izabela Kalinowska, “Śmierć inteligenta, czyli o ponowoczesnym kryzysie męskości w kinie polskim,” in *Gender. Konteksty*, ed. Małgorzata Redkowska (Cracow: Rabid, 2004), 193-202.

⁹⁰ Kłopotowski, “Jutrzenka,” 64-66.

⁹¹ For instance, Rafał Smoczyński is not alone in claiming that neither the spectacular heritage films, nor American “fire-cap” films, nor Polish soap operas serve as to mirror Polish reality. (Rafał Smoczyński, “Zakneblowany,” *Film 11* (2002): 76-79.

exemplifies a new post-transitional male, who does not have to give into the pressures of commercialisation and other expectations of contemporary Polish reality, and who can make his own choices, uninterrupted by grander forces operating around him. Tadeusz Sobolewski positions *Edi* well in its contemporary social context, when he says:

Poland is a nation of individuals. However, these are individualities who fight each other, and who express themselves in losing. What's missing is the sense that "yes, life is terrible, horrible, but this is how it is." This assumption should be a departure point, not a destination. That is why *Edi* is such a good film. For an average Polish film that assumption would have been the film's destination. For *Edi*, it is a starting point. An average film would show how horrible life is, that there are plenty of thieves everywhere, that a man is at a mercy of his fate, capitalism and money. *Edi* starts with that and says "this is how it is; now you have to save yourself; you, nobody else."⁹²

Another example of a similar brand of film-making is *Squint Your Eyes* [*Zmruż oczy*] (Andrzej Jakimowski, 2003). The film's protagonist renounces his background and education to lead a non-conformist life on the margins of social acceptability, yet also a life that seems to be happier, more dignified and less marked by compromises that need to be made by those in the mainstream of the new capitalist Poland. Both films may also be seen as positioned in opposition to the commercialising (historical) force, and they are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

⁹² Tadeusz Sobolewski, personal interview, 11 July 2003, Warsaw (11 July 2003).

Representations of women in Polish post-1989 cinema, as well as in Polish cinema in general, are even more problematic. Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa, a Polish film scholar, argues that Polish cinema of the 1990s is devoid of positive portrayals of women. According to her, they are either mad, amoral, “for sale” or oppressed by the Christian and other dominant/oppressive contexts, the latter especially in the context of their role as “guardians of the home fire”.⁹³ Elżbieta Ostrowska sees the sources of these types of representations in the male trauma brought on by the end of the (Romantic) national-patriotic ethos and the sacredness of the Polish Mother associated with it.⁹⁴ This view holds true, especially given that Polish filmmaking is dominated by men, which suggests the male agency behind the creation of both the transitional male and female, in Polish cinema. In both cases, these representations remain overwhelmingly and symptomatically uncomplimentary in the first two stages of transitions, and they shift in the third stage to create some more positive heroes and heroines, or at least ones that are capable of overcoming the shortcomings of theirs and of their environment. This third stage of transition at the very end of the 20th century started slowly to bring in the real end to the PRL along with the trauma and relative helplessness associated with it. The democratic and capitalist circumstance of Poland and the tradition of individualism are at the root of the ideological shift towards self-reliance, in which an individual is responsible for the maladies and achievements of his social and economic condition. That shift is by no means complete, and is not necessarily an entirely positive phenomenon, since it also encourages individual self-interest, but at the same time, it starts to release a Polish character from the traditional pessimism of helplessness, when his or her agency is transferred onto the state or some other institution.

⁹³ Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa, “Kobieta jako McGuffin,” *Kino* 9 (1998): 26-29.

⁹⁴ Elżbieta Ostrowska from a fragment of an unpublished manuscript in preparation for a book on “Women in Polish Cinema”.

In light of the comments above, Kłopotowski calls for the creation of a new model of Polish culture that would change “the elite of the nation just like one would a paradigm.” A new elite could not be the intelligentsia, but a group of brave entrepreneurs, willing to take risks and existing within legal - rather than illegal – state frameworks.⁹⁵ When it comes to the Polish cinema’s role in that “paradigm shift”, some filmmakers and commentators, especially before 2003 (when the possibility of that shift in film became most visible) remain unconvinced. Film director, Mariusz Grzegorzek’s, statement indicates the sources of that lack of faith:

Young people who are studying now at the [Łódź] School are characterised by – let me borrow from Antoni Kępiński – the crisis of “emotional metabolism”, which comes from a general identity crisis. They don’t know films by Fellini, Tarkovski, Bergman, Eisenstein, they don’t listen to classical music, they don’t read, and consequently their means of expression is limited by their ignorance. They are no longer the elite of the nation. Those people now study what will bring them an immediate gratification of material wealth, a most significant value for the Polish society of the early 2000s.⁹⁶

Despite some negative evaluations of Polish cinema and its filmmakers and heroes, the socio-cultural shift at the turn of the 20th century and in the first years of the 21st century gains in force. The textual references to the past and its traditions are combined with patterns of behaviour and attitude related to the new (post-traumatic?) social conditions.

⁹⁵ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, “Kino IV Rzeczypospolitej,” *Film* 6 (2003): 76-79.

⁹⁶ Mariusz Grzegorzek, “Pokonać zwątpienie,” *Kino* 9 (2002): 20-22 and 55.

Apart from the films already mentioned here, Przemysław Wojcieszek's two films represent that trend in Polish cinema of the beginning of the 21st century, *Louder than Bombs* [*Głośniej od bomb*] (2002) and *Down a Colourful Hill* [*W dół kolorowym wzgórzem*] (2004). In both films the main male characters choose to continue the tradition of their deceased fathers in provincial Poland, rather than follow an attempt to find happiness in bigger cities or abroad. Also, significant is the fact that in 2004 Ryszard Zatorski's successful⁹⁷ generic romantic comedy based on a popular Polish contemporary novel, *Never Ever* [*Nigdy w życiu*], had its main character, a divorced mother of one, Judyta Kozłowska (Danuta Stenka) manage to pull her life together and build her dream house in the hilly Polish landscape all by herself. At the same time, the traditional sacredness of the self-sacrificing Polish Mother is a site of humour in the film when, at the building site of her house, she handles a laden wheelbarrow and is grateful for the approval she receives from the "resting" builders. In another film of 2004, Magdalena Piekorz's directing debut, *The Welts* [*Pręgi*], Tania (Agnieszka Grochowska) literally saves Wojciech (Michał Żebrowski) from his inability to move beyond the repetitive cycle of the trauma inflicted on him in childhood by his father (Jan Frycz), for whom love was inseparable from physical punishment. Wojciech's deliverance and Tania's holiness is completed in the last scene of the film, when Tania announces to him that she is pregnant. That ending, by the first female director since Agnieszka Holland to win the Grand Prix of the Polish Feature Films Festival in Gdynia, might indicate the birth of a post-transitional woman, who moves beyond reliving the trauma of transitions and

⁹⁷ Over 1.6 million sold tickets and the fourth place in the box-office after Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, almost 3.5 million), Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury and Conrad Vernon's *Shrek 2* (2004, almost 3.4 million), Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Ring: The Return of the King* (2003, over 2 million). ("Podsumowanie 2004 roku w polskich kinach," *Stopklatka*, 20 January 2005, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.stopklatka.pl/wydarzenia/wydarzenie.asp?wi=23825>>.

willingly embraces her position as a stronger carer, which reflects the positive model of the Polish Mother. At the same time, given the scarcity of female visions in Polish cinema, that process might happen more slowly than that of delivering models of post-transitional man in Polish film.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has outlined some post-1989 continuities and discontinuities in the terrain of Polish national representations and significations in Polish cinema. First it demonstrated the role of various myths and narratives in the development of the sense of Polishness, for instance the myth of the sacred Polish Mother, a tragic national (male) hero, stereotypically “Polish” landscape and Catholicism. Next, it focused on possible points of interruption to these representations, and argued a three-stage shift in filmic representations of Polish identity. The first chaotic years of transition brought into crisis the patriotic-national mode of identification, which affected other sub-national forms of identification and representation, including representations of Polish men, women and language. The second phase brought disillusion with the new capitalist condition coupled with the continuing dissatisfaction with the old models of Polishness. The disjunctive rupture between this and the next stage of changes came with the 1999 successes of the Polish heritage cycle, which were followed by the parallel birth of a new post-transitional identity.

As already stated in the Introduction, it is the audience and directors of Polish cinema who determine its particular belonging. For instance, for Mieczysław Porębski, an art theoretician and historian, Polishness is a state of mind that is formed at the intersection of tradition, places, books, pictures, sounds, flavours and colours that individuals come to associate with Poland.⁹⁸ This

⁹⁸ Mieczysław Porębski, *Polskość jako sytuacja* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002).

intersection finds its reflection in textual references within Polish (and other) films, and the films are part of the cultural narrative, a text that the people of Poland recognize as theirs, as do those living outside of Poland. This chapter has sketched some of the main points of this recognition as well as the way they evolved in Polish cinema after 1989. The following chapter places these textual and representational changes in the context of Polish cinema industries and cultures of the period under review here.

3

Of the Polish film industry, culture and criticism 1989-2004: a story in three acts

Only cinema can plough the imagination of the masses to revive Polish culture¹

...in the new system the real direction of [Polish] cinema will depend on the individualities of producers, directors, distributors, editors, salesmen, politicians and critics. We will have the kind of cinema that we want and deserve, [the cinema] that is us.²

The changes in the Polish film industry and culture between 1989 and 2004 parallel not only other political, economic, and cultural shifts in Poland, but also transitions undergone by the film industries and cultures of other countries of the region. As Jordanova points out, the tradition of social responsibility, nationally-specific treasured histories, various filmic idylls and intricate psychological portraits in Eastern European cinemas, all find their

¹ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," *Film 11* (2002): 65.

² Tadeusz Sobolewski, *Za duży blask: O kinie współczesnym* (Cracow: Znak, 2004, 17.

expression and continuity in films made in Eastern Europe before and after 1989.³ While pointing to the unifying aspects of post-1989 transitions, Iordanova suggests slight variations in the patterns of filmic continuities, and also in the (post)transitional industrial developments in different Eastern European countries. For instance, despite similar trends across the region, the appeal to Hollywood production companies of the Barrandov film studio in Prague for the first 15 years after 1989 had no equal in Eastern Europe.⁴ At the beginning of the 21st century, Barrandov was second only to London as the “Hollywood centre” in Europe.⁵

In the post-transitional industrial cinema-scape, Poland seems to be neither a winner nor a loser compared to other film industries of the region. The only aspect of the Polish cinema industry that reflected its being the largest population size in the region (40 million comparing to 10 million in Hungary and the Czech Republic) is that of the gross box office revenue. In most other aspects, the Czech Republic and Hungary led the way by, for instance, having more cinema screens per capita, admitting proportionally more viewers to cinemas, and producing more domestic releases per capita every year since 1989.⁶ So, while the regional post-communist transitions brought some variations of similar patterns of industrial developments and thematic continuities, these developments were also steeped in nation or state specific cultures. The issue of Polish specificity as realised in Polish film has been discussed in the previous chapter. The evolution of a (post)transitional film industry and culture, as it unravelled in Poland between 1989 and 2004, is the focus of this chapter’s deliberations.

³ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 150-151.

⁴ Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 145.

⁵ Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 71-72.

⁶ For precise numbers, see Media Salles, *European Cinema Yearbook 2004 – Advance Edition*, 2004, (6 March 2005). <www.mediasalles.it>.

The review of industrial and film culture changes explored in this chapter adopts the three-stage approach delineated in the Introduction. It involves organising the story of post-1989 industrial and cultural changes in film into three periods of around five years each.⁷ As mentioned in the Introduction, the boundaries of these periods are not necessarily as clear-cut as the structure of this chapter suggests. They are also subject to overlaps and underlying continuities of, for instance, the general commercialising push, legislative and co-production concerns, and the most resonating discussion topics on Polish film. Yet, in general terms, the first stage occurs in the chaos of the first years after the collapse of communism and is characterised by the destruction of the old system of film production and criticism, attempts (of varying level of success) to establish new industrial structures, and the flooding of the Polish film market with American products often of inferior quality, yet desirable to Polish consumers because of their previous scarcity in Poland. That period's thematic filmic concerns revolve around political-social-cultural uncertainty, remnants of communism and the desirability of the Western models. In the second stage, the foundations of the new industrial system were beginning to solidify, and the film industry and cultural commentators started to focus on specific, detailed questions of cinema commercialisation in Poland. There appeared to be more discussions of differentiation between capitalisms and democracies, and the models that should follow in the Polish case. In the third phase, after the spectacular box office successes of the Polish heritage cycle of 1999, the Polish film industry solidified further. The systems developed earlier were fine-tuned and filmmakers' and critics' approaches to domestic film production assumed decidedly more positive tones, which were paralleled by an increase in film funding in the early 2000s, the finalising of the cinema legislation, and the filmic debuts of a new generation of filmmakers.

⁷ Jerzy Toeplitz, a late film historian and one of the founders of Australian School of Film and Television, claimed that film trends last approximately four or five years, regardless of whether they are "good" or "bad" (quoted in Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1986), 133).

Within each stage described here, there is an exposition of industry changes, types of films made, dominant axes of discussion in film circles at the time,⁸ and the various films' national and international successes. The function of this exposition is not to present an exhaustive overview of post-communist cinema in Poland, but to complement and position the deliberations of the previous chapter in their industrial context. The choice of films analysed in the ensuing chapters is grounded as much in narrative and thematic continuities and discontinuities, as it is in the commercial, box office and critical considerations outlined in this chapter. My review of Polish cinema draws on chronicles of Polish film and collections of industry data published in Polish and English, especially the collection of film statistics for 1990-2000 compiled by Krzysztof Kucharski, and utilises work published in two Polish industry magazines, *Kino* and *Film*. It also draws on a set of original interviews conducted for this dissertation with several representatives of the contemporary Polish film culture, including Andrzej Wajda (celebrated auteur of Polish film), Robert Gliński (film director of the "middle generation"), Jacek Fuksiewicz (Director for Film in the Ministry of Culture), Lew Rywin (president of Heritage Films, one of the most influential film production houses post-1989), Tadeusz Sobolewski (an acclaimed film critic within Poland), Mateusz Werner (a highly regarded critic of a younger generation), and Mirosław Przyłpiak (a leading Polish film scholar).

⁸ These are based on two main Polish film magazines: *Kino* and *Film*.

1989-1993: “Polish film may be a memory”⁹ and “freedom from what?”¹⁰

The late 1980s started an avalanche of political, social and cultural changes that impacted on the Polish film industry and its productions. Two significant developments of the first year of post-communist Poland were the abolishment of censorship in 1990, as mentioned in my preamble, and the privatisation of some state institutions, including film production units, discussed in the Introduction. This meant that, for instance, previously “shelved” films were released, and that the eight Film Units that existed in 1989, which included Filip Bajon’s “Dom”, Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s “Kadr”, Tadeusz Chmielewski’s “Oko”, Janusz Morgenstern’s “Perspektywa”, Bohdan Poręba’s “Profil”, Krzysztof Zanussi’s “Tor”, Juliusz Machulski’s “Zebra”, Jerzy Hoffman’s “Zodiak”, were granted commercial independence, which was guaranteed by an act passed in 1987, but implemented only in 1989. These two main developments ensured the beginning of a painful metamorphosis for the Polish film industry, from being centrally controlled by the state to being a free-market with some subsidies from the state and its related entities. The most dramatic developments occurred in the first two years after 1989.

Again, Iordanova’s brief overview of the state of film industries in most East Central European countries at the time offers a telling summary of the commonalities they also shared with the Polish film industry:

Initially, there was crisis, which found expression in crumbling production routines, an abrupt decrease in state funding, a sharp increase in unemployment among skilled personnel, and a considerable, yet temporary, decline in documentary and animation output. There was also a

⁹ “Co się kręci,” *Gazeta Poznańska*, 5 April 1991, 15.

¹⁰ Andrzej Wajda, “Wolni od czego?” *Kino* 1 (1992): 3-5.

concurrent crisis in distribution and exhibition. Earlier concerns over freedom of expression rapidly vanished, taken over by worries over the emerging constraints of the market economy. Financing for film production was to change profoundly, shifting from the unit-based studio system to producer-driven undertakings. The involvement of national television networks in film production and exhibition became of vital importance, alongside the international co-production funding and the expanding sector of private financing.¹¹

Although the film industry, like the rest of Poland, was encountering crisis on all fronts, the most urgent problem for Polish filmmakers at that time was funding. Or, as Edward Zajićek put it, “[to] achieve full happiness [the filmmakers] were only missing legislation that would place demands on film buyers and exhibitors, and viewers who would be obliged to come to see them in the cinema.”¹² That legislation would not come to fruition in Poland for the next 15 years.

In the socialist film unit system, the function of film producer did not exist. There was no need for anyone to take care of funding. It either came as a package by way of a director’s affiliation with a film unit, or there was no other means of securing it. With a rapid decline in subsidies available to newly commercially-independent film units, foreign co-productions became one viable option for the Polish film industry. Yet, they were seen in ambiguous terms at the time, both as the saviour of Polish film,¹³ and as a threat that

¹¹ Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 143.

¹² Edward Zajićek, *Poza ekranem: kinematografia polska 1918-1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992), 269.

¹³ For instance, Wanda Wertenstein and Jerzy Płażewski, “Współprodukcje: hydra czy szansa,” *Kino 6* (1991): 5-6.

would encourage a flood of Polish-made films with no real identity.¹⁴ Additional financial backing was to come from television film funds.¹⁵ Three newly established government funding agencies were much needed to ensure the survival of the Polish film industry.¹⁶

Created in 1991, the Film Production Agency [Agencja Produkcji Filmowej] aimed to co-finance film projects of cultural¹⁷ (rather than financial) value. A panel of nine (randomly selected from a group of experts) that included two critics or script-writers, two production managers, two distributors, and three cinema managers, evaluated each feature project submitted to the Agency, which co-financed 17 features in 1992, 18 in 1993 and 15 in 1994.¹⁸ Founded in the same year, the Script Agency [Agencja Scenariuszowa] was to provide financial support for script and pre-production development. And, the Film Distribution Agency [Agencja Dystrybucji Filmowej] aimed to give support to the distribution of films deemed to be of significant cultural value, which included both Polish and foreign productions (mainly art-house; for instance films by Jim Jarmusch, Derek Jarman, and Peter Greenaway).¹⁹ In the first five years of its operation, the Film Distribution Agency contributed to the distribution of over 200 films on the Polish market.²⁰

With the abolition of the government distribution monolith, the Centre for Film Distribution [Centrala Dystrybucji Filmowej], its regional branches received commercial independence, which they proved unable to manage.

¹⁴ For instance, Kazimierz Kutz, "Z mojego młyna," *Kino* 7-8 (1995): 70.

¹⁵ For a succinct and comprehensive review of the changes in Polish film industry between 1989 and 1993-4, see Bjorn Ingvaldstad, *Polish Cinema after 1989: An Industrial Survey*, 1995, (6 March 2005). <http://www.utexas.edu/ftp/depts/eems/Polish_cinema.html>.

¹⁶ "Jak powstaje kino," *Kino* 11 (1994): 14-16.

¹⁷ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (London: Berghahn Books, 2002), 178.

¹⁸ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 179.

¹⁹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 179.

²⁰ Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii polskiej 1895-1997* (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1999), 459.

Consequently, a series of new commercial distributors quickly appeared in the Polish market. Already in June 1990, Przedsiębiorstwo Zagraniczne ITI came into play with a batch of Warner films, and two months later, Columbia-powered Syrena became its main competitor, followed by a pleiad of other foreign and domestic film distribution companies.²¹ The predicted domination of American films on Polish screens²² soon became apparent. This was not surprising given the hunger of Polish viewers for the previously scarce American films, and also the disproportion between an average number of prints for American and Polish cinema releases. Twenty to fifty copies of an American film in cinematic circulation outweighed significantly the meagre 5 to 15 for a Polish film. At the same time, however, the American films encouraged audiences to leave the comfort of their television lounge, and come to the cinema, which – at least to some extent and in the long run – benefited Polish films as well.

The number of Polish film productions began to increase following the reforms of 1991, and film distribution was quick to adjust to the new economic realities, but exhibition and consumption practices lagged behind for another year or two. The number of cinema screens steadily decreased from the end of the 1980s, with around 2000 screens and 91 million viewers in 1986 and between 1195 and 1400 screens and 38 million viewers in 1991.²³ In 1993, the number of screens reached a low of 755 screens,²⁴ and it kept decreasing until its lowest point in 1997 with 698 screens, after which it enjoyed a steady

²¹ Krzysztof Kucharski, *Kino plus: film i dystrybucja kinowa w Polsce w latach 1990-2000* (Toruń: Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, 2002), 319-404.

²² Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 178. According to Haltof, 60-70 percent of productions on Polish screens 1990-1992 were American.

²³ Monique van Dusseldorf and Raphael Loucheux, eds., *Towards the Digital Revolution: European Television and Film between Market and Revolution* (Liege: The European Institute for Media, 1994), 50-53. Although Ingvaldstad quotes a number as low as 18 million for 1991 after *Variety* (*Polish Cinema after 1989*).

²⁴ van Dusseldorf and Loucheux, *Towards the Digital Revolution*, 53. Although some other statistics quote numbers lower than 700 for that year.

increase of an average addition of more than 20 screens a year until 2004.²⁵ Screened in Poland in 1993, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) initiated the slowing down of the reduction in the number of screens, having attracted 2.7 million viewers and so inspiring some faith in the financial viability of the business of film exhibition.²⁶ Coincidentally, in the same year, Steven Spielberg's production of *Schindler's List* (1993) in Poland injected much-needed jobs and expertise into the production end of the Polish film industry, and brought it – however temporarily – to the attention of the international film production business.²⁷

The most important Polish release of that period proved to be Władysław Pasikowski's *Pigs* [*Psy*] (1992), which attracted 400 thousand viewers,²⁸ the greatest number to watch a Polish film in the cinema since the 1990 success of Marek Kotowski's *Porno* (1989), an erotic drama, which sold 800 thousand tickets.²⁹ Two years later, the second instalment³⁰ of *Pigs* (Pasikowski, 1994) brought in 685 thousand viewers.³¹ Despite the success of the first *Pigs* in 1992, cinema attendance remained at the all-1990s low of 10.5 million, and was to increase in 1993 to 17.5 million and 22.5 million in 1994.³² That trend had mostly to do with the flooding of the VCR market with pirate copies of American films, proliferation of satellite television, and also the emergence of a new audience for whom communism was history, and who longed for popular cinema, regardless of its origin. In most cases Polish filmmakers,

²⁵ Media Salles, *European Cinema*.

²⁶ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 320. Also Andrzej Wajda in the interview with Pat Dowell, "The man who put Poland on the post-war map of cinema: an interview with Andrzej Wajda," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 51-54.

²⁷ Aleksandra Sosnowski, "Cinema in transition: the Polish film today," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 24: 1 (Spring 1996): 10-17.

²⁸ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

²⁹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

³⁰ That is, *Pigs 2: The Last Blood* [*Psy 2: Ostatnia krew*] (Pasikowski, 1994).

³¹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 390.

³² Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 404.

especially those who achieved significant experience and/or acclaim before 1989, were slow to respond to the demands posed by these trends.³³

Given the change in audience's expectations, their preference for *Pigs*, the director Pasikowski's second cinema release after his 1990 *Kroll*, is not surprising. *Pigs* responded to the need for fast action drama placed in the chaos and uncertainties of the new Poland. On the one hand, Pasikowski's film marked the first significant success of the popular Polish cinema after 1989, on the other hand, it attracted and still attracts a lot of criticism. A 2002 review of the most scandalous films in the history of Polish cinema lists *Pigs* as one of the top ten.³⁴ The criticism this film attracted, already discussed briefly in the introduction and in the previous chapter, did not prevent *Pigs* from receiving five out of the fifteen possible awards granted during the 27th Festival of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia in 1992.³⁵ That Festival is a barometer of the Polish film culture and industry, and so, despite the film's shortcomings, *Pigs* stands as the emblem of the first stage of post-1989 transformations in Polish cinema.

The only three other Polish films that managed to secure audiences greater than 150 thousand in the first five years of "freedom" were Jerzy Skolimowski's adaptation of Witold Gombrowicz's novel *30 Door Key* [*Ferdydurke*] (1992) with 165 thousand viewers,³⁶ Sylwester Chęciński's comedy about Martial Law, *Monitored Conversations* [*Rozmowy kontrolowane*], (1991) with 159 thousand viewers,³⁷ and Władysław

³³ Andrzej Wajda refers to this phenomenon in a personal interview (3 July 2003, Warsaw, attached in Appendix 2), as does Marek Haltof in his article "A fistful of dollars: Polish cinema after the 1989 freedom shock," *Film Quarterly* 48: 3 (Spring 1995): 15-26.

³⁴ Krzysztof Demidowicz, "Swojski szok," *Film* 5 (2002): 94-96.

³⁵ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 409.

³⁶ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387. As in the case of other canonical literary adaptations *30 Door Key's* attendance was encouraged by schools.

³⁷ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

Pasikowski's crime drama *Kroll* (1990) with 200 thousand viewers.³⁸ Although possibly attributable to distribution and other marketing practices of the time, the selection or typology of the films deemed popular by cinema audiences in that period calls for further attention. The successes of Pasikowski's *Kroll* (1990) and *Pigs* (1992) can be explained in terms of their appeal to younger audiences with their preference for fast action films placed in a Polish context, as stated earlier. The success of *Monitored Conversations* (Chęciński, 1991) can be explained by a peculiar nostalgia for the communist past and its grotesque excesses, which removed its traumatic aspects and replaced them with comical representations of these excesses, thus rewriting the meaning and emotive responses to past events. The same nostalgia finds realisation in the popularity of some urban cafes, which imitate the aesthetics of the Polish People's Republic. The relative success of *30 Door Key* (Skolimowski, 1992), mentioned in the previous chapter, is more problematic, given that only ten copies were released in Poland, while *Pigs* (Pasikowski, 1992) had 18 copies in circulation, *Kroll* 25, and *Monitored Conversations* 15.³⁹ The success of Skolimowski's film could be attributed to the following that Polish directors who achieve relative international success have in Poland, and also to the significance of the Polish self-deprecating literary tradition of the grotesque and the absurd as exemplified by Witold Gombrowicz, whose novel *Ferdydurke* was the literary basis of Skolimowski's film. Yet, at the same time a significant reason for its relative box-office success came from the concerted efforts of educators to encourage school students' attendance of *30 Door Key*'s screenings.

In general, compared with several American films that were watched in the cinema by millions of viewers, the presence of Polish films in Poland between 1989 and 1994 was rather poor. The reasons for that meagreness are

³⁸ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

³⁹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

manifold. Apart from those already mentioned in this chapter, Wojciech Marczewski pointed to the general artistic and expressive vacuum of Polish film in his address at the Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia in 1991, where he said: "Friends, did you really have to make all these films?"⁴⁰ The implications of this statement are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Here it suffices to say that it resonated widely in film criticism circles and among the Polish filmmakers of older generations for the next ten years.⁴¹ And it brought to light the discomfort of a situation in which the well-tried social commentary on socialist reality was no longer a desirable option for a filmmaker. It is then not surprising that less than one tenth (1992), and sometimes as little as one eighteenth (1991) of Polish cinema audiences were willing to see a Polish film.⁴²

Apart from the films already listed in this chapter, in the first five years after 1989 Polish cinema offerings included psychological and behavioural dramas ["dramat psychologiczny" and "dramat obyczajowy"]. The latter type of drama is one of the most prominent genres in the history of Eastern European and Polish film.⁴³ In its post-1989 edition, Polish behavioural drama carried its traditional connection with the social responsibility tradition by centring on a conflict in the life of an individual or a group. During the same time, Polish cinema released a substantial number of less and more successful comedies, most of which appeared in 1990, and a total of 20 made it to Polish cinema screens in the period between 1989 and 1994. The stable presence of Polish comedies is one area of neglect in Polish cinema criticism and scholarship,⁴⁴ possibly due to Polish critics' and scholars' disregard for popular cinema prior

⁴⁰ Adam Mickiewicz Institute, *Polish Cinema During the Period 1989-1999*, c2000, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.polonia.nl/kultura/cinema.html>>.

⁴¹ Andrzej Wajda and Irena Maryniak, "Transformations in waiting," *Index on Censorship* 24: 6 (Nov-Dec 1995): 108-110.

⁴² Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 387.

⁴³ Marek Hendrykowski, *Leksykon gatunków filmowych* (Wrocław: Studio Filmowe Montevideo, 2001), 35.

⁴⁴ Haltof, "A fistful," 15-26.

to 1989 on the one hand, and Western film scholars' focus on Polish productions that could be classified as art-house, on the other hand.⁴⁵ Given the extent of their critical neglect and their significant presence in the Polish cinema-scape after 1989, comedies are given more attention in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

By 1994, comedies and action films amounted to almost half of all Polish productions with cinema releases.⁴⁶ The films made in this realm often followed American patterns and attempted to place them within the Polish context. While Americanised or commercialised productions enjoyed increasing popularity among filmmakers and film audiences the previously important films, those shelved during Martial Law for fear of their political influence, and now released, were virtually ignored. The lack of interest in the "shelved" films and the popularity of commercialised film productions represented the end of the old era. In the light of these trends, it became apparent that the Polish filmmaking tradition of social commentary and social responsibility of Polish filmmaking must be redefined if it were to survive in a free market.

One other significant film that marked the rupture between the old and the new was Wojciech Marczewski's *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* [*Ucieczka z kina "Wolność"*] (1990).⁴⁷ On the surface, it is a tribute to Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), yet in the context discussed above, it is also a film demarcating the new post-censorship reality of Polish film from the old one dominated, if not motivated, by political and cultural censorship. Another

⁴⁵ For instance, Katherine F. Cornell evaluates the state of East European films after 1989 as abominable based solely on their presence and quality on the festival circuits of the time. (Katherine F. Cornell, "After the wall: Eastern European cinema since 1989," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 43-47).

⁴⁶ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 383-385.

⁴⁷ As mentioned in the discussion of the film in Chapter 5, most of my interviewees nominated *Escape* as the most significant film of post-1989 era on the pre-1989 reality.

film seen as a turning point for Polish film and its past political traditions is Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique* [*La double vie de Veronique*] (1991), a French-Polish-Norwegian co-production. Haltof,⁴⁸ Sobolewski⁴⁹ and other commentators see it as Kieślowski's farewell to political filmmaking and a step towards the depiction of a more personal, psychological, if not metaphysical subject matter. Of particular significance is the fact that *The Double Life of Veronique* constitutes a departure from the male-focus of Kieślowski's filmmaking. One of the most quoted moments in the film is when the Polish double of the French Veronique, Weronika, turns her back on a nondescript political demonstration in Cracow's old town, while the French Veronique photographs it from a tour bus. In popular interpretations, that moment symbolises Kieślowski's own turning away from political issues, represented in the Polish Weronika's lack of interest in a political demonstration. This scene may also be seen as representative of the general depoliticising shift in Polish filmmaking after the end of official censorship.

In the new situation, Kieślowski redefined himself better than others by embracing Polish-French and other co-production possibilities, and continuously insisting that his own Polishness complemented the universality of his films,⁵⁰ which brought him international acclaim and which also brought viewing pleasure to international audiences. In general, however, the freedom that Kieślowski embraced so well was not a panacea to bring love and joy to all in Poland. Apart from the industry factors described earlier in this chapter, the whole *Weltanschauung* and *raison d'être* of a filmmaker in

⁴⁸ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 200.

⁴⁹ Tadeusz Sobolewski, personal interview, 11 July 2003 and 15 September 2004, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

⁵⁰ Krzysztof Kieślowski quoted in Adam Mickiewicz Institute, *Polish Cinema*.

Poland had to be reconsidered,⁵¹ and in most cases a filmmaker's social responsibility was clouded by commercial requirements. There was only a handful of exceptions to this rule (including Krzysztof Kieślowski and Krzysztof Zanussi) of older and new filmmakers who successfully insisted on making their own personal films within the European (but Polish) auteur tradition.⁵² Even more interestingly, the end of censorship was a major blow to Polish film, with directors like Tadeusz Konwicki,⁵³ Andrzej Wajda, Kazimierz Kutz and Krzysztof Kieślowski openly mourning the death of what they regarded as the major factor in film creativity in Poland before 1989.⁵⁴ The commercial imperative of filmmaking was seen as a necessary evil, with Wajda inquiring into the nature of the newly acquired freedom by asking whether filmmakers in the new reality were to be freed from the audience, criticism, authority, ideology or maybe even artistic criteria.⁵⁵ In fact, political censorship was replaced by the new economic censorship, which was possibly harsher than the old one. For instance, Krzysztof Kieślowski in his conversation with Wim Wenders asserted that political censorship gives meaning to filmmakers' work, while Western directors are helpless in the face of economic censorship.⁵⁶ For instance, in the U.S. the only type of film that engages in this use of censorship-as-marketing is a film that allegedly contains sexually explicit material.

The excesses of censorship and the subversive games that Polish directors played in their films before 1989 to smuggle in the intended messages were

⁵¹ One comprehensive overview of thematic difficulties faced by Polish directors at the beginning of 1990s can be found in Maria Kornatowska, "Polish cinema," *Cineaste* 19: 4 (Fall 1992): 47-51.

⁵² Also, for instance, Dorota Kędzierzawska, "Pod prąd," *Film* 35 (1 September 1991): 4-5.

⁵³ Tadeusz Konwicki, "Wróżby dnia dzisiejszego," *Kino* 1 (1991): 5-6.

⁵⁴ In discussions published in *Reżyser* "Tren na śmierć cenzora," *Reżyser* (industry supplement to *Kino*) 11 (1992): 1-8.

⁵⁵ Wajda, "Wolni od czego?" 3-5.

⁵⁶ Krzysztof Kieślowski in conversation with Wim Wenders, Tadeusz Sobolewski, ed., "Nie szukam inspiracji w Europie," *Kino* 322 (1994): 8-9.

an effective equivalent of multi-million dollar marketing campaigns conducted in free market economies.⁵⁷ The grapevine news of a film being censored often defined its initial attraction. Censorship was also a measure of filmic success, and at times even a teleological justification of a film's existence. For instance, in his interview with Bren, Krzysztof Zanussi expressed a view common for Polish film directors at that time namely the feeling of pride at having his film *Camouflage* [*Barwy ochronne*] (1977) banned in 1981.⁵⁸ If a film was banned, or its scenes or dialogues had to be re-negotiated with at least a partial success on the part of the filmmaker, its value increased in his/her eyes and those of his/her audience. A similar and more extreme point was made by Wojciech Marczewski, who said that "for many years art circles co-existed with censorship. They fought with it, but also benefited from it. Censorship gave us [...] the sense of importance, and maybe even of a mission. [...] It was then the cheapest and most effective form of advertising."⁵⁹

With the disappearance of censorship in 1990, significant aspects of film valuation in Poland had to be redefined. A large chunk of what had motivated Polish filmmakers was ripped out of the Polish filmic fibre. Andrzej Wajda as well as Krzysztof Zanussi, two of the most internationally visible representatives of the "old guard" of film-makers, on many occasions bemoaned the void created by the disappearance of censorship.⁶⁰ In regard to film scripts, the old obvious villain of the government and its surreal rules and regulations needed to be replaced by a new entity that proved difficult to identify. Following this new uncertainty, the motivation of Polish audiences to see domestic products decreased. The closing down of some film units and a

⁵⁷ Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1990), 128-132.

⁵⁸ For the complete interview, see Bren, *World Cinema 1*, 174-185.

⁵⁹ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Marcin Sułkowski, "Powinniśmy rozliczyć się sami," *Kino* 278 (1990): 11.

⁶⁰ For instance, this was one of the themes Krzysztof Zanussi explored during his 2001 visit to Sydney AFTRS.

reduction in government film funding were only partly to blame for that state of affairs. Other factors in that decrease included the fast introduction of satellite and cable TV, the proliferation of VCRs, and pirated copies of Polish and Western films. Already in the early 1990s, copyright and the illegal VCR tape market in Poland was perceived as a problem of international proportions.⁶¹ Flooding the Polish market with American productions further depreciated the comparative value of watching Polish film in the cinema. Audiences starved for American films needed to satisfy their hunger for these films, before their viewing tastes stopped being shaped by the recent deprivations.

Given the climate of general bewilderment within Poland and a lack of international visibility of Polish film at the beginning of 1990s, most international and domestic discussions of Polish cinema focused on industry concerns.⁶² However, although Polish commentators lamented the general shape of the industry, including the difficulties associated with privatisation of distribution and exhibition,⁶³ their concerns also went beyond economics. The main themes of discussion on Polish films at the beginning of 1990s included the presence in many films of a disinterested darkness and brutality, which proved to be shocking for some of the viewers of the older generations.⁶⁴ Later, these concerns evolved into prolonged and multifaceted discussions of the nature of evil as it was presented in cinema and Polish cinema in particular. That theme continued in, for instance, reviews and critiques of Robert Gliński's *Hi Tereska* (2001), Mariusz Trelński's *Egoists*

⁶¹ "Video džungla," *Film* 15 (12 April 1992): 4-7.

⁶² Wanda Wertenstein's article "Poles hope for privatized film biz similar to France's" is a good example of the tone of Western commentary on Polish film at the time (*Variety* 341: 3 (29 October 1990): 32-33).

⁶³ Waldemar Dąbrowski, "Próba sił," *Film* 12 (24 March 1991): 4 and 20.

⁶⁴ Maciej Maniewski, "Jakie się wtedy ma sny?" *Film* 16 (19 April 1992): 7.

(2000) and Krzysztof Krauze's *Debt* (1999), all of which are discussed in Chapter 6. Also, the presence of feminism⁶⁵ and postmodernism⁶⁶ in Polish films slowly started to be an axis of the more ambitious areas of the film criticism in Poland, while the most debated issue was the role of filmmakers and film in the new reality.

Some commentators advocated a Polish cinema that would be national in character and that would arise directly from the Polish traditions, culture and myths that form Polish awareness.⁶⁷ Others called for "catching up with Europe"⁶⁸ or combining the universalism of American cinema with Polish specificity.⁶⁹ Co-productions attracted a lot of attention in the first years after 1989 with the main question in relation to them concerning the boundaries of a film's Polishness. Mostly, the conclusion of these discussions was that in the climate of the first few years post-1989, co-productions were the only viable option for professional productions by Polish directors, a view advocated strongly by Krzysztof Zanussi.⁷⁰ Interestingly, some foreign commentators focused only on the Eastern European filmmakers' desire to pursue this particular direction of funding, while ignoring the proliferation of discussions on protecting the sovereignty of national cinema productions.⁷¹

From discussions on modes of production and funding, there followed questions of what currently was not effective in Polish cinema, and how it

⁶⁵ Bożena Umińska, "Kwiat, zero, ścierka," *Kino* 298 (April 1992): 8-10.

⁶⁶ Andrzej Werner, "Polpostmodernizm," *Kino* 299 (May 1992): 20-21.

⁶⁷ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2). Lew Rywin, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2). Also Anita Skwara, "Film Stars Do Not Shine in the Sky Over Poland: The Absence of Popular Cinema in Poland," in *Popular European Cinema*, eds. Richard Dyer and Ginnette Vincendeau (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 230.

⁶⁸ Krzysztof Zanussi, "Obrona kosmopolityzmu," *Kino* 2 (1992): 16-18.

⁶⁹ Paweł Łukow, "Jarmark nie wybiera klienteli," *Film* 40 (6 October 1991): 4-5.

⁷⁰ Krzysztof Zanussi, "Współprodukcje – hydra czy szansa?" *Kino* 312 (July 1993): 7-10.

⁷¹ For instance, Catherine Portuges, "Border crossings: recent trends in East and Central European cinema," *Slavic Review* 51: 3 (Fall 1992): 531-536.

could be made effective if Western patterns were to be followed. For instance, the titles of films released at the beginning of 1990s were criticised for their lack of marketing appeal,⁷² as was the quality of scripts and distribution.⁷³ Polish films that were commercially successful more often than not were seen as lacking in artistic value.⁷⁴ Some directors' focus was on understanding the audience, especially the new one.⁷⁵ Especially interesting in this context is an often repeated statement by Andrzej Wajda, who gave Władysław Pasikowski tentative praise for his *Pigs* for "knowing something about the audience that Wajda did not".⁷⁶ At the same time some critics argued that the general decrease of cinema's importance in the Western world found its reflection in the state of affairs of the Polish film industry. Therefore, the crisis of cinema was not specific to Poland, and the existence of the Polish cinema industry, which released anything between 20 and 30 cinema productions a year called for appreciation rather than condemnation.⁷⁷

After the chaos of the first years of democracy, towards the end of 1993, commentaries on Polish film took on a new tone of tentative and temporary optimism in Poland. After the rejection of all the films submitted by Polish directors to the International Film Festival in Cannes between 1989 and 1992, Krzysztof Kieślowski's Gold Lion (ex aequo) for *Three Colours: Blue* [*Trois*

⁷² Oskar Sobański, "Garstka widzów w pustym kinie," *Film* 7 (17 February 1991): 6-7.

⁷³ Krzysztof Sielicki, "Coś nareszcie dzieje się? Kinematografia polska," *Spotkania*, 13-19 May 1993, 42-43

⁷⁴ For instance, numerous articles on Juliusz Machulski and Władysław Pasikowski in *Film* in 1993, including Ryszard Straszewski, "Machulski – pierwsza ofiara gospodarki rynkowej? Długi i zasługi," *Film* 8 (28 February 1993): 6; or Bożena Janicka, "Pies i karawana," *Film* 23 (13 June 1993): 3.

⁷⁵ For instance, Andrzej Wajda in "Co z kinem polskim?" *Reżyser* (industry supplement to *Kino*) 13 (1992): 6.

⁷⁶ Andrzej Wajda in an interview with Tadeusz Sobolewski, "Pojedynk z dniem dzisiejszym," *Kino* 4 (1993): 4-8.

⁷⁷ Tadeusz Szczepański, "Co z kinem polskim?" *Reżyser* (industry supplement to *Kino*) 13 (1992): 3. Also, Maria Komatowska, "Z perspektywy szczura w klatce," *Kino* 10 (1998): 5-6.

couleurs: bleu] (1992) in Venice in 1993⁷⁸ was a ray of hope for Polish filmmakers. Another factor inspiring hopes for improvement in the state of the Polish film industry was a stable increase in cinema attendance from 10.5 million in 1992 to 13.5 million in 1993, and 17.5 million in 1994.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Allan Starski's statement after he received an Oscar for his production design for *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), which was produced in Poland, that "we [Poles] forced our way into the lion's cave"⁸⁰ was rather premature, although not without some grounding in reality. Although a much awaited renaissance of Polish film culture⁸¹ was still to come, the chaos of these first post-1989 years led to an emergence of a slightly clearer picture of the film industry in Poland in the mid-1990s.

1994-1999: "We once knew what they wanted from us"⁸² or "exercises in calligraphy"⁸³

The situation of the Polish film industry and culture in the second phase of post-1989 transitions brought a clearer picture of what was problematic with and within it. This meant that in this second phase, participants in the industry were in a better position to consider possible options and solutions to these problems. Instead of full-fledged stabilisation, the Polish film landscape of that time was similar to the moments after a battle, when the dust settles,

⁷⁸ Małgorzata Hendrykowska stresses this point by including *Blue* in her *Chronicle of Polish Cinema 1985-1997*. (*Kronika kinematografii*, 479).

⁷⁹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 404.

⁸⁰ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 487.

⁸¹ "Czas przełomu," *Film 2* (1994): 7.

⁸² A paraphrase of a line from *Ashes and Diamonds* (Wajda, 1958), also used by Andrzej Wajda during the Congress on Polish Film in 1997. When in *Ashes and Diamonds* Maciek says to Andrzej "Those were good times, we knew what we wanted," he hears back: "We knew what they wanted from us". Wajda used that dialogue as a metaphor for the state of Polish post-1989 cinema. (Andrzej Wajda, "Co się stało z polskim kinem?" *Kino 2* (1997): 4-6.)

⁸³ A comment about films shown in the 1998 Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia. Quoted from Lech Kurpiewski, "Kino dla malkontentów," *Film 12* (1998): 20-22.

and it becomes possible to assess the full damage and regroup for further struggle. That second stage of transitions also clarified other undesirable effects of the systemic change. Soaring crime and unemployment at previously unheard of rates became a major troublesome aspect of the social and cultural landscape. In August 1994, cafes and restaurants closed down for a few days to protest against police incompetence in dealing with extortion by criminal groups in Warsaw,⁸⁴ and in 1996 ten thousand people took part in a demonstration in Gdańsk against the immunity of criminals.⁸⁵ Paralleling dramatic crime occurrences in contemporary Poland, action films overtook any other film genre of Polish filmmaking. This was also due to film funding bodies' paying more attention to the commercial viability of the productions they would (partially) fund.

The "package" system established a few years earlier continued to be operational with the Committee of Cinema, and the Committee's Script Agency, Film Production Agency and Distribution Agency being the first stop for many filmmakers in their attempt to secure film funding. The application process continued to be based on submitting a proposal, which would include the script, director, actors, production and distribution details for evaluation by a panel of nine, and subject to final approval by the head of the Committee of Cinema. Despite, or maybe because of the Committee's central role as a funding body in Poland, there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the way it and its agencies operated. Janusz Dorosiewicz, a producer of Władysław Pasikowski's and others' films, was not alone in expressing his sentiment on government funding agencies when he said that "if we were to organise a mini-conference on the Committee, some potential participants would arrive armed, and others would send in medical certificates to excuse their

⁸⁴ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 482.

⁸⁵ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 498.

absence.”⁸⁶ This and similar attitudes were also reflective of the dissatisfaction with the decrease in financial resources at the agencies’ disposal.

At the beginning of the 1990s the Committee of Cinema could finance 70 percent of the domestic film production. However, its level of financial participation steadily decreased to less than 25 percent by the end of 1990s.⁸⁷ Apart from foreign co-productions, the most significant sources of film funding became Polish TV SA, an heir to the Polish state-funded television, which in the mid-1990s was financially participating in the production of most Polish films,⁸⁸ and Canal+, which entered the Polish market in 1995, and which was obliged by its licensing agreement to invest in Polish film. According to that agreement, Canal+ was to invest 3.5 million zloty (approximately 1.5 million Australian dollars) in Polish film in 1995, and that amount was to increase every year.⁸⁹ Other television stations investing in Polish films included the Polish branch of American HBO (in Poland since 1996), Polish pay TV Polsat, and the first digital television, Wizja TV, which started to broadcast in Poland in 1997.⁹⁰ Continuing from the first phase of transitions, there also existed – after a fifty-year break – ten private film production companies.

In 1993, there were fifteen founding members of the Society of Independent Film Producers which represented private production companies, one of them being Lew Rywin’s Heritage Productions. Set up in 1991, Heritage co-operated on the production of *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1993), *The Pianist* (Polański, 2002), as well as numerous Polish productions, most of which were created in co-operation with one of the two film studios that survived the

⁸⁶ Janusz Dorosiewicz, “Czuć świat przez skórę,” *Film 4* (1995): 34.

⁸⁷ Mariusz Miodek, *Polska kinematografia w zarysie*, December 2001, (6 March 2001). <http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/es_kinematografia_w_polsce>.

⁸⁸ Barbara Hollender, “Inwestorzy w polskim kinie,” *Rzeczpospolita* 21 March 1995, 68.

⁸⁹ Katarzyna Bielas, “Telewizja w kinie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 August 1995, 19.

⁹⁰ Miodek, *Polska kinematografia w zarysie*.

post-1989 transitions. While the Łódź studio was slowly transformed into the domain of advertisers, by mid-1990s Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych [Documentary and Feature Film Studio] in Warsaw, and Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych [Feature Film Studio] in Wrocław were used for Polish and foreign films made in Poland.

By the mid-1990s the distribution side of the film industry in Poland had evolved only slightly with the two main players, Syrena and ITI continuing to dominate the market, while the exhibition situation improved. In June 1996, the first mini-multiplex was opened in Warsaw after renovations to Cinema “Femina”, which was newly furnished with four rooms and the total of 575 seats. Two years later, Multikino co-owned by ITI and UCI opened the first Western-style multiplex in Poznań with eight rooms and 2,300 seats. By 2000 the number of multiplexes in Poland exceeded ten.⁹¹ At the same time, the number of cinema viewers hovered between 20 and 23 million between 1994 and 1998 reaching almost 27 million in 1999.⁹²

1999 was also the first, and so far the only, year after 1989 when ticket sales for Polish films exceeded those for all foreign productions. This was mainly due to the release of the first two films of the heritage cycle, *With Fire and Sword* (Jerzy Hoffman, 1999), seen by more than seven million viewers, and *Pan Tadeusz* (Andrzej Wajda, 1999), which drew over six million viewers. Juliusz Machulski's *2 Kilers* [*Kilerów 2-óch*] (Juliusz Machulski, 1999) came a distant third with over a million tickets sold. The success of *2 Kilers* was preceded by that of Machulski's *Kiler* in 1997, when it sold over 2 million tickets and constituted the first significant box-office success of a Polish film

⁹¹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 320.

⁹² Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 404.

after 1989.⁹³ In general, however, in previous years on average one in twelve tickets sold in Poland was for a Polish film.⁹⁴

The domination of Polish cinema production by action films and comedies in the second stage of the transitions was complemented by an increase in auteur cinema and psychological dramas, which gained audience approval, and resulted in the formation of a “middle” cinema, one which propagates a unique creative vision, at the same time answering to some commercial concerns. Most notably, two films by Jerzy Stuhr, an acclaimed actor of Krzysztof Kieślowski’s films, broke the magic barrier of 100 thousand viewers for a Polish film, which was neither a heritage spectacular, nor an action drama, nor an action comedy. In 1997, almost 300 thousand viewers saw Stuhr’s *Love Stories* [*Historie miłosne*] (Stuhr, 1997), a morality tale of love-related choices, awarded with FIPRESCI and Anicaflash at the International Film Festival in Venice in 1997. And in 1999, his *A Week in the Life of a Man* [*Tydzień z życia mężczyzny*] (Stuhr, 1999), a behavioural drama, granted an OCIC Special Award (ad aequo) in Venice in 1999, had an audience of 160 thousand.⁹⁵ This compares favourably with Stuhr’s earlier comedy/drama of 1995, *Index of Adulteresses* [*Spis cudzołżnic*] (Stuhr, 1995), which had 68 thousand viewers. However, the more usual number of viewers per “quality”, art-house or auteur cinema was anything between 5 and 35 thousand.

More critical acclaim went towards the personal/auteur films of Jan Jakub Kolski, and Andrzej Kondratiuk. In 1995 Kolski’s psychological drama, *Miraculous Place* [*Cudowne miejsce*] (Kolski 1995) had eight thousand viewers. Only a year later, his comedy *Sabre from the Commandant* [*Szabla od komendanta*] (Kolski, 1996) had 36 thousand viewers. In 1998, his magic-

⁹³ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 384-386.

⁹⁴ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 404.

⁹⁵ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 384-386.

realist *History of Cinema in Popieławy* [*Historia kina w Popieławach*] (Kolski, 1998) was seen by 64 thousand.⁹⁶ While Kolski's films started to be noticed outside of Poland, in international film festivals of Cottbus, Bratislava, Moscow and Tokyo, Kondratiuk's poetic auteur films, *Time Spindle* [*Wrzeciono czasu*] (Kondratiuk, 1995) and *Sundial* [*Zegar słoneczny*] (Kondratiuk, 1997) had between three and four thousand viewers⁹⁷ and the admiration of Polish critics. Andrzej Wajda's two productions *Holy Week* [*Wielki tydzień*] (Wajda, 1995) and *Miss Nobody* [*Panna Nikt*] (Wajda, 1996), selected for the International Film Festival in Berlin in 1997, not only attracted just 10 and 40 thousand viewers respectively, but also fervent criticism in Poland and abroad. *Holy Week*⁹⁸ and *Miss Nobody* were perceived by Polish critics as an unsuccessful attempt by Wajda to make a film for the new young audience, losing his grand director's vision in the process.

Artistically ambitious productions were generally on the rise between 1996 and 1998, as was the number of comedies produced every year between 1995 and 1999, while the number of action films produced after 1996 stabilised at around four a year.⁹⁹ In the same period, there was a significant change in the type of protagonists entertained in popular productions. While the Polish School's hero would have been marked by his¹⁰⁰ experience of the war, and the Cinema of Moral Concern would centre on a representative of the intelligentsia, new popular films created an ethos of a (seemingly) tough guy and of a likeable neighbourhood boy or girl, wrought with internal conflicts of varying degrees of complexity.¹⁰¹ Similar kinds of protagonists, usually

⁹⁶ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 384-386.

⁹⁷ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 384-386.

⁹⁸ For instance, *Holy Week*'s review in *Film* lists this kind of accusations heard about Wajda's film after its 1995 premiere at the Berlin Film Festival. (Jan Olszewski, "Obok siebie," *Film* 3 (1996): 76.

⁹⁹ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 385-387.

¹⁰⁰ It was rarely a "she".

¹⁰¹ Zdzisław Pietrasik makes a similar argument in his article "Gimnastyka twarzy," *Polityka* 44 (1 November 1997): 48-50.

male, but exhibiting a more sophisticated character structure, were at the centre of the “middle” cinema of Jerzy Stuhr and Krzysztof Krauze, and – within a different platform of reference – Krzysztof Kieślowski. Jerzy Stuhr’s recipe for achieving recognition while pursuing his filmic authorial vision was a continuation of the filmmaking tradition of Kieślowski in his non-politically engaged years. Krzysztof Krauze’s efforts focused on telling stories placed specifically in contemporary Poland.

The main themes of discussion in the increasingly vibrant Polish film culture circles between 1995 and 1999 continued to be focused on the economic dimensions and also on the identity of Polish film production. Film critics and filmmakers questioned with more and more force the processes that shape, and were to continue to shape, Polish cinema’s identity, with the main focus of these discussions being on the choice between pursuing universalism or (national) specificity.¹⁰² Symptomatic of the time were the stands taken by speakers at the Congress of Polish Films, published in *Kino* in February 1997. During the Congress, Andrzej Wajda again gave an uncomplimentary appraisal of the Polish cinema as an identity confused by ambiguous freedoms and economic limitations.¹⁰³ One significant issue hotly disputed at the Congress, and also outside of it, by older participants in the film industry and not attracting much interest from the younger generations, was the lack of progress on legislation favourable to Polish film production, distribution and exhibition. For instance, Dariusz Jabłoński and Henryk Romanowski, prominent representatives of the Polish film industry, attributed continuous delays in passing the suitable legislation to the lack of unity in film environments.¹⁰⁴ One voice of the younger generation that constituted a

¹⁰² Krzysztof Zanussi, “Jaka jest dziś nasza rola?” *Kino* 2 (1997): 13.

¹⁰³ Wajda, “Co się stało” 4-6.

¹⁰⁴ Bogdan Sobieszek, “Paragraf na kino,” *Film* 12 (1996): 16. A similar argument was advanced by Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw. (attached in the appendix?).

counterargument to that statement was that of Jan Hryniak, a director born in 1969. He argued that filmmaking relies on individualism, so to attempt to form any sort of a unified generational front goes against the individualistic filmmaking imperative.¹⁰⁵

In general, critics and filmmakers continued voicing their concerns about the commercialisation of filmmaking, and the unpredictable tastes of Polish audiences, whose fulfilment should not be the sole motivation for a director.¹⁰⁶ Discussions of commercialisation oscillated around two themes. One had to do with the difficulties of “false freedoms” and the new economic censorship that would thwart Polish cinema, with occasional voices expressing optimism about the opportunities created by a wider range of funding possibilities. In 1997, Tadeusz Ścibor-Rylski, the head of the Committee of Cinema, pointed to a range of funding sources that appeared after 1989, with two or three films made every year outside the government package system. He also brought to his listeners’ attention the fact that the audience for Polish productions on television is frequently much higher than that of foreign films and television programs, which indicated interest in Polish productions higher than was apparent from the study of Polish cinema-going patterns.¹⁰⁷

Another theme of fervent discussion focused on the “how to” of production, distribution and exhibition. One interesting example of dealing with the limited promotional funds available for Polish “art” films was given by Witold Górk, the director of “Stolica”, a repertoire cinema in Warsaw, in an interview published in 1996. Instead of focusing on the “professional” and “popular” qualities of Polish films, he insisted on the effectiveness and also the financial

¹⁰⁵ Jan Hryniak in an interview with Małgorzata Sadowska, “Jak dziecko we mgle,” *Film* 10 (1998): 24.

¹⁰⁶ Wajda and Maryniak, “Transformation in waiting,” 108-110. Also Dorota Kędzierszawska in an interview with Manana Chyb, “Sama na huśtawce,” *Film* 10 (1998): 84-85.

¹⁰⁷ Tadeusz Ścibor-Rylski, “Dziś i jutro polskiego kina,” *Kino* 2 (1997): 6-9.

viability of promoting the “exceptionality” and, in a way, elitism of less commercial Polish productions.¹⁰⁸ Other commercial concerns voiced at the time continued to be focused on emulating Western patterns, but exploring more specific aspects of that emulation. For instance, the new and underdeveloped mechanisms of product placement, which started to become a source of funding for some Polish films around mid-1990s, attracted some attention, both as a funding source, but also as a troublesome addition to scripts for filmmakers unused to working products into their stories. For example, some set designers would smuggle different products onto the set when (secretly) paid to do so by the product makers.¹⁰⁹

Some other themes that started to be discussed in the early 1990s, and which rose to greater visibility in and past the mid-1990s were those exploring the aesthetics of violence and increasing brutality in Polish film.¹¹⁰ A relatively new type of commentary on Polish film, especially by older annotators but not entirely so, called for films that would address the reality of everyday life in non-marginal post-transitional Poland.¹¹¹ Others argued that the tradition of Polish cinema resided in its poetic vision rather than the faithful depiction of social and cultural realities,¹¹² and when confronted with that reality, a

¹⁰⁸ Mariusz Miodek, “W naszym kinie szuka się czegoś innego,” *Kino* 352 (October 1996): 5-7. Although “Stolica” became defunct within a few years, its mission is continued in the building, which became a screening site for Polish National Filmotheque.

¹⁰⁹ Małgorzata Sadowska talks about it, however without giving details on the types of products placed in this way, in her article on product placement in Polish film, in Małgorzata Sadowska, “Towar na ekranie,” *Film* 5 (1998): 124-127.

¹¹⁰ Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii*, 487.

¹¹⁰ “Czas przełomu,” *Film* 2 (1994): 514.

¹¹¹ Mirosław Bork from the Television Film and Theatre Production Agency in an interview with Barbara Hollender, “Inwestorzy w polskim kinie,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 21 March 1995, 68. Also Bożena Janicka in her evaluation of Polish cinema between 1991 and 2001 *Niezapomniane: kino naszych czasów: 1991-2001*, September 2002, (6 March 2005). <<http://film.onet.pl/kino/3766,1094894,kino.html>>.

¹¹² For instance, film director Filip Bajon, “Trwać przy swoim,” *Film* 9 (1998): 84-86.

filmmaker should offer an alternative to it, rather than its emulation.¹¹³ Still others complained about the lack of sympathetic characters to identify with in Polish film,¹¹⁴ although this complaint also marks a critical continuity from at least the 1960s, when exactly the same discussions took place on different filmic materials.¹¹⁵

During the Congress on Polish film mentioned above, Bolesław Michałek, a prominent film critic, opined that it was the tone of disappointment that had been, and continued to be the point of difference, which defined the identity and international success of Polish cinema pre-1989. Yet, the structural poverty of characters drawn in Polish film after 1989 was overwriting that point of difference, to Polish cinema's disadvantage. In his words:

the degree of self-awareness of characters on the screen is not very high; they are not aware of their own existence, its sense, and prospects; they don't have goals beyond today and tomorrow, so they don't have motivation and skills, or even the willingness to shape their own fate, to bring order and value to their lives! Probably that's why they are passive, they don't shape events around them; those events shape them. That's why they are often victims, losers. Let's also say: they become characters that one is not keen to watch. In this area lies, in my opinion, one of the reasons for the limited success of Polish film.¹¹⁶

¹¹³For instance, Jarosław Żamojda in an interview with Bartosz Michałak, "Odpocząć od rzeczywistości," *Kino* 6 (1997): 7.

¹¹⁴For instance, Bożena Janicka and Lech Kurpiewski, "Zawsze może być gorzej," *Film* 12 (1996): 12-15.

¹¹⁵Wojciech Wierzewski, *Film i literatura* (Warsaw: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, 1983) 186.

¹¹⁶Bolesław Michałek, "Co się w kinie zmieniło, co się nie zmieniło?" *Kino* 2 (1997): 9-11. This is also common for heroes of some other cinemas, for instance Australian.

The grounds of this complaint were partially eliminated in 1999, when the cinema attendance for Polish films, and also the critics' open admiration for some productions released that year, seemed to have turned the tables to the advantage of Polish cinema, at least in the domestic market.

After ten years of searching for a new formula for Polish film, the Festival of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia in 1999 presented the possibility of a breakthrough. Professional industry commentators univocally agreed that that year's Festival offered much better standards of Polish films than any previous year of the post-transitional period. This stand reflected the noticeable shift from American action cinema patterns towards a more indigenous mode of filmmaking that would also appeal to Polish audiences, who grew weary of B-grade American simulations. This trend reached its apogee in 1999, although its coming had been announced by film commentator Bożena Janicka after the 1994 Festival of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia.¹¹⁷ Another prominent film critic, Tadeusz Sobolewski expressed most directly the reasons for the critics' appreciation of this trend:

One ought to appreciate the proficiency of Polish popular cinema – thanks to those [comedy and action] films. They break away from the communist heritage of the communist boy/girl-scout morality and their naïve social ideology. We have already learnt that “life is brutal”, but it is not good enough. All the old illusions have been washed away, [and] now films should give viewers a deeper satisfaction of real victory, rather than the illusory victory that comes with having gunned downed the evil [person].¹¹⁸

This development in critical circles reflects critics' and filmmakers' coming to terms with free market requirements towards the end of 1990s. Yet at the

¹¹⁷ Bożena Janicka, “W Polsce, czyli w Europie?” *Kino* 1 (1995): 8-10.

¹¹⁸ Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Kino ciężkich czasów,” *Kino* 12 (1999): 8-9 and 51.

same time, Bożena Janicka insists that the most obvious question which the films of the 1999 Polish Film Festival attempt to answer, but rarely do so, is that of “how to live?”¹¹⁹

On the broader filmic scale, 1999 marked a change in Polish film culture, which on the one hand saw the emergence of professionalism-driven productions in both “middle” and auteur cinema, but also the institutional reinforcement of specifically Polish popular cinema. One expression of the latter was the box-office success of the first heritage cycle films, which altogether accounted for 14 million of the 26.4 million cinema tickets sold in 1999,¹²⁰ and attracted comments on the rise of Polish national film internationally.¹²¹ Another institutional push for systemic support for the popularity of Polish cinema was the initiative of Waldemar Dąbrowski, who was appointed the Minister of Culture in July 2002. In 1995, utilising his industry connections, Dąbrowski founded an annual Holiday Festival of Stars in a seaside resort of Międzyzdroje, which promoted the rise of a star system and the cult of celebrity in Poland. In an interview on his *Dad [Tato]* (Ślesicki, 1995), Maciej Ślesicki expressed his ambiguous evaluation of this phenomenon, in which the film industry starts to be driven by its stars rather than the director or his/her vision.¹²² Although his approach to that trend was ambiguous if not ambivalent, Lew Rywin perceived the rise of the star system as one necessary condition for a healthy state of Polish cinema and its film industry.¹²³ At the same time, the main obstacle to the relative structural and thematic stability of the Polish cinema and film industry remained the lack of

¹¹⁹ Bożena Janicka, “Gdynia ‘99,” *Kino* 12 (1999): 5-6.

¹²⁰ Kucharski, *Kino plus*, 386 and 404.

¹²¹ For instance, Tom Birchenough, “Native hits propel Polish box office,” *Variety* 377: 12 (7 February 2000): 25.

¹²² Krzysztof Demidowicz, “Śmiech i łzy obok siebie,” *Film* 12 (1995): 38-40.

¹²³ Lew Rywin, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

legislation on film and cinema, with the social and commercial realities outgrowing the existent legislation passed in 1987.

2000-2004: Stabilisation and new spring of Polish cinema?

On 6th January 2004, a proposal of the Bill on Cinema was submitted to the Polish Parliament for its approval after more than 15 years of discussions, debates, alterations and attempts at passing it. The general aim of the version of the proposal, finally voted on by the Polish Parliament on 17 February 2005, did not differ significantly from its previous versions. Although its original January 2004 emphasis on films in the Polish language and promoting Polish heritage was deleted from it, its central aim remained supporting the Polish film industry by creating favourable financial conditions for it, supporting young filmmakers, promoting Polish film in Poland and internationally, and assisting producers, distributors and exhibitors of Polish and other films deemed to be of significant artistic value.¹²⁴ One significant change between the final version, the January 2004 version and previous versions of the Bill lay in the definition of what constitutes Polish film. That definition was progressively broadened to reflect the internationalisation of the Polish (film) market and to facilitate Polish co-productions, and film production more generally, on Polish territory. This progressive broadening, as discussed in the previous chapter, provoked anger in some filmmakers who were protective of the state-endorsed institutionalised favours that now could be directed more freely at co-productions. At the same time, it provoked dissatisfaction in those who believed that the version of the bill from the beginning of 2004 did not encourage co-productions, because it did not propose substantial enough changes to the source of film funding. With no additional film production resources, the meagre cap of 750 thousand złotys

¹²⁴ The main versions of the Bill on Cinema are available at the website of the Association of Polish Filmmakers, *Ustawa*, various dates, (6 March 2005). < <http://www.sfp.org.pl/glowna.asp>>.

(approximately 300 thousand Australian dollars) imposed on any one production grant by the Committee of Cinema meant that Polish filmmakers would not be able to meet the entry requirements for co-productions in Eurimage and similar schemes unless they sought independent funding or were underwritten by financial institutions.¹²⁵

Another significant change proposed by the January 2004 Bill involved establishing the Film Institute, which would take over the Film Production Agency, Film Polski – Promotion Agency (established by merging in January 2000 two Polish film promotion agencies, Film Polski and the (Film) Promotion Agency) and the Script Agency. Three out of five functions prescribed to the Institute by the Bill focused on film culture in general, and only two referred specifically to Polish film. The Institute would be responsible for promoting Polish film in Poland and abroad, and creating conditions for developing Polish film production.¹²⁶ The Film Institute in the final version of the Bill became The Polish Institute of Film Art [Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej]. The final version of the Bill voted on in February 2005 included a funding specification, according to which apart from the government's funds, the Institute would receive between 2 and 3 percent of exhibitors', distributors', television advertising revenue¹²⁷ for films that would be donated to the Institute, as well as a percentage of the "gambling industries" revenue, as specified in the Gambling Industries Bill.

The finalising of the Bill on Cinema came after Poland joined NATO in 1999 and soon after Poland became a limited member of the European Union. It also came in an industrial environment very different from the two previous

¹²⁵ Barbara Hollender, "Kino bez szans," *Rzeczpospolita* 27, 3-4 July 2004, A5.

¹²⁶ "Poselski projekt ustawy o kinematografii," *Skrypt*, January 2004, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.skrypt.info/article/articleview/326/1/20/>>.

¹²⁷ Private exhibitors, distributors and television owners hotly disputed these amounts during the voting session on 17 February 2005.

phases of post-transitional developments. Only two years after the spectacular box office successes of 1999, there were 30 large private film production companies, and 400 companies of various sizes and competency. By 2001, they were the producers and co-producers of 70 percent of the annual film releases. The Film Production Agency, however, still remained for many the first stop in their quest for film funding, despite its dwindling financial resources. In 1998 it had at its disposal 19.7 million złotys (about 8.5 million Australian dollars), in 1999 16.1 million złotys (about 7 million Australian dollars), and in 2000, it was allocated 17 million (7.5 million Australian dollars) to invest in production of feature, documentary and animated films. In 2000, 13 million of the 17 available was committed to making feature films, while this was also the total price tag for just one film produced in 1999, *Pan Tadeusz* (Wajda, 1999).¹²⁸ In 2001, the available amount fell to less than 12 million. In 2002 it was just over 6 million, and the financial climate showed signs of a significant change. By 2003, the Agency had at its disposal over 17 million, in 2004, it was more than 21 million, and the Government committed almost 30 million złotys for film production in 2005.¹²⁹ Yet, despite this trend of an increase in available funding, in 2003 the number of feature films that benefited from it was the lowest in the post-1989 history of the Polish film industry, with only nine films produced with the financial help of the Agency that year. In this context, Polish filmmakers had no choice but to pursue other avenues of funding, and the changes to the film production market presented some answers to their needs.

By 2001, Polish TV's Film Agency (Agencja Filmowa) participated in the making of 70-80 percent of Polish films made for television and cinematic

¹²⁸ Miodek, *Polska kinematografia*.

¹²⁹ Departament Filmu i Mediów Audiowizualnych Ministerstwa Kultury, *Informacja na temat polskiej kinematografii*, 2004, (6 March 2005).
<http://www.sfp.org.pl/opracowania/teksty/mk_kinematografia.asp>.

releases. For instance, in 2001, it spent 80 million złotych ¹³⁰ (32 million Australian dollars) on feature films. The amount was six times greater than that available from the Committee of Cinema for producing and co-producing Polish feature films. Banks in Poland also started to invest in filmmaking, with Bank Kredytowy being the first to support domestic film production. In 1999, it granted a massive 12 million złotych (almost 5 million Australian dollars) credit to Jerzy Hoffman's *With Fire and Sword* (Hoffman, 1999), also getting involved in its production and promotion. The Bank evaluated its investment as a marketing success, and furthered its financial involvement in Polish literary adaptations like *Pan Tadeusz* (Wajda, 1999), *Spring to Come* [*Przedwiośnie*] (Filip Bajon, 2001), *In Desert and in Wilderness* [*W pustyni i w puszczy*] (Gavin Hood, 2001), and *Quo Vadis* (Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 2001). In the case of *Quo Vadis*, Bank Kredytowy became a co-owner of a production company set up specifically for the needs of that film, and its main creditor, since more than a half of the film's budget of over 70 million złotych (almost 30 million Australian dollars) came from the credit granted by Bank Kredytowy.¹³¹

After the box-office successes of the heritage cycle films in 1999, 2001 brought another high for Polish post-transition adaptations, while the total number of cinema tickets stabilised around 22-24 million, after a slump to 18 million in 2000. *Quo Vadis*, together with two other adaptations from the Polish literary canon, *Spring to Come* and *In Desert and in Wilderness*, topped the box office in Poland for 2001. The total number of tickets sold to these three films was over 8 million, and *Quo Vadis* alone attracted 4.3 million viewers.¹³² Of four other Polish films that made it into the top 20 of that year, three were comedies and one – the most successful of the four, was a

¹³⁰ Miodek, *Polska kinematografia*.

¹³¹ Miodek, *Polska kinematografia*.

¹³² Box office statistics for the years 1998 to 2002 are available from the Internet film service, <<http://www.stopklatka.pl>>.

fantasy *Hexer* [*Wiedźmin*] (Marek Brodzki, 2001), which brought in 605 thousand viewers and divided the opinions of film critics.¹³³ The “middle” cinema that year produced a limited box office success with Wojciech Marczewski’s mystery drama *Weiser* (2001) also shown in the 2001 Berlin International Film Festival. The art-house films to gain critical acclaim at that time were Robert Gliński’s *Hi Tereska* and Michał Rosa’s *Silence* [*Cisza*] (2001), a psychological/mystery drama about an independent successful woman whose discovery of the past changes her life.

Between the successes of 1999 and 2001, it was a relatively quiet time for Polish cinema. Only two Polish films released in 2000 attracted an audience of more than half a million. One of them was *The Primate* [*Prymas – trzy lata z tysiąclecia*] (Teresa Kotlarczyk, 2000), based on cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s prison notes from 1953-1956, which sold almost three quarters of a million tickets. The other was a comedy *Boys Don’t Cry* [*Chłopaki nie płaczą*] (Olaf Lubaszenko, 2000), which attracted almost 550 thousand viewers. Two more films that enjoyed relative box office success included Piotr Wereśniak’s romantic comedy *In Love* [*Zakochani*] (2000) with 233 thousand cinema viewers, and Marek Konrad’s action drama *Father’s Law* [*Prawo ojca*] (2000) with 200 thousand viewers. 2002 proved to be slightly more rewarding for Polish cinema with two more references to the art and literature of Polish Romanticism. With almost 2 million viewers, Andrzej Wajda’s *Revenge* (2002), an adaptation of Aleksander Fredro’s popular comical play, was third in the box office top 20 for 2002. Jerzy Antczak’s *Chopin. The Desire for Love* [*Chopin. Pragnienie miłości*] (Antczak, 2002) attracted 442 thousand viewers. Roman Polański’s *The Pianist* [*Pianista*] was another great success of that year with 1.15 million viewers and the

¹³³ Ibid.

fourth position on the list of most watched cinema releases considered to be Polish.

Three out of the other four Polish films that made it to the top 20 in 2002 were comedies, including Marek Koterski's *Day of the Wacko* (2002), which sold slightly more than 400 thousand tickets. Another film that received high praise by film critics and scholars, and was named the best film of young Polish cinema by commentators of the stature of Andrzej Wajda,¹³⁴ was Przemysław Wojcieszek's comedy drama *Louder than Bombs* (Wojcieszek, 2002). A sharp and at times comical commentary on the possibility of resisting omnipresent Americanisation, it was said to be a film that bridged the intergenerational audience gap between young adults and their parents.¹³⁵ Andrzej Jakimowski's directing debut, *Squint Your Eyes* [*Zmruż oczy*] (2003), was well-awarded and well-praised, and offered a different possibility for escape from the Westernisation of the Polish mainstream culture, a theme which is taken up in Chapter 6. One of the most discussed films of that year was released in October, Piotr Trzaskalski's *Edi* (2002). It received international attention and was awarded FIPRESCI – for humanity and warmth - and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in the Forum on New Cinema in Berlin. It was also another film on the list of box office successes of the “middle cinema” with 400 thousand tickets sold.¹³⁶

The early 2000s of the Polish cinema were marked by the success of the heritage cycle, comedies, a stable pursuit of the middle cinema with some promising directing debuts and diminishing traces of American-style action films. Mateusz Werner attributed this decrease to the internal censorship mode of the industry, in which it became difficult to secure funds for films

¹³⁴ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

¹³⁵ Małgorzata Hendrykowska, private conversation, 10 July 2003, Poznań.

¹³⁶ Przemek Niciak, “Wydarzenie,” *Stopklatka*, 12 January 2004, (6 March 2005).
<<http://www.stopklatka.pl/wydarzenia/wydarzenie.asp?wi=18042>>.

containing excessive violence.¹³⁷ And Polish “heritage” filmmaking proved not to be an absolutely reliable recipe for a success of the same or increasing magnitude as had been experienced earlier, in the late 1990s. In 2003, out of two canonical literary adaptations, *Old Tale: When the Sun was a God* (Jerzy Hoffman, 2003) and *Pornography* (Jan Jakub Kolski, 2003), only the former made it into the top 20 with less than a million tickets sold, and this success was not repeated in 2004. The second best Polish film in terms of its box office success in 2003 was *The Body* [*Ciało*] (Andrzej Saramonowicz and Tomasz Konecki, 2003), a surreal crime comedy, which attracted 320 thousand viewers. Again, three out of four other films that sold more than 100 thousand tickets that year were popular comedies, and one was a new “middle cinema” comedy production by Jerzy Stuhr, *Tomorrow’s Weather* [*Pogoda na jutro*] (Stuhr, 2003).¹³⁸ In 2004, three films climbed into the box office top 20, two of which were comedies. A generic romantic comedy *Never Ever* (Zatorski, 2004), mentioned in the previous chapter, reached third position with 1.6 million tickets sold, and the attendance to Juliusz Machulski’s crime comedy *Vinci* (2004) was on par with that of Magdalena Piekorz’s debut *The Welts* (2004) (discussed briefly in the previous chapter) with between 300 and 400 thousand tickets sold. Given the general Hollywoodisation of patterns of distribution and exhibition, the consistent presence of at least a few Polish films in the top 20, and the fact that the most popular Polish film of the year consistently sold a million and more tickets since the beginning of the heritage cycle in 1999, provided undeniably positive signs for the Polish film industry. Even so, one area that still lags behind the more positive developments is Polish film promotion concerning

¹³⁷ Mateusz Werner, “My lubimy sielanki?” *Film 10* (2000): 16.

¹³⁸ All statistics in this paragraph come from *Stopklatka*’s box office compilations available at <<http://www.stopklatka.pl>>.

especially those films that do not seem to appeal immediately to the popular and/or populist tastes of Polish audiences.

Some directors and producers in the third phase of post-transitional cinema in Poland attributed the limited box office success some of the more ambitious Polish acts of filmmaking to the lack of support for Polish films by Polish critics.¹³⁹ A complaint by Piotr Wereśniak, a script writer and director of popular cinema, was indicative of the milieu's opinion that Polish critics did not appreciate the difference in function imposed by a particular genre. In his opinion, in writing on popular cinema, a critic should take into consideration its reality and constraints, which are different from those of art productions.¹⁴⁰ This opinion reflected a general schism in Polish criticism that developed especially strongly in the second half of the 1990s, a schism exemplified by the direction taken by the two main film magazines in Poland, namely *Kino* and *Film*. While the former continued its focus on more serious and at times academic film criticism, with few concessions for popular and entertainment cinema, the latter was more in line with the promotional bent of the film industry towards the tentative neglect, although not the complete exclusion of, films with smaller promotional budgets. Although reduced in the first years of the 21st century, this schism was still reflected by some critics who – like Mateusz Werner – were of the opinion that the popular films of the heritage cycle were nothing more than “a manifestation of helplessness, trying to survive by all means, making up for what we might have lost and filling in a market gap.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ During the Eastern and Central Europe Film Festival in Łagów in 2000, this was one of the main themes of discussion. (Anita Piotrowska, “Sanatorium Świtez?” *Film* 8 (2000): 14-16.

¹⁴⁰ In an interview with Agnieszka Prokopowicz, “Solo w duecie,” *Film* 10 (2001): 86-88.

¹⁴¹ Mateusz Werner, “Lady Ballady,” *Film* 8 (2002): 30.

A point that unified Polish critics, and ironically also signified the stabilisation in Polish film at the beginning of 2000s, was a common complaint about the lack of good scripts, which started to be blamed for the state of Polish cinema. This is also a complaint common to other more stable film industries. Wiesław Kot, the editor of the “culture” section of the Polish *Newsweek*, pointed to that factor in his vigorous polemic against other Polish critics,¹⁴² as did other directors and scriptwriters, in a forum organised by *Film* in 2000.¹⁴³ Also, Lew Rywin and Andrzej Wajda, two of the most influential figures of the Polish film industry, saw the lack of good scripts as an aspect of Polish filmmaking urgently requiring attention.¹⁴⁴ In a forum on the state of Polish cinema in 2004, Wajda expressed the need for specifically Polish scripts and not ones “so popular nowadays, and taken from English and German theatres, [about] a hopeless young woman, who has complaints about the world.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, at the same time, more than a dozen film schools, which operated in the Polish market in 2003, focused on directing, cinematography, and sometimes production, with only a few scriptwriting courses.¹⁴⁶ Despite Wajda’s recognising this as a problem, his own Master School of Directing established with Wojciech Marczewski in 2002 also placed the major emphasis on directing.¹⁴⁷

In the general climate of the economic stabilisation and Polish inclusion in wider international organization, the Polish film industry at the beginning of the 2000s did an about-face that allowed Krzysztof Kłopotowski, one of its most vocal critics, to proclaim the beginning of the rise of Polish cinema,

¹⁴² Wiesław Kot, “Fundusz brakoróbstwa,” *Film* 1 (2003): 68-69.

¹⁴³ Joanna Pogorzelska, “Drabinka do widza,” *Film* 7 (2000): 104-107.

¹⁴⁴ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2), and Lew Rywin, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

¹⁴⁵ Wajda refers here to feminist scripts. In Andrzej Wajda, “Nie rob filmu dla wszystkich,” *Kino* 6 (2004): 42.

¹⁴⁶ Iwona Cegiełkówna, “Ucz się, ucz,” *Kino* 6 (2003): 8-11.

¹⁴⁷ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

marked by Marek Koterski's *Day of the Wacko* (2002).¹⁴⁸ Kłopotowski referred to it as a "turning point" that "put an end to the mission of the intelligentsia and exhausted the Romantic ethos." At the same time, and as discussed in the previous chapter, he addressed Piotr Trzaskalski, the director of *Edi* (2002), as a Messiah who should now bring deliverance to the newly formed Polish middle class.¹⁴⁹ Trzaskalski himself pointed to filmmakers' unwillingness to talk about their "real" selves, rather than some imaginary others, which resulted in uninteresting and unrealistic films.¹⁵⁰ His statement appeared in the context of raging debates, started by Kłopotowski, who accused the "barons" of Polish cinema (that is the older masters) of preventing young talent from emerging by securing funds for their own films, whose vision had exhausted itself some time ago.¹⁵¹ His attempts at stirring the ants' nest of the Polish film industry also produced statements about the need to "Americanise" Polish film and the Polish mind, to mould it into a more positive mind set.¹⁵² In his passionate critique of Polish cinema written for *Film* in 2003, Kłopotowski insisted that the affluent societies of America and Europe might be able to afford a questioning of the superiority of creating wealth over maintaining poverty. But Poles could not do that, and the goal of filmmakers should be the building of foundations for the 4th Republic (1989 marked the beginning of the 3rd) with the dominant ethos of success.¹⁵³

At the same time, voices advocating a following of the American lead in filmmaking and other aspects of life became less audible. The general

¹⁴⁸ Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," 64-66.

¹⁴⁹ Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," 64-66.

¹⁵⁰ Piotr Trzaskalski in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz and Bogdan Sobieszek, "Przez dziurę," *Film* 11 (2002): 68-70.

¹⁵¹ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Za wcześniej na requiem," *Film* 10 (2002): 36-39, Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," 64-66, and also Bartosz Żurawiecki, "Kino bez właściwości," *Film* 9 (2001): 30-33.

¹⁵² Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Druga ucieczka z kina wolność," *Film* 9 (2000): 38-41.

¹⁵³ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Kino IV Rzeczypospolitej," *Film* 6 (2003): 76-79.

thematic preoccupation also moved away from it. Some critics continued to insist on the uniqueness or difference of the Polish condition, which needed to be taken into consideration if Poland was to become significantly visible on the international film stage. For instance, Mateusz Werner argued that Polish filmic stories had to be far superior to those filmed by Hollywood, if they hoped to compete with financially superior American productions.¹⁵⁴ To this end, Polish producers would have to be prepared to take risks to invest in new talented filmmakers.¹⁵⁵ And, some of their investment should fill in a gap in Polish filmmaking and create appealing portraits of contemporary Poles, women in particular.¹⁵⁶

In the first 15 years after the collapse of the old system, the tone of debates on the general state of Polish film shifted from the overwhelming pessimism that reflected the chaos of the first five years, to that of optimism, if not tentative enthusiasm of the first years of the 21st century. The commercialisation of the film industry needed no further discussion as it became an undeniable and sometimes even appreciated reality. Once audiences and critics grew tired of American simulations in Polish film, and the excitement of Polish adaptation spectacles thinned out, the most pertinent question posed within the Polish film industry was how to make it into a successful venture artistically and financially, domestically and internationally. One answer sometimes offered involved the “middle cinema”, which would reflect a unique vision of its makers, and which would serve as a psychotherapist and witness to the contemporary viewer and his/her reality, and which would be made to the highest professional standards. Yet at the same time only Polish comedies and films of the heritage cycle were able to secure audiences of more than a million between 1989 and 2004.

¹⁵⁴ Mateusz Werner, “Gdzie jest wasz świat,” *Film 6* (2000): 14.

¹⁵⁵ For instance, Małgorzata Sadowska, “Pokolenie 2000,” *Film 5* (2001): 78-83.

¹⁵⁶ For instance, Małgorzata Sadowska, “Kino bez kobiet,” *Film 7* (2002): 86-87.

Polish cinema of the post-transition years has travelled a long way. From an industry fragmented by the chaos of privatisation, and a set of films in a confused search of their own identity, by 2004 it had become a relatively stable arena for productions that paralleled those of the rest of the professional film world. The development of three strands of popular cinema, heritage, comedy and action, together with support for auteur art cinema, and the establishment of a “middle cinema”, which has attracted some international attention, seems to suggest that the worst post-transitional metamorphosis pains are over. The newly gained confidence, which allowed film critic Maciej Karpiński to see promotional underfunding as the major reason for Polish films’ international invisibility, signifies that we are entering a positive stage in the history of post-communist Polish cinema.¹⁵⁷ The hopes raised by finalising the Bill on Cinema, the survival of the personal (or art-house) cinema, and the rise of new names on the list of directors credits may also be seen as indicators of a stabilisation, if not a renewal, of the Polish film industry.

Conclusion

The preceding review of the Polish film industry, culture and criticism of the first 15 years after 1989 has outlined a three-stage approach to these developments, which parallels the discussion of thematic and representational continuities and discontinuities discussed in the previous chapter. The first chaotic phase of uncertain identities in Polish film was to a large extent a reflection of the industrial turmoil experienced at the same time by its industry. That stage was characterised by the increase in production and popularity of action and comedy films, and it was marked by the growing

¹⁵⁷ Maciej Karpiński, “Festiwale bez Polaków,” *Film 4* (2004): 68-70.

presence of American and Western players in the areas of production, distribution and exhibition. The fervent discussions of the existent and desirable states of the Polish film industry in the second phase found their correlation in a plethora of films progressively unimpressed both with the current reality and the previous (national) traditions, yet willing to address them in film. That dissatisfaction and the continuing trend of low numbers of cinema audiences was tentatively broken by the box office success of Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler* (1997). That success occurred in the same year that marked the lowest number of cinema screens available in Poland after 1989; the number that after 1997 and at least until 2004 was on a steady increase. The most significant turning point for the Polish film industry and the identity of its products after 1989 was the success of the heritage cycle. That success was the beginning of the third phase in Polish filmmaking of the period between 1989 and 2004. Having developed the mechanism of securing film funding outside previously available and state-sanctioned avenues, Polish filmmakers, especially young ones, started to focus more on their self-sufficiency and self-reliability, which was also reflected in some thematic considerations discussed in the previous chapter. The stabilisation of the film industry infrastructure and also increases in the funding available domestically and in Polish co-productions opened doors for Polish filmmakers to other European funding schemes, for instance Eurimages, available only after the initial seed funding was secured from elsewhere.

The industrial and critical concerns outlined in this chapter have also supported the argument on the significance of the heritage cycle, the continuous presence of comedies, and shifting attitudes to the Polish social condition after 1989, reflected in the commercialising drives discussed above. One aspect of the thematic considerations analysed in the previous chapter that has not been made entirely apparent in the above discussion, concerns the representation of the communist past and the Polish People's Republic in films made in Poland after 1989. Although also subject to industrial shifts,

that subject matter is a more complicated filmic site ridden with inherent conflicts and is discussed in chapter five. On the other hand, the “middle cinema”, which enjoyed an increasingly solid presence in Poland especially after the mid-1990s, as considered in this chapter, is excluded from the following analyses, which focus on films with considerable box office success, or ones which are considered to be either iconoclastic or turning points by critics in Poland.

4

Of nostalgia and arcadias in heritage films

[T]rying to prove that national identity requires historical memory is superfluous. What in that memory is true, half-true or an ordinary legend is meaningless. It is about the inability of any nation to exist without an awareness that its existence is an extension ... of the past.¹

*There remains only one country, the sole
Land where some gladness remains for a Pole!
Land of one's childhood! She only will prove
Holy and pure, as the very first love;
Never by memories of past errors hounded,
Nor by illusion swayed of hopes unfounded,
Nor by the stream of events soon confounded.
Where wept I rarely, nor teeth ground in pain,
This land my thoughts would now visit again.²*

¹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Moje słuszne poglądy na wszystko* (Cracow: Znak, 2000), 162, my translations.

² Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz or The Last Foray in Lithuania: A Tale of the Gentry during 1811-1812*, trans. Marcel Weyland (Blackheath N.S.W.: Vernad Press, 2004), 313.

The string of spectacular successes of heritage film productions after 1999 is the most obviously outstanding motif of the post-1989 Polish film. In Poland it is referred to rather dismissively as “adaptations of school canon”. Its “heritage” affiliation is assigned to it by scholars working outside Poland, for instance Ewa Mazierska, and it is discussed later in this chapter. The cycle of (post)transitional heritage productions in Poland started in 1999, in the same year Poland joined NATO and it expired before Poland joined the European Union in 2004. Both its beginning and its end belong to Jerzy Hoffman with his 1999 production of *With Fire and Sword* [*Ogniem i mieczem*], and 2003’s *The Old Tale: When the Sun Was a God*³ [*Stara baśń; kiedy słońce było bogiem*]. As noted on several occasions in the previous chapters, in 1999 *With Fire and Sword* and Andrzej Wajda’s *Pan Tadeusz* (1999) sold over 13 million tickets. This number is especially impressive when compared with 3.5 million tickets sold to *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), which was released in Poland in 1998. Over the next three years six other films that could broadly be described as heritage films filled around 12 million seats, with each consecutive cinematic release bringing a decrease in ticket sales.⁴ This decrease may be attributed to the fulfilment of the demand for this kind of filmic product, and also exhausting the most “filmable” canonical literary texts. In this context, the aim of this chapter is to trace the reasons for the prevalence of the heritage films between 1999 and 2003, and the relationship between the traditional, mostly Romantic, Polish national ethos - as outlined in Chapter 2 - and the context within which these films proved to be successful in this particular period of Polish transitional history.

³ Henceforth: *The Old Tale*.

⁴ In 2001 Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s *Quo Vadis* attracted 4.3 million viewers; in 2002 Andrzej Wajda’s *Revenge* appealed to more than 2 million, and in 2003 Jerzy Hoffman’s *The Old Tale* sold over one million tickets.

The surge of heritage-like productions in any country is usually associated with times of various cultural, social and/or economic instabilities. Heritage films carry the function of a collective identity stabiliser which connect a contemporary viewer to his or her national and, more often than not, mythical past and its specific cultural heritage. In the Polish case, it might seem surprising that such films linking contemporary post-1989 Poland to the greatness of its literary and musical past should come well after, and not during, the period of the greatest destabilisation, namely the early 1990s. The answer to this conundrum lies in two sets of imperatives. One is economic. The early post-1989 filmmaking allowed for some re-evaluation of the past, but only the late 1990s provided a context in which the old guard of filmmakers were trusted to make films that would the a crown their filmic opus and would have a significant chance of achieving commercial success. It is arguable whether this was also their personal motivation, but the film market and the funding system in Poland proved to be ripe for such endeavours.

Another imperative resulted from having achieved a particular stage of transitional collective self-identification. For Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Hoffman, Jerzy Antczak or Jerzy Kawalerowicz, the idea of their national belonging developed under the Soviet domination, and as such it had its roots in the Romantic ethos of nostalgia for the independent Polish state. By the end of the 1990s, that ethos, at least on some levels, had expired, but for the older directors who were brought up on it, it still constituted an important moment of Polish self-identification. On the other hand, at that stage of post-1998 development the initial transitional enthusiasm wore off, and with that waning it started to pull down the ethos of success which it had created. What resulted was a national identification vacuum, with internationalising commercialism and the isolationist, right-wing nationalism becoming the most visible identification options for Poles. At the same time, for those who lived in the pre-1989 Poland, the initially dominant post-1989 divisions between

the communist “them” and the anti-communist “us”⁵ also started to lose their force. Indeed, for the new generations they became meaningless. At that moment, despite the relative political, economic and social stabilisation, despite the ethnic homogeneity of the Polish population, the notion of a collective Polish identity became increasingly destabilised and problematic. In that context, the heritage cycle offered a cultural anchorage. Yet, this anchorage had little to do with the trauma of an occupied or stateless nation, which is what motivated the original literary texts these films were adapting, or – in the case of Fryderyk Chopin⁶ – musical texts. While for some viewers the cycle’s films revive the nostalgias of their childhood schooling and the national identity marked by resistance to oppressors, the readings generated by younger audiences are not primed by the same nostalgic longing.⁷ Nevertheless, for all types of Polish audiences, the heritage cycle constitutes a common point of cultural reference, just as it had been twice before, in the 1920s and the late 1960s/early 1970s, and in as much as it is compulsory viewing for school students, which constitutes a guarantee of revenue.

The box office successes of *With Fire and Sword*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Quo Vadis* (Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 2001), *The Spring to Come* (Filip Bajon, 2001), *Revenge* (Andrzej Wajda, 2002), *Chopin. The Desire for Love* (Jerzy Antczak, 2002) or *The Old Tale* are a third wave of Polish adaptations. The two previous cycles occurred in times of collective self-questioning. In the first case, the heritage cycle took place soon after Poland regained its statehood in 1918, and it produced, for example, the first silent adaptation of *Pan Tadeusz* (Ryszard Ordyński, 1928). The second wave appeared in the

⁵ These divisions are the leitmotif of the next chapter of this dissertation.

⁶ Fryderyk Franciszek is Chopin’s Christian name. He started to sign his name as Frederic after his departure from Poland. (Adam Zamoyski, *Chopin: A New Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 40.

⁷ Arguably, Sienkiewicz’s *Quo Vadis* or *In Desert and in Wilderness* are adventure stories and not patriotic pieces, yet their reading in the past times of national distress was filled with national metaphors.

aftermath of the social unrest, purges and the general disquiet of the late 1960s. Furthermore, according to Dina Iordanova heritage cinema in Poland in general constitutes a special case, owing to the concerted efforts of the state to produce at least one epic in every decade since 1945.⁸ It is also not surprising in the light of the statement by Leszek Kołakowski, a Polish Christian philosopher, quoted as this chapter's opening epigraph. In search of the continuity of a Polish national culture, it is cultural familiarity rather than historical truth that, in times of need, defines national points of reference. Polish Romanticism lends itself to such a mode of reference particularly easily because of the amplified *pathos* of its relation to the partitioned fatherland of the 19th century,⁹ when Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria. An émigré in Paris, in the 1830s Adam Mickiewicz wrote *Pan Tadeusz* "to strengthen Polish heart", a dictum discussed in the previous chapter. Written in 13-syllable verse, his nostalgic epic describes the bygone and idyllic greater Poland of 1811 and 1812, when it comprised Poland and Lithuania. Its complex narrative consists of a real-estate conflict between the patriotic family of the Soplicas and the more internationally minded Horeszkos, a romance crowned with the wedding between a son of the Soplicas (Pan Tadeusz) and a daughter of the Horeszkos (Zosia), and an unrealised longing for a rumoured pro-independence insurrection.

Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *With Fire and Sword* and also of the Nobel-prize winning *Quo Vadis*, was a member by proxy of the Polish Romantic "Great Emigration". He too wrote "to strengthen Polish heart" while constantly travelling abroad.¹⁰ Although his *With Fire and Sword* was published in the

⁸ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 49.

⁹ W.J. Stankiewicz ed., *The Tradition of Polish Ideals: Essays in History and Literature* (Orbis Book: London, 1981), 43.

¹⁰ Stefan M. Kuczyński, "Sienkiewicz a współczesna historiografia polska," in *Henryk Sienkiewicz: Twórczość i recepcja światowa. Materiały konferencji naukowej listopad 1966*, eds. Aniela Piorunowa and Kazimierz Wyka, (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1968), 125.

1880s, almost half a century after *Pan Tadeusz*, its *ethos* has its roots in Romanticism, and (arguably) stands in direct opposition to the Polish Realism (mainly referred to as Positivism in Poland) of the time. *With Fire and Sword* is the first part of Sienkiewicz's trilogy. It places the adventures of its characters, including a love triangle of Polish Jan Skrzetuski and Cossack Jurko Bohun, both in love with Polish Helena Kurcewiczówna, in a heroic 17th century setting filled with the mayhem of shifting alliances and conflicts with Ukrainian Cossacks, Tatars and Russians.¹¹ It is also the part of Sienkiewicz's trilogy, which could not be filmed due to its treatment of Polish-Ukrainian conflict, a politically sensitive topic in the times of the Soviet "protectorate of Poland". Together with *Pan Tadeusz*, *With Fire and Sword* holds a prominent position in the Polish literary canon and in the consciousness of Poles, whose relationship with their national literature traditionally had been particularly close, especially in times when their Polishness was under threat by occupiers.

Two other canonical literary texts adapted for film in the heritage cycle discussed here were condemned for their lack of patriotism when first published. One is Aleksander Fredro's *Revenge* (1831-1833) which was criticised for attempting to entertain its readers by portraying two quarrelling Polish families soon after the failed November Uprising of 1830-1831 against Russia. Fredro also stood in opposition to the ethos of Romantic love, which was expected by his contemporary Poles to be as tragic as their state's fate. Another text controversial for its alleged lack of patriotism is Stefan Żeromski's *The Spring to Come* (1924-1925). *The Spring to Come* was Żeromski's intentionally critical reaction to the newly (since 1918) independent Polish state, its hyperinflation, political fragmentation and instability. He is also affiliated by proxy with Polish Romanticism. And, he shares a trait

¹¹ The contentious nature of the depicted conflicts prevented filming *With Fire and Sword* before 1989, when it was feared to be interpreted as an attack on the "Soviet brotherhood".

common to all these writers, including Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, who wrote *The Old Tale* (1876), which centres on the legendary beginnings of the Polish state, and also including the main character of Jerzy Antczak's film, Fryderyk Chopin. Owing to the state of their fatherland, all these writers as well as Chopin spent considerable time in exile in various countries, mostly, Europe. Their work frequently was punctuated by the nostalgia for the remote homeland often imagined as a timeless arcadia of the type described in this chapter's second epigraph taken from *Pan Tadeusz's* epilogue.

By default, all the texts analysed in this chapter and realised as literature and/or film are not part of "historical heritage" but rather constitute "cultural heritage"¹² of equal or greater value to the construction of nationhood brought about by attempts to present historical objectified truths of a nation's past. Interestingly, as Ewa Mazierska, a Polish film scholar working in England, points out, the films mentioned here are not referred to as "heritage films" in Poland.¹³ The Polish term "cultural heritage" [*dziedzictwo kultury*] refers to the "authentic" historicity of an object of culture, and it excludes its re-workings, unless they themselves are marked by the respectable patina of time. Furthermore, discussions of any type of nation-related heritage in the climate of the late 1990s could easily raise suspicions of affiliation with the dominant vernacular of the right-wing nationalistic political parties. Therefore, the heritage cycle is usually referred to as one of the "adaptations of the school literary canon" rather than one specifically answering to the contemporary needs for the cultural anchorage of the post-transitional Polish nation. In this context, the question of these films' positioning in the cinema-scape and nation-scape of post-1989 Poland becomes compelling, especially

¹² Andrzej Szpociński, *Tożsamość narodowa w perspektywie kulturalistycznej*, a paper presented at Kongres Kultury Polskiej 2000, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.orw.poznan.pl/Orw/Archiwum/20001019/Szpocinski.html>>. John Hill also makes this point in his *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issue and Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 78.

¹³ Ewa Mazierska, "In the land of noble knights and mute princesses: Polish heritage cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21: 2 (June 2001): 167.

given Andrzej Wajda's insistence on the similarity of the concerns in Sienkiewicz's and Mickiewicz's works with Polish nationhood and its place "in a new context, whatever that context may be."¹⁴

Having outlined the basic parameters of the origins of the heritage cycle, this chapter focuses mainly on the first two films, *With Fire and Sword* and *Pan Tadeusz*, which were most successful in terms of the box-office. Even if their success is to a significant extent the result of administrative pressure from schools buying *en masse* tickets for their students, and of the unprecedentedly extensive marketing campaigns coupled with an unusually high number of prints in cinema circulation,¹⁵ the omnipresence of these films at the time of their release constitutes a valid reason for this focus. The main axis of the ensuing analysis revolves around the objects of nostalgia embedded in the films under discussion, including their mise-en-scene, characters and types of national and religious symbolism, as discussed in Chapter 2. In so doing, this analysis converses with Ewa Mazierska's seminal article "In the land of noble knights and mute princesses", which centres on similar questions, with a special emphasis on the representation of Catholicism, gentry [*szlachta*] and women. Before engaging with Mazierska's arguments, I address the concepts to which she gives a less prominent space, namely those of heritage, the positioning of film adaptations within the distinctively Polish version of cultural heritage, and the aesthetics employed to convey various layers of nostalgia for the nationhood as it once was and/or should be.

¹⁴ Andrzej Wajda, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

¹⁵ *Pan Tadeusz* had 104 copies in circulation, and *With Fire and Sword* 99, when an average number of copies for successful Polish films oscillated between 20 and 55.

Adaptations as heritage: the politics of nostalgia

Both literary texts, *Pan Tadeusz* and *With Fire and Sword*, fall into the literary genre of the national epic. Its world is that of the heroic (*With Fire and Sword*) or the idyllic (*Pan Tadeusz*) past of a nation, or it is the world of the founders of a nation (for instance Ignacy Kraszewski's *The Old Tale*). It is usually told from the perspective of a writer respectful of his/her national cultural heritage. It represents what Tadeusz Bujnicki, a Polish literary scholar, refers to as an "absolute past".¹⁶ This notion of an "absolute past" carries little consideration of its status as an historical truth, but serves to "strengthen a sense of possessing a national culture as a heritage of one's ancestors;" that is "associated with the postulate of getting to know the past, acquiring and cultivating it."¹⁷ The symbols of national cultural identity it carries are sanctified by the emotive reactions learned by people adhering to a particular national identity.¹⁸ The process of learning and cultivating national symbols embedded in the objects of national culture means committing to memory the emotive associations these objects bring. This commitment is in principle the same in the case of a literary text and a filmic one. In the context of the drastic decrease in book sales and the number of bookshops and libraries after 1989 in Poland,¹⁹ the film adaptations that are the subject of this chapter are assumed to have gained in significance as a source of the idea of cultural continuity realised in national emotionalism. Even so, the cultural prestige surrounding their original literary sources is one of the main determinants of these adaptations' success.

¹⁶ Tadeusz Bujnicki, *Sienkiewicz i historia: Studia* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 17.

¹⁷ Antonina Kłoskowska, *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku: Pojęcia i problemy wiedzy o kulturze* (Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, 1991), esp. 48-49.

¹⁸ Kłoskowska, *Encyklopedia*, esp. 48-49.

¹⁹ Polish National Commission for UNESCO, *Cultural Diversity in the Light of Globalization. The Future of the Cultural Industries in Central and Eastern Europe* (Warsaw: Polish National Commission, 2000).

All the literary texts whose adaptations could be categorised as “heritage cinema” are part of the school curriculum: a privileged literary canon. Most of them were written in the 19th century to “strengthen Polish heart” and at the time of their publishing, that phrase was a powerful tool of grape-vine promotion for the texts. In fact, the only pursuit worthy of writer during the partitions was to make their work serve their state-less motherland, a tradition revitalised in the post-war ethos of a socially responsible filmmaker. While before 1989 that reasoning still had a recognisable shape to that part of the Polish population not in agreement with the Soviets’ conceptualisation of its existence, after 1989 it started to lose its relevance. Although the rhetoric of independence still might have resonated around the point of Poland’s inclusion in NATO and in the European Union, its occurrences are usually skewed to the right of the political spectrum, and its populist manifestations. This is where Mazierska positions the “heritage cycle”.²⁰ Such a positioning needs to be based on a consideration of the relationship between the role of the original literary texts now and in the past, and the relationship between these roles and that of their adaptations.

Approaches to adaptations

Theories and approaches to film adaptations may be divided into three broad categories. They are either “relationalist”, “separationist”, or “essentialist”. For relationists, a filmic adaptation exists only in relation to its literary origins. Ginette Vincendeau, for instance, writes that “the books and the films themselves, the publicity around them, statements by filmmakers and our own experience as readers and spectators, all compel us, if not to pass

²⁰ Mazierska, “In the land,” 167.

comparative judgment, at least to see one in the light of the other.”²¹ For separationists, the experience of a film based on literary sources may be construed without relating it to the film’s literary origins. For instance, Imelda Whelehan separates the filmic adaptation from its “originary” by asserting that the viewers’ experience of an adaptation might be, and in fact often is, unrelated to the “originary” text, and therefore the adaptation can and at times should be treated separately from the literary text. This, even if the principles of the narrative construction and pleasures of nostalgia embedded in them are the same for filmic adaptations and their literary model.²² Brian McFarlane is also critical of the insistence on the fidelity principle of literary adaptations, proposing that the benchmark of an adaptation’s evaluation should be the intent of the filmmaker.²³

For essentialists, it is the essence of the filmic and literary text that is their focus. Andre Bazin, for instance, argues that filmic and literary texts do not constitute the same category of experience, which means that “faithfulness [of a film] to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory [and w]hat matters is *the equivalence of meanings of the forms*.”²⁴ There are also those who distinguish between the essentialist imperative of a filmmaker, and the parallel relationist approaches of the audiences familiar with the original text. In this way, adaptations in popular consideration function mainly in their relation to the original text, which also serves a filmmaker as a source from which to derive the essence of its filmic treatment, or for the audience as a

²¹ Ginette Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage: A Sight and Sound Reader* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), xi.

²² Imelda Whelehan, “Adaptations: the contemporary dilemmas,” in *Adaptations: from Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 3-19.

²³ Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: an Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 22.

²⁴ Andrew Bazin, “Adaptation, or the cinema as digest,” in *Film Adaptation*, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, ed. James Naremore (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 20.

marker of a film's faithfulness to it.²⁵ This view is based on the assumption that the original text is understood and cherished by the viewers.

Following from this outline of approaches to adaptations, the cycle of canonical literary adaptations of 1999-2003 in Poland is assumed to fulfil two functions. On the one hand, it is an expression of the nostalgia for a bygone national heritage by filmmakers and the older audiences driven by the same imperative. On the other hand, it is an attempt to install a similar nostalgia in the younger audiences by exposing them to emotionally charged national heritage imagery. To this end, all but one film in the heritage cycle include a theme of romance, and the most popular three films resort to the ultimate form of nostalgia aesthetics, namely kitsch, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Cultural imperatives of heritage adaptations

For Wajda *Pan Tadeusz* (1999) was intended to promote a great piece of national literature to his compatriots. In explaining his choice of *Pan Tadeusz*, Wajda justified his promotional intentions by saying that "after all the reader's effort is worth more than that of a viewer, because there are more independent thoughts born in their heads."²⁶ Judging by this one criterion, his film has been a profound success with over 30 new editions of the book coinciding with the film's screenings. Interestingly, even the cast of some of the heritage films confessed in promotional interviews their initial lack of familiarity with and appreciation of the primary and secondary "school canon" texts they were to enact, and declared their growing appreciation of these texts' masterly qualities. In this context, and in agreement with the relationist paradigm, the literary and filmic texts feed off each other to increase their

²⁵ Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 100.

²⁶ Andrzej Wajda, "Dlaczego filmuję *Pana Tadeusza*?" *Kino* 372 (May 1998): 4-6.

mutual significance in the popular culture of the day. In this way, adaptations are expected not to subvert or significantly alter²⁷ their sources, but simply re-write (reproduce) them into a different medium. This fidelity paradigm works differently for the cultivated viewers thoroughly familiar with the literary text and well able to assess the fidelity of its filmic adaptation, and for those other viewers who start with the filmic version, and are recruited to the novel via the film. Furthermore, if the film is for many viewers the first point of contact with the text, that film – instead of being a reproduction – becomes the point of reference for the literary text, which loses its originality.

Despite the fact that most literary texts of the new heritage cinema in Poland are part of the primary and secondary school curriculum, the original pedagogical motivation behind their positioning there is often lost in the process of repeating possibly obsolete pro-independence clichés, amongst which “strengthening Polish heart” leads the way. The popularity of the films (rewritings, re-productions), especially if they are the first point of reference, places these films closer to the contemporary interests of the viewer than to the literary originals. Rather than constructing their “personal” adaptation of the filmed text and having it as a point of reference, viewers in that position may re-write the rewriting that is the film, and re-adapt it for comparison with the now-derivative original and/or their lived national reality. In the Polish case, these interests and the desire to engage with heritage cinema may be easily placed in the context of the “recent fears, discontents, anxieties or uncertainties”²⁸ of Poland facing its inclusion in NATO and in the European Union. The popularity of this particular type of cultural heritage may be seen as telling of the heritage desires of some Polish audiences; the desires that

²⁷ Donald F. Larsson, “Novel into film: some preliminary reconsiderations,” in *Transformations in Literature and Film: Selected Papers from the 6th Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film*, ed. Leon Golden (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1982), 74, quoted in John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issue and Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 78.

²⁸ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday, A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 11-12. Also David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (London: Collins, 1989), 257-258.

might not be able to be fulfilled by non-adapted literary texts enclosed in their historical specificity. In this way, the filmic text might be an expression of the essential quest for (national) belonging, which motivated the success of the originals, now translated into a new visual language of the contemporary reality and concerns.

Apart from fidelity to literature, and a viewer's ability to detect it, a film's faithfulness in depicting the historical period to which it refers often constitutes a measure of a film's value in popular criticism.²⁹ Although such a matrix of judgement is often criticised in the recently growing literature on film adaptations,³⁰ it does constitute a significant area of discussion in the growing field. Yet, even so, the fidelity of film and literature to one another implicates their participation in cultural rather than historical heritage. This point is especially pertinent in the case of Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz* (1999) with its idyllic gentry-focused setting, and Hoffman's *With Fire and Sword* with its emphasis on the Sarmatian patriotic adventurism. It is even more pronounced in Hoffman's *The Old Tale*, which deals with the legendary beginnings of Polish nationhood, and Wajda's *Revenge*, whose historicity remains largely undefined and superfluous with its action placed some time in the 17th or 18th century.³¹

In the context of the cultural heritage imperative of the films mentioned here, George Bluestone's argument that film in general is incapable of reflecting the "mental states" induced by the original literary text³² enforces the strength of

²⁹ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 82-83.

³⁰ For instance, Robert Stam, "Beyond fidelity: the dialogics of adaptations," in *Film Adaptations*, ed. James Naremore (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 54-76. Also, Andrew Horton and Joan Magretta eds., *Modern European Filmmakers and the Art of Adaptation* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981), 1-5.

³¹ Aleksander Fredro was indecisive as to the setting of *Revenge*. Wojciech Natanson, *Sekrety Fredrowskie* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1981), 106-107.

³² George Bluestone, *Novels into Film*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 47.

the emotional connection a filmic adaptation carries for cultural heritage. In one of the first monographs on film adaptations, Bluestone extends his argument to claim the superiority of a written work, which, he believes, is better aligned with the abstract, and thus more capable of capturing streams of consciousness of sorts.³³ Bluestone published his book in 1957, and that argument no longer holds in the era of excessive visual stimulation, which provides a fertile ground for a plethora of visual associations streamlined by a film. Furthermore, the mental state induced by filmic and/or literary texts comes with a disparate rather than hierarchical set of associations, and the pleasures and displeasures that motivate our desire for some and avoidance of others. This is especially important in the context of films that have a potential to contribute significantly to the national identification of a same-nation audience, as is the case with heritage cinema. Heritage filmmakers, and here Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Hoffman in particular, have at their disposal a procession of images that also work as different kinds of triggers to that of their literary sources, and especially so in the context of the post-socialist Poland.

So far, this chapter has advanced a critique which says that treating the original texts of the heritage cinema adaptations after 1999 as the main point of reference when discussing the latter would present at least an incomplete if not a false view, especially given the fact that these texts hold little direct relevance for contemporary Polish viewers, and especially young ones. For them, the times of Polish national splendour of bygone centuries and the national tragedy of partitions are equally remote as the communist and/or socialist past of Poland dependent on the international and domestic politics and policies of the Soviet Union. But, if for many, the original text was seen as derivative of a filmic text, how does the cultural heritage embodied by the spectacularly successful heritage cycle of 1999-2003 operate within the social

³³ George Bluestone, *Novels into Film*, 47.

and cultural reality of contemporary Poland? To answer this fundamental question, it is useful to resort to the operational definition of heritage cinema, and the comparison of its Polish manifestations to that of British heritage filmmaking and of French *film de patrimoine*, as well as their relationship with historical heritage, which constitutes a different type of collective remembering to that based solely on the continuity of cultural identity. In this way, collective memory can be a key differentiator of different types of heritage. The type of heritage favoured by the heritage cycle analysed here is based on imagined time, a time that never existed in the collective experience of those alive. Another type of heritage is that which potentially is believed to be capable of a higher degree of verisimilitude, because it is documented in the memory of the living, and in a wide range of media, including documentary film and photography, so that seeing allows believing. In the case of Polish heritage film, and despite some scholars' insistence that the 19th century is "a period still almost within living memory,"³⁴ it is telling that heritage filmmaking seeks pasts that are unverifiable by the experience of those who watch the films, thus putting in question the historical veracity of the heritage on offer.

Heritage films: generic considerations

As with films in the Polish heritage cycle, British heritage films and French *film de patrimoine* of the 1980s play out respective national pasts, and the culture they represent "is often regarded as a form of retreat from the present, providing satisfactions which the present does not provide or compensations for what it lacks,"³⁵ an assertion that is often linked with the concept of nostalgia discussed later in this chapter. As such, both types of heritage cinema offer "images of stability at a time of upheaval and a sense of

³⁴ R. Giddings, K. Selby and C. Wensley, *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 31.

³⁵ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 74.

continuity in a time of change,”³⁶ which in the Polish case is defensible on some levels, and questionable on others. On the one hand, it could be said that the settings of films like *With Fire and Sword* (Hoffman, 1999) and *The Old Tale* (Hoffman, 1999), placed in the times of upheaval do not satisfy the condition of stability, yet their insinuation of historical, and more importantly – cultural, continuity may be seen as the stabilising factor. Like its British counterpart, Polish heritage cinema, relies on a particular type of adaptation³⁷ that differs from others in celebrating the past rather than investigating or subverting it,³⁸ even if that means celebrating unpalatable national characteristics.³⁹

At this point, it is important to differentiate between French *film de patrimoine*, and British heritage film and costume drama, and place Polish heritage films in relation to these three genres. The British costume films usually “feature romantic adventurous or melodramatic stories against a period background, without bothering too much with historical fidelity. [British] heritage films, by contrast, concentrate on the careful display of historically accurate dress and décor, producing a ‘museum aesthetic’.”⁴⁰ Polish heritage cinema differs from British heritage cinema in that it does not rely on historical accuracy but rather on contemporary aesthetic expectations of a depiction of past opulence. As with British heritage films, however, the heroic or idyllic “absolute past” centres on the “higher-up” strata of the nation, which for the British are the upper and upper-middle classes⁴¹, and which in Poland find their equivalent in the gentry [*szlachta*]. Its manors, castles – however disarrayed – are the backdrop for *With Fire and Sword*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Revenge* and *The Old Tale*.

³⁶ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 74-75.

³⁷ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 78.

³⁸ Ginette Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage*, xviii.

³⁹ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 90.

⁴⁰ Ginette Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage*, xviii.

⁴¹ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 77.

Polish heritage filmmaking shares with its British and French counterparts a use of spectacle, both as a promotional tool and as a dominant mode of delivering text to film.⁴² It is also, unlike Hollywood spectacles, focused on conversation and intrigue, episodic approach, and pictorial rather than dramatic use of visual techniques and makes less use of melodrama.⁴³

Unlike British heritage cinema, Polish heritage films discussed in this chapter arguably rely extensively on the newly-created stardom of their actors, rather than the theatricality or “quality” of their performance.⁴⁴ This characteristic brings them closer to *film de patrimoine*, which is defined by “the particular combination of elements – the concept of popular cinema, the canonical source-text, the stars, the high budgets, the extremely high-profile release and promotion of the film, the use of natural locations to evoke nostalgia for a lost France.”⁴⁵ As is the case with *film de patrimoine*, Polish heritage cycle films respond to the main concerns of contemporary Poland as they are expressed by the filmmakers of the old guard. All the films in the cycle carry an internal unification message for the progressively internationalised Poland. In most cases, the divisive squabbles between families or lovers are brought to a happy resolution, and if this is not the case (for instance in *Chopin*), they result in the protagonist’s illness and his tragic end. Abandonment of the homeland and/or the motherland is also met with a symbolic punishment. In contrast, returning home brings rewards of a fulfilling romance, harmony and/or wealth. However, before proceeding to the analysis of the sites of this homey nostalgia, it is worth noting that, at least in the Polish case, the

⁴² British heritage cinema analysed in John Hill, *British Cinema*, 81. *Film de patrimoine* in Maria Esposito, “*Jean de Florette: patrimoine*, the rural idyll and the 1980s,” in *France of Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*, ed. Lucy Mazdon (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2001), 11-26.

⁴³ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 80.

⁴⁴ John Hill, *British Cinema*, 81.

⁴⁵ Maria Esposito, “*Jean de Florette*,” 11.

heritage cycle is as much a continuation of the previous heritage cycles, as it is a departure from two other traditions of adaptations.

Other traditions of adaptations

One tradition of adaptation that differs from that described so far concerns the more experimental re-workings of literary texts that already at the time of their publication were divorced from the “strengthening Polish heart” dictum. These include, for instance, Wiktor Grodecki’s *Insatiability* (2003) based on Witkacy’s iconoclastic text from 1930, or *Pornography* (Kolski, 2003), reworked from another Polish literary iconoclast, Witold Gombrowicz. The second type of adaptation that subverted the original texts was prominent in the pre-1989 Poland. It includes Wajda’s claustrophobic *The Wedding* (1972) viewed by 1.5 million people,⁴⁶ and also his aesthetically raw *The Land of Promise* (1975), which continues to be applauded by many critics and Polish cinephiles as the best achievement of Polish filmmaking. Interestingly, Andrzej Wajda at the time of making these politically motivated and aesthetically original adaptations was quoted as saying:

In the West superspectacles are generally realised superficially, with an emphasis on one scene or part of the film. A film director finds here no place for any individual experiments, because of the assumption that at least a few tens of millions of people should see the film. Well, we don’t have stars, nor such a great technical base, to impress the viewer with the richness of the explosion of pictures. Instead, we have greater ambitions, but they are incomparably more demanding in terms of time.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Andrzej Wajda quoted in Wojciech Wierzewski, *Film i literatura* (Warsaw: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, 1983), 197.

⁴⁷ Andrzej Wajda quoted in Wierzewski, *Film i literatura*, 193.

Wajda's shift as well as the fact that the heritage films are in general made by older masters of Polish cinema, on the one hand attracted accusations exemplified in Bartosz Żurawiecki's "pamphlet on Polish cinema":

When Jerzy Hoffman made *With Fire and Sword*, we smiled warm-heartedly, because it was owed to the director of *Colonel Wołodyjowski* and *Deluge*. Then we wiped our tears off at the sight of the landscapes from Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*, although we were getting somewhat nauseous from [displays of] national sweetness.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the same accusations also show the recognition of these films as constructing the binding glue of nationhood. This glue's substance is an "absolute past" which John Hill describes in terms of a conservative nostalgia for tying one's identity to physicality uncharacteristic of the postmodern condition.⁴⁹ Whether it is an outcome of a conservative desire for continuity or of postmodern overload of uncertainty, the heritage industry, including its film versions, serves to validate rather than to question a national mode of belonging.

One way of validating the national mode of belonging is by recourse to an aesthetic of universal national appeal, which capitalises on the emotive responses to images and texts (learnt through repetition) that are associated with the idealised state of a nation. The setting of Polish heritage films stands for another kind of nostalgia not dissimilar from that expressed for childhood.⁵⁰ Lew Rywin, the producer of *Pan Tadeusz*, expressed that sentiment in his statement that film for him is a return to childhood, as something "sunny and beautiful" and this was exactly what he wanted to see

⁴⁸ Bartosz Żurawiecki, "Kino bez właściwości? Pamflet na polskie filmy," *Film* 9 (2001): 30.

⁴⁹ Hill, *British Cinema*, 75.

⁵⁰ Hill, *British Cinema*, 85.

in Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*.⁵¹ In this way, heritage films solidify the emotional appeal of the aesthetics and the objects inhabiting the formative years of national (in the case of cultural heritage) and personal (in the case of childhood) identity. That solidification takes place regardless of its historical truth, if such a thing may be said to exist, and it finds its manifestation, for instance, in travel to the places depicted or referred to in *Pan Tadeusz* or *With Fire and Sword*.⁵²

Untouchable spaces of nostalgia

Following the etymological mapping out of "nostalgia", Maria Kornatowska takes the term to its medical roots of 1688, when a Swiss scholar J. Hoper defined it as a longing for a particular place, fatherland, home, and a painful desire to return that is part of that longing. Kornatowska redefines nostalgia, establishing it as a pathology symptomatic of our age.⁵³ Her definition finds its reflection not only in heritage cinema's longing for the realisation of its physical manifestations, as outlined by Hill earlier in this chapter, but is also echoed in Wajda's comments on his *Pan Tadeusz* (1999): "The true role of an artist is that by stepping ahead of a viewer s/he prompts the viewer toward what s/he subconsciously longs for."⁵⁴ That longing implies a lack or absence of its object. Wajda realises that longing by placing *Pan Tadeusz* in a Polish arcadia, not dissimilar from those of British heritage films, French *film de patrimoine* and the Russian heritage films of late.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Lew Rywin, personal interview, 3 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

⁵² Mazierska, "In the land of noble knights," 167.

⁵³ Maria Kornatowska, "Nostalgia – modny przedmiot pożądania," *Kino* 9 (1996): 18-21, 49.

⁵⁴ Andrzej Wajda in BJ, "Książdz Robak, Tadeusz, Zosia i inni," *Kino* 10 (1998): 22.

⁵⁵ David Gillespie, "Identity and the past in recent Russian cinema," in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 143-152.

The topos of arcadia is the most spectacular manifestation of nostalgia; it is a mythical and unreachable place of happiness and harmony. Its temporal locus is, again, in childhood, its spatial locus is in places defined by their symbolic and desirable familiarity, and its heroes are similar to the reader/viewer, but happier or leading more satisfying and fuller lives.⁵⁶ The significance of the locus of national identity, especially in this context, is poignantly described by Elżbieta Ostrowska, when she writes:

"Where" becomes as (...) important as "what." Everything that has happened cannot be recollected without the places where it occurred. The place, the *genius loci*, determines who we are and what we do. If a prairie makes a cowboy and a desert makes a nomad, the act of picking mushrooms in the Lithuanian forest in *Pan Tadeusz* transforms Poles into "Elysian shadows," those half-ghostly, half-real figures who populate the world of Polish Romanticism, the paradigm of Polish collective identity.⁵⁷

In general, the literary arcadia of *Pan Tadeusz* is a faithful embodiment of what Tadeusz Rojek describes in his work on Polish customs:

Those manors of the gentry, which so beautifully melted into the Polish landscape, found a home in [Polish] literature and came alive under the artist's paintbrush, they became a treasury of national tradition. And because they were at the same time the cradle of conservatism, because they treated with disdain any trends that would bring changes, because they stood as an unmovable guard to the old order, (...)

⁵⁶ Robert Jabłoński, "Filmowe Arkadie i raje utracone. Próba analizy filmu nostalgicznego," in *Film – sztuka kulturowych poszukiwań i odkryć*, ed. Jan Trzynadłowski (Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 1996), 9-58.

⁵⁷ Elżbieta Ostrowska, "Landscape and lost time: Ethnoscape in the work of Andrzej Wajda," *Kinoeye* 4: 5, 29 November 2004, (6 March 2005).
<<http://www.kinoeye.org/04/05/ostrowska05.php>>.

Hence that important role of larch-wood manors in Polish culture, and hence the nostalgia for them.⁵⁸

Mickiewicz set *Pan Tadeusz* in the landscapes of a homeland “created by the longing heart”.⁵⁹ It is filled with the “woody hills and green meadows” of the Lithuanian wilderness, the “homely trees”, “evening concerts of noisy birds and choirs of frogs in the ponds” which “speak to each other across the fields.”⁶⁰ Similar self-enclosed landscapes of flowering meadows in daybreaks and dusks, shimmering streams and silvery firs, birch and larch forests flourished in the paintings of Polish Romanticism,⁶¹ which as much as Mickiewicz’s national epic, inspired the imagery of Wajda’s filmic version.

Izabela Kalinowska positions the setting of Wajda’s *Pan Tadeusz* firmly in the ethos of Romantic imagery in her article included in a comprehensive anthology on the director’s work published in 2003. In it she says:

Wajda celebrates his *homeland* in a number of ways. The display of the simple beauty of the rolling hills and the fields Tadeusz passes on his way home, the charm of the luscious green of the forest in the sequence following the hunt, to cite just a couple of examples, transcend diegesis and valorise native landscape. The dialogue between Tadeusz (Michał Żebrowski) and the Count (Marek Kondrat) in which the former defends the value of the native birch forest against the Count’s assertions about the superiority of Italian landscapes provides another type of such valorisation. Wajda transforms the story of Tadeusz’s return home into a celebration of the place to which he

⁵⁸ Tadeusz Rojek, *Polski savoir-vivre* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Transpress, 1984), 15-16.

⁵⁹ Bogdan Suchodolski, *A History of Polish Culture*, trans. E.J. Czerwiński (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1986), 149.

⁶⁰ Suchodolski, *A History*, 149.

⁶¹ Suchodolski, *A History*, 149.

returns. The clearly marked exilic perspective explains the pre-eminence of idealised images of home in the picture.⁶²

The other two significant backdrops for Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz* are a country manor in the classicist Romantic style with harmonious interiors filled with relics of the past, which, again, point to cultural or familial continuity, and a ruined castle at the centre of the ownership dispute between the Horeszkos and the Soplicas. The castle's disarray reflects the effects of a conflict, and it is at most times removed from the audience's view until it is certain that both sides will be reconciled by the marriage of Tadeusz (Soplica) and Zosia (Horeszko, played by Alicja Bachleda-Curuś) a motive that, according to Professor Jacek Woźniakowski, prompted accusations of unpatriotic activity to be directed towards Aleksander Fredro, the author of *Revenge*.⁶³

Although Hoffman protests against having made a "national film" and declares that it is the timeless grand emotions and passions that prompted him to film Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword*,⁶⁴ his film more often than not is seen as a vision of a great, militaristically empowered Poland set in limitless steppes and primeval forests.⁶⁵ Implicit in that setting, as much as that of *Pan Tadeusz*, is nostalgia for a greater Poland that encompassed Lithuania and some of the Ukraine before the partitions of the end of the 18th century, a point subtly omitted from the majority of Polish reviews, and well in agreement with the idealised ethos of the notion of a Romantic homeland whose aesthetics are driven by nostalgia for the "lost country of childhood".

⁶² Izabela Kalinowska, "Changing meanings of home and exile: from *Ashes and Diamonds* to *Pan Tadeusz*," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, ed. John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 74.

⁶³ Jacek Woźniakowski in an interview included on the DVD edition of *Revenge* (Wajda, 2002).

⁶⁴ Jerzy Hoffman quoted in Bogdan Sobieszek, "Jak Wołodyjowski z Bohunem," *Film* 10 (1997): 8.

⁶⁵ Mariusz Czubaj, "Zakręcona dumka," *Film* 5 (1999): 106-107.

The choice of texts that constitute the post-socialist heritage cinema in Poland comes overwhelmingly from the 19th century, as is also the case with the British heritage cinema of the 1980s and even more so of the 1990s. In her introduction to an anthology on British film adaptations, Imelda Whelehan lists three possible reasons for that preference. One is the possibility that “it stems from the public interest in this period of British history,” another is “the growing dominance of the novel as a respectable and morally responsible literary form,” a point reflected in Sienkiewicz’s trilogy, which included *With Fire and Sword*. Another motivation for the choice of the 19th century texts lies in the “moral qualities of the texts themselves – particularly represented by their closure, and depiction of personal relationships and of history itself.”⁶⁶ Yet another reason that is particularly valid in the choices of literary heritage texts adapted into films by Polish directors concerns the similarities between the aesthetics of late Romanticism and postmodernism, which most popularly finds its embodiment in the kitsch that befits the landscapes described above. Once again, Wajda characterises this type of longing indirectly and with different intent in what he says about his motivation in making *Pan Tadeusz*:

I wanted to make a beautiful film, because this is how I perceived Mickiewicz’s poem. But today the sense of beauty is different. People like vehemence, brutality. Artists seek beauty in ugliness, which is not new in art. Mickiewicz’s perspective is different: the world described by him is so remote and unreachable that it cannot prompt anger or cruelty in us.⁶⁷

Wajda is not alone in his longing for this particular and nationally sanctified beauty of a Polish landscape, language and its people. All the films of the heritage cycle at different times cross the boundary between its own domain and its kitsch manifestations, where kitsch carries a positive instrumentality

⁶⁶ Whelehan, “Adaptations,” 13.

⁶⁷ Andrzej Wajda in an interview with Manana Chyb, “A to my właśnie,” *Film 10* (1999): 44.

for the Polish viewer. This is the case with Jerzy Antczak's *Chopin*, in which landscapes used by Wajda and Hoffman are coupled with Fryderyk Chopin's music to produce an ecstatic form of nostalgic appeal to national symbols.

Nostalgia and national kitsch

It may be said that in general adaptations are acted out in a field of Fredric Jameson's "postmodern game of recycling, pastiche and allusions", as Vincendeau points out in her discussion of heritage adaptations.⁶⁸ Gillo Dorfles also argues that it is a particular type of repetition that encourages kitsch: a transposition from one aesthetic system onto another, a process that he also refers to as "betrayal of the proper medium".⁶⁹ If that process is falsified by the stylistic hypersentimentality, then Lotte H. Eisner argues that it would result in a cinematic kitsch.⁷⁰ According to Matei Calinescu's comprehensive article on kitsch, repetition, banality and triteness are its basic markers.⁷¹ From that it follows that repetitious transpositions of objects, texts and symbols that are part of a particular cultural/national heritage encourage a formation of a sentimental bond between the (national) subject and national texts. Sentimentally loaded kitsch is often instrumental in creating the nostalgic appeal held by the aesthetics of a particular cultural heritage. The above assertions are not to deny the positive value of kitsch, and definitely not of pastiche, as they are used by heritage filmmakers, and here by Polish heritage filmmakers.

According to Marek Hendrykowski, a prominent Polish film scholar, "[k]itsch (...) reproduces the same signs borrowed from art, petrifying in its own way

⁶⁸ Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage*, xvi.

⁶⁹ Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 87.

⁷⁰ Lotte H. Eisner, "Kitsch in the cinema," in *Kitsch; The World of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles, Studio Vista, 1969), 200.

⁷¹ Matei Calinescu, "Kitsch," in *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 226.

their earlier received aesthetic function,” and it is not the signs themselves, but “the mode of their use, stifled with time” that constitutes kitsch.⁷² Hendrykowski also juxtaposed kitsch with a piece of [filmic] art that “wrests these signs from the inertia of their previous usage” and “the more boldly it does so, the more effective is the whole process”.⁷³ Or, in the words of Michael Fleischer, the definition of filmic kitsch lies in an object’s “closedness” and reduction to an iconic super-sign.⁷⁴ Therefore, the “discreet charm of kitsch”, as Hendrykowski names it, constitutes a valid if not necessary choice in pursuing popularly recognisable and nationally appealing nostalgia, which is an indispensable part of Polish heritage filmmaking, especially given that it relies heavily on Polish Romanticism.

In the light of Hermann Broch’s work on kitsch that claims Romanticism as its definite cradle,⁷⁵ adaptations of Romantic literary works lend themselves particularly well to a furthering of kitsch’s instrumentality. For instance, Hoffman’s previous adaptations of the two other parts of Sienkiewicz’s trilogy, which borrow from the Romantic ethos, construct the attraction of their lead characters, especially female ones, by contemporising their looks to fit their contemporary audiences’ aesthetic longings. The main female character, Helena (Izabela Scorupco), of *With Fire and Sword* is also subjected to similar operations to the point that she stands out from a rather naturalistic set and is singled out by some critics as un-Polish, despite her obligatory blond braids and blue eyes.

⁷² Marek Hendrykowski, “Kłopoty z kiczem filmowym,” *Kino 9* (1996): 16-17.

⁷³ Hendrykowski, “Kłopoty,” 16-17.

⁷⁴ Michael Fleischer, “Literatura trywialna jako problem semiotyki,” in *Kultura, literatura, folklor*, eds. Marek Graszewicz and Jacek Kolbuszewski (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1988), 498-511.

⁷⁵ Hermann Broch, “Notes on the problem of kitsch,” in *Kitsch: the World of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 49-76.

Mise-en-scene in Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz* also carries signs of kitsch, however in his case it is a "high" form of kitsch, one that Susan Sontag in her seminal article on the topic refers to as "camp".⁷⁶ What, in a different context and executed by a different director, could be described by (non)qualities of "bad taste", "falsehood" and "aesthetic inadequacy", which are the usual attributes of kitsch,⁷⁷ in *Pan Tadeusz* ceases to be "the debris of an aura"⁷⁸ and becomes "theatricality" and "an ideal of artifice".⁷⁹ For instance the inauthentic aesthetics of the interiors of the ruined castle at the centre of the ownership dispute suggests Wajda's distance from the scenes he directs, as it demands the same aesthetic distance from its viewers.

On the other hand, the scenes in which Zosia runs in a summer garden flooded with the summer sun are reminiscent of fragments of paintings from Wajda's favourite "Young Poland" period of Polish art history at the beginning of 20th century, and they may leave doubt as to this reminiscence's intentionality. Interestingly, Wojtek Kość praises Wajda for ridding *Pan Tadeusz* of Mickiewicz's lengthy descriptions of landscape, which, according to Kość, would have constituted kitsch. Following the definition of kitsch outlined above, "replacing them with a physical landscape devoid of commentary,"⁸⁰ should be the process that enables, not impedes, kitsch's formation. Wajda's non-Romantic films similarly carry traces of the signs that become divorced from their original contents and work purely in terms of an aesthetic appeal established by the repetitive learning of emotive cultural

⁷⁶ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'camp'," (1964), in *A Susan Sontag Reader*, intr. Elizabeth Hardwick (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 1982), 105-119.

⁷⁷ Matei Calinescu, "Kitsch," in *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 225-262.

⁷⁸ Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1998), 291.

⁷⁹ Sontag, "Notes on 'camp'," 116.

⁸⁰ Wojtek Kość, "A bygone harmony: Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*," *Central European Review* 1: 21, 15 November 1999, (6 March 2005). <http://www.ce-review.org/99/21/kinoeye21_kosc.html>.

associations. This aesthetic repetition is not surprising given that Wajda trained to become a painter before he started making films. His eye for composing a film frame is similar to composing a classical painting, and painted art is a convenient reference for his filmic art. Yet, this nostalgia for the static aesthetic of a moving image assumes different forms for Wajda. For instance, Paul Coates analyses Wajda's older film *Lotna* (1959) for its kitsch properties. In doing so, he invokes the alienating property of pastiche employed by Wajda,⁸¹ which carries implications beyond the definitional vacuousness of kitsch in which aesthetic value is pursued for its own sake. Coates' analysis may also be applied to Wajda's *Revenge*, although in a different context and to different ends. In *Revenge*, the *mise-en-scene* as well as the characterisation of the central figures borrow various points of reference from the culture of *szlachta*, Baroque fashion as well as contemporary aesthetics and the austerity of a winter landscape, which is not the usual setting for *Revenge*. On the one hand, these disparate undertakings alienate the viewer in an almost Brechtian manner, and on the other, they create images that appeal to younger audiences and are not dissimilar from those used by Baz Luhrmann in his *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996).

Kitsch also carries a specific kind of beauty which Lisa di Bartolomeo refers to in her analysis of *Pan Tadeusz*, particularly in her analysis of the closing scenes of the film, in which the whole wedding party of Tadeusz and Zosia weaves into the blossoming fields to the tune of a polonaise.⁸² The motive of the "enchanted circle" of a dance is reminiscent of Wajda's *The Wedding* (1972), yet its tenor is nostalgic rather than a claustrophobic circling of wasted

⁸¹ Paul Coates, "Wajda's imagination of disaster: war trauma, surrealism and kitsch," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, eds. John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 23.

⁸² Lisa di Bartolomeo, "Ojczyzna Moja': adapting *Pan Tadeusz*," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, eds. John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 172-189.

hopes. The sensuality of that scene is symptomatic of Polish heritage filmmaking as are other scenes portraying the opulent and often gruff customs of the *szlachta*, which constitutes a point of difference from British heritage cinema, whose focus predominantly is on the orderly upper-middle and upper classes of a bygone era.⁸³

Personas of Polish heritage films

Andrew Higson advocates the need to examine closely the political implications of heritage cinema's focus on a particular social class,⁸⁴ even though such a focus might not be an overt or conscious intention of heritage filmmakers. Mazierska suggests the same process takes place in the case of Polish heritage films, and especially in *Pan Tadeusz* and *With Fire and Sword*, which she places in the direction of the conservative right wing of Polish contemporary reality.⁸⁵ Mazierska stops short of drawing a precise parallel in this respect between Polish and British heritage films. She avoids doing so, possibly for two reasons. The first is that, despite a growing nostalgia for communist aesthetics in the Polish popular domain, it is not yet appropriate to create on film an arcadia other than the conservative, right-wing arcadia. For the left-wing of Poland, nostalgia translates into nostalgia for communist Poland, and for older Polish filmmakers, brought up on the ethos of Polish independence, this brings too obvious memories of domination by the Soviet Union. Another, more material, reason for the difficulty of a direct comparison of a particular class focus in Polish and British heritage films is that the social class of whom Polish heritage speaks so fondly scarcely exists in the contemporary Poland. Therefore, its glorification

⁸³ Vincendeau, *Film/Literature/Heritage*, xxi.

⁸⁴ Andrew Higson, "Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in heritage film," in *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester Friedman (London: UCL Press, 1993), 109-129.

⁸⁵ Mazierska, "In the land," 167.

can only serve an indirect mythologising interest, whose implications are symbolic rather than implying a direct parallel to the Polish transitional or post-transitional reality, as is the case with the upper-middle and upper classes of British heritage cinema.

In 18th century Poland, and well into the 19th century, the nobility or gentry (*szlachta*) constituted 8-10 percent of the population, compared to 3.2 percent of the English and 1.5 percent of the French populations at the same time. Of that 8-10 per cent, 25 per cent were Catholic, and 60 per cent dispossessed.⁸⁶ In the Poland of the turn of the 20th century, such a census would be likely to produce unreliable results, given the waves of immigration that carried large chunks of the Polish nobility to other parts of the world, but also because of the official unpopularity of the concept of *szlachta* with pre-1989 governments. Despite some attempts to revive the Polish gentry or nobility – symptomatic here is Andrzej Wajda's insistence on referring to Aleksander Fredro as a "count" in interviews on *Revenge* - that revival remains fragmented. The intelligentsia was the gentry of communist Poland, and it inherited the ethos of the spiritual national leadership from *szlachta*. After 1989 its place was being taken by the wealthy elites, whose place in the contemporary order could only be indirectly validated by the type of nostalgia induced by Wajda's and Hoffman's films.

Already at the time of writing *Pan Tadeusz*, *With Fire and Sword* and *Revenge*, these works were taking on the task of mythologising a world that no longer, if ever, existed. Adam Mickiewicz wrote *Pan Tadeusz* in response to the spreading disharmony of émigré circles, who started to be perceived as burdensome rather than the "pilgrims of freedom" they would have preferred to see themselves as. Andrzej Wajda conveyed the disintegration of the

⁸⁶ Andrzej Walicki, *Idea narodu w polskiej myśli oświeceniowej* (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 2000), 20.

once-vibrant and idealised class in the émigré scenes of the filmic version of *Pan Tadeusz*. The bright and colourful representatives of *szlachta* who populate the idyllic world of Soplicowo throughout most of the film, are shown as greyed and disillusioned shadows of themselves, deprived of their earlier hopes and vitality, in the dark rooms of an émigré Parisian flat.⁸⁷ The disintegration of *szlachta* and the disillusion of emigrant circles were what prompted Mickiewicz's writing of *Pan Tadeusz*, which presents a set of desiderata on Polish values, tradition and historical continuity immersed in nostalgia for the past. That past is inhabited by the mythologised *szlachta*, a class that, although almost extinct at the time of writing *Pan Tadeusz*, epitomises in itself Polish traditional (or mythical?) virtues and woes.⁸⁸ Their representatives are jovial, hospitable, honest, generous, passionate, if not hedonistic. Men dress in a traditional *kontusz*, which is a Middle-East inspired colourful coat, which marks *szlachta*'s connection to the Sarmatians, their mythical ancestors. Women's dress is also colourful and Middle-Eastern inspired. *Szlachta*'s representatives are partial to alcohol, good food and a lot of it. At the same time, they are self-interested, irrational, indecisive and impulsive. They squabble a lot and unite only if faced with an external threat, provided that such unification would not threaten their self-interest. All of these traits are subtly hinted at in Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*, and amplified in Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword*, this amplification mainly due to the accessibility of the format in which it was written, unlike that of the challenging 13-syllable Mickiewicz's verse in *Pan Tadeusz*.

Henryk Sienkiewicz's trilogy, which includes *With Fire and Sword*, is seen variously as a historical fairytale, a hybrid of heroic adventure narratives, a folk story, or a combination of all of the above, which is what is said to explain

⁸⁷ Tadeusz Lubelski, "Dług and *Pan Tadeusz*: dwie inwokacje," *Kino 9* (2002): 34-35.

⁸⁸ Anna Witkowska, *Wielcy romantycy, sylwetki: Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Norwid* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1980), 94-95.

the trilogy's undying popularity in Poland.⁸⁹ In more recent times, Sienkiewicz's work is also compared with the Western film genre⁹⁰ and with American comics.⁹¹ These comparisons place its language closer to its spoken rather than literary variety, which in turn encourages a less subtle and more direct use of language and imagery. That oral literariness of the written text lends itself in *With Fire and Sword* to a more forcible filmic expression than is to be found in *Pan Tadeusz*. Hoffman's portrayal of *szlachta* and their Polish hedonistic joviality is criticised in the film itself by Polish King Jan Kazimierz (Marek Kondrat), when he says "in Poland *szlachta* gathers for war as if it were a seaside picnic," a view in stark opposition with another myth of Polishness supported in the literary source of the film, and according to which it is *szlachta* who stood guard to one of the oldest European democracies of Poland.

Interestingly, in her comparative analysis of the portrayal of *szlachta* and the "others" on the outskirts of the nostalgic and/or heroic visions of Polish cultural heritage, including the portrayal of peasants, Tatars, Cossacks and women, Mazierska argues that the representations of *szlachta* males are superior to those of any other group. Yet, this argument is not as univocal as is implied by Mazierska. For instance, in the words of Izabela Kalinowska:

[...T]he Polish gentry's world [in *Pan Tadeusz*] is both colourful and desirable but, at the same time, quite ugly in its details. From the perspective of someone who is slightly on the outside, such as the innkeeper Jankiel (Władysław Kowalski) or the exiled "author", the *szlachta*'s quarrels and

⁸⁹ Aniela Piorunowa and Kazimierz Wyka, *Henryk Sienkiewicz: Twórczość i recepcja światowa. Materiały konferencji naukowej listopad 1966* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1968), 11.

⁹⁰ Piorunowa and Wyka, *Henryk Sienkiewicz*, 30-33.

⁹¹ Zbigniew Zamachowski in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz, "Michał i Michał," *Film 2* (1999): 73.

the often-violent squabbles make no sense, and they bring disastrous results.⁹²

This point is also emphasised by Andrzej Wajda, who reminds his viewers and listeners that, despite their expectations and the literary work's status in the history of Polish culture, *Pan Tadeusz* portrays also the non-complimentary aspects of szlachta's, that is of Poles', national nature.⁹³ This is also the case with Fredro's *Revenge*, which Wajda compares to Molière's *Tartuffe*.⁹⁴ Despite the dictum "to strengthen Polish heart" proclaimed by Mickiewicz himself, his *Pan Tadeusz* was criticised by his contemporaries for being a novel-like story about szlachta, who "eat, drink, pick mushrooms and wait for the French to make them a fatherland."⁹⁵ Their Catholicism, even though its prayers save Jan Skrzetuski from insanity and make him into Helena's future husband in *With Fire and Sword*, is manifested mainly in a depiction of custom and a naïve mysticism instrumental in realising some characters' longings. In the case of the former, the sign of the cross and prayers are repetitious but instrumental in creating an emotive connection with the contemporary gestures, which express the Poles' identification with Catholicism. The naïve mysticism in *With Fire and Sword* is a fertile ground for humour, as is the case with, for instance, Podwipięta's promise to Holy Mary, the "Lightest Virgin", to live in chastity until he cuts off three enemy heads with one swing of his beloved sword. Podwipięta managed to accomplish this unlikely task, given the unusually heavy weight of his sword, yet he dies shortly after that accomplishment without "relieving" his chastity.

⁹² Kalinowska, "Changing meanings," 75.

⁹³ Andrzej Wajda quoted in Manana Chyb, "Kochajmy się." *Film* 9 (1998), 106.

⁹⁴ Andrzej Wajda in an interview released with *Revenge* (Wajda, 2002) DVD.

⁹⁵ Cyprian Kamil Norwid quoted by Józef Bachorz in Maria Janion, Marian Maciejewski and Marek Gumkowski eds., *Literatura krajowa w okresie romantyzmu 1831-1863: Tom III* (Warsaw: IBL, 1992), 39.

Othered nostalgia

Another significant point in discussions of *szlachta* and Poles more generally in *Pan Tadeusz* and *With Fire and Sword* is that they inhabit the lands, that is Lithuania and Ukraine, which have not belonged to Poland for two centuries. *The Times' Guide to the Peoples of Europe* lists the Poles of these lands separately from those of "Poland proper", and refers to them as *marchland Poles*, a cohort almost completely disappeared as a culturally separate group around the time Poland regained its independence in 1918.⁹⁶ In fact, Adam Mickiewicz, who for all purposes considered himself a Pole, also referred to himself as a Lithuanian, as did Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817) who fought for Polish and American sovereignty. The Lithuanian nomination signified a territorial rather than a national identification,⁹⁷ and is almost forgotten in the post-1989 Poland, beyond the charitable work conducted for ethnically Polish people in contemporary Lithuania and Byelorussia. Furthermore, despite Hoffman's assertions to the contrary⁹⁸ and his efforts to avoid potentially politically sensitive areas of Sienkiewicz's novel,⁹⁹ Ukrainian and Lithuanian critics have not taken kindly to the balance of cultural power between the Poles and their own nations in *With Fire and Sword*. For them the world depicted in the film is one of Polish domination, in which the Poles try "to civilise an uncouth and backward barbarian nation."¹⁰⁰ According to Mazierska, they are justified in their reluctance to appreciate Polish heritage cinema, since both Cossacks and, even more so, Tatars are portrayed as more barbarian than Poles. Hoffman's Cossacks "are shown with bare

⁹⁶ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, ed., *The Times' Guide to the Peoples of Europe* (London: Times Books, 1994), esp. 275-282 and 319-321.

⁹⁷ Janusz Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce; rozkwit – upadek – relikty*, 3rd ed. (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1983), 105.

⁹⁸ Jerzy Hoffman in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz, "Ogniem i sercem," *Film 3* (2000): 35-37.

⁹⁹ Mazierska, "In the land," 167.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew J. Horton, The empire strikes back; the revival of nationalist epics in cinema," *Central European Review* 0: 37, 7 June 1999, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.ce-review.org/kinoeye/kinoeye37old1.html>>.

chest, sweating heavily” and with “primitive hairstyles: mostly bald with long wisps of greasy hair falling over their faces.”¹⁰¹ The Poles themselves are scarcely vehicles of aesthetic pleasure for their viewers since they have greasy hair, and drink and eat excessively, which many a time leads Poles and non-Poles alike to their demise. Also, the Middle-East inspired traditional clothing of *szlachta* might be seen, albeit rarely, as a point of separation from the Western European ethos that is one source of Poles’ imagined superiority towards the Ukrainians or Lithuanians. The *szlachta*’s self-claimed ethnic origins are said to lie with the Sarmatians, whose Iranian origins are a detail frequently omitted from the nostalgic discussions of *szlachta* seen as bearers of Polish cultural continuity and a picturesque point of cultural reference for heritage films.

Apart from the imbalances of representation of Ukrainians and Lithuanians, Mazierska also suggests that Jews are shown as aspiring to be Poles, and their Jewishness, especially in *Pan Tadeusz*, is not represented as clearly as it is in the literary text. However, it would be difficult not to differentiate, for instance, the Jewish innkeeper, Jankiel from non-Jewish Poles in *Pan Tadeusz*. Jankiel wears traditional black clothes, not the colourful *szlachta* attire, dark skull-cup and side curls. He is also portrayed as wiser than non-Jewish Poles. He stands as a troubled witness to the folly of fellow Poles, very much like Maciek (Jerzy Bińczycki), a sage savant whose wisdom is respected but not followed in the time of crisis. The only difference in the way Wajda represents the two characters is in their reaction to the insanity of internal *szlachta* squabbles at the time when they could easily jeopardise the national cause. Jankiel’s reaction is that of worried resignation and helplessness, while Maciek reacts with frustration that finds its culmination in his dismissive fury. In one way Jankiel could be said to be alienated and “othered” in the story, because his peaceful resignation stands in opposition

¹⁰¹ Mazierska, “In the land,” 167.

to the stereotypical hot-headedness of a Polish male exhibited by Maciek, who is also marginalised. At the same time, Jankiel's "otherness" is superior by virtue of the calm wisdom and concern that he projects.

National genders and gendered nostalgia

Marginalisation of women in Polish heritage films is one other point of criticism advanced especially strongly by Ewa Mazierska. While Kazimiera Szczuka sees an under-representation of women in these films producing a "handicap of the female world" in the first Polish heritage productions of 1999,¹⁰² Mazierska refers to portrayals of women as "mute princesses". Although not completely unjustified, Mazierska's evaluation of women's representation is unduly strong. It neglects the origins, context and function of this particular heritage cycle, whose sources are still in the Polish Romantic ideologies of a nation striving for an independent Polish state. In the narratives of these ideologies, women assume a mythologised role as the guardians of nationhood in the only sphere in which that was possible during the partitions – a domestic one. A woman prepared to protect the home and its Polishness was, at least mythologically or even allegorically speaking, the cradle of the future independent state. Her calm wisdom and quiet private perseverance is what allowed for the continuity of a Polish nation to the point at which its nationhood was coupled with an independent Polish state. Furthermore, when placed in the context of Romantic ideologies, the virginal, blonde-braided and blue-eyed Zosia in *Pan Tadeusz* and Helena in *With Fire and Sword* represent a hope of national rejuvenation when reunited with, respectively, Tadeusz and Skrzetuski, and in that act they exit their private world and enter the public sphere. Interestingly, one interpretation of Helena's longing look for Cossack Bohun in the closing scenes of *With Fire and Sword*

¹⁰² Kazimiera Szczuk, "Czar, co łby podchmiela," *Film 10* (1999): 40-41.

makes it into a symbol of Helena's independence.¹⁰³ Putting aside Polish Romantic myths' concern with women, heritage films do offer some examples of strong-willed, active and outspoken women, albeit very few of those and of women in general.

Apart from Zosia, the only other significant feminine presence in *Pan Tadeusz* is that of Telimena (Grażyna Szapołowska). She is outspoken, flirtatious, beautiful and worldly. In *Revenge*, young Klara (Agata Buzek) is assertive, self-assured and generally a more defined and definite character¹⁰⁴ than that of her beloved Wacław (Rafał Królikowski). More mature Podstolina (Katarzyna Figura) is another strong character in *Revenge*, which, released after Mazierska's seminal article, represents the strongest departure point from the predominantly male-centred world of the cycle. Following the pattern of the division between younger females who reside in the private space, and older ones in the public spaces, Hoffman's *The Old Tale* offers powerful and striking in her contemporarised beauty, mature Duchess (Małgorzata Foremniak) and younger and quieter Dziwa (Marina Aleksandrova), who is promised to serve gods. At the same time, most significant female characters are defined by their relation to a significant male character(s) and all heritage films of the 1999-2003 period are married to romantic passions of sorts, regardless of their outcomes. It is telling that Hoffman lists *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) as a chief inspiration for his *With Fire and Sword* (1999),¹⁰⁵ and in Wajda's films the initially forbidden love of the children of two quarrelling families brings these families together in the final scenes of both films, in line with the archetypes of the historical romance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Mariusz Czubaj, "Zakręcona dumka," *Film 5* (1999): 106-107.

¹⁰⁴ Dariusz Kosiński, "Ta druga Klara, czyli o bohaterce nieodkrytej," *Kino 7-8* (2002): 32-33.

¹⁰⁵ Jerzy Hoffman in an interview with Maria Oleksiewicz, "Skrzetuski – waleczne serce," *Film 5* (1997): 13.

¹⁰⁶ Leger Grindon, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 11.

The absence of mothers in the films under analysis is interesting in the context of Polish national mythologies. The two Polish mothers significantly present in the cycle include the *Old Tale*'s Duchess, far removed from the self-sacrificing ideal of Polish Romanticism, and Chopin's mother (Jadwiga Barańska), who is promptly replaced in the narrative by George Sand (Danuta Stenka) and in most cases appears only in Chopin's feverish reveries. The absence of mothers is perplexing, and if it is mothers who in Romantic national longings stand for the cradle of Polishness, their absence could indicate a way of representing the world in which the very cradle of Polishness must be hidden from external view, yet such an interpretation may be somewhat overstretched. In any case, instead, national hopes shift to future mothers, for instance, Zosia and Helena. The role of other women, whose future motherhood is less likely, remains that of sexual initiators of sorts for young Tadeusz in *Pan Tadeusz*, Waclaw in *Revenge*, and even, arguably, for Chopin. That motive, coupled with the absence of a mythologised and idolised Polish Mother from the narratives of these films allows for the Oedipal conflict to find its resolution without upsetting acceptable moralities too much. In this way, these "older" women serve as midwives to the other type of sexuality that is the proper site of Polish nationhood. For instance, as Ostrowska argues, sexuality in Wajda's films is generally depicted in the public domain, and often it is a metaphor for societal or national obligations. Ostrowska illustrates this point with an example of a scene from Wajda's *The Wedding* [*Wesele*] (1972), another heritage adaptation, in which the Poet's gesture places Poland in his Bride's beating heart, under her tactile bosom.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Elżbieta Ostrowska, "Dangerous liaisons: Wajda's discourse of sex, love and nation," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, eds. John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 46-63.

The world of Polish heritage productions is undeniably populated mainly by men. Mazierska argues that it is the world of masculine, militaristic prowess, which a Polish contemporary male may only dream of, and which he longs for.¹⁰⁸ Yet, if that world is also a site of nostalgia for what is to be considered the superior masculine past, its male representatives do not create enviable role models. In his article on “Piszczyk’s complex”, Przyłipiak argues that Polish films are populated by weak males, who are as a rule lost and often opportunistic.¹⁰⁹ The same may be said about the men of the heritage cycle. They shift their alliances, change or lose their mind, and in general are not a picture of strength and unwavering morality and national pride. The nostalgia that defines the heritage cycle, however, does not consist so much in individual characters as in the national glory of the mythical and/or literary pasts. Its longing is not for the idealised version of their ancestors, but for cultural continuity, and a nation’s spectacular, even if imagined, past. The characters of heritage films confirm the national foibles and place them in familiar yet bygone idyllic or adventurous settings, and therein rests their significance for the contemporary viewer.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the box office successes of the heritage films cycle between 1999 and 2003, and especially that of *With Fire and Sword* and of *Pan Tadeusz*, signify a particular cultural need of Poles a decade after the end of communist rule. Despite the criticism that the main currency of heritage filmmaking is money,¹¹⁰ they held a particular attraction for a sizeable audience. That attraction functions in the context of a destabilised collective or national identity of the post-transitional period, in which Poland is

¹⁰⁸ Ewa Mazierska, “The redundant male; representations of masculinity in Polish postcommunist cinema,” *Journal of Film and Video* 55: 2-3 (2003): 29-43.

¹⁰⁹ Mirosław Przyłipiak, “Kompleks Piszczyka,” *Kino* 12 (2002): 17-20.

¹¹⁰ For instance, Krystyna Lubelska, “Nakręćcie mi to ładnie,” *Polityka*, 22 (2247), 27 May 2000, 42-45.

open to internationalisation and in which the initial enthusiasm of entrepreneurial drives had worn off. Despite Maria Janion's popularised assertion that the ethos of Romanticism exhausted itself with the arrival of the Third Polish Republic, that ethos continues to be a most stable guarantee of a national and cultural continuity with the past before the Polish People's Republic, and a site of nostalgia for the commonly familiar concept of Polish nationhood.¹¹¹ To quote once again Wajda, the heritage films aim to show to its audiences "how beautiful and wonderful the language that we speak is."¹¹² Appreciating the difficulty of this task in the contemporary free-market and populist Poland, Wajda also interprets the affinity of younger audiences for *Pan Tadeusz* and its language when he says: "I thought they might be put off by the verse, but I think it reminded them of rap music."¹¹³

After a decade of "opening up" and looking to the West and the US for direction and inspiration, the heritage cycle, even if it was force-fed to Polish audiences, does constitute an important point of national reference. Its direct relevance to the Polish political or economic situation and decision-making would be remote, but its cultural significance is probably greater than was envisaged by many Polish critics and viewers who by 2003 had grown tired of the heritage films and embarrassed by their unashamed national longings. Still, while some critics believe that portrayals of *szlachta* in these films contain a commentary on the current condition of Poland,¹¹⁴ others express their disappointment that they do not contain it.¹¹⁵ For others, the main appeal of the films in the cycle lies in their depiction of battles or romance

¹¹¹ Maria Janion, *Do Europy. Tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (Warsaw: Sic! 2000).

¹¹² Andrzej Wajda in an interview published on *Revenge* (Wajda, 2002) DVD.

¹¹³ Alan Riding, "A comeback for a man of freedom: nostalgic epic by Andrzej Wajda strikes a chord in Poland," *The New York Times*, March 2000, (31 January 2004).
<<http://query.nytimes.com/search/article-printpage.html?res+9B04E5D6103AF932A15750C0A9669C8B63>>.

¹¹⁴ Jacek Tąbecki, "Te gwiazdy to sztylety," *Film 2* (1999): 34.

¹¹⁵ Bogdan Sobieszek, "Zemsta," *Film 11* (2002): 92.

enacted by Polish film stars.¹¹⁶ If the cinema may be seen, to some extent, as an indication of a collective cultural Polish mindset, then the prevalence of the heritage adaptations between 1999 and 2003 suggests a significant shift in their collective self-perception. That shift does not necessarily eventuate from an uncritical admiration of the heritage cycle, or a clear-cut and uncomplicated nostalgia for the ideal Poland that once was, not even from nationalistic right-wing longings. Rather, it comes from having a common point of national reference, which, even if it leans to the right of the Polish contemporary political spectrum, constitutes a common reference point. The heritage cycle provides an alternative for the internationalising drive in post-transitional Poland by validating the cultural continuity of a post-communist nation, but also, and more importantly, it opens that continuity up for questioning. In doing so, it distances contemporary Polish popular culture and identity from the recent past of communist Poland, at the same time allowing for reconciliation with the communist past, something which was not possible in Polish cinema throughout the first 15 years after the collapse of communism. The problems associated with dealing with the communist past and its memory, as represented in film, are the subject of the next chapter of this dissertation.

¹¹⁶ Agata Buzek in an interview with Magda Sendecka, "Lubię Klare," *Film* 7-8 (2002): 34-35.

5

Of the People's Republic and its memory

*I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question
"Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"¹*

*Memory seems to answer expectations and is already framed by the answers it
seeks.²*

It would seem that the portrayals of the Polish People's Republic in films made after 1989 could not be further removed from the arcadias of the Polish heritage films discussed in the previous chapter. Those arcadias imagined by Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Hoffman and Jerzy Antczak are the never-lands of nostalgia. Forging links to those arcadias lifts mundane realities to a higher plane. Arcadias offer the luxury of forgetting, allowing one to imagine a better past, which can imply a better future. On the other hand, the experience of the Polish People's Republic, or, as it is often fondly referred to, the "PRL", for the majority of the early post-1989 Polish society did not lie in a "higher plane"

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216.

² Liliane Weissberg, "Learning culture," in *Cultural Memory And The Construction of Identity*, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1999), 14.

of life. It was an everyday life experience. Yet the normality of that experience is difficult to find in Polish films made after 1989. Most of these films³ emphasise the punishing qualities of the regime, and aspects of its absurdity. In popular opinion and with an exception made for the period between 1971 and 1980, the PRL is seen as a costly mistake, and is portrayed as such in post-1989 films set in the PRL. The precise parameters of that experience as perceived in the first 15 years of the Third Republic are bound not only by documents of the time, but also by individual and collective memories, which – as Liliane Weissberg says in the second epigraph quoted at the start of this chapter – are in servitude to our current expectations and desires, and no less so than any other type of history or collective remembering. Weissberg's assertion is especially significant in the context of Polish historiography, which traditionally – as were films – was in servitude to the national project, and – even more importantly, as Piotr S. Wandycz notes “Poles more than other nations experienced history twice: when they occurred and when they became the object of debates and disputes.”⁴ So far, the discussions around the PRL past have not been so much a debate, as a revisionist search for the less and more significant culprits of the old system. The trauma of the PRL and its end so far has been only at times overwritten by the trauma of the realisation that Poles might not only be victims in their history, but also victimisers, as seems the case with, for instance, the forceful removal of the German population of Breslau, which became Wrocław after WW2.⁵

³ Apart from few notable exceptions which use People's Republic only as a backdrop to their story, for instance *The Welts [Pręgi]* (Piekorz, 2004), *My Nikifor [Mój Nikifor]* (Krauze, 2004).

⁴ Piotr S. Wandycz, “Historiography of the countries of Eastern Europe: Poland,” *American Historical Review* 97:4 (1992): 1011.

⁵ This subject matter was taken up in 2002 by Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse in *Microcosm: A Portrait of a Central European City* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2002), and attracted limited attention in Polish media.

Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to position some significant post-1989 films set in the PRL as textual resources for a collective memory of that time, which is affected by collective and individual traumas of all sorts, again focusing on the “main stream” “majority”⁶ experiences. The argument that underlies the structure of this chapter is that at least one function of the collective memory realised through these films is their legitimisation of the current socio-cultural order by creating a disjunctive rupture from the communist/socialist/PRL-ist past, which may allow a coming to terms with that past in the near future. Furthermore, this chapter’s underlying assumption is that that disjunctive rupture as well as the dilemma of accepting collective and individual responsibility for the uncomfortable past, is a site of post-traumatic narratives relived in Polish post-1989 films about the PRL.

As much as Kalinowska’s post-traumatic masculinity discussed in Chapter 2, all people who were born in Poland before, say, 1975 and remained in the country, have been subjected to the stress of dealing with an absurd, if not disturbing, reality, as well as to the stress of having gone through the systemic quake that put an end to the PRL. Traditionally, trauma is conceived as played out in the individual domain; however, a growing body of work recognises the effect of such collective trauma on societies as well as individuals. For instance, Kai Erikson, an authority on collective trauma, defines it as a state “resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a *persisting condition* as well as from an acute event.”⁷ Although Erikson focuses on singular traumatic events, for instance natural or technological disasters, he also refers to a case of the Romanian experience of communism, and the lasting trauma that results from

⁶ For simplicity understood here is the opposite of “minority”.

⁷ Kai Erikson, “Notes on trauma and community,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185. Emphasis in original.

“sustained dread and dislocation”.⁸ The most significant outcomes of such prolonged traumatic experiences are helplessness, a general sense of fear, and lack of faith in the good will and good sense of those in charge,⁹ all characteristic of a great part of the Polish populace, as discussed in Chapter 2.

In general, films made about the PRL after 1989 reflect various stages of dealing with the trauma of life under communism, an experience which is exasperated by its unexpected and rapid end. The initial outcry and the deep sense of injustice are usually followed by often interchanging states of denial and intrusiveness of images associated with the traumatic event or situations. The vicious circle of the perpetual internal or collective dialogue with past experience gets broken only if individuals or collectives are willing to work through the trauma of the past to put it to rest, a process that for some people may never be completed.¹⁰ During the first 15 years of the post-communist Poland, most films made about the PRL reflect either the “denial” or “intrusiveness” stages of post-traumatic coping, for instance Wojciech Marczewski’s *Escape from Cinema “Freedom”* [*Ucieczka z Kina Wolność*] (1990) relives the moral bankruptcy of that time, while Krzysztof Zanussi’s *In Full Gallop* [*Cwał*] (1996) denies the significant stresses of daily lives in the PRL. The other two films analysed here, Teresa Kotlarczyk’s *The Primate* [*Prymas – Trzy lata z tysiąclecia*] (2000) and Wojciech Wójcik’s *There and Back* [*Tam i z powrotem*] (2002) are examples of the commodification of the

⁸ Erikson, “Notes on trauma,” 190.

⁹ Erikson, “Notes on trauma,” 195.

¹⁰ Mardi J. Horowitz, Henry C. Markman, Charles H. Stinson, Bram Fridhandler, and Jess H. Ghanam, “A classification theory of defense,” in *Repression and Dissociation: Implications for Personality Theory, Psychopathology, and Health*, ed. Jerome L. Singer, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 64.

trauma of those times, and thus possibly might be seen to be part of a collective working through of it.¹¹

The 44 years of the PRL are not a uniform period. The developments in Polish filmmaking trends discussed in the Introduction run parallel to broad socio-political and cultural changes. For ease of reference, this chapter follows a systematisation of that period based on the changes in the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party, a system also employed by the Centre for Public Opinion Research, the main polling organization in Poland. Accordingly, the first period after the World War II (1945-1956) is most commonly referred to as the Stalinist period, mainly under the leadership of Bolesław Bierut, who died in unexplained circumstances during his 1956 visit to Moscow. That Stalinist period is a favoured focus of Polish films about the pre-1989 Poland, because it accentuates a rupture between the improved and "free" present and the particularly oppressive past. A few films of the Cinema of Moral Concern (1976-1981) period, including those mentioned in the Introduction, focused on the dubious ethics, or lack of ethics, of Stalinism, although they mainly focused on then contemporary systemic excesses. The second period in the life of the PRL starts with the arrival of the Polish School (1956-1961) and continues under the leadership of Władysław Gomułka until 1970. Gomułka's times are a less popular destination for filmmakers after 1989, even though they are the site of one of the most significant post-Stalinist communist government's excesses – the purges of 1968 which resulted in the forced emigration of prominent Poles of Jewish heritage, including, for instance, Zygmunt Bauman.

¹¹ Several Polish films that were released in 2004 treat life in the PRL like in any other place, which could indicate the first signs of the collective arriving at the completion stage of dealing with the PRL past, especially in the context of the progressive openness about the secret police's files, which were only selectively accessible before 2004.

The period between 1971 and 1980 was the time of the Party leadership by Edward Gierek, also popularly known as the “Gierek era”.¹² It gave rise to the Cinema of Moral Concern, which to some extent increased the visibility of Polish cinema at European film festivals. At the same time, in his 1985 publication, Adam Michnik, a leading opposition figure, defined the Gierek era as “a strange and roguish epoch. It was an epoch of hurried materialism, of explosion of long-forbidden material aspirations, whose realisation was paid for in the currency of moral conformism and complete de-politicisation.”¹³ Or, in the words of Jacek Bromski, a film director, producer, and script writer, who often ventures into the field of popular cinema in Poland, “in Gierek’s time everything was half-hearted. Everybody was winking at everybody. Nobody, not even the government, treated the official propaganda seriously. Everybody suspected that in the evening news even the weather forecast was subject to manipulation.”¹⁴

If these accounts were to be held relatively indicative of the time, it is not surprising that the Gierek era remains the least visited site of the PRL in the films of the first 15 years after the end of the old regime. However, at the same time, it remains the most definite site of nostalgia for the lived past for post-1989 Poles. In 2000, 56 percent of Poles surveyed by the Centre for Public Opinion Research nominated it as “the time in which, generally speaking, life was best in Poland.”¹⁵ In comparison, only 20 percent nominated as superior the decade of 1989 to 1999,¹⁶ which adds significance to the absence of films about that period made after 1989. If materialism was part of life under Gierek, and at the same time the people of Poland were not

¹² Edward Gierek for the First Secretary and the Prime Minister of Poland in that period. He increased significantly Polish foreign debt thus creating a temporary improvement in the life-style of the PRL’s inhabitants.

¹³ Adam Michnik, *Takie czasy... Rzecz o kompromisie* (London: Aneks, 1985), 9.

¹⁴ Jacek Bromski in an interview with Czesław Dondziłło, “Alibi już nieaktualne,” *Film*, 21, 1989, 4-5.

¹⁵ Zdzisław Pietrasik, “Odkurzony Peerel,” *Polityka*, 30, 22 July 2000, 6.

¹⁶ Pietrasik, “Odkurzony Peerel,” 6.

rebellious against the then-current system, that period serves no purpose in re-legitimising the break from it, and therefore is not a site of any significant trauma.

On the other hand, the last decade of the PRL under General Wojciech Jaruzelski, which lasted from the beginning of Martial Law in December 1981 until 1989, enjoys neither popularity (3 percent of the above-mentioned respondents nominated it as the time “when life was best in Poland”, exactly the same number as for Gomułka’s period of 1956-1970), nor much filmic treatment between 1989 and 2004. One explanation of this phenomenon may be that at that time the old system was irrevocably falling apart and without any significant conflicts arising from the disintegration. Party bureaucrats, instead of being monumentally oppressive, hurried to secure their place in the new system. The Party dissolved in 1990, just like the communist system itself - without any protest.¹⁷

Another reason for the lack of films focusing on the socio-political or cultural problems of that period is given by Tadeusz Sobolewski in his discussion of post-1989 cinema.

Even the fact that Wajda thought all throughout the 1990s about making the third *Man of...*, and never made it, is also symptomatic. Maybe it wasn’t possible to make it. [...] If he were to make another *Man of...* he would have to say some negative things about Solidarity, and he would be the last man to do so. He would have to bare the myth of Solidarity, because the lives of Solidarity’s people have been

¹⁷ That attitude is obvious in a series of interviews published in 1991 with the communist leaders and participants of the Round Table talks, including Wojciech Jaruzelski, Jerzy Urban, Kazimierz Barcikowski. With candour they reminisce about the recent past and do not seem to be uncomfortable with their participation in the ruling elite of the communist Poland. In Maksymilian Berezowski, *Koniec epoki* (Warsaw: Instytut Prasy i Wydawnictwa “Novum,” 1991).

complicated and often very dramatic, if not tragic. Many of them emigrated. Others got disappointed with politics after 1989. Others assumed some fanatical stands, they dug their own trenches, they even went left. That protective umbrella of Solidarity's myth, which kept people alive until the mid 1980s, was not replaced by anything that would give people [the same] sense of unity.¹⁸

Sobolewski's approach establishes the difference between the most recent memories with direct connections to the present time, and those slightly more remote, which already fall under the realm of history, a distinction defined in more detail later in this chapter.

As much as it is possible to differentiate between the popularity of different periods of the PRL in their post-1989 filmic treatments, it is also useful to point to the differences in the way the communist past is depicted in them. The most balanced, if not ambiguous, reading of the communist past is offered by the films made in the early to mid-1990s, that is soon after the Polish Left came back to power. They are more likely to focus on the absurdity of the system, the ambiguity of people's alliances when caught in that system, but also on the relative helplessness of its apparent victims, who are not averse to pursuing utilitarian rather than any other type of ethics. By resisting the duality of good and evil, these films offered, comparatively speaking, a more complex reading of the recent realities at the same time representing the trauma of those times or denying it. One example of a film depicting the traumatic helplessness is Jacek Bromski's *Polish Cuisine* [*Kuchnia Polska*] (1991). In it, Margaret (Krystyna Janda), an English wife to a Polish lieutenant, Stanisław Szymanko (Marek Kondrat), consents to a continuous sexual relationship with Colonel Bergman in order to get her husband, who is arrested on the day of Stalin's death, released from prison.

¹⁸ Tadeusz Sobolewski, personal interview, 11 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

The “necessary compromises” of communism are portrayed also in Krzysztof Zanussi’s *In Full Gallop* (1996), in which aunt Idalia (Maja Komorowska) appears to co-operate with the communist state, yet she does so mainly in order to realise her aristocratic passion for horse-riding. Her aristocratic anti-communist heritage is part of her private identity, while the public one appears in agreement with the dominant regime. This type of duality between the public and private identification is not limited only to these examples, and is discussed later in this chapter.

Films made at the end of the 1990s and around 2000 are more likely to recolour communist history/memories to accentuate the heroic struggles of everyday lives and unwavering Kantian ethics, which power the narrative of *There and Back* (2002) by Wojciech Wójcik. There, Andrzej Hoffman (Janusz Gajos) refuses his chance to escape from Poland to join his English wife in Australia, because that chance is steeped in the blood of a security guard who has been shot by Hoffman’s partner. Together with Wojciech Marczewski’s 1990 *Escape from Cinema “Freedom”* [*Ucieczka z kina “Wolność”*] (henceforth *Escape*) and Teresa Kotlarczyk’s 2000 *The Primate*, *There and Back* constitutes the three-pronged focus of this chapter, which argues that *There and Back* is a piece of the consumable past in line with the film’s contemporary socio-political reality and the dominant modes of commercialisation. It is set in 1965, an under-represented time of the PRL, a fact that in itself is worthy of attention. *Escape* is cited by the majority of critics and scholars surveyed for this dissertation as the most significant post-1989 portrayal of the PRL. It is set in the period between 1985 and 1989, again an under-represented time in post-1989 Polish cinema, and a time which is also one of the most contested and ambiguous filmic resources of collective remembering, where even its possible ambiguity is a site of

contest.¹⁹ The third film, which is the focus of this chapter, is also third on the list of box office successes of 2000. It constitutes a particularly powerful example of the use of the communist past to legitimise the current social, cultural and political status quo. *The Primate* is set in the last three years of the Stalinist period (1953-1956) and centres on the imprisonment of Cardinal Wyszyński (Andrzej Seweryn), one of the most vocal figures in the Catholic Church's struggle against the oppressions of the communist regime.

My analysis of these three films is contextualised by the conditions necessary for the existence of a nation. As has been repeated throughout the preceding chapters, one such condition is that of continuity. Discussions of the communist past, including those contained in the films analysed here, shift between different evaluations of the positions taken by the so called "us" in the communist times and the oppressive "them". So, before engaging with my three main film examples in more detail, the following part of this chapter outlines fundamental types of post-1989 evaluation of the PRL and "our" role in it. Next, it places these types in the more general discussion of collective memory, which problematises cultural continuity as a necessary condition of a claim to national existence. The last part of this chapter is an analysis of these three films, used to illustrate the problematic and changing relationship of the post-1989 Polish nation with its communist past(s).

The PRL: compromise and duality

In films about the PRL made after 1989 the distinction is clear between the communist oppressors, otherwise known as "them", and the victims of oppressions, commonly identified as "us". "Us" in this instance usually

¹⁹ This aspect of *Escape from Cinema* "Freedom" (Marczewski, 1990) is discussed later in this chapter. Also see an interview with Mirosław Przyłpiak conducted on 15 September 2004 in Gdynia and attached in Appendix 2.

encompasses almost everyone in the Third Republic, maybe with the exception of a few public figures, who are useful as a physical manifestation of “them”. Such an insistence on this division in Polish films goes counter to other media trends in post-1989 Poland. For instance, a commemorative article on the PRL, which, while describing nostalgia for the PRL’s aesthetics realised in the popular 2000 exhibition of the PRL artefacts, also includes the following statement by a renowned post-1989 journalist, social commentator, and film critic, who also lived through the PRL. The comments of Zdzisław Pietrasik are indicative in general of the point I wish to make here:

... it was a system ideal for average citizens. It absolved *them*²⁰ of responsibility for the state, assigning them the role of extras participating in the fictitious ritual of democracy. The majority took part in this mystification without any resistance just so they could be left in peace and retain the right to a realisation of their dreams of a (very) small stability.²¹

In a more explanatory vein, in his essay on the anthropology of the communist past and its tools, Czesław Robotycki differentiates between at least two types of writing about the communist past of Poland.

Black and white schemata do not suffice to understand the fate of Poland and the motives of her inhabitants. That is why a sociologist would point to two types of writing the histories of the People’s Republic; a political one that describes the system and its functioning, and a social one that shows how the society was reacting to evolving forms of oppression, and how people realised their smaller or

²⁰ My italics.

²¹ Zdzisław Pietrasik, “Odkurzony Peerel,” 9. Pietrasik paraphrases here the title of a well-known play, *Witnesses or Our Small Stability* [*Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja*] by Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-), who wrote the theatre of the absurd pieces ridiculing the lack of freedom in people’s everyday lives, which are ruled by the pursuit of stability.

bigger daily goals. At the same time, the intersection of these two dimensions was unavoidable in the practice of everyday life, and it is only in this context that the many forms of social conformism of people living in that regime may be understood.²²

Robotycki's explanation carries some validity, but does not explain the mechanism by which the line between "them" and "us" becomes mythologised.

One fascinating account that highlights the mobility of the line separating the communist oppressing "them" and the active anti-systemic "us" comes from the set of interviews published in 1990 conducted with prominent Polish actors and directors on their "boycott" of television during Martial Law in 1981. On the one hand, there exists a story of the spontaneous solidarity of actors and directors who refused to co-operate with a television industry seen as a mouthpiece of the abusive government. On the other hand, many actors were abroad during Martial Law (e.g. Bogusław Linda, Krystyna Janda), and for others it was a boycott by proxy, caused by the decline in production activity in television at that time and immediately after Martial Law. Others, such as Andrzej Wajda, pursued a temporary compromise which made it possible, for example, to finish the fifteen films that were close to completion, including *Interrogation* (Ryszard Bugajski,²³ 1982, released 1989), *The Mother of Kings* (Janusz Zaorski, 1982, released 1987), *The Big Run* (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1981, released 1987) and others that ended up "shelved" for a good few years until they were allowed to be shown in public.²⁴ The narrative

²² Czesław Robotycki, "Pamięć o PRL – antropolog wobec doświadczenia przeszłości własnej kultury," *Konteksty; Antropologia Kultury, Etnografia, Sztuka* 3-4 (2003): 66.

²³ Ironically, Ryszard Bugajski's Canadian film of 1991, *Clearcut*, earned him there a similar reputation of notoriety as with the Polish state for *Interrogation*.

²⁴ Based on interviews with actors and other "boycotters" published in 1990. Andrzej Roman and Marian Sabat, *Komedianci: rzecz o bojkocie* (Warsaw: Agencja Omnipress and Zakłady Wydawnicze "Versus", 1990).

of actors' and directors' solidarity against the oppressive state is incomplete, because for many of them that solidarity was not entirely an outcome of conscious political or ideological protest, but was a part of their individual professional trajectories and opportunities that presented themselves (or not) at a convenient time. This is not to pass a fundamental ethical judgement but to point to the tendency of the narratives to homogenise a set of events to be remembered by the contemporaries and generations to come.

Following from that argument, on the micro-level of living in the PRL, Jerzy Płażewski, an "old-guard" film critic, is more accurate than Robotycki in labelling the compromises of every-day life as a "philosophy of survival" in his review of Zanussi's *In Full Gallop* (1996).²⁵ Zanussi's film is semi-autobiographical and offers a telling metaphor of the duality of private and public life as they are experienced under communism. James V. Wertsch describes this duality in his study of Russian recollections of the communist past as "internal immigration", a process in which the true opinions and views of individuals are hidden from the public sphere and only expressed, if at all, in the security of the private.²⁶ In *In Full Gallop* the protagonist, aunt Idalia creates for herself a double identity amidst post-war administrative chaos. She is at once her Catholic and aristocratic self, and her own fictitious communist twin sister, the latter of whom makes living in communist Poland more bearable because of her affiliation with the system. Idalia has two identification cards, and she works two shifts at the local post office – one as herself and one as her twin-sister – to support her passion for horses, which in itself belongs to the bygone capitalist era of pre-war Poland and carries a strong association with the culture of *szlachta*, themselves the (mythical) cradle of Polishness. This duality of existence is interpreted by Bożena

²⁵ Jerzy Płażewski, "Przetrwąć cwałem," *Kino* 4 (1996): 18.

²⁶ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. 138-148.

Janicka as permissible because of Idalia's aristocratic upbringing, which places her in a zone untouchable by the new system, regardless of how much she presses against it.²⁷ From Janicka's argument it follows that compromises like Idalia's are excusable if they are executed by those on the "good" side of the "us" and "them" divide. The reversal of the strict valorisation that comes from this divide never occurs in the Polish cinema of the first 15 post-communist years. To be anti-communist and preferably an aristocrat is "good" and to be a communist is irrevocably "bad".

Co-existing with the nostalgia for communist aesthetics and cultural artefacts, is an underlying reluctance in films of this period to evaluate the communist era in terms other than heroic acts of opposition, the absurdity and injustices of the system, and unavoidable utilitarian compromises by characters inhabiting "our" side. Writing about *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) Mateusz Werner, a younger generation²⁸ film critic, gives one explanation of that reluctance when he says:

Nostalgic cinema [of the *Good Bye Lenin!* type] is not possible in Poland, because no one is concerned with the character who is central to that genre: a "noble commie" believing in the "ideals of socialism". (...) Secondly – the Germans can with clear conscience play sentimental pieces, because they did make a clear break from the past. They got rid of the people of the old order from all institutions. They opened Stasi archives. They established new laws. [In Poland] such far-reaching changes have not occurred.²⁹

²⁷ Bożena Janicka and Kamil Rudziński, "Cwał," *Kino* 9 2002, (6 March 2005). <www.film.onet.pl/kino/3766,kino.html>.

²⁸ Werner was born within a couple of years of 1970, and has been writing on film since his late teens in the late 1980s.

²⁹ Mateusz Werner, "Lenin wiecznie żywy," *Film* 1 (2004): 32.

Similarly, Leszek Koczanowicz, a Polish philosopher, outlines some paradoxes of Polish transitions of the post-1989 period. To him drawing the line between the communists of the old regime and the non-communists of the new regime is impossible for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the new Poland eventuated from the talks of the Round Table in 1989, which brought together the communist government and the anti-communist Solidarity movement. The presence of each side at the talks legitimised the other side, and recognised the input of each side into the political, economic and social transitions to come. Secondly, the incomplete and ambiguous state of security police archives made it much more difficult than in, for instance, the GDR (East Germany) to determine who might have been the old state's collaborator. Furthermore, again according to Koczanowicz, while many names in the security police's books are those of opposition members, the old Party members are the only ones beyond suspicion of being agents of the security police, because it was against its rules to recruit them.³⁰ Additionally and interestingly so, in 1993 at least one third of the Polish political elite is said to have belonged to the old political nomenclature.³¹ *Summa summarum*, the extent of political and ideological intersections on the one hand may be a factor preventing the portrayal of "good commies", and on the other it also explains the urge to sharpen the divisions between the good oppositional "us" and the "bad" communist "them" wherever possible, and the tendency to downplay the nature and/or degree of the "necessary" compromises as outlined earlier in this chapter.

Despite Marek Haltof's hopeful claim in 2002 that black-and-white portrayals of the past were gone from the Polish cinema,³² they remain very much in

³⁰ Leszek Koczanowicz, "Memory of politics and politics of memory; reflections on the construction of the past in post-totalitarian Poland," *Studies in East European Thought* 49 (1997): 259-270.

³¹ Jacek Wasilewski, "Elite circulation and consolidation of democracy in Poland," in *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, eds. John Higley, Jan Pakulski and Włodzimierz Wesołowski (New York, St Martin's Press, 1998), 167.

³² Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 217.

demand for reasons explained above, and are likely to do so until the collective memory of the PRL becomes history or those who lived through it complete the process of working through it and reconciling with it. As is the case with the Romantic ethos, even if some filmmakers and critics would deem obsolete the distinction between good oppositionists and bad commies,³³ almost all films about the PRL made between 1989 and 2004 rely on that division. The nostalgia for the past that powers - to some extent at least - the popularity of heritage films discussed in the previous chapter is more problematic when it comes to explaining the preference for Gierek's decade expressed by 56 percent of survey respondents in 2000.³⁴ It stems from the comparison of the standard of life as perceived "now" and that of the romanticised PRL. It might also stem from a general narrative predisposition within the Polish public/popular sphere, which was formed by and in Polish Romanticism and which was pivotal for the national narratives for over two centuries.

According to Eviatar Zerubavel, an American Jewish sociologist, various groups and times are dominated either by a "progress narrative" of history, or by a "narrative of decline", or combinations and variations of the two. The former narrative type is exemplified by the "American dream", and it stems from the belief that "now" is better than "before" and holds an optimistic view of history seen as progress. The latter comes from an inherently pessimistic view that believes the good old days deteriorated into the inferior present moment. Zerubavel says that this latter view not only produces nostalgia, but also the convergence of a general narrative predisposition of a given group in

³³ For instance, Krzysztof Krauze's *Long Weekend* [*Długi weekend*] (2004), a television feature screened in 2004 Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia, portrays a couple who - having come from the opposite sides of the pre-1989 socio-political divide - decide to put aside their respective and superfluous ideologies so they can get a house together as a prize in a blind-date television show.

³⁴ Pietrasik, "Odkurzony Peerel," 6.

a given time.³⁵ While the official narratives of Polish history during communism were teleological accounts of progress, the popular stories for more than 200 years relied on the narratives of lost national sovereignty and as such were deeply pessimistic. This type of collective narrative had been playing out in the collective memory for a couple of centuries and was unlikely to expire immediately after Poland underwent transition to emulate the operative Western model of economic and socio-political structures and cultures. At least, not for as long as the memory of the Soviet-influenced PRL is alive in the minds of those who participate in the post-1989 Polish public sphere.

Collective remembering of the PRL

Collective memory is often seen as being governed by a collective discourse *du jour*, or as a sum total of all memories of members of a given society - broadly understood.³⁶ A factor downplayed in the definition of collective memory is that of loyalty to a group to which individuals perceive themselves to belong. That factor carries with it the "question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures."³⁷ On the one hand, the official discourse *du jour* in the first 15 years of post-communist transition, evident in the films made at the time, plays on the dichotomy of bad communists and good dissidents. On the other hand, the unofficial vernacular discourse of personal memories is grounded in the premise of life in the PRL being superior to the current state of affairs. It may seem inexplicable to a Western observer that all the

³⁵ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 14-17.

³⁶ See for instance; James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective*, 21-25. For a comprehensive review on collective memory and identity, see Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social memory studies: from 'collective memory' to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 1 (1998): 105-141.

³⁷ John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.

democratic freedoms that the post-1989 Poland brought to its citizens did not eradicate the longing for – at least some aspects of – the communist past. But if loyalty to the group is part of the mechanism of collective memory, then in the time of dispersed national identity at the beginning of the 21st century, belonging to a group that remembers the depoliticised reality of Gierek's PRL may be a useful mechanism in coping with the disappointment of the shortcomings of the new order.

In different words, Waldemar Kuligowski, a Polish scholar, attributes the reasons for various forms of Eastern European nostalgias - including "osstalgia" for East Germany, "yugostalgia" of the Balkans, and Polish nostalgia for communist Poland (the PRL) - to "weak memory [Polish "pamięć"] and very rich memories [Polish "wspomnienia"]",³⁸ where Polish "pamięć" [memory] stands for the remembering process in general and "wspomnienia" [memories] for episodes committed to an individual's memory. Kuligowski's differentiation between memory and memories may be taken further, where any expression of nostalgia for the PRL originates from the memories of what was individually "ours" in turbulent and oppressive times. This nostalgia coexists with the official and popular distaste for the PRL as a political system. On a micro-level, for many people, living in that system was not about attempts to topple the communist regime, but about the daily struggle to survive. Survival usually implied various ways of cheating the system, which could be interpreted either as acts of compromise, or acts of sly cleverness, which are similar in their structure to what Michel de Certeau describes as "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations" that bring victories of the

³⁸ Waldemar Kuligowski, "O historii, literaturze i teraźniejszości oraz innych formach zapominania," *Konteksty; Antropologia Kultury, Etnografia, Sztuka* 3-4 (2003): 82.

‘weak’ over the ‘strong’.”³⁹ Of course, for the sake of maintaining individual sanity, compromises are the less favoured interpretation of living in the PRL. While acts of daily survival and the perks of the socialist “welfare state” define collective memory on the micro level, in post-1989 film the macro narratives of the past become even less partial to the confusing ethical reality of compromise in the PRL. In fact, compromises that were part of survival do not belong to the official narrative of the past. They are either deleted from it, or portrayed as an heroic act of self-sacrifice for another person (see *Polish Cuisine* discussed earlier in this chapter) or an act of forced and excusable opportunism (see *In Full Gallop* discussed earlier in this chapter). For this narrative to become a more balanced representation of the pre-1989 past, that past has to function like a history rather than a collective memory, the latter of which usually carries implications of emotional involvement by those engaged in the act of remembering.

Re-constructing the recent (national?) past in post-1989 Poland

One basic condition of national/cultural identity is the continuity of a nation told in its history(s). To claim its right to define itself, a nation needs a past. As discussed so far in this chapter, the fundamental problem that stems from this condition concerns the way(s) in which to approach uncomfortable national pasts, especially recent ones, which may still be remembered by living citizens. In an article published five years after 1989, Henryk Samsonowicz, a Polish historian, argues that in the new reality, Polish history, and national history, may be told freely from many points of view and without omissions, a view quite common to the early post-1989 public sphere. He specifically refers to the freedom to fill in those gaps in Polish history, which earlier had been rewritten to satisfy the needs of dominant communist ideologies.⁴⁰ Iwona Irwin-Zaręcka, a sociologist of Polish descent working in

³⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), xix.

⁴⁰ Henryk Samsonowicz, “Myths that die hard,” *UNESCO Courier*, May 1994, 23-26.

Canada, provides an interesting counterbalance to this optimistic view of the relationship of the post-communist Poland and its pasts. In her 1993 article, she highlights the symbolic significance of one of the first post-communist Parliament's acts: that which declared the Third Polish Republic a newly independent state of Poland separate from the Soviet-dependent Second Republic,⁴¹ or the PRL. She argues that although the overt significance of that act rests in the symbolic obliteration of the possibility of seeing the communist Second Polish Republic as independent, that symbolism carries critical implications for the shape of the post-communist Polish national identity. Irwin-Zaręcka suggests that to achieve a healthy state of national identity, Poles need to consider their recent past, a difficult, even unrewarding task. The more remote 19th century debates utilised by the political parties are often ill-matched to the current situation. In her words, "What does it mean when a party stands for 'national sovereignty' or 'Christian values'? True, the lack of meaning can be a virtue in politics, but not when it is combined with modelling issues and priorities on long non-existent ones."⁴² Although the use of symbolism, rhetoric and narratives of the Poland of the 19th century, however problematic, proves to be popular not only in politics but also in film, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is the more recent past that is a source of more apparent problems, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Again, Irwin-Zaręcka gives an apt description of the complexities associated with the Poles' relationship with their recent past:

The initial euphoria was not to last. It soon became apparent that the desire to mark the end of communism could all too easily turn into an "Orwell-in-reverse" sweep of

⁴¹ Iwona Irwin-Zaręcka, "In search of usable pasts," *Society* 20: 2 (Jan-Feb 1993): 32-37. Perhaps this phenomena/process is a Polish equivalent of the (West)German "Vergangenheitsbewältigung", "coming to terms with/mastering one's past" as it is used by, for instance, Thomas Elsaesser in his various works.

⁴² Irwin-Zaręcka, "In search," 32-37.

collective heritage. As Poland (...) introduced a revised literary canon for its schools, many observers were quick to point out that excluding works of high artistic merit solely on the basis of their authors' Party membership is not what "freedom" is supposed to mean. (...) Discussions about honouring the dead rapidly came to include questions about the memory of the living. It could not be otherwise, not when top scientists, artists, writers, architects, all those whose accomplishments had mattered hitherto, produced their prime work under the communist rule. And the picture became increasingly complex. In theory, the system, the ideology were both evil and now bankrupt. But what about the author of poems praising Stalin who later became a central figure in the democratic opposition? (...) A city planner and loyal Party member, who was responsible for rebuilding Warsaw, left in ruins by the war? Also, what about the legions of dedicated teachers, doctors, administrators, engineers, all those who had to find a modus of accommodation with the regime to give their best to their country?⁴³

These and other dilemmas remain unresolved 15 years after the fall of communism, both in the public and popular spheres as well as in a form of Polish film that rarely ventures to embrace the communist past with all its complexities and intricacies. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, all films about the communist past made after 1989 did not so much project the history as it was, as reflect the ideological climates in which they came to be made.

⁴³ Irwin-Zaręcka, "In search," 32-37.

Cinema as a memory of the PRL

Two films that are often quoted as proposing a more balanced, truer concept of the communist past are *Pekosiński's Case* [*Przypadek Pekosińskiego*] (Grzegorz Królikiewicz, 1993) and *Temptation* [*Pokuszenie*] (Barbara Sass, 1995). *Pekosiński's Case* is based on a true story of a man with no apparent origin and an inexplicable talent for chess. Pekosiński arrives from nowhere and is tempted by various conflicted forces of the PRL; the Party's intriguing protectorate and the not always accommodating Church. In his final act of self-discovery, which is never to be completed, Pekosiński accepts the Virgin Mary as his mother and protector. This act, according to Tadeusz Lubelski, a renowned Polish film theorist and commentator, defines the psychotherapeutic premise of *Pekosiński's Case*.⁴⁴ Yet, this way of interpreting Pekosiński's final resolve is valid only from a vantage point which would accommodate the Virgin Mary as an acceptable, or in fact desirable, identity-formation device. In 1993, the Church was still at the beginning of its road to formalising the seat of its institutionalised political and social powers in the post-PRL Poland, so Pekosiński's story was not only a story of his past, but also of the past that validated the changes which were happening at the time of the film's release in Poland.

Temptation on the other hand offers a more ambiguous take on the past through a story of a young woman whose devotion and love for a man is tested by the fact that he is a highly ranked priest, and she – as a nun serving him in his government-imposed seclusion – is tempted by the government officials to collaborate against him. The film is inspired by the story of Cardinal Wyszyński's imprisonment, as is *The Primate* the film made by

⁴⁴ Tadeusz Lubelski, "Królikiewicz w transie psychodramy," *Kino* 12 (1993): 4-7.

Teresa Kotlarczyk, another female director, and analysed in more detail later in this chapter. Yet, *Temptation*'s unresolved ending in which the nun is possibly abandoned by both (ideological) players, the church and the communist system, points to one tacit anti-clerical undercurrent of the post-1989 Poland involving people unimpressed with the overpowering presence of the Catholic Church in Polish public life. *Temptation* is also another film that points to greater complexities of the communist and post-communist realities, which to some commentators suggested a greater than hoped for fluidity of the distinction between the oppressive "them" and victimised but eventually victorious "us".⁴⁵

Historical films have an obligation to represent past events in an accurate manner, which demands a high level of fluency in the intricacies of a given historical moment. Viewers who lived through the depicted historical period and events may be able to assess their representations' verisimilitude, while those unfamiliar with the portrayed past can treat its filmic representations as an approximation of historical reality. In both cases, the onus falls on the filmmakers to respect historical complexity and accuracy, unless they choose a polemical approach to the past. In the Polish case, both tasks are rather difficult, given an on-going revisionism of the communist past. For instance, at the beginning of 2005, Bronisław Wildstein, a journalist of *Rzeczpospolita*, made a list of 240 thousand names of the people with any type of connection to the communist security police publicly available. Following that, he was dismissed from his job, and various public personalities demanded full access to their "files" as well as restoring their good name. Still, after 15 years since the collapse of communism, the situation of the Polish communist past remains unstable and open to rewritings, which have not yet been undertaken by Polish filmmakers.

⁴⁵ Lech Kurpiewski, "Z miłością," *Film 4* (1996): 82.

Following Jean Laplanche's assertion that memories are subject to a constant perfecting process,⁴⁶ history and historical films are certain expressions of that process on the national collective scale, because they belong to the popular or public sphere, or both. Their significance or use to advance the idea of the collective identity is similar to that of Pierre Nora's *les lieux de memoire*, that is spaces that at present map out the memories and histories of a social group.⁴⁷ Alongside monuments, architecture and public festivals, films portraying stories of the recent past are spaces in which history and memory intersect. Unlike monuments, architecture and public festivals, however, contemporary films about the recent past may more easily stand for shortcuts of memory, in which the uncomfortable ambiguities may be omitted from sight, as is usually the case with films on the PRL past made between 1989 and 2004. The mnemonic imperfections of those films are not so much about forgetting some aspects of the past, as about favouring the memories that are in line with the current *status quo*.

In some respects, historiography presents similar problems to historians as well as filmmakers of films set in the historically defined past. The literature on the issues of historical verisimilitude in historiography is vast,⁴⁸ yet in the context of this chapter, it suffices to evoke Robert A. Rosenstone, a historian involved in work on film, who emphasises that an historical film tells a story of an individual, which gives a closed interpretation of a particular moment in the past. Rosenstone differentiates between historical films according to the way they project and evaluate – positively or negatively - the particular moment

⁴⁶ Jean Laplanche, "Psychoanalysis, time and translation," in *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives*, trans. Martin Stanton, eds. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), 176-177.

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between memory and history: *les lieux de memoire*," *representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25.

⁴⁸ For a good overview of those, see Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH Press of New England University, 1997).

that they strive to portray through an individualised story.⁴⁹ In the case of post-1989 Polish films set in the communist past, the majority aim to leave the film's audience with a feeling of relief that they no longer live in the time depicted in the film. That message is created through common modes of editing (quick juxtaposition of disparate images), camera work (close-ups of faces) and sound (evocative music) to evoke emotions in the viewer.⁵⁰ Although Rosenstone provides a useful descriptive typology of historical filmmaking, this typology only suggests the commonality that exists between Polish post-1989 films on the communist past and other films about out-of-favour or discredited pasts. It does not, however, offer an explanation as to why it should be necessary for some pasts to be portrayed in predominately negative terms, which is the case with the films referred to above, and those analysed in the following part of this chapter, namely *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* (Marczewski, 1990), *The Primate* (Kotlarczyk, 1999), and *There and Back*. Such an explanation should come from examining various films, case by case, and exploring the dominant uses of the film at the time of its release and beyond.

For instance, *Escape from Cinema Freedom* is an allegory on the just acquired social freedoms, and – judging from the acclaim that the film gathered – was and still is an important voice in evaluating the PRL from the perspective of the first phases of the post-communist reality. *The Primate* (Kotlarczyk, 1999), through a hagiographic tale, advances the cause of the Catholic Church and justifies its position in the post-communist Poland. And Wojciech Wójcik in his *There and Back* proposes a marketable true story with a sensationalist plot of a bank robbery that answers to the demand of Polish contemporary viewers. Although *Escape* is re-living the trauma of the past, and the other two films made in the third stage of post-1989 transitions (which

⁴⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55-61.

⁵⁰ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 55-61.

is the predominant focus of film analyses here) are examples of the commodification of that trauma, nevertheless, all three films portray negatively fragments of life in the PRL (respectively, the late 1980s, late Stalinism and the late 1960s). That wholly negative interpretation questions the type of cultural continuity these films might be propagating on the behalf of and for post-1989 Poles.

In this context, Maurice Halbwachs' differentiation between history and memory, although disputable, throws some explanatory light on the discrepancy between the complexities of the PRL's realities and their simplified tendentious filmic treatments. To Halbwachs, the concept of memory emphasises continuity, whereas in histories an accent falls on discontinuities and differences.⁵¹ If this differentiation is applied to the case of Polish post-1989 films on communist pasts, they become at once expressions of history as well as collective memory. So, on the one hand, these films depict the oppressions of the departed system (discontinuity), however on the other, they stress the continuity of collective existence by emphasising the viewers' assumed affinity with those oppressed by the communist system. Subject to this continuity, the Poles of the post-1989 Poland had never been oppressors, but their collective identity rests with those opposing the old system from the heights of their moral ground. Mirosław Przyłipiak, a Polish film scholar, expressed this point strongly when referring to the original reception of *Escape from the Cinema "Freedom"*.

I was at the festival [of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia] in 1990 or 1989 when Marczewski showed this film, [...] Marczewski, who had not made a film for ten years during communism. The implications were obvious. Those who

⁵¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

made films, sold out. Kieślowski in particular was attacked as someone who kept making films. [...] At the press conference there were film journalists, filmmakers, all those people who lived [in Poland] in the 80s [and] wrote articles, made programs, shot films. [...] All of them could identify with the censor, because they did work in that system. And all of them identified with the characters on the roof [who kept their morals by – metaphorically - not engaging with the system at all].⁵²

Apart from the explanatory potential of Halbwachs' differentiation between history and memory, it also suggests another important concern which is not explored in any significant depth in this dissertation, but which nevertheless deserves a mention here. The films analysed below are likely to be received and perceived differently by those for whom the filmic reality was part of their lived collective memory, and those for whom that reality is just a history. Obviously someone who has never experienced living in Stalinist Poland, is not going to have the same appreciation of that time as someone dreading a late-night police visit in those times. How is someone, who attends annual love parades in Berlin and pops into Barcelona whenever they have a chance, going to relate to a story of a man who cannot get his own passport so he could visit his child in the West? The threats and difficulties of living and surviving in the PRL in its different periods may seem absurd to a viewer born after 1985. Food shortages, underdeveloped consumerism, slogans incomprehensible in their pathos and banality are part of the filmic treatment of that past in the first 15 years after 1989. Their absurdity could easily reduce the impact of the stories of oppression or heroism, which are usually the main focus of the narrative. Communism has become another country for

⁵² Mirosław Przyłipiak, personal interview, 15 September 2004, Gdynia (attached in Appendix 2).

younger Poles, who could be more readily identifying themselves with their counterparts in the West than with the past of previous Polish generations. Yet, there is no present without the past, and no identity – collective or otherwise – without the concept of its continuity through time. Hence, the analysis of the following films does not make any significant attempt to compare the reality depicted in them to what “really” happened; rather it takes the filmic texts as *les lieux de memoires*, which create the past in answer to the needs of the current social condition.

Last moments of the PRL close up: Escape from Cinema “Freedom”

For Wojciech Marczewski, *Escape* is a self-proclaimed auto-therapy created after the director's return from his tenure in the Copenhagen Film School. It was meant to allow him to release the anger brewing in him since the introduction of Martial Law in 1981.⁵³ Its filming was finished in April 1990 around the time the Polish Parliament passed the bill abolishing censorship. The film, a striking example of meta-cinema, centres on the figure of a film censor (Janusz Gajos), who is disillusioned by his profession and, and by his unrealised professional longing to be a film critic. The censor in *Escape* comes across his greatest professional challenge. Characters in a new Polish film *Daybreak* [*Jutrenka*] screened in a cinema in Łódź called “Freedom” rebel against their script and refuse to carry on as they should according to the film's final version. *Daybreak* is a story of a blind woman, Małgorzata (Teresa Marczewska, Marczewski's wife) who recovers her sight after an operation by her filmic husband. As she does so, her father is supposed to die of a heart attack, and he is the first character to rebel against the script that demands his undignified death. After his act of rebellion, with

⁵³ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Tadeusz Sobolewski, *Za duży blask: o kinie współczesnym* (Cracow: Znak, 2004), 65.

every consecutive screening the characters of *Daybreak* descend further and further into anarchy.

Escape starts with a medium shot of the censor, who talks to a group of people seated in the darkness. He seems to be tired but content when he explains that “a good censor should be an artist” and that “after the institution of censorship is abolished, its responsibilities will fall on you.” For a very brief moment, in a close-up, he looks straight into the camera as if the viewer was one of the listeners in his audience on the screen. The opening scene was suggested by the cameraman to explain the institution of censorship, if this needed to be explained for a foreign, for instance American, viewer. It is also the first suggestion of the breakdowns of reality and fiction that will follow. Here the censor addresses the film’s viewers directly, and later he enters *Daybreak*, after Tom Baxter, who comes into *Daybreak* (film within *Escape*) as well from *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985), when *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and *Daybreak* are accidentally projected on the same screen at the same time. It is one of very few cases in which metafilm is used in Polish cinema. *Daybreak*’s characters do not expose their one-dimensionality, but provide a rebellious filmic antidote to the “real” world in *Escape*. Their not considering an option of leaving *Daybreak* to return to what is “real” in *Escape* suggest the superiority of the celluloid existence over the enslaved and corrupted reality outside of it. Tom Baxter, or rather Jeff Daniels, is not less one-dimensional in his lack of comprehension of Polish reality than his character is in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Although both films play with collapsing the “fourth wall” of cinema, in *Escape* there is no illusion left to be upheld by characters either in the film itself, or the film within the film.

The challenge that the censor is facing in *Escape* comes not so much because of the loss of control over the characters in *Daybreak*, but because of the audience’s enthusiasm for these characters’ claim to freedom. *Daybreak* audiences applaud when the father, a music professor, says to

them “you can stick it up your arse” in response to what he perceives as an undignified life. He also says “fuck off” to the husband of his film daughter, to the great amusement of the audience and the protests of a woman who screams “there are children here”. The professor’s response is “drown the children”. All these exchanges provoke laughter from the audience in *Escape* watching *Daybreak*, and even from the censor’s assistant, but the exchanges are also significant because they anticipate changes in linguistic register accepted and expected in the Polish popular cinema soon to come.

Having suffered a physical breakdown as a result of this ordeal and the ambiguous demands of his professional life, the censor designs a solution by which all the tickets to all the screenings are to be bought out. This means that everything will be as per usual. *Daybreak* will not be officially subjected to censorship in any way, and yet no one is going to see it. However, he does not anticipate that the film has already caused significant ripples. It has started a Mozart’s *Requiem* singing epidemic, with affected people bursting into spontaneous arias. The film has also aroused the interest of the “authorities”. A dignitary from Warsaw (Michał Bajor) arrives to investigate the phenomenon, and using the familiar communist stylistic, he declares with distaste that what happens in *Daybreak* is reflective of the state of Polish cinema in general; it is all about banalities and slow pace. He proclaims that all art is a fraud, and he does not mind being deceived by it, as long as it is the “real thing”, a contradiction in itself. Then, instead of proposing a Soviet model of filmmaking, he praises Woody Allen’s *Purple Rose of Cairo* and orders it to be screened immediately, at which point Tom Baxter (Jeff Daniels) crosses over to *Daybreak* and demands to call his agent in New York. That causes great amusement for the characters of *Daybreak*, who know that such a phone call would be a mission impossible in the communist Poland, in which international phone calls had to be pre-booked, sometimes days ahead. Baxter’s act of crossing over presents a double metafilmic effect, in which not only the actors of *Daybreak* communicate with their audience in

Escape, but also recent Hollywood metafiction, as evidenced in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, crosses over into the fiction turned anarchic reality of *Daybreak*.

Escape finishes with the frustrated censor's attempt to join the characters of *Daybreak* when he learns that the dignitaries are planning to burn the film print. After the censor gets onto the rooftop, where all the film's characters now reside inside *Daybreak*, he is confronted by an actor who reminds him of the characters/scenes he censored out in his censoring career. The actor calls for the censor's punishment, but the censor keeps repeating that he does not remember any of this, a sign of traumas to come in the post-1989 Poland. These calls for punishment from those wronged by the old system are countered by acts of forgetting by those who instigated that system. At this stage forgiving a humanised communist is not an option. Banned from the rooftops, abandoned by the character of Małgorzata, who is the only one sympathetic to him because he launched her career, the censor gets out of *Daybreak* and returns to the real Łódź. There, he slowly walks back to his place, observing life in the streets, which goes on as if nothing has changed. In the last scene, he draws the curtains of his apartment and sits in the dark, with only the contours of his face visible.

The absurdity of the film's plots, according to Marczewski, reflects the absurdity of the PRL. For him, people who lived through the absurdity of the PRL, accepted it, and they have difficulty separating from it. Hence the sentiment of those times.⁵⁴ For Marczewski, *Escape* is not the only way of expressing his frustration with the compromise and passivity of the PRL's inhabitants. For instance, in an interview conducted a few months after the film's original release, Marczewski claims that everyone in the PRL is guilty,

⁵⁴ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview released as part of the 2003 DVD *Escape from Cinema Freedom*.

even or especially those who made films against the system, because they used censorship as a promotional vehicle,⁵⁵ a view echoed in his famous statement: “Friends, did you really have to make all these films?”⁵⁶ quoted in Chapter 3. A year earlier, in another interview he proclaims that everyone had a choice of not cooperating with the system, of avoiding compromise. Interestingly, however, when probed by his interviewer, Bożena Janicka, he also admits that he was fortunate to have an option of not compromising by working abroad.⁵⁷ In other words, he managed to escape the “philosophy of survival” by opting out rather than objecting to it directly, *in situ*. It could also be said that most of those inhabiting the rooftops migrated there after they were censored out, which means that they must have attempted to accommodate themselves to the system. Yet, in most interviews, and in the predominant tone of the film, the victims are the just ones of the film, and there is no forgiveness for collaborators. They do have to suffer punishment as a result of their crimes. According to Marczewski, there were not 352 censors at the end of the PRL, but 40 million of them,⁵⁸ and *Escape* is about all of them. Surprisingly, given Marczewski’s insistence on it, Tadeusz Lubelski, for instance, singles out the censor⁵⁹ as the bearer of a responsibility that cannot be escaped.⁶⁰ Sobolewski, on the other hand, sees Marczewski’s treatment of the censor in *Escape* as open to forgiveness.⁶¹ In both cases, the reading by the commentators is different from the one

⁵⁵ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Marcin Sułkowski, “Powinniśmy rozliczyć się sami,” *Kino* 278 (1990), 11.

⁵⁶ Adam Mickiewicz Institute, *Polish Cinema During the Period 1989-1999*, c2000, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.polonianet.org/kultura/cinema.html>>.

⁵⁷ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Bożena Janicka, “Długi grudzień,” *Film* 17 (23 April 1989): 3-5.

⁵⁸ Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Małgorzata Furdal, “Siłą sztuki jest błąd,” *Kino* 10 (1993): 25-26.

⁵⁹ Of course, censors were concerned also with other forms of cultural and art output.

⁶⁰ Tadeusz Lubelski, “Wojciech Marczewski – gry o osobność,” in *Autorzy kina polskiego*, eds. Grażyna Stachówna and Joanna Wojnicka (Cracow, Rabid, 2004), 149.

⁶¹ Tadeusz Sobolewski, *Dziecko Peerele; esej dziennik* (Warsaw: Sic! 2000), 123-127.

intended by Marczewski and avowed in his interviews, and is in line with the reaction to the film described earlier in this chapter by Mirosław Przyłipiak, in which everyone who worked in the old regime is seen to be inescapably part of it.

Putting aside the accusatory tone of the film and its formal absurdities reflective of the general tone of the PRL and its post-1989 evaluations, the People's Republic shown in *Escape* is a world of grey streets, long dark corridors with doors on both sides closed, and interiors that suggest immediately the social status of their inhabitants. For instance, the censor's flat is bleak, simple and filled with antiques and expensive audio. It is almost black and white, with some unpacked boxes suggesting a state of impermanence. Offices are dark and cluttered, but tidy. Their corridors are dark, long and with a multitude of closed doors on both sides. People who inhabit this world could live in any other. Men in power are weak, because that power comes only from the position they hold, not their personal strength or charisma. Women are secretaries, or femmes fatales (the censor's ex-wife), or young rebels (the censor's daughter). The most humane and the only strong and compassionate character in the film is Małgorzata in *Daybreak*, although she also has to give in to the pressures of her loyalty to the group of the non-collaborators on the roof.

In general, *Escape* is a prompt assessment of the last days of the PRL, when freedom is near. Freedom is already part of the world of *Daybreak*, however onlookers in *Escape*, who are passive and not so passive participants in the communist system, can only amuse themselves by at least attempting to look into the world of the free on the screen in the film within the film. Although from time to time they burst into singing Mozart's *Requiem* (or *Requiem* for the censor), which is taken to be a sign of freedom as well, that type of rebellion seems less specifically directed than that of *Daybreak*'s characters, although it is also steeped in the tradition of the absurd and the grotesque

discussed briefly in Chapter 2. At the same time, the PRL as a system is not itself convincing. Its representatives are exhausted by it (the censor), or removed from it (the security police dignitary, who “likes the people” but from the height of his office’s window). The young assistant to the censor is incompetent and visibly confused about the ideological underpinning of what he stands for. When the old censor says about the demonstrators in front of the cinema “Freedom” “they are waiting for a miracle, a different government, better children,” the assistant has an immediate miscalculated impassioned response: “I will fucking let them,” but by the time he arrives at the end of this short sentence, it is clear that he is not so convinced that he really would.

On the other hand, the censor’s daughter’s unwavering and consequently confident disgust for her father’s chosen profession shows with whom the future lies, according to Marczewski. Sadly, even the censor’s attempts to redeem his daughter’s respect go unanswered, and instead of being allowed to speak with his daughter when he arrives at night at her student hotel, he is greeted by a portrait of the Pope. Given Marczewski’s own stand, expressed in 1990, that in the new Poland the only real threat of censorship is likely to come from the Catholic Church,⁶² including that image in *Escape* makes it into an even more powerful symbol. On the one hand, it is the Pope guarding the censor’s daughter from her father’s untimely visit, on the other, the Pope’s picture is an object given undue powers; powers to guide toward and through freedom, but also powers to censure. The world created by Marczewski leaves its viewer with relief that it does not constitute the current reality, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In this world, in which the blame is generously distributed amongst its participants, there are no winners, nor are there any true heroes.

⁶² Wojciech Marczewski in an interview with Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Ucieczka cenzora,” *Kino 5* (1990): 1-5.

Martyrdom in the Stalinist past: The Primate

When Teresa Kotlarczyk spoke of her new film in 1999, she expressed her strong commitment not to adhere to the “heroic genre” when making a film about Cardinal Wyszyński (Andrzej Seweryn) and the three years he spent under arrest by the communist authorities of Bierut’s government. Yet, at the same time, Kotlarczyk speaks of her admiration for the Cardinal, who was not broken by his imprisonment, and who deserves the admiration and following he gets.⁶³ She believed that showing the strength of Wyszyński’s soul and the authenticity of emotions in the film were the imperatives guiding her through the decision-making process when shooting and editing the film. Yet, not all viewers find this imperative of “authenticity” convincing. While Bogdan Sobieszek, a *Film* journalist, has no qualms about insisting that the film is “completely faithful to facts”,⁶⁴ another *Film* journalist for whom the PRL is more of a history and memory, Bartosz Żurawiecki says, “Polish artists love to blow themselves up. They fall into an exaltation that is especially unhealthy when its source lies in national sanctities and taboos. This leads to a film like *The Primate* by Teresa Kotlarczyk – a life of a saint who had never been to the bathroom.”⁶⁵ Similarly unimpressed reviews come from other commentators. For instance:

It is obvious that a film about Wyszyński has to be a hagiographic film. The question is “which level of hagiography is it going to stop at?” Is it going to be awfully hagiographic, or maybe just a little bit hagiographic? But it cannot be any different. (...) When someone makes a film (...), they have to have certain freedoms. At the beginning

⁶³ Bogdan Sobieszek, “Trzy lata z tysiąclecia,” *Film* 9 (1999): 118.

⁶⁴ Sobieszek, “Trzy lata,” 117.

⁶⁵ Bartosz Żurawiecki, “Kino bez właściwości,” *Film* 9 (2001): 32.

of working in film, everything has to be allowed. When one makes this kind of film, not everything is allowed.⁶⁶

Even if the three quarters of a million of tickets sold to *The Primate* are largely due to Church-based promotion, and despite critical comments like these above, *The Primate* was the most watched Polish cinematic release of 2001. It was also a story with significance for the historical narratives of post-1989 Poland.

Cardinal Wyszyński, the hero of *The Primate* was one of the most visible, if not outstanding, diplomats of the Catholic Church in the PRL, whose standing continues beyond his death in 1981. Stefan Wyszyński became Cardinal at the beginning of 1953, although he was not allowed by the Polish authorities to travel to the Vatican to receive the nomination, and in September of the same year, six months after Stalin's death, he was put under arrest by the government of Bolesław Bierut. Unwavering in his faith and his belief that the Catholic Church was the main defender of freedom in communist Poland, Wyszyński used his release in 1956 to negotiate significant concessions for the Church, a fact omitted from the film, which focuses on the hagiographic aspects of Wyszyński's imprisonment.

The title of the film itself positions its story in a much larger historical context of a millennium. It refers to the title of "the Primate of a Millennium" used for Cardinal Wyszyński in 1966, on the 1000th anniversary of Polish acceptance of Christianity. The film relies to a large extent on the notes written in his imprisonment by the Cardinal himself. The register and style of these notes, however, make them into not so much a factual text, but one inspired by religious devotion, and the pathos allowed under its aegis. Already in the introduction Cardinal Wyszyński says he is glad that his arrest eliminates his

⁶⁶ Mirosław Przyłipiak, personal interview, 15 September 2004, Gdynia (attached in Appendix 2).

disappointment with not yet having received “the honour [...] of going through concentration camps and prisons.”⁶⁷ A few sentences later he reminisces on a lesson from his liturgy teacher, in which priest Antoni Bogdański warned of the “unimaginable” suffering which the priests will have to go through in the not too distant future.⁶⁸ A few pages on, Cardinal Wyszyński contradicts his earlier statement by saying that it was the Polish state that accused him of his willingness to be a martyr, while – although he did not exclude such a possibility – it was not his intention.⁶⁹ The rhetoric of immanent, if not desirable, martyrdom seems to be steeped in Catholic Messianism, in common with the traditional Romantic nationalism, yet in general the stylistics of religious elevation may find limited appreciation in someone not devoted to a similar cause. Its discursive specificity is reflected in, for instance, the description of the following item from the list of the fifteen significant events in the three-year imprisonment of Cardinal Wyszyński at the beginning of his *Notes from the Prison* published in Polish in Paris in 1982: “8 December 1953 – Imprisoned Primate commits an act of spiritual surrender to the Mother of God, and he places his fate completely in Her hands. In this act he agrees to every fate assigned [to him] by God.”⁷⁰

For a believer, this statement has a factual if not material value. To someone not versed in the discourse of Polish Catholicism, this statement’s significance may not be so obvious. The literalness with which it is approached in the film indicates the type of viewer the filmmakers expect for *The Primate*. Again, while obvious to a believer, to an unsuspecting viewer the moment of the Cardinal’s spiritual surrender to the Mother of God, as it is

⁶⁷ Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne* (Paris: Editions Du Dialogue, Societé D’Editions Internationales, 1982), 15.

⁶⁸ Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, 15.

⁶⁹ Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, 19.

⁷⁰ Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, 9.

realised in the film, may seem to be the case of the Cardinal's over-interpretation of the sight of a villager with a baby as a sign from the Mother of God. So, while scenes like the one of surrender may be powerful for Polish Catholic audiences, the way *The Primate* "remembers" the past for those outside this discourse may be, or with time may become, different from the viewpoint intended by Kotlarczyk, as Polish Catholicism evolves and possibly moves out of the politicised public sphere.

The film sets up the expectations of factuality with the opening text that announces "ruthless repressions towards the Catholic Church which existed legally in Poland" at the beginning of the 1950s, which meant that "under the pretext of anti-state activities many bishops and priests were arrested and a large part of the church's possessions was confiscated." The text is followed by scenes of arrests *en masse*, which are quickly picked out by, for instance, foreign commentators, as lacking in historical validity.⁷¹ The music of Zygmunt Konieczny, who also composed the score for *Escape*, complements the *film noir* style of cinematography, in which the statesmen in glamorous hats and coats, and expensive looking leather gloves confiscate Catholic artefacts, and cast long shadows on the windows of churches and convents raided at night.

The story of Cardinal Wyszyński's imprisonment is told from the moment in which he gives an inspiring sermon to a crowd in the church of St Anna, through to his arrest, imprisonment and release, followed by archival footage of Cardinal Wyszyński at the Pope's feet. Cardinal Wyszyński is assigned two fellow-prisoners, a priest Stanisław Skorodecki (Zbigniew Zamachowski) and a nun Maria Leonia Graczyk (Maja Ostaszewska), both hastily

⁷¹ Christina Manetti, "Faith kept behind bars: Teresa Kotlarczyk's *Prymas—trzy lata z tysiąca*," *Central European Review* 3 12, 26 March 2001, (6 March 2005). <http://www.ce-review.org/01/12/kinoeye12_manetti.html>.

transported from other prisons to join the Cardinal. Sister Leonia surrenders to the Cardinal's oppressors and agrees to relay to them his movements in exchange for some oranges and other items difficult to obtain in Stalinist Poland, while Skorodecki in the course of the imprisonment becomes the Cardinal's assistant and confessor.

Interesting, although probably accidental here, is the casting of Zamachowski, who in *Escape* is also in a supportive role, but on the other side of the political divide. Another actor with a connection to *Escape* is Krzysztof Wakulinski, who is an eye surgeon in *Daybreak*, who soon after the rebellion becomes an irresponsible womaniser high on freedom. In *The Primate* Wakuliński is a solemn colonel who never surfaces during the day, and whose face has Humphrey Bogartian qualities. Depending on whether *The Primate* is to be seen as a portrayal of a Stalinist moment or a sign of the times in which it is produced, the comparison of the roles in which Zamachowski and Wakuliński are placed may be interpreted as the exhaustion of the initial euphoria of freedom, or as the comparatively negative evaluation of the PRL of the early 1950s. The juxtaposition of shots filled with the Cardinal's followers together with dark scenes of alienated close-ups of Bolesław Bierut behind a desk that overwhelms him, may point in the direction of Rosenstone's notion of undesirable pasts, yet it does not exclude other interpretations.

As *un lieu de memoire*, *The Primate* presents the past, which is dominated by fear. The Cardinal and his allies are afraid that their courage might not be great enough to withstand their incarceration. The representatives of various state and police institutions are afraid that the Cardinal's power might withstand theirs. The former stand high and co-operate with each other, the latter are shown as alienated; they emerge from the dark, and sink back into it once they deliver their lines. It is never ambiguous where the viewers' sentiment should lie. The Cardinal not only does not neglect his Christian and priestly duties, but from the beginning he warns against "the sin of self-

neglect”, and establishes the rules of his behaviour by reminding himself and father Skorodecki that “one should not complain or hold anything against anyone.” In the moments of his greatest weakness, when he learns that his communication with his own sick father is limited by his captors, he gathers all his strength to say “God, help me not to learn how to hate.” His captors, meanwhile, remain manipulative, yet weak and directionless at the same time.

The world of *The Primate* is predominantly grey, austere. How its male characters are evaluated depends on their ideological affiliation. Their enjoyment of life and power to live also seem to depend on their ideological allegiances. In the traditionally unifying moment of Polish Christmas Eve, one of the communist guards thanks the Cardinal for his blessing, a brief humanising moment, before the guard steps back into the shadowy corner of his guard-post. Women, on the other hand are scarce in *The Primate*. The only woman with a significant physical presence in the film, Sister Leonia, is not so much treacherous as she is unworthy of the great responsibility bestowed on her by fate and the state. She has nothing in common with the Mother of God. She is weak. At the same time, weakness, as it is used in the film, has a humanising quality. The evil of the communist state stems from weakness, yet it is not excused by it. For the sake of cultural continuity, it is the unwavering faith and strength of the likes of Cardinal Wyszyński that allowed for Polish deliverance from the PRL. That univocal message is a desirable commodity in the post-1989 Poland, which attempts to come to terms with its uncomfortable past.

Consumable memories of Gomułka's PRL: There and Back

In line with the heroic mode of construction and delivery of the communist past in the post-1989 Polish film, Wojciech Wójcik's *There and Back* (2002) received a ten-minute standing ovation at the Polish Feature Film Festival in

Gdynia in 2002. It is described as “a story of a brave hero in a struggle against security police.”⁷² The habit of seeing the communist past in terms of heroic struggle seems to have replaced the earlier one of seeing it as a space of helplessness and inescapable oppression. This may be reflective of the budding social empowerment, which follows from the previous phases of post-1989 socio-cultural transitions. Yet, in the words of Wójcik himself, *There and Back* is about two men who are “at variance” with reality.⁷³ Such a comment seems to place the film in the wide pool of “outsider” films, which is in line with Wójcik’s self-proclaimed commercialist desires.⁷⁴ To him cinema is, by definition, a plebeian art, which exists most of all to bring entertainment.⁷⁵

The commercial promise of the *There and Back* premise lies in the promotional links of the film with the mystery of the “Polish bank robbery of the century” and/or a “real” story of an ex-anti-communist Home Army (AK) soldier who is denied a passport so he cannot reunite with his English wife and daughter, first in England and then in Australia. The factual setting of the film is accentuated by the text which at its beginning situates its action in Łódź in 1965, and at the end informs the viewer of the subsequent fate of the protagonist, a talented surgeon, Andrzej Hoffman (Janusz Gajos). Again, the casting of Gajos in this role when compared to his playing of the censor in *Escape* may be seen as indicative of the changes Polish society underwent in the first 12 post-1989 years. Even if Hoffman is not a courageous hero, even if his actions are first motivated by helplessness and then by desperation, it is reassuring that in the newer visions of the communist past it is slowly becoming possible to exercise, in however limited a form, internal freedoms.

⁷² Krzysztof Kłopotowski, “Jutrzenka wielkości,” *Film* 11 (2002): 66.

⁷³ Wojciech Wójcik quoted in *Tam z powrotem: Twórcy o filmie*, n.d. (6 March 2005). <<http://film.onet.pl/F,6833,1074575,1,artykul.html>>.

⁷⁴ Wojciech Wójcik in an interview with Maria Kornatowska, “Gorąca linia,” *Film* 16 (16 April 1989): 6-7.

⁷⁵ Wojciech Wójcik in an interview with Kornatowska, “Gorąca linia,” 6-7.

The framing of the main character of *There and Back* not only answers to the needs of resolving and systemising the communist past, but is also dictated by the requirements of a crime drama, which facilitates the commodification of that past and a resolving of its traumas.

Hoffman's life story unravels in the first scenes of the film. It is told by his hospital superior as well as the security police officer, Niewczas (Olaf Lubaszenko) who keeps trying to talk Hoffman into becoming a security police informer. His efforts are unsuccessful. Hoffman keeps placing himself on the "right" side of the political divide. After the war, Hoffman spent some time in prison, which presumably had to do with his involvement in the Home Army. After he was released in 1956, he refused to join the Party and participate in the 1st May celebrations, and kept reapplying for his passport so he could at least attempt to find his wife and daughter in England. Soon he learns from Niewczas that his wife's letters to him in prison were intercepted and she has never married again, as he was lead to believe. He writes to her, she calls him from Australia, where she now lives with their daughter, and the call gets cut off when he starts to explain that it is not easy to leave Poland. Soon after that, in an act of desperation, Hoffman decides to consent to the bank-van robbery proposed to him by an unemployed painter Piotr Jurek a.k.a. Piotr Klimek (Jan Frycz), whom he knows from his Home Army years. The robbery goes wrong, and despite Piotr's earlier reassurance, the driver of the van, while aiming his pistol at Hoffman, gets shot by Piotr. Hoffman ends up operating on the driver, and refuses to accept the passport and ticket to Sweden bought for him by Piotr, because "there was to be no blood." Eventually he is called on at night by the security police to operate on the daughter of the dignitary who is responsible for refusing Hoffman his passport. From him, Hoffman accepts an offer of help and the last scene of the film shows Hoffman on the plane to Australia.

The communist world of Gomulka's PRL in *There and Back* is grey, beige, dark brown and rudimentarily austere. Even though it is not as glamorous as that of the security police in *The Primate*, it is not devoid of the communist charm so much favoured by the nostalgia for communist aesthetics. Hoffman's own flat is furnished with a combination of antique and communist pieces, old photographs, drawings, peeling pinkish wallpaper, all suggesting a memory of a better past contextualised in a somewhat impoverished present. To accentuate Hoffman's difference from his vodka-drinking neighbours, he is shown to be partial to a glass of cognac at a time of need, which does imply a higher social standing.

Interestingly, a few Internet reviewers of *There and Back* seem to be convinced that the film is set in Stalinist Poland, which suggests that the PRL might be slowly becoming a unified historical period, rather than a set of collective memories differentiating between its phases. The corridors of government institutions are no longer so bleak, and another new quality of a film that discusses the PRL is the fact that the "our" side, that is, anti- or non-communist side, does not have to be synonymous with the high moral ground or the taking of a superior ethical stand. Klimek is revealed to be the person responsible for Hoffman's imprisonment. His dubious ethics (leaving after damaging a parked bike, perceiving shooting the van driver as wrong only if the driver recognises them) make the complimentary or even idealised view of that side of the ideological divide more problematic. Regardless of these changes, it might still take a long time before it is possible for the Polish cinema to create a similarly problematised portrayal of a communist.

Conclusion

The film analyses in this chapter have supported the thesis that these films about, or set in, the Polish communist past are answering to the social and cultural needs of the time in which they are created, rather than being a

faithful representation of those earlier times. Whether they are to portray the memory of a particular period of that past, or treat it as history, the narratives that underpin them seem to be moving away from the Romanticism-driven pessimistic visions of a helpless, victimised and oppressed nation and the individuals within it. Furthermore, in some recent films whose action takes place against the backdrop of communist Poland, that backdrop is reduced to an aesthetic presence denied any precise valuation. In some of them, the communist time is no longer despised, oppressive or heroic. In *My Nikifor* [*Mój Nikifor*] (Krzysztof Krauze, 2004), the events play out with party slogans in the background, while a Party opportunist facilitates the future international success of a handicapped flea-infested primitive painter Nikifor (Krystyna Feldman astonishingly convincing in the male role of Nikifor). In *The Welts* [*Pręgi*] (Magdalena Piekorz, 2004) the introduction of Martial Law in 1981, which serves as the backdrop of one temporal setting of the film, is not a pretext for ideologically courageous acts, but simply a background to the everydayness of the father-son relationship that is at the centre of the film. The only moment of ideological or systemic demarcation of its setting is in depicting the consumerist poverty of everyday life.

Films like *There and Back*, *The Primate* and *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* not only populate the past and its enacted memory with post-communist noble non-communists ("us"), they also constitute the retrospective projection of an acceptable "us" onto the past. This projection in most cases and to a large extent rids post-communist Poland of ambiguities that could fragment the narrative of the Polish nation as it is 15 years after the end of the communist system. It is also worth noting here that in many cases these films are a way of venting anger and frustration with the injustices of the old system, a process characteristic of post-traumatic processes. Although they are also the site of post-transitional gender themes, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is the relationship between the post-transitional present and the PRL past that has been the main focus of this chapter. The discussion in the next

chapter, on the other hand, centres on the films most directly representing the post-transitional ethos and realities.

6

Of the transitional ethos

In the cinema, reality can act as something different from what it is, pretend to be something different, but can never enter a complete fiction, frolicking on the border, beyond the limits for other arts.¹

The obligation of our cinema towards the contemporary viewer is to bring their attention to the changes in our morality, our hierarchies of values in the most intimate of individual relations.²

The things you want to own, possess – things you can buy with your money. To be a slave of things is a form of slavery much more perfect than the best slavery you can get in prison. A truly ideal slavery - because there are no external restraints. Not a single restriction.³

¹ Aleksander Jackiewicz, film critic and theorist, in Joachim Gleńsk, ed., *Współczesna aforystyka polska; antologia 1945-1984* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1986), 157.

² Jerzy Płażewski, "Dług kina znad Wisły," *Kino* 391 (1999): 8.

³ Sławomir Mrozek, *The Emigrants*, trans. Henry Beissel (New York and Hollywood: Samuel French Inc., 1984), 78.

The transitional process that Poland underwent in the first 15 years after the collapse of the old system is not yet a *fait accompli*. After the elation and euphoria of the first moments of so-called “freedom” there came confusion and uncertainty about what lay ahead. Poland and the Poles opened up to the world, and capitalism introduced new opportunities as well as consumerism, while widening visibly the gap between the poor and the rich. On the one hand, the Poland of the 1990s was the site of a spectacular rebirth, which came with an insistence on the ethos of success, an ethos many would pursue with little regard for the law. On the other hand, vast numbers of Poles were excluded from that cultural-economic circumstance, either by their limited access to resources (including appropriate networks and knowledge), or by making a subconscious *a priori* commitment to the learned helplessness inherited from the previous regime.⁴ When taken to the extreme, these two outcomes of the same systemic change present a socio-pathology, which inspires descriptive and expository filmic treatments. At the same time, and this is more prevalent among younger filmmakers whose formative years fall into the 1980s, the transitional dilemmas brought on by various forms of newly-found materialism have encouraged a search for alternatives to it.

The first phase of the transition to capitalism understood as an economic and ideological system manifested itself in the ethos of success and entrepreneurial desires to replicate the West understood as the U.S. and Western Europe. It also meant a slow and inevitable dismantling of the social and cultural structures that underlined the fibre of the Polish nation and society during the partitions and under the “protectorate” of the Soviet Union. The need to respond to the rapid changes put Poles and their collective

⁴ The phenomenon of helplessness in pre- and post-transitional Poland is well-documented in sociological literature. For a brief outline of the problem, see Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska, “Unlearning ‘learned helplessness’: the view from Poland,” *The Christian Century* 111: 9 (16 March 1994): 281-282. Incidentally, helplessness in psychology literature on trauma is usually listed as one of the most significant post-traumatic symptoms.

identity under duress. One provisional means of dealing with the stress of the end of the old system was constructing a new transitional ethos: that of success. Although Poles were not strangers to that ethos - it was, after all, one powerful narrative propagated by the communist state – the new ethos of success was based on capitalist ideology, within which commercial and financial, rather than social, achievements were the main measure.

The aim of this chapter is to trace the fate of the transitional ethos of success in some films dealing directly with the transitional reality and its outcomes. To this end, I begin by placing the focal films of this chapter in the general filmic landscape, as their thematic and stylistic considerations evolved to reflect and problematise the changing attitude to the ethos of success, and its other derivative cultural patterns. Most notably, these patterns included shifts in the representation of masculinity and femininity, and their relationship with their past conceptualisations in Polish film. The underlying argument of these explorations is that the selection of films discussed in this chapter reflects the stages of “working through” the (post)transitional trauma, as outlined in the previous chapter. After the exposition of the filmic background that motivates that underlying argument, this chapter proceeds to focus on films that represent subsequent stages in the changing attitude to the ethos of success, as well as the “working through” of the trauma of transitions. The first film analysed, *Pigs* [*Psy*] (Władysław Pasikowski, 1992), simultaneously relives that trauma, and denies it by creating a “tough guy” who can (seemingly) withstand systemic vicissitudes. Although not motivated by financial gain, the protagonist of *Pigs* leaves no doubt in the viewer’s mind that he is well equipped to achieve any form of success, including financial, if he chooses to will it. *Pigs* is also the only film discussed in this chapter to have achieved considerable box-office success, with 400 thousand cinema viewers in 1992, otherwise a year of generally poor cinema attendance. The motivating factors in the choice of the other films in this chapter are their evolving portrayals and relationships with the ethos of success, their iconoclastic tendencies and/or

their ability to inspire resonating debates amongst Polish critics and audiences. The broad range of films discussed here aims to reflect the breadth of attitudes to the transitions and the ethos of success, especially in the last stage of the discussed period of the first years of the 21st century.

Permutations of the transitional success

As discussed in Chapter 2, the rise and revisions of the ethos of success are intertwined with the decline and, at times, outright rejection of the traditional values of Polish nationhood, family, and Romantic patriotism⁵ as well as such icons as the Romantic patriotic hero and the Polish Mother as a cradle of nationhood. The emphasis on creating a new commercialised Poland and doing away with its undesirable past resulted in a rewriting of Polish masculinity and femininity, and a general preoccupation with non-reproductive sexuality. In all films that are the focus of this chapter, even if a viewer catches a glimpse of a traditional familial “normality”, as in *Debt [Dług]* (Krzysztof Krauze, 1999), it is soon jeopardised and dissipated, metaphorically and literally. Cited in the previous chapter, Erikson lists the loss of communal and familial cohesiveness as one of the symptoms of having suffered a collective trauma.⁶

Yet, the clusters of films discussed later in this chapter also represent stages of “working through” that trauma. After its initial denial and pervasiveness, as in the case of *Pigs*, there came a cluster of films reconsidering some of the transitional outcomes, including the desirability of success, its exclusions and excesses.

⁵ Andrzej Podgórski, *Spółeczeństwo polskie* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo WSP, 1995), 134. Also in Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, “Wartości w polskiej reklamie telewizyjnej lat dziewięćdziesiątych,” *Zeszyty prasoznawcze* 48: 3-4 (2001): 60.

⁶ Kai Erikson, “Notes on trauma and community,” in *Trauma; Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 190.

That alternative and non-complimentary way of representing the ethos of success provided a disturbing yet powerful counterbalance to some other commercial and non-commercial productions insisting on this ethos' viability. The next phase of working through post-transitional trauma in film continued some aspects of the previous ones, for instance the lack of familial cohesiveness, at the same time presenting alternatives to the dominant ethos of success. The main alternative that emerged from this type of film was that of pursuing individualism, which allowed for other choices without entirely rejecting the ethos of success.

As already described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Polish filmmakers in the early 1990s generally and generously borrowed from the action genre, and more specifically from gangster and revenge films. Although these films' Americanness would be difficult to dispute, they are still firmly set in the Polish reality. *The Father's Law* [*Prawo ojca*] (Marek Kondrat, 1999) for instance, resonated strongly among Polish audiences because it suggested the power of an individual to withstand the initial chaos of transitions and take the law into his hands,⁷ as a father tries to protect and avenge his daughter, a rape victim. This type of filmmaking also emphasised the powerlessness of the law in the post-communist Poland, and "a feeling of an inevitable threat," in which Poland continue[d] to live.⁸ *The Young Wolves* and *Young Wolves 1/2* (Żamojda, 1995 and 1998) mentioned in Chapter 2 of this dissertation were a successful manifestation of this generic cluster. They were designed to appeal to young audiences and also show a world in which young people have to be a law unto themselves because of the corruption and helplessness of the law professionals. Another film that expressed the initial levels of

⁷ Cezary Wiśniewski describes the enthusiastic reception of *The Father's Law* (1999) in "Sprawiedliwość według Michała Korda," *Film 2* (2000): 82.

⁸ M.s., "Pięć prawa... i lewa," *Film 1* (2000): 54.

disappointment with the new order and its political elites was *The Kidnapping of Agata* [*Urowadzenie Agaty*] (Marek Piwowski, 1993). In Piwowski's film, a senator (Jerzy Stuhr) uses all the means available to him as a politician, including antiterrorist brigades, to prevent his daughter from continuing her relationship with an undesirable boyfriend. At the time of the film's release, some commentators pointed out that the abuse of power portrayed in the film is the same as that of the old regime, but here that abuse is by the new political elites who came to power "on the backs of the workers".⁹ Intended as an action film, it was read as a political statement.

Pigs' lasting resonance is similar to that of Krzysztof Krauze's *Debt* (1999), in so far as both films destroy the prevalent assumptions of the values underlying the Polish collective being at the moment of their respective releases. While *Pigs* achieves this by breaking with the tradition of socially-responsible filmmaking and positioning one of the most hated functionaries of the old regime, a security policeman ("ubek"), as a hero of the film,¹⁰ *Debt* contests the ethos of success, which had been axiomatic of the transitional period thus far. It also shows real or "decent people", who – according to Mateusz Werner - have been largely neglected by Polish popular cinema of the 1990s.¹¹ Based on the events widely publicised in 1994, *Debt* implicates the corrupting possibilities of capitalist desires when these are coupled with the powerlessness of law in post-1989 Poland. The same theme is explored from a different vantage point by the controversial *Egoists* [*Egoiści*] (2000) by Mariusz Trelński. *Egoists* centres on the milieu of successful advertising

⁹ Bożena Janicka, "Za zasłoną kpiny," *Kino* 316 (1993): 30-31.

¹⁰ This, however, does not signify a complete departure from the Polish tradition of representing masculinity on film. As Michael Stevenson argues, *Pigs'* hero, despite his propensity to succeed, is also marked by the futility of some of his actions, just like the heroes of the Polish School or of the Cinema of Moral Concern. Michael Stevenson, "'I don't feel like talking to you any more': gender uncertainties in Polish film since 1989. An analysis of *Psy*," in *Gender in Film and the Media: East-West Dialogues*, eds. Elżbieta Ostrowska, Elżbieta Oleksy and Michael Stevenson, Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 138-149.

¹¹ Mateusz Werner, "Przyzwoici do kin," *Film* 4 (2000): 20.

professionals, and their decadent world in which all values are blurred by daily drug abuse and sexual and social excesses. In *Debt* as well as in *Egoists* there are no positive portrayals of characters partial to the ethos of success.

The other side of the division created by the ethos of success and its accessibility or lack thereof is explored in three other films examined in more detail in this chapter. The first one, *Hi Tereska* [*Cześć Tereska*] (2001) by Robert Gliński, is a black-and-white feature reminiscent of French *cinéma de banlieue* and employs documentary conventions. Its focal point is Tereska, a teenage girl who grows up in a family, like many others, inhabiting one of the many tower blocks inherited from the socialist attempts to provide cheap accommodation for all. Again, there are other films of equal potency that work with similar social matter. Dorota Kędzierzawska's *Nothing* [*Nic*] (1998) or *The Crows* [*Wrony*] (1994) both focus on the learned helplessness of the "ordinary" people,¹² and – as Kędzierzawska claims – they aim to show their audiences that they are not alone in this,¹³ at the same time borrowing from Dostoyevski and Bulhakov,¹⁴ and inspiring various claims to feminism and/or femininity depending on the vantage point of a reviewer.¹⁵ Yet, unlike *Hi Tereska*, these films did not have a wide cinematic release¹⁶ and they did not occupy as prominent a space in public fora as did and still does *Hi Tereska*, even though the latter's prominence may be – at least partially – attributed to the film's continuation beyond the filmic text and into the life outside it. Ola

¹² Dorota Kędzierzawska, "Sama na huśtawce," *Film* 10 (1998): 84.

¹³ Kędzierzawska, "Sama," 85.

¹⁴ Bożena Janicka, "Frieda," *Kino* 10 (1998): 34.

¹⁵ For instance, Andrew J. Horton, "A fatalistic feminism," *Central Europe Review* 1: 14, 27 September 1999, (6 March 2005). <http://www.ce-review.org/99/14/kinoeye14_horton.html>.

¹⁶ Both *Nothing* and *Crow* are broadcast repeatedly on television in Poland, and also on SBS in Australia.

Gietner, the young actress who plays Tereska, continues to reappear in the press after each of her consecutive sentences for yet another robbery.¹⁷

The working through of the trauma of transitions and its dominant ethos reached at least a tentative stage of post-traumatic completion with two films: *Edi* [*Edi*] (Piotr Trzaskalski, 2002) and *Squint Your Eyes* [*Zmruż oczy*] (Andrzej Jakimowski, 2003), which are symptomatic of the new Polish cinema, which seems to divorce itself from the earlier cinema of social responsibility.¹⁸ Films that may be placed in that general category of films, that focus on the new type of individualism are predominantly made in the first four years of the 21st century by younger film directors who had not made a recognised film in communist Poland, and whose formative years are the late 1980s and early 1990s. Some of these films were criticised for “digging inside yourself”, which was traditionally seen as inferior to “social duty”.¹⁹ Yet these films also point to a solution to the question of “how to live”²⁰ in the uncertainties of post-transitional Poland, a question some critics see as a filmmaker’s imperative and an appropriate continuation of the tradition of social responsibility. In these films, the responsibility for any undesirable social or personal state shifts from a collective onto an individual. They point to alternatives to the materialism that underpins a Western (and now Polish) brand of capitalism. They include Przemysław Wojcieszek’s *Louder Than Bombs* [*Głośniej od bomb*] (2002) and his *Down A Colourful Hill* [*W dół kolorowym wzgórzem*] (2004) which find resolution in their protagonists’ respective decisions to cultivate his father’s land instead of pursuing a “better

¹⁷ At the time of writing this dissertation, Ola Gietner’s last sentence was for her robbery of an old woman in Pabianice in mid-2004. She was sentenced to two and a half years in prison (in 2004 she was 19).

¹⁸ For instance, Przemysław Wojcieszek makes a strong claim to that divorce in an interview with Elżbieta Błaszkievicz, “Oko w oko z publicznością,” *Kino* 10 (2004): 26.

¹⁹ Manana Chyb, “Detoksykacja,” *Kino* 10 (2004): 55.

²⁰ Bożena Janicka, “Gdynia ‘99,” *Kino* 12 (1999): 5-6.

life” in the U.S. (*Louder Than Bombs*), and reunite with his brother and their father’s land rather than reject the sibling for his opportunism in appropriating both the protagonist’s inheritance and his girlfriend (*Down a Colourful Hill*).

Interestingly, the way in which these changes are expressed in cinematic releases has a high correlation with the age of their directors and the time of their filmic debut. *Squint Your Eyes*’ Andrzej Jakimowski (born 1963) and *Edi*’s Piotr Trzaskalski (born 1964) grew up in the communist Poland and made their first significant film or first feature film in the 2000s. Władysław Pasikowski of *Pigs* and Mariusz Trelński of *Egoists* were adults before the introduction of Martial Law in 1981, and they both made their first significant film immediately after the collapse of the old regime, hence possibly their initial (Pasikowski) and general (Trelński) iconoclastic tendencies. Robert Gliński, the director of *Hi Tereska*, and Krzysztof Krauze, the director of *Debt*, were born in 1952 and 1953 respectively, and their feature film careers started just before 1989. Gliński’s filmmaking had started in the mid-1970s with documentaries, while Krauze had not made a film for eight years since his 1988 debut, which seems to have moved him away from the social and filmic tradition that Gliński continues. At the same time, the timing of the formative years of film-work of the two directors seems to lend itself to the taking of a more stoic attitude to new developments, often seeing them through the prism of their pre-1989 experiences, in a very different way from that of Pasikowski.

The shock and success of *Pigs*

Pigs’ reception in Poland falls into two broad categories. On the one hand, and mostly for its young viewers who were in their late teens or twenty something, at the time of the film’s release, it is a cult film, one which shaped their formative cultural experience, and which “speaks to them” in a language

that combines the Polish reality and the American action genre, both of which are familiar to them. This attitude to *Pigs*, which is elaborated later in this chapter, stands in opposition to the majority of critics who were initially outraged by the film's nihilistic language and its placing of an "ubek" not only as its protagonist, but also as a hero and as one of the few characters "with principles". Although, originally, *Pigs* was either lauded or ridiculed for its adherence to the American action genre, a few years after its release, critics now recognise its generic hybridity, as is the case with some other "Americanised" films of the early and mid-1990s.²¹ In his seminal article on *Pigs*, Michael Stevenson analyses its film noir, film policier and gangster film characteristics.²² Also, Janina Fałkowska refers to *Pigs* as a "socialist-Hollywood thriller".²³ In another retrospective a decade after the film's release, Bożena Janicka is no longer concerned with its generic properties, but she describes *Pigs* as a shock that was to prepare the viewers for new times, which "were not to be concerned with any sanctities, and considered big money the only real one."²⁴

The film's iconoclasm towards the values of the past generations of Poles is most poignantly expressed in one scene that copies Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981). Originally, in Wajda's film shipyard workers carried on their shoulders the dead body of their colleague, presumably shot by "ubeks" or militia. In *Pigs*, drunken "ubeks" sing the Solidarity protest-song that closes *Man of Iron*, while carrying their drunken unconscious mate on their shoulders and, to accentuate this scene's provocation, they walk straight into the camera. *Pigs'* nihilism is also brought out when Olo (Marek Konrad), a friend of the

²¹ For instance, Maciej Ślesicki's *Sara* (1997) is seen as an American-Polish hybrid of action, comedy and melodrama, which for its director is simply "a love story." (DoMi, "Taka mała," *Film* 5 (1997): 46-47).

²² Stevenson, "I don't feel," 140.

²³ Janina Fałkowska quoted in Alicja Helman, "Postmodernizm i barok," *Kino* 9 (1999): 50-51.

²⁴ Bożena Janicka, "Psy," *Kino* 7-8 (2002): 12.

protagonist, drinks a toast with Gross, an ex-captain of the security police (Janusz Gajos); “down with the blacks, down with the reds, and down with everyone.” The blacks signify the Catholic Church and the political parties affiliated with them and the new regime, the reds refer to communists and more generally to functionaries of the old regime, and everyone most likely stands for everyone. The lack of respect for any particular world-view or political division is replaced by elevating money and (frequently betrayed) personal alliances to the level previously occupied by national history, institutions, the Polish mother and the family in general. The primary position of money is realised in *Pigs*’ main crime theme (the drug trade), but also in other details. When a new recruit “Młody” [Youngster] (Cezary Pazura) arrives to join the security police at the beginning of the film, he is told that he would be better off setting up an arms dealership or a sex shop.

Tadeusz Sobolewski, a prominent Polish film critic, describes the significance of *Pigs* for Polish audiences and the reasons for its box-office success;

To describe *Pigs* we used the term “bandit cinema”, seeing it as mainly following American patterns –types of protagonists, narrative style. However the importance of that film and also of many similar ones was not in the act of emulation. Pasikowski in his “bandit” films revoked the common idea that the reality surrounding us became “banditist”. To resist it effectively, one had to adopt the rule “an eye for an eye” and in the name of justice become a bandit oneself. Ridiculing the Solidarity ethos, mocking *Man of Iron* (Wajda, 1981), Pasikowski broke away from the dilemmas of the Cinema of Moral Concern, from collectivised, socialist-Romantic hope for the coming of better times. He accepted, following his audience, that worse times are coming, more dangerous times. An untrained eye may see that a constant element of reality is

mafia and gangsterism, an element of the market – drugs and prostitution; poverty come out onto the streets and railway stations. The blame for the dominance of evil cannot be attributed to the system. The old evil has been taken in by the present system, the state is weak and corrupted, etc. Nobody promises happiness for everyone any more. Nobody points to the new promised land. We are alone, sentenced to a life of free-style boxing, we have to manage ourselves.²⁵

The first scene of *Pigs* is a mid-shot of a man in his late 30s sitting nonchalantly on a chair positioned a couple of meters in front of rows of the same dark wooden chairs.

The room is dark, with some seemingly natural light beaming from what could be a high window in the right back corner of the room. The man wears a dark suit and a white buttoned up shirt without a tie. What seems to be a voice-over introduces colonel Franz Maurer (Bogusław Linda), “37 years old, married with one child, a law graduate – with an award.” It is soon revealed that the voice-over belongs to the Chair of a Verification Commission evaluating the suitability of internal security police from the old regime for work in the new one. Maurer shows more interest in the cigarette smoke that he blows than in what is being said until the mention of his marriage to his wife.

He throws an ambiguous brief look at the Chair, and returns to watching his cigarette smoke. Soon, he explains that he shot his colleague’s head off from 200 meters because the latter demanded registration of the Free Workers’

²⁵ Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Gdynia ‘99: kino ciężkich czasów,” *Kino* 12 (1999): 8.

Union, Solidarity. When asked whether he is prepared to guide the public order of the new democratic Poland, he answers:

“Absolutely.”

“Until the very end.”

“Hers or mine.”

Night scenes that follow show the ritualistic burning of the Security files, in which he participates, then his large empty house, the burning of his wife and daughter’s photo in the garden. Franz’s initial portrait is completed with a sexually obscene phone call he makes from a public telephone in the building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The ensuing story has Franz demoted to the criminal police unit, whose first action goes terribly wrong and eventuates in several dead and wounded officers. After being sacked from the police, and without telling Franz about it, his friend Olo gets involved in a drug war, and also appropriates Franz’s girlfriend, Angela (Agnieszka Jaskólska). After Olo secures Franz’s help, no questions asked, and for a significant financial reward, the latter turns the tables and in the final squaring up with Olo, Franz kills his treacherous ex-friend, and later in prison, refuses to speak to his ex-girlfriend because “he doesn’t feel like talking to her.”

On one level, Maurer is politically and ethically torn if not corrupt. Instead of following his son with his wife to the States, an expected response from a family man who subscribes to traditional values, he chooses “to clean up [Poland]”. At the same time, and ironically so, this resolve links Maurer to the tradition of the Polish Romantic hero, a motif discussed by Stevenson.²⁶

²⁶ Stevenson, “I don’t feel’,” 143.

Under the tough exterior, Maurer is a vulnerable being, not able to understand or express the reasons for his wife's abandoning of him. Betrayed by the new system, friends and women, with stoic calmness hiding the underlying pain of disappointments and mismatched alliances, he proceeds uncompromisingly with his life. At the same time, he is a man of honour, a Romantic hero from the "school canon" – he is betrayed by his company, a woman, then the closest friend, but he fights unlawfulness till the very end. Why? "In the name of principles, son of..."²⁷ Essentially, and not disregarding the Romantic connection, Maurer embodies a white hat cowboy and a black hat cowboy of the Polish action film. He is a Romantic hero, a man of principles, but the masculinity he represents exists in isolation, thus it, and therefore he, are both incomplete. This isolation has dual causes. It comes from betrayals; he is betrayed by his friend (Olo) and by his girlfriend (Angela) for whom money, at least for a large part of the film, is more important than loyalty to him. At the same time, he remains passive (un-masculine?) in times when he could demonstrate his own loyalty to the people that matter to him.

Even more problematic is the portrayal of women in *Pigs*. The most significant female in the context of the film's narrative is Angela. Franz meets her when assigned the task of finding the daughter of a Catholic priest,²⁸ currently in an orphanage. Their first encounter shows a tall willowy girl with big eyes and harmonious features walking in slow motion towards Franz from her desk in an orphanage classroom to the haunting nondiegetic music theme that reverberates throughout the film.²⁹

²⁷ Wiesław Kot, "Fundusz brakoróbstwa," *Film 1* (2003): 68.

²⁸ Catholic priests are under the oath of celibacy, yet there are many cases when their fatherhood becomes common knowledge, and is used as a political weapon against them.

²⁹ An excellent analysis of this moment is included in Stevenson's article, "I don't feel'," 147.

A romance with the seventeen year old ensues when Angela amuses Franz with a coquettish remark on his wife, after he mentions that she had left him. Angela's comment "silly cunt" charms and perplexes him to the point that he decides to allow her to stay at his place, the empty house soon to be claimed by the divorce lawyers.

More often than not, women – especially Angela - in *Pigs* are written about as reduced to the role of "a sofa-bed that goes to a highest bidder",³⁰ since Angela leaves Franz after he loses his house and she finds out how little money he has. Yet the same lack of loyalty as exhibited by a male character attracts much less attention in writings on *Pigs*. Olo betrays Franz also because of money. In fact, his betrayal is more severe than that by Angela. He has been Franz's friend for many years, which, compared to a few months of the relationship with the underage Angela, carries a different set of expectations. Stevenson also points to the significance of placing Angela as the focus of the last image of the film, when she visits Maurer in prison and he refuses to speak to her. Although concerned with that scene's ambiguity, Stevenson emphasises the generic possibilities, which could imply her role as a potential saviour of Maurer.

Marek Haltof's description of men in Pasikowski's films as "active, powerful, and violent" and women as "passive, powerless and blatantly sexual"³¹ only holds when examined from a perspective that does not position the dramatic personas in the complexity of their relations to each other. Angela is blatantly sexual, however she is also a virgin when she meets Franz, a fact deemed insignificant by some commentators, and missed by others. For instance, Dina Iordanova describes Angela as a former young prostitute,³² neglecting

³⁰ Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa, "Kobieta jako McGuffin," *Kino 9* (1998): 26-29.

³¹ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 253.

³² Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 142.

the scene in which Angela loses her virginity to Franz, an omission which is understandable given that some turns of the plot are difficult to follow by viewers who have to rely on, at times inadequate, English subtitles. At the same time, other females – those attached to various friends of Franz – are not overtly sexual. They wear neat suits, high heels, they are carefully coiffured and they stand tall.

The only glimpse of family life afforded its viewers by *Pigs* is that of Gross's family. As Stevenson argues, in "seven shots and 30 seconds" a viewer is subjected to the picture of the "perfect" family life with a highly presentable, yet homey, blonde young mother, and three Daddy's girls.³³ At the same time, the familial scenes are flavoured with the awareness of the looming threat that comes with Gross's affiliation with the mafia.

From the perspective of time, the role of *Pigs* can be seen not so much to emulate or to comment on the existing social reality, but to provoke and offend some viewers and attract others. Consistent with its general iconoclasm is its portrayal of women, although this is not exactly done in the mode of binary oppositions favoured by many critics. As Elżbieta Ostrowska points out, a different opposition or discontinuity is more important here.

[T]he female characters in Pasikowski's movies have nothing to do with the traditional representational pattern and this is noticeable already through their physical appearance. Tall, slim, short-cut, dark-haired girls represent a different anthropological type from the one we would tend to call "typically Polish". Moreover, their life-attitude and behaviour are in radical opposition to what in Polish culture was traditionally ascribed to the feminine and

³³ Stevenson, "I don't feel", 143.

which was perfectly embodied in the myth of the Polish Mother.³⁴

While the representation of women in *Pigs* differs to some extent from their portrayal in previous films, the illustration of men only appears to depart from Polish filmic traditions, as does the mise-en-scene of cold, grey, deserted streets, dark and barely furnished inns, and the film's cinematography in general. Rough, grainy, using muffled colour, and despite some Hollywood-style takes of smoke-and-shadow night streets during a brief car chase, *Pigs* is more reminiscent of the Cinema of Moral Concern or a Channel 4 crime series than a main-stream American film. Furthermore, the country landscape, which traditionally in Polish film is a site of idyllic escapism or nationalistic nostalgias, in *Pigs* becomes a place of crime, which is a theme continued in *Debt*. Yet, all the points that broke with tradition in *Pigs* also proved to be the points of attraction for many young viewers in Poland.

Grażyna Stachówna in her 1999 retrospective on the achievements of the early 1990s Polish cinema describes the significance of *Pigs* (Pasikowski, 1992) for the generation born in the late 1970s.

They are not concerned with the PRL's grudges, and a security policeman doesn't carry negative connotations for them. Just the opposite. He becomes an embodiment of a tough guy. They are genuinely tired of "Styrofoam" and "ethos", that is of martyrology and combatantism³⁵. They want to have a good time in the cinema, and until recently

³⁴ Elżbieta Ostrowska, *Screening Women in Polish Cinema after 1989: Gender, Nation, Identity*, paper presented at the Conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Minneapolis, 2003.

³⁵ In Polish: "kombatantyzm", a neologism meaning an excessive preoccupation with Polish combatants.

only Hollywood films would do it for them. Now there was also a Polish film.³⁶

Earlier in the text Stachówna refers to the case study that informs her analysis. She describes her acquaintance, a law student, who from time to time would meet with a few of his high school friends to reminisce about their “old times”, “to drink a few cans of beer and once again watch *Pigs* on the video.” And further:

Pigs, divorced from its political, social and cultural significance has become for them the symbol of school years, of mateship, of belonging, of rebelling against the generation of their parents, and certainly of the exciting feeling that they may laugh at issues, which for the older generation are serious and almost sacred, but for them are trivial and pathetic.³⁷

This view is confirmed by Maciej Pawlicki, a reviewer from *Film*, who lauds *Pigs* as a manifesto of a new generation, the generation of “hangmen”,³⁸ and a film that perfects American patterns of filmmaking, albeit with one significant difference; it does not culminate in returning the world it depicts to a state of balance.³⁹ The values in the world of Maurer are nowhere to be found, which is what earned high praise from, for instance, Piotr Lis, a *Kino* reviewer, who says the final imbalance of the film is one reason for its superiority over the Hollywood patterns, at least for the domestic market.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Władysław Pasikowski insists that he defends a world in which “honour” is still meaningful against a world in which the values of life and love are not

³⁶ Grażyna Stachówna, “100 lat kina w Polsce: 1990-1993,” *Kino* 391 (1999): 47-48.

³⁷ Stachówna, “100 lat,” 47.

³⁸ An expression denoting a new “cool” generation which creolises the Western, but mostly American “coolness”.

³⁹ Maciej Pawlicki, “Spsienie,” *Film* 2 (1993): 14.

⁴⁰ Piotr Lis, “Moralitet z klocków,” *Kino* 311 (May 1993): 14-15.

sought after any more. According to him, it is his anger that drives his film directing.⁴¹

Stachówna also quotes a Master's dissertation by Małgorzata Bogunia, in which the latter analyses young people's uses of *Pigs*, focusing mainly on males rather than females. The youth of the vocational high schools in Poland are said to have taken to it indiscriminately. For them the world of *Pigs* is a literal reflection of reality with no unnecessary distance standing between the film and the world as they see it. To them, being tough and uncompromising is the definition of masculinity as it should be in the capitalist Poland. For students of elitist high schools, on the other hand, *Pigs* is said to be a treasury of *bon mots* and a tableau of role models – tough yet sentimental guys respected by boys and adored by girls.⁴² In any case, unlike many commentators who find strong points of historical reference for the film, for the younger generation, *Pigs* serves mainly as a cohesive factor, whose references to recent history are purely accidental.⁴³

Corrupting longings for success in Krauze's *Debt*

When Małgorzata Kozubek, a film scholar, conducted a survey of 200 people for her research on the influence of the cinema on attitudes and behaviour, half of those surveyed listed *Debt* as the film that prompted them to change their attitude to a significant issue. The survey was conducted five years after the premiere of the film, so the results of Kozubek's study can be interpreted as indicating the lasting effect of *Debt* on its viewers. Based on her research, Kozubek attributed this effect to the shock of becoming aware that our "state

⁴¹ Władysław Pasikowski in an interview with Maciej Pawlicki, "Jestem wkurzony," *Film 4* (1994): 65-67.

⁴² Stachówna, "100 lat," 48.

⁴³ For instance, Piotr Szulkin, "Psy wieszane non stop," *Kino 311* (May 1993): 12-13. Also, Maciej Parowski, "Podmienione relikwie?" *Film 8* (1993): 39.

can be so weak, and justice so handicapped.”⁴⁴ In the words of Tadeusz Lubelski, a prominent film scholar and theorist;

Debt attacks the organism; one leaves with an upset stomach. And it is not the usual cinema-upset that comes from worrying about the fate of protagonists. It's a physical sense of extreme helplessness, which – as a result of the filmmakers' precision – we are made to digest as viewers.

And feeling the protagonists' helplessness and not being able to make any ordinary move of self-defence, we are looking instinctively for solutions which normally would be out of the question. The relief with which we welcome the crime committed by our protagonists – it's a trap, which the filmmakers set for us from the very beginning.⁴⁵

The commanding impact of *Debt* has mainly two sources; one is that its characters are depicted as “normal”, “ordinary” young people who want to succeed in business to build their houses and families. These are the type of people that most Polish viewers have no problem identifying themselves with, or at least of identifying someone similar in their immediate or remote family or in their circle of friends. Another reason for the film's potency is that it is based on a case reported a few years back in the media. On the night of 8th March 1994, two friends and business partners, Sławomir Sikora and Artur Bryliński killed two men and threw their naked, headless bodies into the Vistula River. Once the bodies were found, a tattoo on one of them was widely advertised in the media appeal to identify the body.

Debt opens with the police and investigators examining the scene of the crime and the corpses pulled out of the river on a grey-blue winterish day.

⁴⁴ Małgorzata Kozubek, “Prawdopodobnie zrobiłbym to samo,” *Kino* 12 (2004): 38-39.

⁴⁵ Tadeusz Lubelski, “Gdynia '99: nadzieja i rozczarowanie,” *Kino* 12 (1999): 6.

The scene is accompanied by a haunting, tense rhythm of a musical theme by a renowned jazz composer, Michał Urbaniak, and is filmed with a hand-held camera suggesting its social-realist leaning and affinity with a documentary film form. This effect is amplified later in the film in scenes that are suggestive of *cinema verite*. In the film's opening, the camera singles out a small elephant pendant in the mud, neglected by the investigators. The conclusion of the opening scenes is announced by one of the investigators, who declares his intuitive judgement of the situation; "I can smell our friends from the East" (That is, the Russian mafia). His friend replies "That's OK, let them kill each other."

The next sequences take the viewer to a time three months earlier and introduce the real protagonists of the film; first Adam Borecki (Robert Gonera) and his newly pregnant wife-to-be Basia (Joanna Szurmiej), and later Stefan Kowalczyk (Jacek Borcuch) and Stefan's wife Jola (Agnieszka Warchulska). Adam is building a house for his young family-to-be. Stefan is introduced during his indoor rock-climbing exercise, visibly his passion. They are in their early-to-late twenties, well-educated, ambitious and hungry for business and life success. They are well within the tradition of family and home values, which provides a sense of generational continuity. Gerard Nowak (Andrzej Chyra), the antagonist of the film, is introduced when Stefan runs into him accidentally in a shopping centre. They used to be neighbours, and – unlike Stefan - Gerard is apparently not short of money. He leaves a bundle of notes in his jacket at the dry-cleaners', and repeatedly conducts business transactions in the presence of Stefan and/or Adam. The ensuing story line shows Adam and Stefan attempting to secure credit to set up a scooter dealership. The vicious circle of Kafkaesque helplessness has its beginning point when, despite their refusal of Gerard's offer to assist, he still presents them with a continuously growing bill for his "operational cost" and interest on it, which grows at times by 1,000 dollars a day. Once Stefan and Adam

cannot meet his requests for money, he proceeds to pose physical and psychological threats to them and their families.

The threat to business and to a family life comes not only from the outside, that is from Gerard, but is also generated internally. For instance, Adam's father (Krzysztof Gordon) makes two small mistakes in his recitation of "Invocation" from *Pan Tadeusz*, and this is suggestive of the shaky grounding of the ideology of Polishness as it has been passed on from generation to generation. In his review of the 1999 Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia, Tadeusz Lubelski points to the coincidence of *Pan Tadeusz*'s presence in two films screened at the Festival, the other being, of course, Wajda's adaptation of Mickiewicz's epic.

"At first sight, it seems to be an ironic signal on how completely superfluous are the intellectual foundations of a member of the traditional Polish intelligentsia. Afterward, a viewer starts to arrive at the conclusion that the memorised fragment of *Master Tadeusz* serves some purpose, but we can't make use of it anymore."⁴⁶

Later in the same article, Lubelski attributes Adam's self-initiated confession of his crime at the end of the film to two aspects of the film. One is the recitation of "Invocation" and another is the general context of Polish culture, which "has enough wisdom in it to provide Adam with a conscience."⁴⁷

Another discontinuity of the traditional (Romantic) national ethos manifests itself in Basia's conviction that the best solution to her husband's problems would be to leave Poland, an act similar to that executed by Maurer's wife, and in stark contrast with the traditional role of a (reproductive) woman as a cradle of Polish nationhood. A more subtle discontinuity in traditional national

⁴⁶ Lubelski, "Gdynia 99," 6.

⁴⁷ Tadeusz Lubelski, "Zło w kinie współczesnym," *Kino* 10 (2002): 12-16.

and family life comes from Basia's diet of "lettuce and apples" and her desire to be thin, which endangers her pregnancy and makes her bed-bound and, because of her immobility, more susceptible to the threat of Gerard, who visits her in hospital. While the generational continuity is encapsulated in Basia's doubly threatened pregnancy, both external and internal threats to home and family, which traditionally stand for a safe haven of Polish nationhood, may be attributed to the newly-arrived capitalism⁴⁸ and the desire to succeed. According to Krauze, however, the leitmotif of *Debt* is individual internal freedom and the ease with which one can part with it out of fear.⁴⁹ In another interview, Krauze also speaks of the courage to say "no" and the fact that people like Adam and Stefan no longer have it.⁵⁰

In light of this statement, it is not surprising that Krauze quotes *A Short Film about Killing* (Kieślowski, 1988) as his inspiration for *Debt*.⁵¹ This connection is enforced by the film's interior designs by Magdalena Dipont, who for many years collaborated with Krzysztof Kieślowski and Andrzej Wajda on projects such as *Man of Iron* (Wajda, 1981), *A Short Film about Killing* (Kieślowski, 1988), and *The Double Life of Veronique* (Kieślowski, 1991). Her set design for *Debt* oscillates between the warmth and rawness similar to those in the Wajda's and Kieślowski's films mentioned here. While private homes are equally ordinary and homey, official buildings carry the same kind of coolness and darkness as in previous films with set design by Dipont, and they again encourage the audiences' identification or at least familiarity with those spaces, which are in most cases shot as if in a documentary.

⁴⁸ This point is also made by Michael Stevenson in the paper *Polish Cinema's Exit into History*, presented at the Conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Minneapolis, 2003.

⁴⁹ Krzysztof Krauze in an interview with Manana Chyb, "Trzeba się pilnować," *Film* 11 (1999): 104-105.

⁵⁰ Krzysztof Krauze, "Powiedzieć: nie!" *Film* 2 (1999): 10.

⁵¹ Krzysztof Krauze in an interview with Łukasz Maciejewski, "Pod wiatr," *Kino* 12 (1999): 10-11. In the context of this statement, it is also surprising that Krauze chose to quote from a socialist cult comedy *Cruise* (Marek Piwowski, 1970) rather than from Kieślowski or Wajda.

In pursuit of the film's verisimilitude, Krauze also visited Sławomir and Artur (the prototypes of Adam and Stefan) in prison and recorded his conversations with them. The recording helped the actors to generate the "unbelievable emotional intensity" involved in the situation.⁵² The glimpse of that intensity is also apparent in, for instance, Sławomir's letter to the Internet users posted on his website.

Debt is an account of the reality surrounding us.

This is a reality that we often don't notice, or we don't want to notice. Whether we like it or not, it **exists**. If accidentally you find yourself in it, you won't manage by yourself. You won't get out. It's an illusion.

You won't be able to fight your own weaknesses without help from others. You will proceed to the edge, beyond which there is only the abyss and nothingness.⁵³

The film, the book written by Sławomir, and the website (www.dlug.org.pl), which was set up in July 2002, seem to feed off each other in encouraging a belief in the realness of the story, and in securing support for Sławomir's petition for pardon, which by April 2005 was signed by almost 33,000⁵⁴ people, while the parallel website of Artur Bryliński (www.dlug.com.pl) set up in September 2004 secured almost 4,000⁵⁵ signatures. In 2004 both men were sentenced to 25 years in prison.

⁵² Krauze, "Powiedzieć," 10.

⁵³ Sławomir Sikora, "List do internautów," *Dług*, 2002, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.dlug.org.pl>>.

⁵⁴ Five thousand new signatures appeared between January and April 2005.

⁵⁵ One thousand new signatures were added between January and April 2005.

Losers and winners in the ethos of success?

Although *Debt* and Robert Gliński's *Hi Tereska* (2001) share a recourse to documentary or "realist" modes of filmmaking, and have a powerful connection to the "real life" of the characters and/or actors of the two films, they are dissimilar in many other respects. Tereska (Ola Gietner) in *Hi Tereska* has an unfulfilled dream of becoming a successful fashion designer. Like Adam and Stefan and their real-life prototypes, Ola's story, up until 2004, is marked by her prison sentences. Unlike Adam and Stefan, whose background connects the new commercial Poland to the ethos of intelligentsia upbringing, Tereska (and Ola) is born into a working class family with no tradition of reciting *Pan Tadeusz* at a family dinner, however vacuous such a gesture may become. Her social condition represents that of a sizeable social group in Poland. It is a group that missed out on the spoils of the commercialisation and democratisation of Poland. It is also a group sitting in stark opposition to the social stratum represented in Mariusz Treliński's *Egoists* (2000), which centres on the apparent winners of the same processes, the successful advertising and media executives. Yet, in both cases, the lives of the successful elites and the disadvantaged inhabitants of blocks of flats are marked by deprivations of sorts. In the case of *Egoists*, that deprivation is less obvious and has to do with the post-transitional re-gendering as well as discarding values like love and family for the benefit of a "good time" and drugs. Most obviously, *Hi Tereska*'s deprivation is to some extent derived from Tereska's and her family's and environment's socio-economic condition, yet not entirely so. Rather than provide answers, the film questions the roots of that deprivation, and of choices made by the protagonist, a teenage girl.

Indiscreet charm of blocks of flats

As with *Debt*, *Hi Tereska*'s appeal for Polish audiences lies in its "realism" and, for the followers of older schools of Polish filmmaking, in the way it exemplifies the "Polish collective fate, with a vague hope that does not get realised due to broken family ties, bad friendships and the demise of role models."⁵⁶ Outside Poland, *Hi Tereska* does not have the same immediate reference point in reality, and it is usually received as a filmic text contextualised in comparison to other filmic texts rather than any possible social realities it might seek to represent. For instance, Dina Iordanova, not unlike some commentators in Poland, treats it as a continuation of "a well-established tradition of filmmaking that portrays the existential dimension of everyday life as conditioned by social constraints."⁵⁷ To take these themes beyond Polish borders, Maria Kornatowska draws a similarity between Michael Haneke's *The Pianist* [*La pianiste*] (2001) and Patrice Chereau's *Intimacy* [*Intimité*] (2001) by saying that the three films share "a note of cold cruelty". She refers to them as the "new brutalists".⁵⁸ On the other hand, in his review of the film screened in the 36th Karlovy Vary film festival, Andrew James Horton reads with no difficulty the hopelessness into which Tereska's life submerges as the film progresses. Horton attributes the sources of this hopelessness to Tereska's "poor no-hoper family"⁵⁹ without making it clear that this particular type of hopelessness is a norm rather than an exception for millions of people living in the multitude of tower blocks in Polish cities and towns.

The point of Tereska's family's "normality" is captured well by Polish film scholar Mirosław Przyłipiak.

I like the straightforwardness of this film.

⁵⁶ Tomasz Turyn, "Dziewczynka z naszego podwórka," *Film 10* (2001): 74.

⁵⁷ Iordanova, *Cinema of The Other Europe*, 153.

⁵⁸ Maria Kornatowska, "Pod znakiem Nostradamusa: *Cześć, Tereska*," *Kino 9* (2002): 38-39.

⁵⁹ Andrew J. Horton, "Concern for the devil," *Kinoeye* 1: 3, 2003, (6 March 2005) <www.kinoeye.org/01/03/horton03.php>.

It is not a deeply pathological family, nor one marked by crime. They are not some kind of weirdos. The father is simply a normal, ordinary man, who takes care of his children as well as he can, except that it slips away from him. In my opinion, it rings very true. As does the depiction of the youth in this film. If you go into a suburb with tower blocks like, for instance those in Gdansk's Zaspas or Żabianka, you find suburban groups that act like the young people in the film. In this way, it is also true. At the same time, this film avoids the fundamental assumption of blaming social conditions for individuals' behaviour. ... The important question here is whether this film can be aligned with the theory of social pedagogy that says all social evil is related to people's living conditions, or whether it moves in the direction of a dark human nature, which does not depend on social conditions. This is the question that the film poses.⁶⁰

The claim to truth of *Hi Tereska*⁶¹ and the discussion of the fundamental reasons for Tereska's downfall in the film, and also Ola's in real life, are the most prominent themes of deliberation on the film, as is the case with *Debt* and its characters' and their prototypes' crime connections. Unlike the case of *Debt*, where film represents reality, Tereska's life is not Ola's life's representation, but the two intertwine and feed into each other. Yet, in the film, the breaking points that assist with Tereska's downfall can be determined more easily than in Ola's life. Even so, they are still open for discussion.

⁶⁰ Mirosław Przyłipiak, personal interview, 15 September 2004, Gdynia (attached in Appendix 2).

⁶¹ Even student reviewers attribute to the film and its environments a characteristic of being "real", for instance Robert Kluga, "Cześć Angelus! Ciąg dalszy," *Uniwersytet Kulturalny*, January 2002, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.uniwersytet.uw.edu.pl/kultura/sty02/angelus1.htm>>.

The opening scenes of the black-and-white *Hi Tereska* were filmed by Robert Gliński before he knew that he would be able to make the film. They are essentially a home recording of Ola's First Communion. After Christening, First Communion is traditionally the second significant celebration in an eight year old child's Catholic life in Poland. Invariably, every year in May, hordes of girls in white dresses with flowers in their hair, and boys in suits or white frocks walk and run around cities, towns and villages. Gliński's footage of Ola shows the moment in which she receives her First Communion. Straight after it, *Hi Tereska* cuts to the title credits and the context of that situation – a panorama of blocks of flats, not unlike the one in *Day of the Wacko* (Koterski, 2002) described in the next chapter. It is the first time that the barrier between Tereska's innocence and dreams is broken for the viewers of the film. When Tereska/Ola stands smiling behind the window in the corridor of her building and looks out at the children playing, a stone breaks the window and hits Tereska's face. After a slightly awkward cut, the next scene shows a girl in a white communion dress lying on the floor pressing her hands against her eyes, with blood stains on her white dress. Despite a slight roughness of editing in this particular film moment, its significance is well-marked.

The coming of age story of Tereska starts on the day of her first communion and it continues through other defining moments of the film, as does her separation from the innocence of her dreams about different, possibly better worlds. One such dream of becoming a fashion designer (she shows considerable talent for it) is shattered over and over again. First by Tereska's enrolment into a Tailoring Vocational School rather than a Fashion College, then by being befriended there by a street-wise or demoralised (depending on the viewer's opinion) Renata (Karolina Sobczak) who belittles Tereska's dreams. And finally by a scene in a shopping centre, when Tereska insists on trying on designer clothes, which are too big for her. Renata and a group of befriended boys react with a cascade of ridiculing laughter, their faces glued to the outside of the shop-window. That completes the act of destruction of

the insecure Tereska's faint connection to the mirage of a different reality. Her truancy, her first cigarettes and first bottle of stolen alcohol are probably less the consequence of Renata's influence, and more a result of her parents' inability to communicate with their daughter on a level she could relate to. Her first sexual experience (a rape by her boyfriend), a discovery that it is Renata who stole her money at the beginning of the semester before telling Tereska that she should also steal because everyone does so, are the final betrayals for Tereska. Having happened on the same day, they seem to propel Tereska to avenge her betrayed innocence on Edek (Zbigniew Zamachowski), her older friend, a factory watchman and an alcoholic, paralysed from the waist down, by beating him - possibly to death.

Apart from her friendship with Renata, Tereska's relationship with Edek is one of the most significant and metaphorical themes of *Hi Tereska*. In most cases, the connection they develop during Tereska's visits to Edek's workroom is interpreted in terms of their unfulfilled desire for love and human warmth and emotion. Edek's immobility is rarely analysed in this context. That immobility and his inability to feel pain in the lower body may also be interpreted as a general emotional impotence of Edek and, progressively, of Tereska, who is allowed to extinguish cigarettes on Edek's legs or beat them with a metal rod in return for kissing him. In one of these encounters, Tereska seems to have a deeper understanding of his desire for emotions. After she strokes his hair to show him that she cares and promising him a kiss "and possibly more" she arouses his interest, to which she responds by expressing her angry desire to hit his legs so he can feel pain. The logic behind her desire seems simple. If Edek's legs hurt, he can feel. Yet, his condition is portrayed as irreversible, and Tereska's angry desire is an expression of her helplessness. Just as is the case with her relationship with her parents and their emotional ineffectuality.

Tereska's father (Krzysztof Kiersznowski) is a policeman, who in a drunken stupor repeats a line from a sexually abusive phone call Franz in *Pigs* made from a public phone in the Ministry of Internal Affairs; "you want the police? I am the police." Arguably unlike the case with Franz, that line in *Hi Tereska* reveals the father's powerlessness, since all he can do is hide behind his degraded uniform. Tereska senses her father's powerlessness, and aggressively resists his drunken excesses, while reacting with a passive resignation to her mother's (Małgorzata Rożniatowska) desperate enquiry of "why do you want to waste your life? ... Why do you want to live like us?" before the mother gets distracted by Tereska's younger sister. While the mother holds more power in their household than the weak father, her attention focuses in general on Tereska's younger sister, who starts to prepare for the First Communion. She becomes aware of Tereska only when the latter causes trouble for herself, her sister or the schoolteachers. Tereska is left to herself, with only Renata and Edek to explain the adult world to her. The cycle that is broken in *The Welts* (described at the beginning of this chapter) will continue for Tereska, and other ordinary if not sensitive children of the families in the Polish blocks of flats.

To increase the "reality" effect of *Hi Tereska*, Gliński chose a semi-documentary form. He uses hand-held cameras, under-lit cinematography and naturalistic sound, from the outset aimed at confusing the viewer as to which scenes are real, documentary, and which are staged. He filmed stoic reactions by passers-by to staged violence in Praga, the quintessential block-of-flats landscape in a "don't-go-there-at-night" district of Warsaw.⁶² The director knew that "girls from good homes" would not deliver the character of Tereska naturally, so he opted for children from socio-pathological environments to take the roles. He often encouraged Ola and Karolina to improvise, as they do in a scene where they drink cheap wine in a cemetery

⁶² Jerzy Chołub, "Nieśmiałe dziewczynki palą inaczej," *Film 8* (2000): 110, 108-111.

and discuss love and death.⁶³ At the same time, however, he would insist that Ola should learn how a “little girl (that is, Tereska) smokes a cigarette” because Ola does it too well for her character.⁶⁴ Given the critical success of *Hi Tereska* and the insistence of its audience on its truth and realism, Gliński’s exertions have paid off and the film stands out from some other staple documentary and feature films made about the rejects of the transitional ethos of success inhabiting the Polish equivalent of the French *banlieue*.⁶⁵ For some viewers, however, it is a film about lost chances,⁶⁶ both for Tereska and especially for Ola, who since making the film, rejected an invitation to go to Hollywood and was sentenced to two years in prison for a robbery committed in 2004. Treliński’s *Egoists*, in a very different way, also points to the lost chances of the elite of the ethos of success, whose world appears not less enviable than that of *Hi Tereska*.

Excesses of success in Egoists

Like *Pigs*, *Egoists* is an iconoclastic film, yet differently so. Its depiction of nihilism is that of the fast-paced, expensive drug lives of Warsaw elites. In the words of a reviewer, Ewa Modrzejewska, *Egoists* is about

the generation of “egoists”, ... the generation of people living fast, helping themselves to a myriad of drugs. They pay for their success with an emotional atrophy or simply extreme cynicism. They are the representatives of the myth

⁶³ Robert Gliński in an interview with Manana Chyb, “Robert Gliński: zablokowani,” *Film* 11 (2001): 100-103.

⁶⁴ Chołub, “Nieśmiałe dziewczynki,” 109-111.

⁶⁵ Turyn, “Dziewczynka,” 74.

⁶⁶ For instance, Turyn, “Dziewczynka,” 74.

of success. Their careers are what the youth want, they are what provincial girls dream of.⁶⁷

Their world is one not accessible to the vast majority of Poles. It is a world of a handful of successful advertising and media executives in their early to late thirties. This world's mood is revealed in the film's opening scenes of *Egoists*. *Egoists* begins with a night panorama of Warsaw accompanied ironically by a popular socialist anthem praising the beauty of the new socialist city and its bridges. The juxtaposition of the enthused socialist propaganda of success (sic!) encapsulated by the song on rebuilding Warsaw after the war, and the visuals of the capitalist metropolis accentuates the discrepancy between the two realms that has been brought about by the socio-cultural changes following the socialist period.

The next scene introduces one of the main five characters of the story. Naked Anka (Magdalena Cielecka) is mixing a cocktail of ice-cream, fruit and colourful pills.

She runs frantically around her kitchen and soon descends into an intoxicated dance in the colourfully lit corridor of her apartment to the tune of muffled hard-core dance music, physically unstable just like the camera from which these scenes are shot. She falls asleep, wakes up still intoxicated and starts to watch and, interchangeably, record an hysterical farewell to her boyfriend, whom – in her words – she adored and prayed to “like an idiot” at the beginning of their relationship, but who annihilated himself and her. The next shot shows the boyfriend a.k.a. Smutny [literally “Sad”] (Olaf Lubaszenko) waking up dishevelled on the side of a road, and following the rail track to meet a little boy who leaves various objects on the rail to be flattened by the train, the Warsaw-Berlin express. Asked by the boy for an object to be

⁶⁷ Ewa Modrzejewska, “Słodkie życie egoistów,” *Film 11* (1999): 121.

flattened, Smutny gives him a key with a key ring of a red rose, explaining that it is a souvenir of his girlfriend.

While Smutny continues his excessively indulgent life, even though he seems to find it progressively unsatisfying, Anka is intent on escaping her nihilistic Warsaw existence and leaving for New York. Blue from cold, she is pulled out from a bath by her girlfriend, Ilona (Agnieszka Dygat) just in time to make it to the airport and find that her plane is cancelled due to bad weather. She spends the next 24 hours dancing and drinking heavily with pregnant Ilona, sexually abusing a handsome young man in the toilet of a trendy café, picking up an older man who proceeds to rape her (with her encouragement) in the same motel where she has spent a memorable night with her ex-boyfriend, Smutny. She also manages to find the latter in the country villa of their friend, Filip (Jan Frycz), so they can tell each other that they have no strength to go on, and after that she disappears from the film, presumably having left for New York. Following this, Filip's lover leaves him and Filip commits suicide by convincing a bus-load of soldiers (after an orgy-like party that he instigated) to set his country house on fire, while he undresses inside and lays down with his imaginary daughter, a doll called Pindi. The film ends with Smutny sobbing at the sight of Ilona's prematurely born baby, who is fathered by her husband, Mały (Rafał Mohr), also Smutny's friend, absent at the child's birth because his drug dealer has just returned to town after a few days of privation.

The reaction of Polish audiences to *Egoists* was twofold. On the one hand, some critics saw Treliński as "one of the most original and talented Polish directors,"⁶⁸ who drew a caricature of a certain type of Poland,⁶⁹ and the ways

⁶⁸ Modrzejewska, "Słodkie życie," 121.

⁶⁹ Bartosz Żurawiecki, "Kino bez właściwości? Panflet na polskie filmy," *Film 9* (2001): 30-33.

of successful people, with high-flying careers and healthy bank accounts, but “completely unprepared for life.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, the film was rejected as overdrawn⁷¹ and incomprehensible by participants of Internet film discussion boards. Interestingly, not one review or discussion examined for this dissertation raised concerns about the film’s use of religious imagery or the presence of Filip, who is one of the very few overtly and unashamedly homosexual figures in Polish main stream (that is non-independent) post-WW2 cinema. Furthermore, Filip is a sought-after architect commissioned to design residential and public utility buildings, including an impressive Catholic church that he visits with a group of soldiers before he makes them an accessory to his suicide. During the church visit, Filip assumes god-like qualities when he stakes his claim to being the creator of the church, the creator obsessed with his creation. Of course, the reversal of his claim highlights the official lack of reciprocity by the Catholic Church in general. Filip delivers his claims to an awe-inspiring, impressively-lit monumental cross, which is part of his design. His performance in the church scene escalates into a dance more reminiscent of Mephisto than of a grand creator, although in the meantime he also requests that soldiers frolicking on the altar show the respect owed to it.

Egoists includes other references to the Church and its symbolism. When Smutny returns home from Młody’s buck’s night with a “Polish prostitute from Lvov”, the moment of his return is shown from behind a 30-40 centimetre statue of the Virgin Mary, the type adorning many public and private places in Poland. Except this Virgin Mary is half submerged in a green fish tank and most likely a piece of iconoclastic conceptual art popular in some circles of Poland in the 1990s. Religion and the values associated with it are explained

⁷⁰ Małgorzata Sadowska, “Moje miasto nocą,” *Film 2* (2001): 59.

⁷¹ Also Żurawiecki, “Kino,” 30-33.

most emphatically in a scene in which Smutny asks Młody what the latter believes in. Młody replies “Me! I believe in me!” When Smutny enquires about Młody’s attitude to love, the reply is “I like MYSELF”.⁷² In *Egoists* the traditionally and politically sanctified value of motherhood is reduced to Ilona’s irresponsible pregnancy, which concludes in a premature lonely birth, as well as two phone calls; one to Anka minutes before her departure to inform her, to her visible disappointment, that her mother would not make it in time, and another by a drunken soldier during the orgiastic party to tell his mother that “the boys are awesome”. In all three instances, the Polish mother is someone either functionally disfigured (Ilona and Anka’s mother) or falsified by the reality that is presented to her (the young soldier’s mother).

Egoists’ iconoclastic force is enriched by the use of colour. The film’s mise-en-scene and lighting are in most cases in green and blue tones, with an occasional red accent, including the mini-coat of “the Polish prostitute from Lvov”, Młody’s shirt, an occasional lipstick or handbag. Mostly set in chic urban spaces, when the action of the film migrates to the bank of the Vistula river just outside Warsaw, it happens almost by accident, and the characters are not comfortable with it until they find a bottle of vodka. The careful, if not overdrawn, aesthetics of *Egoists* owe a lot to Trelński’s self-proclaimed inspiration by *La Dolce Vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960),⁷³ and his own vast operatic experience. His intent on scandalising his audiences is also clear from the outset, given his choice of one of the script’s co-authors, Manuela Gretkowska, a bestselling author, whose other script credit includes the scandalous *She-Shaman* [*Szamanka*] (Andrzej Żuławski, 1996), a film that culminates in a scene in which its female protagonist consumes her lover’s brain. As in *She-Shaman*, the order of (traditional, non-decadent, non-

⁷² Cf. A statement by Bart Lonergan (Ernest Borgnine) in *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954)

⁷³ Modrzejewska, “Słodkie życie,” 121.

hedonistic) values is not restored at the end of *Egoists*; life goes on despite, not because of, life's "natural order".

Of all the films discussed in this chapter, *Egoists* is one that represents the post-transitional re-gendering of Poland in the most feverish way. As already discussed in Chapter 2, traditionally, the shape of Polish nationhood formed the main axis of cultural debates. After 1989, when the sovereignty of the Polish state deemed it less pertinent to the collective wellbeing, the focus of these debates turned also to the positioning and the structure of gender roles in film and beyond it. *Egoists* is a fete of non-reproductive sexuality, in which Narcissistic love seems to be the only thing capable of surviving. Any other type of heterosexual or homosexual love-relationship is either illusory or eventually destructive. In this way, both *Hi Tereska* and *Egoists*, despite their focusing on the (apparent) winners and losers of the commercialising changes, suggest a pessimistic view of Polish new realities. They interrogate these realities and the individual within them, and find her or him at loss, adrift from themselves (especially true of *Egoists*) and incapable of making what could seem a constructive choice for their individual wellbeing.

Choices and alternatives

The idea of a choice belongs to the same family of concepts as freedom. Freedom understood in the essentially capitalist context means freedom to consume, and that is what underlies the ethos of success, which is a means of securing that freedom. That is the assumption explored in *Pigs* and *Egoists*. This is also an assumption challenged in *Debt*, while *Hi Tereska* explores the possibility of that freedom at the margins of the transitional

society. The protagonists of the multi-award winning⁷⁴ *Edi* and *Squint Your Eyes* exercise the same right of choice to seek alternatives to the freedom to consume. These films' protagonists' choices are executed with forethought in the atmosphere of confident content permeating the two films. *Edi*'s alternative to the ethos of success lies in renunciation. *Squint Your Eyes*' alternative comes from a reclusive individualism, which – although not specific to Poland – could be expected to mark a new chapter in the theme of voluntary exile in Polish films.

The blessings of castration

Based on a story of a Buddhist monk who is accused of fathering the child of a village girl, *Edi* (Trzaskalski, 2002) is a tale of a scrap-metal collector Edi (Henryk Gołębiowski) who is alleged to have raped Princess [Księżniczka] (Aleksandra Kisio). Edi is secretly in love with Princess who is the sister of “the Brothers”, who are bosses of a small mafia that specialises in illegal alcohol trade. By accusing Edi of raping her, Princess attempts to protect her love and the real father of the baby, Gypsy [Cygan] (Dominik Bąk), from her brothers' wrath. She does not anticipate that, as a result of her accusation, her brothers will castrate Edi and bestow on him the responsibility of raising the child, both of which he accepts without a word of complaint. Together with the baby and his sidekick, Jureczek (Jacek Braciak), Edi moves to the country, to give the baby a better life in the house he once owned, which now belongs to his brother, who has also appropriated Edi's former girlfriend. The film ends with Edi and Jureczek returning to their life in Łódź after the Brothers, Princess and Gypsy reclaim the baby.

⁷⁴ *Edi* received the Grand Prix in Cleveland, awards at festivals in Berlin, Newport and multiple awards at festivals in Poland, including one for the cinematography by Krzysztof Ptak. *Squint Your Eyes* received 15 awards, mainly at festivals in Poland, and also in Mannheim-Heidelberg.

The opening scenes of *Edi* provide for an ambiguous set up. First, the screen is filled with an image of a water surface with increasingly frantic raindrops falling onto it to produce an escalating sound of rain and an approaching storm. This scene then cuts to the opening credits, after which a boy on a small wooden jetty on a lake throws a stick into the water, which carries it slowly away. The next sequence shows Edi wheeling Jureczek along one of the four traffic lanes. Jureczek is drunk and feeling guilty, because of his drunkenness, about not being able to collect a large metal oven from the street. The following scene shows a queue of scrap metal collectors, including Edi and Jureczek, selling their daily finds to get money for alcohol. The disharmony between the purifying rain, peaceful lake and the ugliness of drunken swollen faces in the sordid dark building that is the purchasing centre creates a tacit conflict of judgement about Edi, which gets resolved slowly as the film's story progresses to eventually interpret it in the manner intended by the director, as Edi's "internal holiness".⁷⁵

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, *Edi* earned its director the status of a Messiah⁷⁶ for the film's portrayal of Edi, the choices he makes, and the manner in which he realises them, while existing on the margins of Polish capitalist society. In one scene, in a bout of anger, Princess attributes to Edi the characteristics of a great Messianic literary figure of Polish Romanticism, Kordian. Yet, Edi's Messianism moves beyond the one commonly associated with great Romantic heroes significant for the mythology of Polish nationhood. His unfulfilled love and the tragedy of castration do not produce an anguished desperation characteristic of a Romantic hero, but are taken by Edi with stoic calm as another experience to learn from about his own and others' lives, and

⁷⁵ Piotr Trzaskalski in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz and Bogdan Sobieszek, "Przez dziurkę w murze," *Film 11* (2002): 70-71.

⁷⁶ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," *Film 11* (2002): 64-66.

the give-and-take that they bring. And, this giving and taking also comes in a materialist, consumerist form.

Throughout the film it is Jureczek who expresses most overtly his affinity with materialism, despite his destitute existence. When his dream of possessing his own television set gets realised, with Edi's support, it is a purely symbolic act. Jureczek and Edi's home has no electricity, so the object of possession is emptied of its functional value. Jureczek also oscillates between two different definitions of happiness, both of which have to do with the consumption of material possessions. On the one hand, having a television set and enough alcohol is what makes him happy, and having more of it would make him even happier, by his own admission. On the other hand, he finds pleasure in giving his beloved television set away to Edi's brother, Andrzej (Tomasz Jarosz), and his wife, Krystyna (Małgorzata Flegler). This act of giving follows one by Edi earlier in the film, when he sells all his books, his pride and joy, to buy a toy car, which is a gift dreamt of by a son of their colleague who was killed by the Brothers. In doing this, Edi recognises the value that consumerism brings to others. He delivers the toy to the boy without making himself known, and announces to Jureczek that Christmas is whenever one wants it to be. To do this, however, Edi renounces the only material possession of significance to him; his books. For lack of a better place, Edi keeps them in a dysfunctional fridge, and for him they are an entry point to a paradise of words. Written words for Edi are eternal. They last forever, unlike other material possessions which he and Jureczek encounter in some more affluent residential streets, and which "are here today and gone tomorrow."

That and other renunciations by Edi, including that of his manhood, are interpreted by Polish critics as therapeutic for Polish audiences and society at large. In the words of Tadeusz Sobolewski,

[Edi] does win, albeit a Christian or Buddhist victory, but he wins by sacrifice, by giving up. Therefore, it is a film about a winner. It says that you have your life and no one can take it away from you. The film appeals to a certain kind of anxiety, which is quite common, that we will have things taken away from us, that superannuation will disappear, banks will collapse, that money will have no value. People don't have a sense of the durability of it all. This film appeals to that. At the same time it points to a spiritual solution.⁷⁷

That spiritual solution is by default non-material, although not necessarily non-materialist. Edi, and Jureczek especially, do not reject materialism, but simply subscribe to values that are more important, although this realisation takes a while to arrive for Jureczek, who at the end of the film not only gives up his television set, but also throws money back at the Brothers, who offer it as a compensation for the castration and the baby being taken away from Edi.

The theme of castration coincides with Edi taking on parental responsibilities for Princess's baby boy, and it opens a plethora of symbolic interpretations. Krzysztof Kłopotowski interprets it as follows:

Edi is for Jureczek the symbol of the super-ego, from which he learns life's rules. In turn, Jureczek is a symbol of Edi's undeveloped manhood – it is expressed with a great difficulty and that's why Jureczek stutters. Caring for that poor fellow means that Edi subconsciously desires his masculine aspect to develop and reach (masculine)

⁷⁷ Tadeusz Sobolewski, personal interview, 11 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

maturity. Despite that, he sacrifices it, allowing himself to be castrated to save another human being.⁷⁸

This interpretation may be taken even further to suggest that in exchange for his masculinity, Edi saves Gypsy's manhood, and is free-er to focus entirely on the baby boy and his upbringing. This argument is supported by the scene in which Edi explains to the baby boy how his life will progress, his monologue being a direct consequence of Jureczek's questioning Edi for the first time about the castration, the questioning that meets Edi's silence. Also supportive of this argument is Edi's conversation with his brother, Andrzej, in which the latter muses on the strangeness of life; Edi has a baby but no woman, and Andrzej has a woman but no baby.

That imbalance of traditional gender and parenting roles extends more broadly across different characters in the film. The only two viable, stable relationships are that of childless Krystyna and Andrzej, and only at the end of the film that of Princess and Gypsy. Krystyna possesses all the characteristics of a Polish Mother, strong yet feminine, independent yet devoted to her husband, but cannot have a child with him. Princess seems to have evolved from being a young angry female, driven by her sexual desires, into a more mature woman possibly capable of being a mother. The portrayal of masculinity in *Edi* is more problematic. Edi represents a saint, who rises above the issues of gender as the story develops, and the same may also be said of Jureczek, his pupil. Other scrap-collectors are defined more by alcoholism than gender. The Brothers are tough but erratic and exist in a gender vacuum, since they are not affiliated with any females. Gypsy is passive and quiet. And the only man who is apparently and traditionally masculine in his appearance, Andrzej, cannot fulfil his longing for parenthood, which – according to the traditional values embedded in Polishness – would constitute a final destination of his manhood. The cycle of “tough” filmic

⁷⁸ Kłopotowski, “Jutrzenka,” 65.

masculinities of the early stages of transitions is replaced in *Edi*, as well as in *Hi Tereska* and other post-transitional films, by portrayals of men who do not express their masculinity, or are prevented from expressing it, in the sense defined by the traditional values. They are freed from it by the new post-Romantic Polish circumstance. At the same time, however, Edi follows the lead of Kordian, a tragic national literary figure, in becoming a Messiah. His (Romantic) self-sacrifice is done not in the name of national, but of individual deliverance, a different type of heroism to that cherished by Polish Romantic ethos.

The disrupted world of traditional wholesome parenting and family patterns is paralleled by the world of religion (or its absence) which is present in *Edi* only in one scene, the funeral of Edi's colleague killed by the Brothers. The cemetery at which it takes place is situated on a hill with a panoramic view of Łódź's suburbs full of blocks of flats. The widow presents to the mourners and to her dead husband a eulogy that is in stark contrast to the usual solemnity of an occasion like this. It is filled with the curses of the woman left alone with a young son, and now expected to fend for both of them. The eulogy culminates with an emphatic "fuck you!" as the widow walks away from the fresh grave. This scene is the only manifestation of Catholicism in the film. Even the usual places on the walls of interiors filmed in *Edi* are not adorned with the staple of crosses or statues of the Virgin Mary, but with kitschy landscapes (the Brothers' and Edi's homes) and a love scene (Princess's room) instead. That degradation or disappearance of religious symbols is compensated for by Edi's holiness and the purifying symbolism of water, which washes over Edi after the castration scene, and which returns repeatedly in the country scenes.

In general, the country and life in it are harmonious and idyllic. The rural landscape is green rather than grey, which is the colour of Łódź's streets and of the urban interiors of homes and cheap bars that are the backdrop in *Edi*.

In one scene, Edi walks with the baby into the birch-wood forest, which is a staple landscape of many Polish films, including heritage films. The next scene shows Edi and Jureczek cutting birch wood, which in this instance undergoes a functional transformation from its aesthetic manifestation of a “typically Polish” landscape, and points to the self-sufficiency of the country. The musical theme that punctuates the whole film takes on a different meaning here; it is more in tune with the landscape as well as the internal states of people who inhabit it, including Edi and Jureczek. The same flowing, liquid-like musical theme accompanying the harsh and sordid urban setting produces an aesthetic dissonance, which is absent from the country. This effect is enhanced by the cinematographer, Krzysztof Ptak, and his long sweeping takes, longer and more fluid in the country than in the Łódź streets and interiors. Most reviewers, if they do discuss the significance of the country versus the city, frame the former as a heaven, a paradise, and the latter as an urban hell,⁷⁹ to which Edi and Jureczek return, because – according to Edi – their life there is “theirs and nobody else’s”.

Although Trzaskalski himself refuted any claims to the role of a socially-responsible filmmaker,⁸⁰ and cited Wajda as the most proficient at doing so,⁸¹ insisting that his *Edi* was a personal film about love, rather than a social observation,⁸² film reviewers and audiences received it differently. Bogdan Sobieszek, for instance, writes that “Trzaskalski juxtaposes his film with the atmosphere of omnipresent complaints, helplessness and defeat. He looks for hope and consolation. And even though he finds it in a scrap-yard, his film makes us believe him.”⁸³ Sobieszek sees the universalism of the film’s

⁷⁹ For instance, Kłopotowski, “Jutrzeńka,” 65.

⁸⁰ Piotr Trzaskalski in an interview with Demidowicz and Sobieszek, “Przez dziurkę,” 70.

⁸¹ Piotr Trzaskalski in an interview with Elżbieta Błaszkievicz, “Artysta, czyli głupiec,” *Kino* 11 (2004): 9-10.

⁸² Piotr Trzaskalski in an interview with Błaszkievicz, “Artysta,” 9-10.

⁸³ Bogdan Sobieszek, “*Edi*,” *Film* 11 (2002): 93.

messianic message delivered through a story of a person on the margins of Polish contemporary life. But it is not the margin that matters here so much as how a human existence may be moulded to deliver sainthood regardless of its material or materialist condition. Ironically, this kind of liberation has been induced by the freedoms that arrived in Poland with capitalism, which also produced the ethos of success. Fortunately and at last, over a decade after the symbolic end of the old regime, these filmic stories present alternatives to that ethos, alternatives which exist alongside it rather than in opposition to it, and which are the first sign of the beginning of a resolution to the trauma of transitions.

The pleasures of escapism

Trzaskalski's *Edi* (2002) and Jakimowski's *Squint Your Eyes* (2003) inspired discussions of each film's relation to the lived reality of contemporary Poland, with the latter also receiving a Passport of *Polityka*, a respected public affairs magazine, which was granted to it for the film's extraordinary contribution to Polish culture and its "universalism and localism".⁸⁴ Michał Oleszczyk describes the Poland of *Squint Your Eyes* as one ready for hope and different from the cynical world of Pasikowski, or the world filled with bitterness found in the Cinema of Moral Concern of the 1970s. In the films mentioned here, and many films of the Cinema of Moral Concern, a protagonist rebels or attempts to rebel,⁸⁵ yet that rebellion is realised in a different way in new Polish films. In *Squint Your Eyes* it is a particular kind of philosophically motivated escapism. One significant factor determining the shape of that escapism is that its director, Andrzej Jakimowski earned a Master's degree in philosophy. According to him, the lead character, Jasiek (Zbigniew Zamachowski) is a modern Socrates, "a true teacher – he doesn't depend on

⁸⁴ Magda Sendekca, "Kronika: Paszport dla Jakimowskiego," *Kino 2* (2004): 7.

⁸⁵ Michał Oleszczyk, "Pomiędzy negacją a afirmacją – bohaterowie kina polskiego w poszukiwaniu wolności," *Kino 9* (2004): 46.

anyone apart from his own thoughts.”⁸⁶ For Jakimowski, Jasiek is a rare humanist, a person marginalised in the contemporary (post-1989) Poland, one who does not reject capitalism and material riches, who instead chooses to focus on other, and to him more important, ways of conducting his life.⁸⁷ Following the philosophical thread, *Squint Your Eyes* is inspired by Jakimowski’s attempts to explain the death of his mother to his daughter. Hence the film’s protagonist’s insistence that nothing passes, it is just that “things move away” and “if we flow over them, we can see everything at the same time.”

The plot of *Squint Your Eyes* evolves around the relationship of Jasiek (Zbigniew Zamachowski of *Hi Tereska*) and Mała (Olga Prószyńska) a girl in her early teens. She is in hiding from her parents at Jasiek’s. Her parents are a well-to-do couple who reappear through the film to reclaim her, ineffectively. The relationship between Jasiek and Mała is one of equals, and Zamachowski’s character in *Squint Your Eyes* as well as his relationship with Mała, differ from that depicted in *Hi Tereska*. As Jakimowski delivers his tale in small increments, Jasiek and Mała teach each other and learn about loyalty and the relationship they have together and with other significant people. In addition, Jasiek’s past and the choices he has made to take the job of a watchman in a small agricultural estate that is falling apart, most likely the remains of a socialist collective farming unit, are slowly revealed as the story progresses. A procession of small events marking the quaint life in the country allow Mała to return to her estranged rich parents, and propel Jasiek to walk away at the end of the film. He seeks another life-stop elsewhere, but

⁸⁶ Andrzej Jakimowski in an interview with Janusz Wróblewski, “Władze boli wiedza,” *Polityka* 4 (24 January 2004): 50.

⁸⁷ Andrzej Jakimowski in an interview with Wróblewski, “Władze,” 51.

only after he teaches Mała how to see “the past and the present at the same time” because “nothing passes away”.

Unlike Edi, Jasiek has explored the option of following the path of success chosen by his friends, who at some stage visit him in new expensive cars, well-dressed and apparently well-to-do. They tease him for not keeping in touch and organise a spontaneous party at his place with dance music by popular European DJs. Jasiek is visibly respected by them and accepted as one of them. In various conversations throughout the film, it becomes obvious that he has a Master’s degree, can speak French and ancient Greek, has written a book, and has given away his car and his woman “into better hands”. Yet, this does not impress Mała’s father for whom, according to Mała, Jasiek is a nobody (Polish “zero”), because he does not even have a car. Jasiek accepts that judgement stoically, repeating to Mała “Ok, I am a nobody”. He also delivers lessons on values beyond materialism to Mała, when he asks the girl to get her father a present that she cannot buy in the shop. He also refutes an argument of Mała’s mother (Małgorzata Foremniak), who tells him that everything at home revolved around the girl, by saying that everything in his abode revolves around the pole in the middle, but no one talks to it. And, he accuses Mała’s father (Andrzej Chyra⁸⁸) of dishonesty, because he told his daughter that he liked a stolen police badge she presented to him, and then he took it to the police. While teaching Mała and her parents values beyond capitalist materialism, Jasiek himself does not reject pleasures that come with material affluence.

When Mała’s father sends over to Jasiek a French celebrity hairdresser to shave him in the hope that Jasiek would accept a different job where a

⁸⁸ Andrzej Chyra is also Gerard in *Debt*.

shaven face is required, Jasiek accepts the gift, despite initially saying that he does not feel like a shave. He changes his mind after a local acquaintance, a young male just released from prison, tries to convince him that if he accepts it, he would be a point of ridicule for everyone. Following that, Jasiek, the young male and the male's sister get the same haircut à la Moby (English DJ). When the young man complains that he is laughed at, Jasiek points out to him that neither Jasiek nor the sister have the same problem. Of course, the tacit message here is that it is fear that is laughable, not an action itself, and the real freedom is freedom from fear, not from anything else.

Interestingly, Ewa Mazierska sees both *Squint Your Eyes* and *Edi* as films underlined by a deep critique of capitalism and the ethos of money rather than one proposing a different hierarchy of values from that which comes with the unquestionable acceptance of the ethos of success. Mazierska also argues that, in this critique, rich women, wives and sisters of rich men, are portrayed in a more negative light than men.⁸⁹ This is, according to her, evident in the fact that it is Mała's father, not her mother, who in the closing sequences of the film ends up learning from his daughter how to see a multi-layered reality independent of time.⁹⁰ Yet the father is also subject to ridicule. After promising his wife that he would talk to Jasiek, the father spends a night in his convertible in front of Jasiek's place. The next morning, Jasiek knocks on the window of the car with the sleeping father inside and offers him some tea. The scene that follows is wonderfully absurd. Jasiek positions a chair next to the car, and the two men drink tea while conducting a conversation punctuated by silences; the father confined in a convertible, Jasiek in the open space and plenty of room to stretch. Again, this scene could be read as a humorous metaphor concerning the assumed sources of freedom and confinement.

⁸⁹ Ewa Mazierska, "Uciec jak najbliżej," *Kino 9* (2004): 72.

⁹⁰ Mazierska, "Uciec," 72.

Squint Your Eyes in general affords the strongly absurd brand of humour, which, though not widely known outside Poland, is distinctive of Polish culture.⁹¹ For instance, in one scene reminiscent of the absurdities of the old system, Jasiek refuses to sign a new work contract. The old one, already signed, has been lost, but according to Jasiek, this is inconsequential because, once signed, an agreement stands. The administrative envoy cannot understand that it is possible for Jasiek not to sign the new contract. To this Jasiek answers with a humour typical of the (il)logic of the old times: “I can not-sign it. I have just not-signed it. Would you like me to not-sign it again?”

Squint Your Eyes was received in Poland as a film about freedom, about the third alternative to the two customary approaches to life – conformism and rebellion.⁹² Tadeusz Sobolewski describes the film’s effects on the audiences in the following way: “This film causes us to hold our heads high, because there is no point in childish complaint, our immemorial Polish complaint, because this disillusionment⁹³ demands that we stand up to it, that we demonstrate the strength of our character.”⁹⁴ Therefore, according to *Squint Your Eyes*, the third way of approaching life is to accept its misgivings and find a means of living in a capitalist Poland without compromising one’s own hierarchies of values, while also not necessarily rejecting the benefits that a changed Poland brings to an individual.

⁹¹ Mirosław Przyłpiak, personal interview, 15 September 2004, Gdynia (attached in Appendix 2).

⁹² Oleszczyk, “Pomiędzy negacją,” 46.

⁹³ Tadeusz Sobolewski repeatedly refers to Polish cinema of the late 1990s and early 2000s and that time as the “time of disillusion”, in which Poles are searching for new values, after realising that neither the socialist and nor capitalist values are universally superior to any others.

⁹⁴ Tadeusz Sobolewski, personal interview, 11 July 2003, Warsaw (attached in Appendix 2).

Conclusion

The broad range of brief film analyses in this chapter give evidence to the existence and the evolution of the ethos of success, which is the main transitional ethos of the first 15 years of the post-1989 Poland. In so doing, this chapter has focused on films that question the validity of that ethos (*Pigs*, *Debt* and *Egoists*), films that show the worlds excluded from it (*Hi Tereska*) and films that present alternatives to it (*Edi* and *Squint Your Eyes*). Although the trajectory of this ethos is not as clear-cut as this chapter implies, and is paralleled by the traditional distrust of financial success in Poland, the evidence offered here is indicative of the general cultural and filmic trends, which progressively seek to position the desire for personal freedoms either within, outside or alongside capitalist and/or materialist longings. While Franz Maurer had to rebel against the old and the new system to comply with the requirements of the Polonised action genre, and Adam, Stefan, Anka, Smutny and Tereska are not strong enough to withstand the pressures and possibly destructive pleasures of their situation, Edi and Jasiek offer a way out, which is also a way in, one not based on personal compromises and not propelled by self-destructive forces.

As outlined in the previous chapters, the evolution of the ethos of success is paralleled by changes in the type of representation of masculinity and femininity. While females in the discussed films often lose their nationally sanctified status and are mostly represented as reflections of the processes undergone by men, the nuances of post-transitional re-gendered masculinity in these films are given prominence in the view of the domination of Polish cinema industry by men and the characters they create. The shifts from representing the (apparently) “tough” filmic men in the initial stage of transitions, gave way in the later stages to the representations of men emasculated by the process of transitions, yet slowly coming to terms with its effects and reclaiming their freedoms in, for instance, *Edi* or *Squint Your*

Eyes. The death of the “intelligentsia man”, which is also indicative of this process, is discussed in the next chapter, alongside the role of comedy in (post)transitional Poland.

7

Of (post)transitional comic relief

If we were to judge only by their films, the Poles would seem the most depressed people on earth.¹

Realism is not a formal term, but an ideological one, and it does not exclude the grotesque or the fantastic.²

Despite appearances, the term “Polish comedy” is not an oxymoron. Polish comedy has enjoyed a stable presence in Polish cinema since its beginnings. In the 1930s it was supported by a budding star system, which included actors like Mieczysława Ćwiklińska, Jadwiga Smosarska, Eugeniusz Bodo or Adolf Dymśa. In the post-WW2 history, it was realised in the dark satires of the late 1950s, in the use of irony, which frequently borrowed from the French boulevard comedy of the 1960s,³ in the comedy of the absurd in the 1970s,⁴

¹ Gerald Pratley, “Gdańsk: metaphors for Poland,” *Sight and Sound* 59: 1 (1989): 4.

² Artur Sandauer, literary critic, in Joachim Glensk, ed., *Współczesna aforystyka polska: antologia 1945-1984* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1986), 317.

³ Tomasz Jopkiewicz, “Ta nasza paranoja,” *Film* 51/52 (20-27 December 1992): 8-12. Also note that Roman Polański’s earlier films were perceived internationally as “dark” and “absurd”.

⁴ Some popular Polish comedies of the 1960s and 1970s include: Tadeusz Chmielewski’s *Where is the General?* (*Gdzie jest generał?* 1964), *How I Unleashed World War II* (*Jak rozpętałem drugą wojnę światową*, 1970), *I Hate Mondays* (*Nie lubię poniedziałku*, 1971), Sylwester Chęciński’s

and in commercially-minded comedies of the 1980s. Between 1992 and 2004 at least four Polish comedies were released in cinemas in Poland every year. The first Polish film after 1989 to sell more than 2 million tickets was Juliusz Machulski's pastiche comedy *Kiler* (1997). Every year since *Kiler*, the top twenty films shown in Polish cinemas include at least one, or more often three, Polish comedies. Almost half of the most commercially successful Polish films since 1989 are comedies. Yet, at the same time, Polish comedy is unlikely subject matter for a film scholar or a Polish film critic. While some dispute the overall existence of Polish popular film, for instance Anita Skwara in her often quoted article "Film stars do not shine in the sky over Poland: The absence of popular cinema in Poland,"⁵ more recently Dina Iordanova correctly argued that the historical problem of Eastern European popular cinema in general is in its lack of recognition rather than its lack of existence.⁶

In the context of criticism's neglect of Polish comedy, the aim of this chapter is to argue the cultural significance of post-1989 Polish comedy, and especially that of Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler* (1997) and Marek Koterski's *Day of the Wacko* [*Dzień świra*] (2002). Apart from its box-office success, the importance of *Kiler* lies in its universalising and commercialising tendencies, which are a strong yet not new undercurrent of post-1989 Polish filmmaking. *Day of the Wacko*, on the other hand, stems from a long tradition of the absurd and grotesque in Polish literature and film. Seen by more than 400 thousand cinema viewers, Koterski's film ridicules the Romantic ethos of a

Our Folks (*Sami swoi*, 1967), *Take It Easy* (*Nie ma mocnych*, 1974), *Love It or Leave It* (*Kochaj albo rzuć*, 1977). Stanisław Bareja's *Wife for an Australian* (*Żona dla Australijczyka*, 1964), not to mention Marek Piwowski's cult film *The Cruise* [*Rejs*] (1970).

⁵ Anita Skwara, "Film stars do not shine in the sky over Poland: The absence of popular cinema in Poland," in *Popular European Cinema*, eds. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), 220-231.

⁶ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 27-28.

socially responsible hero, whose unrealised longings of national and universal grandeur lost their validity in post-transitional Poland. The more detailed analyses of these two films and the way they represent Polish (post)transitional reality is preceded by a consideration of specificities of Polish comedy, its traditions and the reasons for its lack of recognition, followed by a discussion of the general theoretical boundaries of the comedic, which inform the subsequent film analyses in this chapter.

De-oxymoronising Polish comedy

The domestic neglect of Polish comedy in scholarly work and “serious” film criticism has its roots in the ethos of the socially responsible filmmaker and the perception of film as art in service to the Polish nation, rather than entertainment. Until recently and despite (or because of) their popular appeal, films whose objective was to entertain were seen as inferior and not worthy of a learned academic or critical pen in Poland. Despite popular comedies’ capacity to entertain by critiquing their social, political or cultural contexts, amongst Polish film critics and commentators the dominant belief was that as a genre popular comedy was incapable of undertaking serious social analysis and critique. That view had a major and lasting consequence in an implicit schism between “high” Polish comedy, which was socially responsible yet rarely undertaken in Polish cinema, and “low” Polish comedy, which was perceived as nothing more than “entertainment for the masses”. While neglected by Polish critics concerned with the national mission, Polish popular comedies, and popular cinema in general, remain a useful reference point for the formative experiences of a (Polish) viewer,⁷ in a process similar to the one discussed in the analysis of *Pigs* in the previous chapter. For instance, fragments of comic dialogue in popular films used to be and still are

⁷ This is done in the same way as Miller and McHoul describe in their study of popular culture, *Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).

appropriated into the vernacular, highlighting the cohesive function of popular comedy films.⁸ Furthermore, comedy more so than any other mode of filmic delivery allows for a cathartic release of social and cultural pressure, with which a particular group of viewers can identify. Andrew Horton argues that in the Soviet Union comedy used to serve as a mechanism helping to cope with the communist realities of everyday life, as well as its repetitive rituals and absurd regulations, which were largely inscrutable to an outsider.⁹ The same could be said in the case of Poland, which also implies at least one reason for the international invisibility of Polish comedies.

Many¹⁰ Polish comedies produced between the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern (1961-1976), a period of an intensified comedy output in Poland, are especially steeped in Polish specificity. While some set their comicality in the time of World War II, for instance Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Where is the General?* [*Gdzie jest generał?*] (1964), *How I Unleashed World War II* [*Jak rozpętałem drugą wojnę światową*] (1970) or Hieronim Przybył's *Women's Republic* [*Rzeczpospolita babska*] (1969), others focused on the contemporary absurdities of PRL life. For instance, in Marek Piwowski's cult film *The Cruise* [*Rejs*] (1970), the captain of a cruise down the Vistula River assumes a free rider (Stanisław Tym) is a "Cultural Activities Officer", popularly referred to as "KO", a function that is an organisational obligation for any leisure event organised in the PRL. The KO-impostor has no choice but to take his cultural duties seriously, and he organises a (sort of) democratically-elected cultural activities committee, and

⁸ Jacob Levine, ed., *Motivation in Humor* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 12.

⁹ Andrew Horton, *Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6; also Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky, "From accusatory to joyful laughter: restructuring the Soviet comic-satiric muse," *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 187-216.

¹⁰ Marek Haltof quotes that 24 out of all 119 productions released between 1961 and 1964 are registered as comedies. In Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 140.

orchestrates a series of meetings and discussions, grotesque performances and absurd trivia competitions. *The Cruise* gives an impression of an amateurish documentary, which is accentuated by unexpected cuts, seemingly unjustified close-ups and improvised “naturalist” dialogues, which inspire comparisons to Jacques Tati’s *Monsieur Hulot’s Holiday* [*Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*] (1953).¹¹ Its language is that of the convoluted “newspeech” of Gomułka’s time, and it includes one of the most cited monologues of Polish cinema: “In Polish film it is as follows: boredom [long pause] nothing happens [long pause] poor dialogues, very poor dialogues [long pause] in general, there is no action, nothing happens.” For Polish viewers, *The Cruise*’s monologues of this type provoke compulsive laughter in appreciation of the bygone absurdities of the PRL. At the same time the film’s underlying satire leaves non-Polish viewers perplexed if not – ironically so – bored.

Some other comedies of the 1960s and 1970s may also be perceived as didactic if not offensive to a foreign viewer for their unashamed praise of Polish superiority. Sylwester Chęciński’s popular trilogy, which includes *Our Folks* [*Sami swoi*] (1967), *Take It Easy* [*Nie ma mocnych*] (1974) and *Love It or Leave It* [*Kochaj albo rzuć*] (1978), tells a story of an ongoing family feud between the Karguls and the Pawlaks, two “marchland Poles”¹² families resettled at the end of World War II from the Eastern Lands to become, as they used to be in the Eastern Lands, neighbours in the PRL. The birth of their granddaughter puts a tentative end to their feud after their children defect to marry each other. When their relative in the U.S. demands a family photo from the two families, the Pawlaks bring out their newest colour television set and their little Fiat to impress American “John” Pawlak (Zdzisław

¹¹ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 141.

¹² “Marchland Poles” are discussed as an identity briefly in Chapter 2.

Karczewski) with their consumerist spoils (which are also relatively backward compared with the American consumerism of the time). The Karguls, on the other hand, present themselves for the family photo in traditional peasant attire to remind “John” of his Polish roots. Of course, the resulting argument between the Pawlaks and the Karguls destroys the “happy family” photo moment, but the message of that scene is clear – Poles’ pride is in their heritage, not in the goods they may (or may not) consume. Furthermore, when “John” Pawlak dies, and the heads of the families, Kazimierz Pawlak (Wacław Kowalski) and Władysław Kargul (Władysław Hańcza) together with their granddaughter Ania (Anna Dymna) are organising his funeral in Chicago, they are shocked by American violence and the fact that the burial sites for dogs in America are more sumptuous than those for humans (meaning, in Poland family heritage and family ancestors are not treated in such a disrespectful way). Their superiority is reconciled with the presumed foreign inferiority only after Ania discovers that “John’s” daughter, Shirley Gladys-Wright (Duchyll Martin-Smith), is black and, following the initial horror of this discovery, Kazimierz Pawlak decides that, after all, “John’s” daughter is also “a Pawlak girl”.

The forbearing self-deprecation in Polish comedies like *The Cruise* is also present to some extent in the *Our Folks* trilogy. The irrationality of internal squabbles, a stereotypically Polish trait, usually leads to dire consequences for the hot-headed squabblers. This type of Polish comedy constitutes its more populist brand, which (unlike films of the kind of *The Cruise* and very much like the war comedies mentioned above) intentionally pursues and courts a viewer comfortable with an operational set of stereotypes. Their Polish specificity relies on their setting, *mise-en-scene* and references to the Polish popular culture of the time. The type of humour manifested in *The Cruise*, on the other hand, is better described as “a mixture of the varied shades of Slav wit – more cerebral yet more aware of reality than, say, Russian, sharper and more grotesque than Czech humour, (...) [a] particular

blend of earthiness and cerebration, of absurdity and logic.”¹³ It is paralleled by its strong literary tradition in the works of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939) and his absurd theatre of “Pure Form” and catastrophic visions of the human condition,¹⁴ Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) and his grotesque prose stamping out the pathos of Polish Romantic longings,¹⁵ and Sławomir Mrożek (1930-) and his brand of the theatre of the absurd, in which the lack of individual and social freedoms is the axis of the absurdities of human relations.¹⁶ This “cerebral” mode of Polish humour is most readily taken up by the intelligentsia, and it is also turned back on that group’s representatives in *Day of The Wacko*, in which Koterski systematically deconstructs the ethos of the Polish intelligentsia using the very same tools of the absurd and grotesque that this ethos produced.

Apart from the comedies whose humour requires the understanding of Polish specificities, Polish post-WW2 comedy started to exhibit signs of universalist longings in the 1980s, partly encouraged by the official state politics of the time, and most notably realised in films by Juliusz Machulski. His second film, *Sexmission* [*Seksmisja*] (1984) is a tale of two men, Albert Starski (Olgiard Łukaszewicz) and Maksymilian “Maks” Paradys (Jerzy Stuhr), who after a period of hibernation are defrosted in the underground world in which only women have survived a historical Earth-wide catastrophe. The ruling

¹³ Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, “Sławomir Mrożek: the moulding of a Polish playwright,” in *The Tradition of Polish Ideals: Essays in History and Literature*, ed. W.J. Stankiewicz (London: Orbis Books, 1981), 205.

¹⁴ Bożena Danek-Wojnowska, *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz a modernizm. Kształtowanie idei katastroficznych* (Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow and Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1976).

¹⁵ For a wide-ranging problematisation of Gombrowicz’s prose, see Ewa Płonowska-Ziarek, ed., *Gombrowicz’s Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Elżbieta Sidoruk, *Antropologia i groteska w dziełach Sławomira Mrożka* (Białystok: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza, Zakład Teorii i Antropologii Literatury w Instytucie Filologii Polskiej – Filia Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w Białymstoku, 1995), 14-15.

League of Women has rewritten the history, so now Einstein and Copernicus are officially women, and crime has been invented by Cain, who first tried it on his sister Abel. For the sake of their happiness, Albert and Maks must undergo a sex-change operation so they can be freed from the evils of their maleness. Fortunately for them, a handful of old women still have a vague recollection of hetero-sexual pleasures, which they subtly convey to the females born into the feminised underground world, and which saves Albert and Maks from castration. With the help of two female converts, Albert and Maks manage to remain masculine by escaping to the surface to discover that there is life there after all. Resorting to little cultural specificity, *Sexmission* could be made in any language by any director courageous enough to propose that the world run exclusively by and for women might not be the ultimate utopian dream. When shown to American and English students of Polish film, *Sexmission*'s humour travels well to the point, where some students referred to it as one of the funniest films they have ever seen.¹⁷

In line with Juliusz Machulski's universalising tendencies, his films are often titled with foreign words, for instance his debut is titled *Vabank* [Polonised *Va Banque*] (1981) and it is styled on George Roy Hill's *The Sting* (1973). Other films include *Kingsajz* [Polonised *King Size*] (1988), *V.I.P* (1991), *Girl Guide* (1995), of course *Kiler* [Polonised *Killer*] (1997), *Vinci* (2004), and the internationally little known but masterly executed pastiche, *Déjà vu* (1988), a Polish-Soviet co-production, which quotes *ad lib* from American gangster movies and Soviet propagandist musicals, as well as recreating verbatim the Odessa stairs scene from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* [*Bronenosets Potyomkin*] (1925). With *Kiler* also being the site of postmodern

¹⁷ From conversations with Michael Stevenson of the University of Reading, and Elżbieta Ostrowska on her experience of teaching at the University of Pittsburgh.

intertextualities and pastiche, Machulski's "citatology"¹⁸ could earn him a place in the universal traditions of cinema, yet as is the case with other Polish comedies, his films are not widely known or written about outside Poland. This could be partially due to the continuing and overwhelming unavailability of sub-titled copies of Polish comedies. Only at the beginning of the 21st century and 15 years after the end of communism, has it started to be possible to obtain sub-titled DVD versions of films popular with millions of Poles. The next decade or two will attest to the possibility of Machulski's and other new universalist Polish comedies' international popularity, or it will irrevocably confine these comedies to the cultural boundaries of Polish nationhood. At the same time, increasing these films' accessibility for viewers does not have to mean their increased presence in scholarly or critical writings. These writings' ongoing aversion to popular cinema and comedies in particular, which in Poland stems from the status of the tradition of the socially responsible artist, also finds its expression in the poverty characterising writings on comedy in general.

Andrew Horton sees the reasons for this aversion in the enjoyment that comedy brings to the viewer, and the wide-spread belief that a scholarly scrutiny could destroy that enjoyment.¹⁹ However, as Andrew Horton notes, knowing does not need to imply destruction. An analysis does not have to obliterate the pleasure of comedy, but merely enable at least dual channelling of its reception; that of the intellect, and that of the intuitive and/or sensual pleasure or displeasure. Horton's other weighty assertion concerning scholarly neglect of comedy casts some responsibility for this neglect onto Aristotle, his *Poetics*, and their followers.²⁰ A significant portion of writings on comedy is under the aegis of the Aristotelian, therefore negative

¹⁸ A translation of a Polish neologism borrowed from Elzbieta Ostrowska.

¹⁹ Andrew Horton, "Beginnings: the unbearable lightness of comic film theory," *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford University of California Press, 1991), 2.

²⁰ Horton, *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, 2.

conceptualisation of comicality, and the frameworks they establish are often the key point of reference for comedy, which in Poland is further fortified by the traditional cultural pessimism discussed briefly in Chapter 2.

While many theorists would perceive the pleasure of comicality as resting in the release of aggressive drives and aesthetic and moral degradation, others, like George Meredith, in his often quoted work on comicality, argue that it carries the civilising power for nations,²¹ while others, like Sigmund Freud, contend that humour in general has a therapeutic value that expresses a rebellious way of getting rid of fears.²² Jacob Levine also follows Freud's lead in his statement that "humour is [...] one of a number of psychological processes which are functionally adaptive modes of withdrawal from reality into the world of imagination."²³ Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin, by taking comedy back to its carnival origins, constructs comedy as "the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance"²⁴ allowed by a temporarily suspended order of reality and preoccupation with the most basic human(ising) functions. This mode of theorising comedy places at its centre Comus, the Greek god of fertility, perpetual rebirth and eternal life²⁵ that happen with help from human recourse to humour and laughter. The world of comedy, therefore, allows release of uncomfortable assertions and, by allowing us to laugh at them, reduces their distractive and destructive potential. Probably the most significant assertion on comedy, and filmic comedy in particular, is that by Andrew Horton, who – similarly to Harry Levin

²¹ George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897).

²² Jacob Levine, "Humour as a form of therapy: Introduction to Symposium," in *It's a Funny Thing, Humour*, eds. Anthony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Sydney, Paris and Frankfurt: Pergamon Press, 1977), 127.

²³ Jacob Levine, "Humour," 128.

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Carnival ambivalence," in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London, New York, Sydney & Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1994), 199.

²⁵ Susanne Langer, "The comic rhythm," in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), 124.

– suggests that the 20th century comedy brought an amalgamation of the subject and object of laughter,²⁶ a claim encapsulated by the Gogolian “What are you laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves.”²⁷

Theorising comedy and comicality

Comical people, things and events do not constitute comedy in themselves, but comedy cannot exist without them. Most people find comicality or comical events a pleasurable if not necessary part of human communication and existence. Yet, many scholars who concern themselves with this subject matter, are not complimentary in their analysis. Illustrative of that negative evaluation of the comic and comedy is the aesthetic approach undertaken by Aristotle in his *Poetics*:

As for comedy, it is ... an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not reproductive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.²⁸

Despite Aristotle's insistence on the dissociation of the reaction to comicality from the reaction to pain, Peter L. Berger makes the point that laughter at the comic is an essentially malign phenomenon, which usually has to do with

²⁶ Andrew Horton, *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, 10.

²⁷ Nikolai V. Gogol, *The Government Inspector*, trans. D.J. Campbell (Melbourne, London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1961, 1947), 91.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941, 1459): cited in Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 18.

belittling others, especially those who are different from “us”.²⁹ Some other proponents of - what is later referred to as - Moral Theory or Theory of Degradation are Thomas Hobbes and Alexander Bain. James Sully in *An Essay on Laughter* points to a forced desire to render incongruity devoid of degradation as a possible source of comicality.³⁰ Such a process carries with it a possibility of hurt for belittled characters, and it implies the desire to degrade others. If this is the case, the pleasure of comicality in comedy should be divorced from any identification with its characters, unless spectators enjoy belittling themselves, or unless they are prepared to surrender their idealised versions of themselves.

In the Polish case, the tradition of national self-deprecation had been particularly prevalent in literature and film, yet in most cases in the post-WW2 history it has been delivered from the heights of the ethos of the intelligentsia, suggesting a superior standpoint, from which it is possible to laugh at others. Koterski's *Day of the Wacko* is a departure, however slight, from that tradition because it does not offer a vantage point that would make anyone in Poland immune to the film's ridicule. If *Day of the Wacko* is the measure of degradability, then according to it no-one is superior to anyone, and by laughing at its protagonists, a Polish viewer, especially a member of the intelligentsia, cannot help but laugh at oneself. In this way, *Day of the Wacko* affords a carnivalesque pleasure to its viewers, despite its attempts to ridicule the intelligentsia. It does so by recourse to the mechanisms of comicality encapsulated in its theories of incongruity.

In the Intellectual Theory, or Theory of Contrariety or Incongruity, humour is contained not in the sign of degradation of others, but in “the nullification of a

²⁹ Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 55-61.

³⁰ James Sully, *An Essay on Laughter, Its Form, Its Causes, Its Development, and Its Value* (London, New York, Bombay and Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co, 1907), 119-123.

process of expectation or of an expectant tendency” otherwise referred to as incongruity. “It is [a] perfectly disinterested intellectual process which brings about the *feeling* of the ludicrous and its expression of laughter.”³¹ The theories of incongruity evolve around the Kantian principle of experience seen as “fundamentally a rational process”,³² which brings the Theory of Incongruity closer to the Polish tradition of humour and its cerebral connections. Seen this way, humour is a crack in the plane of reason, a crack, which shows reason’s inadequacies in instances where it is taken literally without any adjustments to accommodate irrationality which is an essentialist element of the human condition. In principle, this process is similar to a possibility of employing logic to achieve conclusions that are logically true, yet inadvertently absurd in their relation to physical reality. In this manner, humour lies in the surprise of reason’s failure, which could be perceived within the limits of the Theory of Degradation, if reason were to be the superior human value.

In the context of comedic films produced within a national culture, incongruity would only be comic if it allowed for a slight paradigm adjustment rather than threatening the established cultural *status quo*, especially in the case of comedies that achieve reasonable popularity. This is also a conclusion that Sully arrived at in 1907. In his words:

The most promising way of bringing the several laughable qualities and aspects of things under one descriptive head would seem to be to say that they all illustrate a presentation of something in the nature of a defect, a failure to satisfy some standard-requirement, as that of law or custom, provided that it is small enough to be viewed as a harmless plaything. Much, at least, of our laughter at the

³¹ Sully, *An Essay*, 125.

³² Sully, *An Essay*, 125.

odd as opposed to the customary, at the deformed, at failure in good manners and the other observances of social life, at defects of intelligence and of character, at fixes and misfortunes – so far as the situation implies want of foresight – at the lack of a perception of the fitness of things, and at other laughable features, may undoubtedly be regarded as directed to something *which fails to comply with a social requirement*, yet is so trifling that we do not feel called upon to judge the shortcoming severely.³³

In the case of the two films analysed later in this chapter, Sully's deliberations imply that by the virtue of their popularity, neither *Day of the Wacko*, and especially not *Kiler* constitute a threat to a post-transitional *status quo* in Poland. Therefore, the latter's universalising games of pastiche, and the former's ridicule of the Romantic ethos already fall within the broadly acceptable ways of perceiving (post)transitional reality.

According to Monro, with some minor adjustments to Sully's conceptualisation of it, comicality falls into the following categories:

- a. any breach of the usual order of events (e.g. bodily deformities)
- b. any forbidden breach of the usual order of events (e.g. gluttony)
- c. indecency (i.e. special case of the above)
- d. importing into one situation what belongs to another (i.e. incongruity)
- e. anything masquerading as something it is not
- f. word-play
- g. nonsense (i.e. absurd is a type of logically incongruous)
- h. small misfortunes (e.g. banana-skin slip)
- i. want of knowledge or skill (i.e. failed attempts to do something)

³³ Sully, *An Essay*, 139.

j. veiled insults (e.g. an adult version of children's "you are a donkey").³⁴ All of the above examples imply some type of disorder, deviation from the normal, thus also constituting the point of difference that, most importantly, emphasises and confirms normality, which is true in both cases, in *Kiler* as well as in *Day of the Wacko*. Furthermore, according to Henri Bergson, the comical aspect of the body lies in its divorce from the soul, in turning it into a machine-like entity performing actions separated from the expected (read: "normal") intentions of the body's owner,³⁵ an argument that can also be extended onto a social body, which can deviate from socially acceptable or desirable practices. Although Bergson insists on ambiguity, the key to his reading of comicality is in what he defines as its fundamental condition; suspending empathy for the object of laughter,³⁶ which places Bergson closer to theorists of comic degradation than to that of incongruity, and which implies a differentiation between the protagonists of *Kiler*, a likeable next-door male acted out by a popular star, Cezary Pazura, and the protagonist of *Day of the Wacko*, a neurotic representative of a dying breed of the degraded intelligentsia.

Traditionally, the main cleavage of the different ways of seeing a comical effect falls on the line separating degradation and incongruity as the essential definers of comicality. Their definitions change slightly, yet degradation is usually found in satire, the grotesque and parody, which are more often than not seen as attacking and belittling their comical objects, again a point especially valid in the case of *Day of the Wacko*, in which the degraded representation of the protagonist, Adaś Miauczyński (Marek Konrad), is calculated not to receive Polish viewers' empathy, but rather their forbearing condemnation of his Romantic longings. Charles Baudelaire sees as comical

³⁴ D.H. Monroe, *Argument of Laughter* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1951), 32-52.

³⁵ Henri Bergson, *Śmiech: esej o komizmie*, trans. Stanisław Ciechowicz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo KR, 2000), 31-38. (Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, 1 August 2003, (6 March 2005). <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4352>>.)

³⁶ Bergson, *An Essay*.

that which allows one to confirm one's superiority over the frailties of others, especially of disliked others,³⁷ which in the case of *Day of the Wacko* implies that Polish national identity defined by Romanticism and the intelligentsia is no longer a socially desirable aspiration of a Polish viewer. Incongruity, in which the source of laughter's pleasure is in two or more incongruent situations being drawn together for a comic effect, is more ambiguous and can be benign.³⁸ It serves as an intrusion,³⁹ diversion,⁴⁰ an interruption to stop the expected flow of events,⁴¹ and its main purpose is pleasure, relaxation and good will.⁴² This kind of comicality is present in *Kiler*, although at the same time the film is not devoid of attempts to ridicule and belittle supporting characters, who represent, for instance, new crime worlds.

More recent work fragments the topography of the comic, its forms and functions beyond this duality. For instance, in a 1972 publication *The Psychology of Humour*, Patricia Keith-Spiegel further divides theories of comicality to include Instinct Theory (comical effect as an adaptive in-built bodily function), Surprise Theories (an element of disruption to the expected), Ambivalence Theories (conflicting emotions), Release/Relief Theories (comical effect as an opening for a release), Configurational Theories (the same mechanism as in incongruity, but here the point of conjuncture surprises with its "rightness"), and Psychoanalytic Theory (super-ego taking on the repressed material to turn the forbidden into the acceptable).⁴³ One

³⁷ Charles Baudelaire, "On the essence of laughter, and, in general, on the comic in the plastic arts," (1855) in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, trans. Johanathan Nayne, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), 448-464.

³⁸ Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 60. Also The Rev. Dr. Bob W. Parrott, *Ontology of Humor* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1982).

³⁹ Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 66-69.

⁴⁰ Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 68-69.

⁴¹ Bergson, *An Essay*.

⁴² Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 99.

⁴³ Patricia Keith-Spiegel, "Early conceptions of humor: varieties and issues," in *The Psychology of Humor*, eds. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York and London: Academic Press, 1972), 4-34.

writer who influenced the development of several of the above types of theories, including Ambivalence, Release and Instinct Theories, is Sigmund Freud. Based on the limited material available to him in 1905, he concluded that comical effects reside in the subject rather than the object of laughter and the release of incongruity of two elements put together,⁴⁴ which indirectly gives rise to Horton's assertion that in the 20th century the merging of the object and subject of laughter are the most pertinent characteristic of comedy. This is also the basis of the following film analyses.

According to Freud, comicality is grounded in brevity and making up a new entity, be it a word or a set of ideas, whose roots are in two different entities, but which change significantly their meaning to arrive at the pleasure of humour.⁴⁵ Freud also differentiates between "innocent" or "abstract" jokes and humour which is "tendentious" and has an aim different from the joy of laughter,⁴⁶ but which can also be placed closer to the work of Aristotle and Hobbes on the spectrum of the theoretical search for humour's form and role in human lives. The "tendentious" comic is either "hostile", that is "serving the purpose of satire, aggressiveness, or defence" or it is "obscene", that is "serving the purpose of exposure". It serves as a release of natural hostility, which we are taught to hide.⁴⁷ The way that release is achieved (but also built up) is realised in a pleasurable recognition of the elements of a joke or comicality,⁴⁸ which is related to the duality of a humorous occurrence's structure and its derivative qualities. Freud emphasises that these types of comicality should be treated strictly separate from the "conceptual" or "abstract" (therefore innocent) comical effects.⁴⁹ He also claims that it is

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 31-46.

⁴⁵ Freud, *Jokes*, 47-131.

⁴⁶ Freud, *Jokes*, 132-162.

⁴⁷ Freud, *Jokes*, 146-161.

⁴⁸ Freud, *Jokes*, 170-172.

⁴⁹ Freud, *Jokes*, 140.

unlikely that the object of comedy can elicit laughter from the one who is being laughed at, which – again - minimises if not excludes the process of identification in reception of comedy films of a particular nationality. In this way, Freud's deliberations on the nature of comicality found their later reference points in Theory of Incongruity and of Degradation.

If the possibility of identification in the comical effect were to be considered a vantage point in the context of this essay, Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the carnivalesque comedy and laughter furnishes the other possibility residing in comicality, that is, its cohesive and universalising tendencies. In Bakhtin's words:

[Carnival laughter] is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (...) [A]nother important trait of the people's festive laughter [is] that it is also directed at those who laugh.⁵⁰

Although Bakhtin stresses that these universalising tendencies are not part of "the pure satire of modern times" (in which the satirist "places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it"⁵¹), it is still possible to identify the modern satirical elements of comedy that evoke identification with the object of laughter. The moments of identification and recognition are unstable and mixed with contempt for the object of mockery, but the two co-exist in different proportions in modern satire. That co-existence elucidates the

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, "Carnival ambivalence," 200-201.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, "Carnival ambivalence," 200-201.

ambiguity of the original duality between the comic conceived as degradation and as incongruity, and also is significant in the discussion of the sources of humour in the two films under more detailed consideration later in this chapter.

For the purposes of this dissertation all the preceding types of comic theory can be placed on a two-dimensional diagram. One dimension focuses the onus of comicality on the object, and runs between this object's disruptive, intrusive and degrading characteristics and its innocent, benign and joy-provoking incongruity. Another dimension refers to the subject, who finds the pleasure of humour and thus comedy somewhere between his/her desire to belittle others,⁵² the socially appropriate if not unexpected release of the build-up of constraints,⁵³ and the innocent pleasure of comedy, which resides in one's ability to (re)discover it and share it with others. Interestingly, the assumptions underlying particular theories, especially if their idea of comedy were to be placed within this scale, indicate the more general assumptions about human nature and the role of events and objects in the narrative of life. The clarity of well-defined approaches with either an optimistic or pessimistic view of human nature and life is enviable. Yet, it is also incomplete if it excludes – often *a priori* – the possibility of the co-existence of seemingly opposite distinctions, as is the case with *Kiler* and *Day of the Wacko*.

Capitalising on the range of approaches discussed above, the Polish (intelligentsia) tradition of the absurd and grotesque (with the latter being a mode of realisation of the absurd) lies in the subject's desire to belittle the undesirable national characteristics, which are represented in the object that exhibits logical incongruity and mental degradation. Polish laughter perceived in this way is, indeed, a serious matter as much as it is difficult to realise its

⁵² Sully, *An Essay*, 143-145.

⁵³ Sully, *An Essay*, 140.

comicality in a filmic product, something that Koterski managed to achieve in his *Day of the Wacko*. On the other hand, universalising comedies like *Kiler*, as well as some earlier Polish populist comedies, are more intent on finding the common ground of the shared experience of comical joy rather than belittlement, which by default implies behavioural incongruity or the carnivalesque rather than the mental degradation of the comical object. Yet, at the same time, the positioning of any comedy, and that of *Kiler* and *Day of the Wacko*, on the different comical continua that attempt to separate the subject of laughter from its object is open to a range of readings and interpretations. These readings and interpretations reveal an instability of such positioning which is exemplified in the analyses of the post-1989 Polish comedies, in which the points of comical pressure can be seen as representing points of cultural or social tension, and its release.⁵⁴

Comical pressure points in Polish (post)transitional comedy

By far the most common type of Polish (post)transitional comedy is the action/crime comedy, which after the success of *Kiler* takes on more and more Polish specificity, and which often overlaps with the cinema of the “Young Wolves”.⁵⁵ The most successful in that cohort is Olaf Lubaszenko’s *Boys Don’t Cry* [*Chłopaki nie płaczą*] with 548 thousand cinema tickets sold in 2000. It is a story of Kuba Brenner (Maciej Stuhr), a young violinist, who lands in the middle of mafia dealings when he tries to reclaim his parents’ valuable antique sculpture taken from his place by a pimp. Jacek Bromski’s 2002 *A Career of Nicky Dyzma* [*Kariera Nikosia Dyzmy*] with slightly over 400 thousand tickets sold is a parody of a TV miniseries of 1980, *A Career of Nick Dyzma* [*Kariera Nikodema Dyzmy*] (Marek Nowicki and Jan Rybkowski). In

⁵⁴ Paul Kline, “The psychoanalytic theory of humour and laughter,” in *It’s a Funny Thing, Humour*, eds. Anthony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Sydney, Paris and Frankfurt: Pergamon Press, 1977), 10-11.

⁵⁵ The term “Young Wolves” refers to some Polish action films made after 1989 about young people living fast at the edge of the law. For some more detail on the context of “Young Wolves” films, refer to Chapter 2.

Bromski's film, *Nicky Dyzma* (Cezary Pazura) is a simple young man living at the edge of unemployment. He finds himself bestowed with the favours of Polish politicians, diplomats and their wives after he abuses a man for spilling a drink at a high-flying party, which he accidentally gate-crashes. Nicky's lack of pretension is perceived as refreshing in an environment stifled by protocol and poisoned with political games, and his actions propel him on the trajectory of eventually becoming a presidential candidate.

E=mc² (Olaf Lubaszenko, 2002) is another action/crime comedy that enjoyed popularity with Polish viewers,⁵⁶ and it deserves special attention in the context of distinguishing between the "high" humour of the intelligentsia and populist humour in Polish comedy. Lubaszenko's film oscillates between criminal and impoverished academic milieus. Max Kadzielski (Olaf Lubaszenko), a young professor of philosophy, who attempts to get some extra income, advertises his services on the Internet. He offers to write Master's and Doctoral dissertations for a fee, a practice not uncommon in Eastern European countries before and after 1989. His first client is blonde "Stella" (Agnieszka Włodarczyk), the girlfriend of a Mafioso, Andrzej "Ramzes" Nowicki (Cezary Pazura). Her dissertation is to be on the topic of "The Archetype of the Little Red Riding Hood in the Light of Contemporary Pedagogical Research."

The point of interest in Lubaszenko's *E=mc²* here is that, although the academic - intelligentsia⁵⁷ milieu is represented as degraded, unaware of the surrounding realities and simply impoverished morally and financially, it has

⁵⁶ It sold 400 thousand tickets.

⁵⁷ Bożena Janicka, "Między nami doktorami," *Kino* 7-8 (2002): 49.

intellectual capital that may be attractive for the new aspiring crime elites in Poland, as Kłopotowski argues is the case.⁵⁸ After Ramzes compares himself unfavourably to other mafia bosses from around the world, he decides to get a Doctorate in philosophy, but a real one. For this, he also seeks Max's tutoring help. As a result of their alliance, Ramzes becomes a respected mafia boss, well versed in logical antinomies and inductionist logical empiricism in general. Max, on the other hand, gets Ramzes' blonde girlfriend and a contract in Brussels arranged by Ramzes' estranged father who is a discreet and well-connected *capo di tutti capi*, now proud of the achievements of his son who is unaware of the father's standing in his organised crime world. In this way, Lubaszenko's comedy reconciles the underlying motifs of *Kiler* and *Day of the Wacko*, and rather than "killing off" the old ethos of the intelligentsia, urges it to adjust to the post-transitional reality.

Other Polish post-transitional comedies include romantic comedies like *In Love [Zakochani]* (2000) by Piotr Wereśniak, who is also credited with writing *Kiler* and co-writing *Pan Tadeusz* (Wajda, 1999), and 2004 Polish box-office success, *Never Ever [Nigdy w życiu]* by Ryszard Zatorski, a directing assistant of earlier Machulski's films and a TV director in his own right. These, together with the successful *The Body* (Tomasz Konecki and Andrzej Saramonowicz, 2003),⁵⁹ in which a convoluted and surreal story of a dead body that swaps hands and assumes different identities, is told backwards, and other universalising post-transitional comedies are the context within which *Kiler* operates. *Day of the Wacko*, on the other hand, stems from the "serious" tradition of Polish comedy, which in post-1989 is exemplified by

⁵⁸ Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "Jutrzenka wielkości," *Film 11* (2002): 66.

⁵⁹ *The Body* was seen by 320 thousand cinema viewers in Poland.

other authorial films of Marek Koterski⁶⁰ and, for instance, Jerzy Stuhr. The latter's *Tomorrow's Weather* [*Pogoda na jutro*] (2003) falls within that tradition, being a comical morality tale attempting to restore the system of traditional values decayed by commercialisation and sexualization in post-transitional Poland. While Stuhr's films are also steeped in the metaphysics of Polish Christianity, Marek Koterski's comedies converse uninterruptedly with the ethos of the Polish intelligentsia ever since his first film *The House of Fools* [*Dom wariatów*] (1984) and his first post-1989 success of *Porno* (1990). Most of Koterski's films centre on the same character, whose name in *The House of Fools* (1984), *Not So Funny* [*Nic śmiesznego*] (1995), *Ajlawiu* [*I Love You*] (1999) and *Day of the Wacko* (2002) is Adam "Adaś" Miauczyński, first played by Marek Kondrat, then by Cezary Pazura, and in the last instalment of Adaś's saga, again by Marek Kondrat. Koterski's comical saga simultaneously celebrates "man's capacity to aspire and suffer", which may be defined as its tragic element, and "man's capacity to endure", which is the source of its comic effects.⁶¹ Combined, they produce an absurdly grotesque satire with elements of parody, which is intended by Koterski to have a therapeutic value for its (Polish) viewer.⁶²

Death by tickling: post-transitional intelligentsia in Day of the Wacko

Tadeusz Sobolewski in his collection of reviews of the most enlightening films of his life describes his reaction to *Day of the Wacko*:

I'm coming out of the screening of *Day of the Wacko*
washed out, ashamed, full of disgust for people, for this

⁶⁰ Marek Koterski in an interview with Krzysztof Demidowicz, "Na całość," *Film* 12 (1998): 114. (114-115). Also Bożena Janicka, "Seksio i Seksia," *Film* 7 (1999): 78.

⁶¹ Corrigan, *Comedy*, 3.

⁶² Marek Koterski quoted in Tadeusz Sobolewski, *Za duży blask: o kinie współczesnym* (Cracow: Znak, 2004), 33: and denied by Marek Koterski quoted in Bartosz Żurawiecki, "Marek Koterski – Nie tym tonem, Miauczyński!" in *Autorzy kina polskiego*, eds. Grażyna Stachówna and Joanna Wojniecka (Cracow: Rabid, 2004), 133.

country, for the director and for myself. This film is like an annoying guy who sits next to us on the bus and talks, infecting us with his frustration. (...) Maybe he is insane? Yet, he is too much like us. Bothersome. After a while, the disgust disappears and I start to laugh. (...) What have I got out of it? Exactly this laughter – clever, provocative, balancing at the edge of bad taste, intentionally crossing it (Koterski reminds me here of a young Almodavar).⁶³

The sources of Sobolewski's reaction conceptually lie in the object/subject of laughter fluidity described above, and the oscillating between seeing the principal character of Adaś Miauczyński in terms of incongruity or degradation.

Adam connotes the biblical origins of the name and of the human race,⁶⁴ yet in Koterski's films Adam is belittled to diminutive "Adaś", stuck in his Romantic ideals and petrified by the possibility of their realisation. Koterski does not hide his intentions for Adaś and his character's reception by the viewer, when he says that he makes the heroes of his films sad, so he can make viewers happy.⁶⁵ He gives reasons for the viewer to produce the "laugh of contempt", *Schadenfreude*, which contains elements of anger and moral disgust,⁶⁶ yet does not exclude a possibility of identification with the protagonist, especially in the context of the seriousness of the Polish tradition of laughter. In Koterski's words:

Adaś Miauczyński, 44 years old, is a frustrated representative of the intelligentsia – a teacher of Polish,

⁶³ Sobolewski, *Za duży blask*, 34.

⁶⁴ Janicka, "Seksio," 78.

⁶⁵ Marek Koterski, *Jak się narodził Świr*, additional material on a DVD release of *Day of the Wacko*.

⁶⁶ Sully, *An Essay*, 143-145.

divorced, who loves his teenage son, but the film is about the hell of the next five minutes. Our hero suffers for his country, for millions, but he is destroyed by the present moment, the repetition of daily activities and contact with fellow human beings, which disgusts him. In the sphere of patriotic feelings, he is grand, in the sphere of daily feelings and reactions he is an aggressive little arsehole.⁶⁷

The director is successful in conveying his disdain for Adaś in the film. A rising star of Polish film criticism, Bartosz Żurawiecki in his review of the film's premiere described Adaś as:

a white male. A Pole. A Catholic. Built of phobias, complexes, pretences, obsessions, dislikes, hatreds, frustrations, bitterness, suppositions and unfulfilled ambitions. Perceiving himself as a representative of the traditional intelligentsia, declassed by the old and new systems. A mental cripple with a limping sense of mission. He saves his barren intellect with [Polish] Romantic poems and dreams of a "great love" – a submissive and devoted woman.⁶⁸

Described in this way, Adaś is unlikely to inspire admiration or even sympathy, yet Koterski's expectation that many a viewer would identify and empathise with his "twisted" [Polish "zakręcony"] hero does not go unfulfilled.⁶⁹

Adaś's day is filled with complex little rituals that have to do with "food, drink, defecation, and sexual life", which may easily be seen as a modern

⁶⁷ Marek Koterski, "Świr," *Culture.Pl*, c2002, (6 March 2005).
<http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/dz_dzien_swira_koterski>.

⁶⁸ Bartosz Żurawiecki, "Premiery: *Dzień Świra*," *Film 6* (2002): 70-71.

⁶⁹ Koterski, "Świr."

embodiment of Bakhtin's "material bodily principle",⁷⁰ and also a degradation of the lofty Romantic ideals of the intelligentsia, bringing it down to the commonality of the human body. Urinating and defecating rituals take precedence with Adaś. He provocatively passes a stool under the window of a female owner of a dog that did the same under his window, to his disgust. Adaś's language is also on the one hand degraded; he confuses himself about the correct declinations, and fills his – otherwise sophisticated literary – speech with the abusive language of the streets and profanities, whose function is purely ornamental. That use of a language that reverses the order of the Polish world (intelligentsia versus "low" street life) results in an iconoclastic fusion of realms, which works to humanise and equate both social strata, another characteristic of Bakhtin's carnivalesque comic elements.⁷¹ Yet, in this case it may also be seen as an act of despair.

The opening scenes are designed to prepare the viewer for the magnitude of Adaś's internal conflicts and incongruities, which in the film constitute one day of his life. At the beginning, while the camera sweeps through an urban landscape of blocks of flats accompanied by Chopin's pompous and forcefully delivered *Revolutionary Etude*, Adaś's voice describes his dislikes of the morning. His first reaction to waking up is "Oh fuck – in the name of the holy father, son and holy spirit." Then he proceeds to make mental lists of the elements of his life that produce anxiety, boredom, phobia, and the rituals that stabilise them: "seven sips of mineral water", "seven strokes to wash the face", "four, seven, thirteen or twenty one wipes of the bum", "seven handfuls of breakfast cereal". When shaving, he imagines himself to be a gangster

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, "Carnival ambivalence," 204-205.

⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin claims a rejuvenating property of medieval carnival abuse in "Carnival ambivalence: Laughter, praise and abuse," in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London, New York, Sydney and Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1994), 207-226.

from an American film.⁷² When emptying his bowels, he learns English phrases, including “to go to pieces, to lose control of one’s emotions” accompanied by the “plop” sound. When he washes himself, he thinks of a drought in Africa. When he prepares his breakfast, he listens to the reports of traffic jams on “how these fuckers are stuck in those fucking cars.” He, as a representative of the impoverished intelligentsia, despises the masses in general. They “don’t see beyond the end of their sausage.” At the same time, Adaś himself is not capable of hearing the world around him, and for him it degenerates into a meaningless string of sounds.

Koterski uses the Polishness of the Polish intelligentsia in the post-1989 reality in the same way as Woody Allen relies on his Jewishness to produce the comicality that highlights moral, philosophical, and – in the case of Koterski – underlying political concerns.⁷³ For instance, when the camera interprets Adaś’s perception of broadcast Parliament proceedings, it is constructed as an attack on the helplessness of an individual within a democratic system, in which major (Socialist, Christian and Right) parties need individuals only so s/he can be ridiculed for his/her lack of political influence. Adaś reads his own feeling of helplessness into the Parliamentary proceedings, in which – in his eyes - the parties concerned fight among themselves to tear off the biggest piece of a Polish flag, which Adaś sees bleed. He is a concerned (couch) patriot after all. The Romantic anti-partitions and pro-independence sentiments, which he inherits from his (degraded) class, do not allow him to look at such an (imagined) sight without bottled-up anger, frustration and helplessness.

⁷² Like in *Kiler* (Machulski, 1997) that could signify unfulfilled dreams of the west, as it is presented in action films.

⁷³ For a study of Woody Allen’s use of Jewish institutions and rituals, see S. Girgus, “The eyes of god,” *The Films of Woody Allen* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 110-129.

Another, traditional yardstick of Polishness is Catholicism, and the intelligentsia's civic or religious affiliation with it, which in *Day of the Wacko* is reduced to Adaś's compulsive religious practices like, for instance, the obligatory kissing of the feet of his statue of Jesus before Adaś leaves home. Or, practices that are manifested in the bed-time prayer that concludes the film and is a parody of a popular patriotic nursery rhyme recited *unisono* by tens of Polish families on the balconies of blocks of flats: "Fuck the neighbour. I don't want anything for myself. Just humiliate him, please. Who am I? A little Pole. [I'm] little, envious and vile... Destroy this son of a bitch, my compatriot, neighbour, my enemy and reptile." This collective prayer is grotesque in itself, yet these sentiments are not foreign for Adaś, who expresses them in action and visualisations rather than words, and whose attitude to religion is equally involved as his attitude to commercialisation. He receives plenty of correspondence that he "has no time to answer". His mailbox is filled with it. It comes dressed in colourful leaflets of Pizza Hut, Rossman and his other "friends". His perception of most commercials is pathological, tinted with explicit sexuality, and filled with images of teeth falling out and worms squirming on the toilet seat, fears mixed with unfulfilled desires.

Adaś's flat, unlike those of *Kiler's* Nouveau Riche and the new bourgeoisie discussed later in this chapter, carries connections with the past. It is a combination of the old and new (photographs, lamps, tables) pointing simultaneously in two cultural directions combined in one film frame, in which he conducts his daily routines of attempting to write a 13-syllable Romantic poem or watching television. Adaś usually positions himself in the frame closer to the side including "new" objects, which creates a slight imbalance in the shot, which returns repeatedly throughout the film. His connection to the cultural past is exemplified by his evocations of Romantic poetry, while his neighbour is listening too loudly to a televised concert of Chopin's music.

Most interiors shown in *Day of the Wacko* have little connection with the past, and they remind one more of shots from Ikea catalogues than of historical or cultural continuity. A notable exception is Adaś's mother's flat, which is filled with old, dark and heavy furniture. Her flat is represented in the film by two spaces; the kitchen dominated by an impossibly long heavy table and the dark cellar cum pantry filled with pots and food. These inns, as well as the internal and external monologues that (given that they are both incapable of dialogue) Adaś and his mother conduct in each other's presence, define their characters and their mutual relationship.

Adaś's mother, like many other elements of the Romantic ethos of the Polish intelligentsia in *Day of the Wacko*, is a parody of the Romantic ideal of a Polish Mother. Like a damaged record, she repeats nurturing phrases that have long lost their meaning (for instance: "Eat the soup, it's tomato soup, your favourite"), much as she has lost her symbolic meaning of national and familial nurturing and belonging. The helpless mother, whom Adaś "had been afraid of for the first half of his life, and for whom he is going to be afraid for in the next half," is one of the two female characters allowed by Koterski to have any claim on viewers' sympathy. Another is Adaś's idealised first love, Ela, who returns to him in his beach reverie. She is blonde, understanding and agreeable, yet too ideal for Adaś to have room for her in a life filled with small rituals and petty hatreds. She leaves him no choice but to escape her in his reverie, and then tentatively return to realise his sexual fantasies of her. It seems that frustration and unfulfilment are the most desirable and satisfying states for Adaś, as representative of the intelligentsia.

All the other women portrayed in *Day of the Wacko* are either mad, hateful, hysterical, nonsensical or trivial. Despite a rather uncomplimentary portrayal of most women, the blade of the grotesque is pointed towards men rather than women in *Day of the Wacko*. This is because the representation of

women is constructed by Adaś's masculine perceptions, and it is reflective of his cognitive shortcomings.⁷⁴ For instance, women in *Day of the Wacko* rarely communicate beyond a set of nonsensical phrases or even nonsensical sounds.

That lack of communicativeness is portrayed mainly as an outcome of Adaś's own vision of his world, which rejects "regular" accidental women as well as important women (his mother and his first ideal love). He prefers his daily masturbation rituals over any female presence in his life. Adaś's masculine self-identification is most evident in a scene, in which he is asked by a woman on the train to help her with her luggage. To her surprise he does something unthinkable to a "proper" Polish male, a "proper" representative of the traditional intelligentsia. He refuses to help her out and after a short exchange in which he declares his "full support for women's full equality", he places his masculinity, and also Polish post-transitional masculinity in general, in a state of crisis by saying: "I'm not fully a man, because there is no need for it anymore." Thus, in its heavy reliance on the Romantic ethos of the intelligentsia, Koterski's satirical *Day of the Wacko* annihilates all that is dear to it. Juliusz Machulski's pastiche-parody, on the other hand, uses comical incongruity to appeal to the genre's cohesive effectual properties, at the same time not neglecting the new reality of transitional Poland at the end of the 1990s.

Resurrecting a universal Pole in Kiler

Filmic comedy is said to be the genre most susceptible to hybridisation.⁷⁵ It may imbibe elements of romance, tragedy, the war film, Western and/or

⁷⁴ A point also described in relation to all dramatic personas in *Day of the Wacko* by Żurawiecki in "Marek Koterski," 127-128.

⁷⁵ Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 15-18.

action film and still be soberly placed in its original comical genre. Regardless of how far its generic tentacles can spread, qualifying a film as a comedy creates an expectation if not a guarantee of laughter for the spectator. Unless it is to be a result of an interpretative accident, that guarantee can only be fulfilled if the film's [inter]textuality coincides with its awareness in the viewer.

Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler* (1997) and its sequel *2 Kilers* [*Kiler-ów 2-och*] (1999), like other Machulski's films, rely on a rich palette of generic and textual references from Western and Polish cinema and other texts. Firstly, both *Kilers* (Machulski, 1997 & 1999) are parodies of the action genre, which make a thorough use of pastiche. The incongruity of the comical elements is contained in surprises that are translatable into the code of the comedy style practised in the West, because this is where many of them are borrowed from. Machulski relies heavily on viewers' familiarity with action films, and Quentin Tarantino's style in particular. Secondly, the protagonist is a familiar combination of a buffoon and an impostor, two out of three types of characters inherent in comedy⁷⁶ and predating their analysis by Aristotle. And thirdly, these elements are written into the social, cultural and economic realities of Poland at the end of the 20th century as a parody of the filmic texts to which they refer, a characteristic that which may prove less attractive for a foreign viewer. All these elements result in the creation of a universalised, postmodern product, with an appeal to a viewer familiar with any of these terms of reference.

The tenor and style of both *Kilers* (Machulski, 1997 & 1999) are set out in their opening scenes. The beginning of the first *Kiler* (Machulski, 1997) shows a close-up of the black loafers of a man standing in some sort of spillage. Next, the man is lighting a cigarette, creating a generic expectation

⁷⁶ The third type of comic character is an ironist.

that the spillage should be explosive and the lighting of the cigarette is just about to ignite it. Instead, creating an incongruous effect, the soundtrack plays a shot from a gun with a silencer, and the shoes of the man with a cigarette jump upwards out of the frame. The following slow-motion shot presents one loafer falling on the ground, hinting that the – possibly dead – man fell out of his shoes while being shot, rather than being killed by the expected and self-inflicted explosion. In *2 Kilers*, the tension builds in the same way until Jurek Kiler (Cezary Pazura), the protagonist, slips on the banana skin (sic!) of the fruit he has just eaten. Both opening sequences play with the expectations of the viewers based on their familiarity with these types of comedy and comical effects, and, for the sequel, also the familiarity of the first *Kiler*.

At the beginning of the first film, Jurek Kiler, the main character of both films, works as a taxi driver who gets mistaken for “Kiler” because of the incidental similarity of names. “Kiler” is a sought-after professional killer with a slate of over 40 dead bodies of people, mainly from the crime circles of both Eastern and Western Europe. Following the case of mistaken identity, Jurek Kiler, the taxi driver, is sent to prison, where he opportunistically assumes the identity of “Kiler”-the-killer to protect himself and gain the respect of his inmates. As a result of having assumed a new identity, Jurek Kiler is kidnapped from the prison by a gangster, Siara (Janusz Rewiński). Siara treats Kiler to a new car, apartment and money in exchange for killing Siara’s “business” partner, a well-known businessman Ferdynand Lipski (Jan Englert). Terminating Lipski will allow Siara to take hold of the big container of dollar banknotes, which is to arrive from Columbia as a payment for the sale to Colombian buyers of the Palace of Culture and Science (a prominent architectural monstrosity in the centre of Warsaw and a gift from the Soviet Union). As with Pasikowski’s “universalisation” of *Pigs* (1992), Machulski’s comicality of the act of selling the Palace also relies on the understanding by at least some viewers of the

cultural significance of the building presented to the city of Warsaw by the Soviet Union.

After Lipski finds out that Siara wants him dead, he also asks Kiler to kill Siara. With the help of an attractive female television journalist, Kiler manages to manoeuvre the growing list of requests to kill husbands and neighbours to convince the main customers that he fulfilled their orders. Finally, he leads the police to Siara, Lipski and “Kiler”, intercepts the container full of cash and then donates it to the police, orphans and, as an afterthought, to the Polish film industry. In the sequel, Kiler owns a charity fund, is in a committed relationship with the journalist from the first *Kiler*, but is also vigorously pursued by Lipski’s nymphomaniac daughter, who wants to marry him. And, Siara hires a paid killer to kill Jurek Kiler. This repeated reversal and rejuvenation of characters and their roles in the narrative are reminiscent of Bakhtin’s carnival. Although not much emphasis is placed on it in the film, it still contains traces of Bakhtin’s “material bodily principle”, in which, for instance, Siara’s and Kiler’s drunkenness and Siara’s wife’s ambiguous utterance at the sight of Kiler’s genitals are points of humour, and a unifying recognition of – at least some forms of – common humanity.⁷⁷

Other universalising elements of Machulski’s film rest with its generic and stylistic references to action films, those of Quentin Tarantino in particular. In the first *Kiler*, after Kiler decides to take on the criminal responsibilities of his namesake, he comes back to his apartment with action film videos from which he plans to learn how to be a gangster, just like, according to Machulski, Tarantino learnt how to be a filmmaker by watching videos while he worked in a video store.⁷⁸ The videos include Luc Besson’s *Leon* (1994), Martin

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, “Carnival ambivalence,” 204-205.

⁷⁸ Juliusz Machulski in an interview with Ewa Sobiecka-Awdziejczyk, “Ochota na Vabank,” *Film 10* (1995): 110-111.

Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), and Polish Władysław Pasikowski's *Psy 2. Last Blood* (1994). Kiler acts out the characters from the films he hired. He practices the celebrated "are you talking to me" in English, but also Maurer's "what the fuck do you know about killing" in Polish, paying tribute to Władysław Pasikowski's contribution to the action genre. Finally, he decides on *Reservoir Dogs* as the blueprint of his gangsterness. He leaves his hideaway in dark glasses, a black suit, white shirt, a thin black tie and with a black violin case, into which he packs some fresh vegetables from a street stall: "two little tomatoes, but firm ones, two cucumbers, also firm and some firm radish," another of many incongruous stylistic parodies in *Kiler*.

That parody of Tarantino is carried out innocently and to well received comic effect. If one were to consider Freud's definition of parody, one should be more suspicious of that scene. According to Freud, parody replaces a dignified action by an undignified, inferior one to produce a comic effect, which relies on the mechanism of unmasking an unrightful claim to superiority.⁷⁹ Yet, as discussed above, the motivation of parody might also have little to do with belittling someone. In this case, the misplaced gangsterness of Kiler does not degrade or belittle him, but rather points to the incongruity of the situation, which he chooses to be in while being well aware of the shortcomings of his gangsterness. In another scene of an airport shooting between Siara's and Lipski's groups, the gangsters on both sides pretend to be shot early in the piece to stay unharmed and see whose boss is going to win the final fight. The parody of a Western shootout is an outcome of financial considerations⁸⁰ and can be perceived as degrading of Polish film,

⁷⁹ Freud, *Jokes*, 262.

⁸⁰ Juliusz Machulski in an interview with Małgorzata Sadowska, "Chodzi o to, żeby było śmiesznie," *Kino 10* (1997): 23-24.

yet Machulski compensates for this temporary degradation to the Polish film industry by the final act of donating to it part of the recovered money, as mentioned above. The comical effect of Machulski's parody rests also in the resulting "rhythm of rejuvenation",⁸¹ which according to Robert W. Corrigan is a generic requirement of comedy, which celebrates a human capacity to "endure" rather than to "aspire and suffer"⁸² as is partially the case within the tradition of the "serious" Polish comedy.

One other element that by definition should be common to all comedies, and thus recognisable to the same extent within and without a national context is the range of protagonists comedy employs. The most fundamental of this range are the Aristotelian buffoon, ironist or impostor.⁸³ The buffoon is a folk character who stumbles and tumbles through one surprising situation after another, trying to fend for himself. S/he is neither good nor bad, but rather amoral.⁸⁴ The ironist has a distance to the comicality of the world and is its commentator rather than a participant. The impostor pretends to be who s/he is not. A comic protagonist may also switch between these figures to emphasise one or another, as does Jurek Kiler in *Kiler* (Machulski, 1997), oscillating between a buffoon and impostor throughout the film. Inadvertently, Kiler also borrows from the celebrity status of Cezary Pazura, who usually portrays a highly strung but likeable male "next door", and enjoys star status in Poland.

The representation of masculinity is an interesting case in point in both *Kiler* films. Machulski constructs the protagonist with no trace of the heroic

⁸¹ Susanne Langer, "The comic rhythm," in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), 132.

⁸² Corrigan, *Comedy*, 3.

⁸³ Wylie Sypher, "The meanings of comedy," in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), 43.

⁸⁴ Susanne Langer, "The comic rhythm," in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), 134.

machismo of characters like Maurer. He and other men do not hide their weaknesses, and in so doing they exemplify a Polish transitional male, as a universalist every-man. They are also susceptible to women's charms, with the exception of Siara, who is unappreciative of his wife's, Gabriela's (Katarzyna Figura), exaggerated sexuality, although according to her he "copulates with the girls from [a nearby] primary school". In general, however the men are everyman, open to manipulation by women, and they can be corrupt, amoral or insane. Women, on the other hand are driven by sex (Gabriela and Lipski's daughter, Dona (Jolanta Fraszyńska) in *2 Kilers*) or they are controlling and mildly hysterical (Ewa in *2 Kilers*). The only significant character that displays strength is the television journalist, Ewa (Małgorzata Kożuchowska), yet only so in the first *Kiler*. She is ambitious, determined, not afraid to exploit her sexuality to get what she wants, and she wears a long braid (albeit red, not the patriotic blonde, and in a French twist), which in its basic form stands for the traditionally encouraged hairdo of a quintessential Polish female. In the sequel to *Kiler*, Ewa's independent television career and self-assurance are replaced with irrational erratic behaviour (in her attempts to control Kiler) and awkwardness when she attempts to play a *femme fatale* to manipulate Lipski. Therefore, Ewa, once the pillar of support for Kiler in the first film, ceases to fulfil the traditional supportive role of a strong Polish female and is thrown off her pedestal when she becomes a distraction for Kiler rather than his support. This transition parallels and parodies that of Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda) between Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (1977) and his *Man of Iron* (1981), where Agnieszka changes from being an strong-willed filmmaker to a more passive "pillar of support" for her husband. Interestingly, the inherently decent characters are asexual, and the apparently sexually active characters in the two films are sooner or later ridiculed for their inclinations. For instance, when at breakfast Kiler asks Dona for a newspaper, she answers, "I'm off to get it straight away,

I was down there already, but I forgot it. I am such a silly nymphomaniac, I am.”

If inserting comical elements releases the underlying tensions, and especially if these tensions could be defined in social rather than individual terms, then the preceding analysis of representations of masculinity and femininity suggests a fear of women, and especially of those that express their sexuality. It also indicates the fear of an unfulfilled desire for the West. For instance, in the sequel, faced with the surprise regarding his Polishness, an internationally renowned contract killer says, “What, did you think that a Pole cannot make it in international business?” The distribution of reward and/or punishment in the *Kilers*’ endings indicates the text’s approval or disapproval of the characters. Jurek Kiler is happily reunited with Ewa at the end of both films, the one with Ewa as an independent and supportive female and the subjugated one in the sequel. Siara and Lipski are imprisoned at the end of the first *Kiler* (Machulski, 1997) and end up without the bounty in the second. The sexually explicit women, Gabriela and Dona, despite their uncomplimentary portrayals, are not punished by *Kilers*’ narratives. Gabriela’s life goes on as usual in both cases, and Dona marries a hot-blooded Colombian double of Kiler, so it is safe to assume that these women’s sexualised *modus operandi* is not necessarily entirely condemnable, even although it constitutes a source of carnivalesque humour in both *Kilers*.

Despite the universalising shape of Machulski’s comedies, they are also set within the Polish specificities, just like Pasikowski’s *Pigs*. At their centre is the class of the post-1989 nouveau riche, whose connection with the darker side of transitional life (that is crime and corruption) are taken for granted, to the amusement of the viewer. Their social belonging is expressed in their dress code. Siara usually wears a tracksuit popular with various types of small-time-dealers of the 1980s and 1990s, commonly referred to as “dresiarze”

("dres" means "tracksuit"). His wife, Gabriela, is a parody of a nouveau riche female, as well as Katarzyna Figura's usual type-casting of a trashy well-endowed blonde, in too-short skirts showing her shapely legs and a too-small blouse accentuating her bustiness, which hardly needs accentuation. This time she also carries flashy jewellery and in the sequel she is squeezed into *Playboy*-like outfits. Ewa of the first *Kiler* normally dresses in comfortable, tentatively feminine clothes, often trousers, that signify her independence and emancipation, but also the belonging to the well-established new media bourgeoisie. Ewa in the sequel is portrayed as a more homely woman to the point that her portrayal risks excluding her from the new bourgeoisie she belonged to in the first part.

Ferdynand Lipski, who represents the new business class, is consistent in his style. He wears well-cut Polish suits (by a well-known Polish brand, Vistula) or casual neat clothes that signify his belonging to the higher stratum of Polish post-communist society, but which also seem to be deceitful in their neatness and decency, juxtaposed against his corrupt criminal activities. Kiler, on the other hand, transcends all these appearances, moving between a "dresiarz" at the beginning of the film, Tarantino-inspired gangster and a representative of the new bourgeoisie towards the end of the film, non-committal to any of these classifications but faithful in his appearance to his position in a particular moment in the social tapestry of the post-1989 Poland.

The domestic spaces of the representatives of different social groups are also telling of their claim to Polish cultural continuity. The nouveau riche's domestic spaces, as Mazierska pointedly argues, are barren of history, books or any signs of cultural continuity.⁸⁵ Even the "designer" homes, for instance Kiler's hideaway in a newly built suburb of residential complexes, have an ambience of transience and impermanence, with their barren white walls and

⁸⁵ Ewa Mazierska, "Any town? Post-communist Warsaw in Juliusz Machulski's *Girl Guide* (1995) and *Kiler* (1997)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19: 4 (October 1999): 515-530.

austere non-homeliness. Only one flat's interior approximates the traditional positioning of a home-space in Polish culture and cinema; namely that of Ewa in the first *Kiler*. Ewa, according to Mazierska, epitomises the new post-communist "bourgeoisie", whose homeliness is appropriately "tasteful", feminine and welcoming yet also not carrying many signs of historical and/or cultural continuity.⁸⁶ The potency of the representation of the living spaces in both *Kilers* is increased by the fact that they are all homes of Machulski's friends and friends of friends, all from the well-to-do social strata of post-communist Warsaw.⁸⁷

Taking *Kiler* to a macro-scale of social analysis, Mazierska also suggests that Machulski's film represents a shift towards a more material culture,⁸⁸ a shift that she already described in her 1994 article on the treatment of money in post-1989 Polish films, in which financial wealth is to be mistrusted if not condemned.⁸⁹ In both *Kilers* money constitutes power, and all is for sale. It is possible for Colombians to buy an icon of the Polish socialist-realist past (the Palace of Culture and Science). When Dona tells her father, Lipski, that she does not know how much money her fiancé has, he replies: "so what do you talk about?" To accentuate this point, Machulski borrows characters from Żamojda's "Young Wolves" films to give Siara a hand in the *Kiler* sequel, because "they can do anything" for money; they can do "Amphetamines, production, distribution, masturbation" and more. Money, although at times used to comic effect, if taken seriously in both *Kilers* implies that it is the main mode of communication and human exchange in the Poland represented by the director. Yet, its power can also be used to positive ends, as is the case with Kiler's fund. Its importance over that of the state or the government, for instance, is exemplified in the plea of a retiree to Kiler in the sequel, "Not to

⁸⁶ Mazierska, "Any town?" 515.

⁸⁷ Juliusz Machulski in an interview with Sadowska, "Chodzi o to," 24.

⁸⁸ Mazierska, "Any town?" 515.

⁸⁹ Ewa Mazierska, "Lepiej gdy gorzej?" *Kino 2* (1994): 82.

forget the retirees” who are popularly perceived as abandoned by the new non-welfare state. Since the fear of poverty is one of the most important socially expressed fears, and the perception of money is traditionally negative in Poland, this recognition of its power constitutes both a defeat and a point of departure from the old Poland, but also a recognition of the significance of commercialisation and, generally, of financial wealth.

When discussing the Polish specificities of *Kiler* and especially of *2 Kilers*, it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which the Polish state is represented in the two comedies. Various emblems of Polish state and nationhood appear sporadically throughout both *Kilers*, usually serving an incongruous if not atavistic function. For instance, in the sequel the Polish white-and-red flag is used as a sling for a damaged arm of the President. In the same film, Siara brings a bunch of red-and-white carnations to welcome Kiler’s Colombian double. The flowers are reminiscent of pre-1989 official state celebrations, and they are promptly discarded, because they serve no real purpose. In the context of the representation of money, it is tempting to read this as a farewell to nationhood as it was imagined by/in the pre-1989 state, and its replacement by the questionable commercial drives of the Young Wolves. Although a far-fetched claim, this could place Machulski close to a label of “new cinema of moral concern” designed by Konrad J. Zarębski to describe Olaf Lubaszenko’s *E=mc²*,⁹⁰ despite Machulski’s repeated and pronounced attempts to separate himself from his more serious colleagues by insisting that he is a “light” director⁹¹ who makes films “for the millions”⁹² and who claims that

⁹⁰ Konrad J. Zarębski, “W pułapce swoich filmów,” *Kino 9* (2002): 44.

⁹¹ Juliusz Machulski in an interview with Małgorzata Sadowska, “Jestem z miasta,” *Film*, 5, 1998, 114-115.

⁹² Mazierska, “Any town?” 515.

[f]ilm art is a light matter needed only if people are fed, well-rested and healthy. If one were to erase film from the history of human kind, probably nothing significant would happen. That is why I am amused by Cameron, who cries “I’m the king of the world!” because he got an Oscar; it is only a film.⁹³

Regardless of their directorial proclamations, that is, Juliusz Machulski’s entertaining intentions and Marek Koterski’s psychotherapeutic ambitions, both comedies discussed here offer filmic representations written into the cultural filmic landscape of (post)transitional Poland. They both make use of comical incongruities and degradations, they both merge the object and subject of laughter for the (post)transitional viewer. *Kiler*’s closer affiliation with the parodic style of filmic comedy, and *Day of the Wacko*’s proximity to the filmic satire,⁹⁴ although positioned within the specifically Polish tradition, are both subject to the mechanism of humour as described by Peter L. Berger. According to him comedy’s comicality is a combination of benign humour (as a strategy of diversion), tragicomedy (as a strategy for consolation), and wit (as a game of intellect).⁹⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has presented evidence for the argument of the cultural significance of Polish post-1989 comedy and its Polish literary and filmic traditions. It has discussed the types of representations on offer in Marek Koterski’s satirical parody, *Day of the Wacko*, and Juliusz Machulski’s pastiche parody *Kiler* and its sequel, *2 Kilers*, as well as their positioning on

⁹³ Juliusz Machulski in an interview with Sadowska, “Jestem,” 114-115.

⁹⁴ Satire and parody are the two fundamental types of filmic comedy, as argued by Geoff King in *Film Comedy* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002) and others, for instance, Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film*.

⁹⁵ Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*.

the scale of filmic universalism and Polish specificity. Although all three films stand in a different relation to Polish traditions, all of them contain Polish-specific cultural references, and they answer to the transitional trends, which are discussed throughout this dissertation, including the shifts in representations of gender, commercialisation and, generally, of nationhood.

The two universalising comedies of Juliusz Machulski appear to be more sympathetic to their characters, and their comical effects are created by incongruity, often incongruity brought on by pastiche. Koterski's *Day of the Wacko* brings the tragi-comicality out of the tentative degradation of the already declassed intelligentsia, which propels to the surface transitional fears and frustrations so they can be put to rest by laughter. Both these films include the comic elements cited in the first part of this chapter and categorised by analysts from a different cultural region, which is another point that indicates the universalism of these films. In any case, if recognition is to be seen as one condition of comicality, then for a comedy to please its audience, it must offer what can be interpreted as comical by its viewers. And, despite Jacob Levine's claim that it is impossible to be cheerful and be a philosopher,⁹⁶ the skilfulness of the comic design of these two films has its grounding in the social and cultural insights into a world relevant to the Polish (post)transitional viewer.

⁹⁶ A scholar quoted by Levine, "Humour," 127.

8

Conclusion

This dissertation has been organised around three main tasks. One has involved identifying points of differentiation between the transitional stages of the first chaotic years, then reassessing the initial changes, and achieving relative stability, as they are manifested in films produced in the first 15 years of post-communist Poland. The second task has been to establish the reoccurring narratives and myths of Polishness, their representations in Polish cinema and their relation to the post-1989 film output in Poland. The third task has focused on an analysis of Polish films that received theatrical release in Poland in the period between 1989 and 2004. These films' box-office successes and popular appeal, and/or their iconoclastic illustrative position in the cinematic landscape of post-communist Poland have been the basis of their selection for analysis here. In analysing these films I have tried to identify their points of resonance with the fundamental narratives and myths of Polishness as they are represented in (post)transitional Polish film.

My Preamble sketched a general perspective on the social, cultural and political developments of the first 15 transitional years in post-1989 Poland,

while the Introduction outlined the historical origins of Polish cinema and its evolution before 1989, including the development of such waves as the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern, with some consideration given to trends of popular cinema. Based on these broad delineations, the Introduction has also offered a preliminary survey of the period between 1989 and 2004 in Polish cinema, identifying parallels with the social and political developments of that time. As outlined, the developments of the first 15 years of Polish post-communist cinema occur in three broad stages. In the first five years after 1989, the economic and political chaos is reflected in various Polish films' attempts to settle accounts with the past, and the expression of confusion as to the future directions of the Polish film industry, culture and thematic concerns, and the commercial drive behind those. At that stage Wojciech Marczewski's *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* (1989), which points an accusatory finger at those Poles who co-operated with the old regime, meets with the enthusiasm of Polish film critics and the filmic environment in general, and Władysław Pasikowski's iconoclastic hybrid action film *Pigs* (1992) seemingly obliterates the recent past by creating a tough-guy hero who has no choice but to repress rather than to reckon with the trauma of the transitional changes. In a slightly different manner, Krzysztof Zanussi's semi-autobiographical *In Full Gallop* (1996) also denies another Polish trauma of the communist past by portraying an amicable or acceptable reality of the PRL.

In the second transitional shift in Polish cinema, Krzysztof Krauze's *Debt* (1999) leaves a lasting impression on its viewers for laying bare the dangers of pursuing commercial and/or financial success at all costs, and Mariusz Trelński's *Egoists* (2000) with its scrutiny of the excesses of new capitalist elites provokes equally passionate approval and rejection from critics and viewers. While Juliusz Machulski's continues to simultaneously embrace and mock warm-heartedly Polish Westernising drives in his comedies of this period, Marek Kotowski in his *Day of the Wacko* (2002) somewhat belatedly

seals the fate of Polish Romanticism and the Polish intelligentsia, each of which already has shown signs of ill health in other films, including Krauze's *Debt*. In this second transitional phase, the uncertainties, repressions and anxieties of the first phase give way to the rejection of tentative answers offered by the Polish economic and socio-cultural circumstance of the first few years of post-communist Poland. It appears that neither the Polish Romantic ethos, nor the new ethos of (commercial) success, nor the attempts to do away with the recent past offer a positive cultural solution for the stabilising Polish situation. The old film masters' response to this set of unrealised desires is in the films of the heritage cycle. By providing a co-orientation point for national identification, these films are to some extent a life-line of national self-identification for post-transitional Poles.

In the third post-transitional stage of the early 2000s, following its membership in NATO in 1999 and in the European Union in 2004, Poland and Polish cinema achieves the first phase of stabilisation, in which the responsibility for the course of an individual life rests with the individual, not the systemic enemy sabotaging his or her life. Films delivering this narrative information are usually made by young Polish filmmakers with ambiguous attitudes to the communist and other national pasts, for instance Przemysław Wojcieszek with *Louder than Bombs* (2002), Piotr Trzaskalski with *Edi* (2002), Andrzej Jakimowski with *Squint Your Eyes* (2003), and Magdalena Piekorz of *The Welts* (2004). At the same time, Polish commercialised productions achieve new levels of commercial professionalism expressed in their relaxed willingness and ability to commodify the Polish past, as in Wojciech Wójcik's *There and Back* (2002). Both drives, that of shifting responsibilities of sorts to an individual and of delivering professional commercial filmic products are reminiscent of the period of the late 1960s and 1970s, the movement between the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern, when younger filmmakers in Poland also showed their mistrust of the Romantic ethos, and

when popular Polish cinema enjoyed relatively high visibility with Polish viewers.

The three (post)transitional stages of Polish cinema were preceded by parallel developments in the Polish film industry and culture, which were surveyed in Chapter 3, while Chapter 2 identified the narratives and myths of Polishness with most significance for the transitional stages, be it either by the rejection of these narratives or myths, or their continuation. Although the ethos of Romanticism, of social responsibility, and of the intelligentsia as a leading force of Polishness after *szlachta*, have been declared dead by Polish cultural debate and by Polish film critics and commentators, the many permutations of the 'new' transitional male at least recognise the importance of that ethos, as in *Day of the Wacko* and *Debt*, and at times, despite appearances, they are its reformatted continuation. For instance, *Pigs'* Maurer, in all his new Westernised toughness, is also a Polish classical (Romantic) male hero, tragic and destined to fail. Polish transitional females typically only reflect these shifts and the trauma undergone by the Polish male, since it is he who takes centre-stage in Polish (post)transitional film. In effect, all the films discussed here are devoid of representations of the myth of the Polish Mother, traditionally perceived as the cradle of Polish nationhood, but they are set in (stereo)typically Polish landscapes and interiors, which indicate various types of historical continuities and discontinuities of the (post)transitional Poland.

As already stated in the Introduction, the sample of films selected for this dissertation is skewed towards the later years of the (post)transitional period of 1989 to 2004, and is focused on the films that are either box-office successes or films that have provoked vigorous cultural dispute concerning their iconoclastic textual properties. Unfortunately, such criteria of selection exclude the resilient 'middle cinema' of authors like Jerzy Stuhr and Jan Jakub Kolski, two very significant filmmakers who emerged in post-1989

Polish cinema. Although they enjoy a stable and faithful following from fans in Poland and abroad, their films are neither huge box-office successes, nor are they the subject of provocative debate on the Polish (post)transitional condition,¹ and/or the condition of Polish cinema. They assume their well-deserved place within it, without provoking scandalised protests or relying on populist excesses. The film sample scrutinised in this dissertation has also excluded Polish independent cinema ['filmy offowe'], which although growing in significance and professionalism, is yet to leave as visible a mark on the Polish cinematic fibre as main-stream cinema.

One other calculated omission here was that of ethnic or religious minorities in Poland and their representation in post-1989 film. Although the focus of this dissertation is on the 97 percent of the (presumably) ethnically Polish population of Poland, which remains one of the most homogeneous countries of Europe, tracing representations of otherness would constitute a fascinating perspective on the transitional changes in Poland after 1989, but would be the topic of another dissertation.

¹ Exception of Jerzy Stuhr's *Tomorrow's Weather* (2004) mentioned in Chapter 7.

Appendix 1

Selected box-office data: 1990-2004¹

Film	Release	Tickets
<i>Polish Cuisine</i> [<i>Kuchnia polska</i>]	1991	7,929
<i>Pigs</i> [<i>Psy</i>]	1992	400,505
<i>30 Door Key</i> [<i>Ferdydurke</i>]	1992	165,489
<i>Monitored Conversations</i> [<i>Rozmowy kontrolowane</i>]	1992	158,900
<i>Pigs: Last Blood</i> [<i>Psy: ostatnia krew</i>]	1994	684,946
<i>Young Wolves</i> [<i>Młode wilki</i>]	1995	542,955
<i>Crows</i> [<i>Wrony</i>]	1995	15,521
<i>Girl Guide</i>	1996	312,622
<i>She-Shaman</i> [<i>Szamanka</i>]	1996	162,278
<i>Colonel Kwiatkowski</i> [<i>Pułkownik Kwiatkowski</i>]	1996	76,220
<i>Street Games</i> [<i>Gry uliczne</i>]	1996	39,740
<i>Miss Nobody</i> [<i>Panna Nikt</i>]	1996	39,740
<i>Of Children and Fish</i> [<i>Dzieci i ryby</i>]	1996	37,785
<i>In Full Gallop</i> [<i>Cwał</i>]	1996	23,176
<i>Holy Week</i> [<i>Wielki tydzień</i>]	1996	9,740
<i>Time Spindle</i> [<i>Wrzeczono czasu</i>]	1996	3,645
<i>Kiler</i>	1997	2,200,943
<i>Sundial</i> [<i>Słoneczny zegar</i>]	1997	3,544
<i>Young Wolves 1/2</i> [<i>Młode wilki 1/2</i>]	1998	618,235
<i>Nothing</i> [<i>Nic</i>]	1998	17,545
<i>With Fire and Sword</i> [<i>Ogniem i mieczem</i>]	1999	7,151,354
<i>Pan Tadeusz</i>	1999	6,168,344
<i>2 Kilers</i> [<i>Kiler-ów dwóch</i>]	1999	1,189,800
<i>I Love You</i> [<i>Ajławiu</i>]	1999	190,891
<i>Debt</i> [<i>Dług</i>]	1999	187,714
<i>Primate</i> [<i>Prymas – trzy lata z tysiąclecia</i>]	2000	736,903
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i> [<i>Chłopaki nie płaczą</i>] (comedy)	2000	548,551
<i>In Love</i> [<i>Zakochani</i>]	2000	233,168
<i>Father's Law</i> [<i>Prawo ojca</i>]	2000	201,067
<i>Sisyphean Labours</i> [<i>Szyfowe prace</i>]	2000	86,062
<i>The Promised Land</i> [<i>Ziemia obiecana</i>]	2000	31,868
<i>Quo Vadis</i>	2001	4,300,351

¹ The following data includes most films released between 1989 and 2004 mentioned in this thesis. It is compiled based on Krzysztof Kucharski's *Kino plus: film i dystrybucja kinowa w Polsce w latach 1990-2000*. Toruń: Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, 2002, and updated with data offered by <http://www.stopklatka.pl>.

Film	Release	Tickets
<i>In Desert and in Wilderness</i> [<i>W pustyni i w puszczy</i>]	2001	2,221,215
<i>Spring to Come</i> [<i>Przedwiośnie</i>]	2001	1,743,635
<i>Revenge</i> [<i>Zemsta</i>]	2002	1,958,956
<i>The Pianist</i>	2002	1,153,740
<i>Chopin. Desire for Love</i> [<i>Chopin. Pragnienie miłości</i>]	2002	442,910
<i>A Career of Nicky Dykma</i> [<i>Kariera Nikosia Dykmy</i>]	2002	404,558
<i>Day of the Wacko</i> [<i>Dzień Świra</i>]	2002	403,568
<i>E=mc²</i>	2002	400,352
<i>Old Tale</i> [<i>Stara baśń: kiedy słońce było bogiem</i>]	2003	907,887
<i>The Body</i> [<i>Ciało</i>]	2003	319,048
<i>The Kidnapping of Agata</i> [<i>Urowadzenie Agaty</i>]	2003	170,520
<i>Never Ever</i> [<i>Nigdy w życiu</i>]	2004	1,620,307
<i>Vinci</i>	2004	341,613
<i>The Welts</i> [<i>Pręgi</i>]	2004	324,839

Appendix 2

“High artistic values” and “wide audience” Interview with Jacek Fuksiewicz

11 July 2003, Warsaw

Jacek Fuksiewicz is a Director for Film in the Polish Ministry of Culture and Arts. He has also written scripts and made films with Krzysztof Zanussi and Jacek Bromski

RM: Do you think there is a united vision of what Polish cinema should be in the present film climate?

JF: As the Ministry of Culture, we finance the most interesting projects, which are submitted to the Agency of Film Production [Agencja Produkcji Filmowej], where they are evaluated by a group of experts. These experts are organised into three committees, one for feature films, one for documentary and educational films and one for animation.

The committees are comprised of representatives of different film professions such as directors, distributors, cinema operators and film critics. Projects are either accepted or rejected, or accepted conditionally with suggestions for changes. Based on these submissions, the Minister for Culture approves finances for a given project.

Obviously, the committees' responsibility is to choose the best, most interesting projects for financing and we definitely want Polish cinema to be diverse. We also want Polish films to be of a high artistic value, but at the same time have a good chance of reaching a wide audience.

RM: Would you be able to define what Polish film is, based on the selection criteria for those films?

So far, there hasn't been a real definition of this type made. We are working on a film legislation definition right now. It is in the process of inter-departmental consultations, and is expected to be put to the government this month [July 2003]¹. It should make it to the Parliament, or at least to its appropriate committees before the Parliament disperses for its summer break. There is a definition of Polish film in it, however it is yet to be approved, so I can't quote it at this stage. However, it does take into consideration European provisos, because Polish law right now is being brought into line with the requirements of the European Union. Therefore, the

¹ The Bill on Cinema was finally voted on in February 2005.

definition of Polish film in the bill will be expanded to include a European proviso.

RM: You are also a film practitioner, so in that capacity have you noticed significant changes to Polish cinema since 1989?

JF: This could be a topic for a whole book. It is difficult to summarise in just a few sentences. No clear trend such as the Cinema of Moral Concern of the 1970s has emerged that I could describe here. Polish cinema is diverse, and I can only tell you about the kinds of problems it has to deal with.

First, there was the shock of transition from a communist economy to that of a free market. Filmmaking until 1989 was subjected to the rules of the society of a totalitarian political system. Filmmakers had difficulty expressing what they wanted to express with the level of censorship that existed.

Also, when complete creative freedom did come, it transpired that we were short of money. This was largely due to the fact that, in the old system, despite the fact that there were censorship limitations, the government financed films 100 per cent. This meant that, once the project had gotten through the sieve of the censor, there were no problems searching for money. Somehow, all the best films of those times did manage to get through that sieve. Filmmakers had a whole system of means to show a significant truth, or at least a significant part of that truth about the country, society and life of those times.

When complete creative freedom finally eventuated, finding money became a huge problem. American commercial cinema, which had previously only had a limited release in Poland, descended onto our screens. Commercial films attacked our cinemas, audiences started to go to the cinema to watch those films and Polish film had to withstand these challenges.

On the one hand, there appeared to be a trend imitating American cinema, whereby Polish reality would appear in the form of genre filmmaking. One example of this was in Polish action cinema, where films by Pasikowski such as *Pigs* were very popular at the time. However, as time went by, the formula of imitating American cinema revealed its weaknesses. Audiences usually prefer to see an American original as opposed to a Polish imitation.

On the other hand, there also existed the cinema of the grand masters, like Wajda or Kawalerowicz who adapted the works of masters of Polish literature and made big film spectacles, which attracted large audiences. For example, *Pan Tadeusz* and *With Fire and Sword* were great commercial successes.

However, the path of great adaptations will also exhaust itself at some stage. What we are looking for are films with a contemporary subject matter which

represent what is happening in Poland now, that show all the social costs and the positive aspects of what happened in the 1990s. That means depictions of how the new society is being built – the transformation from the communist system to the free-market system, to the liberal system. There are not enough films like this being made, according to both critics and viewers.

One of the films that enjoyed high acclaim, that was applauded by critics as a revelation was Krzysztof Krauze's *Debt*. It showed people who, when subjected to the pressure of the realities of a liberal society, where the margins for personal freedoms widened, could degenerate into the situation shown in the film.

RM: Would you say that the films made in the last two or three years indicate some sort of stability emerging in the industry for the first time since 1989?

JF: What do you mean by “stability”?

RM: I mean most of all a thematic stability. More defined thematic trends seem to have emerged in the last two to three years...To name a few; limitations of American comedies, imitations of American action films, literary adaptation spectaculars, auteur cinema...

JF: I think the situation is very fluid now. In the long term, the genre of literary adaptations will not be possible, because we will run out of the most popular literary works that attract cinema audiences. On the other hand, the formula of imitation of Hollywood action cinema, or Hollywood comedy, and especially of gangster comedy, has exhausted itself already.

An audience, when given the choice between an authentic Hollywood film and an imitation, will nearly always choose the Hollywood original. However, auteur cinema using contemporary subject matter is still in its fledgling phase. Of course, we have great hopes for auteur cinema, and by we I mean the Ministry, critics, and audiences.

Interesting films appear every year. Marek Koterski's *Day of the Wacko*, which won an award at the Festival of Polish Films in Gdynia, was a good example of one last year [2002]. There was also *Edi*, which revealed the fabulous individuality of Piotr Trzaskalski [*Edi*'s director]. We are also counting on having interesting films to show this year in Gdynia. The genre of literary adaptation will be represented by Hoffman's *Old Tale*, which I haven't seen yet, but will have its premiere in Gdynia. However, the reserves of adaptable literature are running low, as I already mentioned, and this trend won't continue.

Auteur cinema, on the other hand, has many creative individuals working amongst its ranks, so we will have to see how it all evolves. It is difficult to program it.

Nevertheless, the great individuality of Marek Koterski or Krzysztof Krauze or Piotr Trzaskalski or many other young filmmakers, is highly encouraging. Iwona Swierzyńska and Łukasz Barczyk, for example, are young filmmakers who made their debut working on the television film series "Generation 2000". Those modest television films have already showcased the great individuality of their respective makers. When they start making films for the cinema, they will undoubtedly do something interesting. However, it is difficult to say that there exists a unified artistic trend, or even an ideological trend with regards to this type of filmmaking. There are groups of individuals who want to talk about their own generation. I only wish that they would do so in a louder and louder voice, which will be more and more artistically interesting.

RM: If you were to compare Polish cinema of the mid-1990s to what is happening in Polish cinema now, what would be the most significant differences?

JF: I can't see significant differences. The cinema of the 1990s is quite similar to today's. On the one hand, the cinema of the 90s sought to replicate the American formula in search of Polish entertainment cinema, and it did achieve some positive results. However, there were some important exceptions which were not mere Hollywood imitations. I am thinking here most of all about *Kiler* and *2 Kilers* by Juliusz Machulski, which are excellent examples of how it is possible to make entertainment films that appeal to wide audiences that search for their own Polish formula.

Polish action films based on Hollywood patterns, which also conveyed aspects of a Polish kind of truth, enjoyed popularity in the early 1990s. These include the aforementioned *Pigs* and *Pigs 2* by Pasikowski. In his later films in the late 1990s, Pasikowski didn't repeat his earlier success, however. That pattern was no longer effective – it had exhausted itself. Generally speaking, there has been no major turning point that would separate mid-1990s films from those of today.

RM: What conditions would be necessary for the development of a strong Polish cinema, visible in Poland and on European and world markets?

JF: We have interesting and talented young film directors. The major obstacle for development is lack of money. In 2001 there was a crisis, because money from the government budget was reduced. Now we have an opportunity for greater investment due to the bill on gambling. Part of the tax on gambling will be spent on culture and films in particular. One should also expect that new licences granted to private television broadcasters will include an obligation to invest in national culture.

With regards to the bill on cinematography, it is emphasised that those bodies whose revenue comes from films are to invest in film production. Therefore,

Polish public television already invests in Polish cinema, and traditionally so. Now, we need private television to invest not only in soap operas and sitcoms, but also in cinema production. Also, cinemas, videos and CDs should be taxed for that purpose. We would like to hope that finances for film will increase.

We are also very open to film co-productions, especially with France and Germany. Co-productions happen and we want to develop that area further, with other countries, which will also hopefully give us another source of finance. In the case of co-productions, one may also apply for funding from Euroimage, for instance. So, on one hand, it is the financial problem, on the other hand it is the problem with scripts. It was a problem and it constantly remains a problem of Polish filmmaking.

There are no interesting scripts and there are not professional scriptwriters. In developed cinematographies, one in ten scripts might be realised, so the best one of ten would be chosen. Also one would take a long time to develop a script, to rewrite it many times. A lot of funding is committed to the time taken for script development. In Poland, however, there are few scriptwriters, despite the fact that there is a department of scriptwriting at the Łódź Film School. At present, amongst those writing for television and cinema, there are already very talented scriptwriters, however there are still not enough. There is not enough money spent on script development, so inferior scripts go into the production stage. That's why we are putting an emphasis on scriptwriting and development here in the Ministry.

RM: Do you have films that you would see as Polish for you personally? Those films that signify Polishness to you?

JF: I couldn't narrow it down to, say, three films. There are plenty of films that fit this category. I can speak of authors, maybe. Andrzej Wajda and most of his films are what represent Polishness to me.

RM: Thank you very much for you time.

“It’s all about an ability to shoot”

Interview with Robert Gliński

15 September 2004, Gdynia

Robert Gliński is a Polish film director of the “middle generation”.

*RM: In our initial conversation you said you couldn’t remember many things about making *Hi Tereska*. Can you remember why you made that film?*

RG: I made it because I was looking for a contemporary story which would relate to the question of “why do children kill?” At the beginning of the 1990s, there was an eruption of senseless crimes in Poland committed by teenagers. No one knows why. For example, in Wrocław, two girls killed their girlfriend with knives. Asked “why?”, they said, “because she didn’t fit in in our class.”

There were other murders that also seemed to have no reason. We are used to the idea that if someone kills someone else, it is for a good reason. I don’t know... For money. Out of revenge. Out of love. And here it appeared that there was no known reason [for these killings]. Yet, there really was one. It was deeply rooted in matters of either a social or psychological kind. That was the kind of a story I was looking for when I came across the script for *Hi Tereska*, although it had a different title at the time. I don’t remember what. We started to change it with a colleague and this is how *Hi Tereska* came about. This is its origin.

RM: You are not suggesting it might be a topic specifically Polish, are you?

RG: I don’t think it is a specifically Polish film, because I travelled a lot with this film. I took it probably to every country in Europe. I went with it to the US, Canada, South America. Everyone kept saying that they had similar problems with their youth, that they are lost, that they live this way. Of course, every country’s reality is different, because the slums of Mexico look different from somewhere else, but the mechanism of this phenomenon itself is everywhere similar. [There is] some kind of lost connection at home, not a very good school, aimlessness, a feeling of being lost. There is the need for these youths to communicate with others yet there is also the feeling of unfulfilment. These things function everywhere.

In Poland, it got written into the reality of the *blokowiska*,¹ because it was a typical Poland Moloch, which pulls in young people. This is where youth

¹ Districts filled with blocks of flats, the heritage of the communist push for “cheap accommodation for all”.

subcultures form. So, its appearance is typically Polish, but the phenomenon itself occurs everywhere.

RM: Were there any significant differences in the way your film was received in Poland as opposed to how it was received abroad?

RG: As I mentioned, I made a film about young people, lost young people, a need for emotions, which are unfulfilled, and this is what, more or less, everyone saw and felt in this film. And, everyone knew that the specificity of that phenomenon varies. For instance, in Paris, where I also showed that film, there is a similar problem with the youth, especially with those of ethnic minorities. There are even similar "blokowiska" on the outskirts of Paris. The youth subculture there is very strong and is also quite wild. So everywhere there were commonalities, although specificities were different in every country.

RM: What did you expect from your viewers? Was it your intention to shock them?

RG: You can't assume how a film will end up being perceived. You make a film that has a thought in it, you conduct a certain process, but what its effect is going to be, what its power is... varies. It is difficult to say that I assumed that it would turn out the way it did. When you make a film, you always have some assumptions, but how it all turns out is often divergent from these plans, so eventually you have to forget about them and follow what you have, what works.

RM: How did the idea of Hi Tereska evolve?

RG: Well, it changed a little. I didn't know how blokowisko was going to function in film. I didn't know how the lead girl would measure, whether she would lead that film, whether I would have to abandon her. There are always questions which get clarified only during the shooting. Was she going to be powerful enough on the screen? Those things became clear only during the shooting.

RM: Are you still following what happens to Ola Gietner?

RG: She kicked up a row. She didn't want to change, and this is how it is. She had an opportunity to change. She didn't want to. This is how it is.

RM: Why did you choose to shoot in black-and-white?

RG: It was first shot on a digital camera, and then we made a copy on 35 millimetres, so it was first in colour. If you can imagine, that colour wasn't true. Blokowisko is grey, and in the camera it appeared sometimes green, sometimes blue; some kind of falseness was sneaking in. The optical

impression of that world is grey, and on the screen it kept coming out as coloured, so we abandoned colour.

RM: How does Hi Tereska fit in with all the social and cultural changes after 1989?

RM: I think that this film on the one hand portrays the milieu of these blocks of flats, for that space where some 60-70 percent of people in big cities live. That's a huge population. It is communism's inheritance. Let's not be mistaken, these are horrible blocks of flats. It's something that trails behind us from that period. Those social phenomena like loneliness or not being understood, or helplessness, the need for human contact and emotions which cannot be realised, these are phenomena out of contemporary civilisation. I would separate them from the [communist] system, because it is something that will deepen as this civilisation progresses.

Poland is now a mixture of different problems and issues. On the one hand, we have a significant burden of the period that was. It's not only material, such as blocks of flats or the not very high standard of living, but also our psyche. There is a distinct lack of energy. A kind of a lack of will. A kind of giving into our fate. These are kinds of the remains of the old system. Yet on the other hand, there is a new world with new challenges and new openings that we often cannot manage. It's a clash of these two tendencies, and I do hope that in the future we will Europeanise and our standard of living will be higher. By this I also mean our personal standard, whereby people will manage problems of the contemporary world.

RM: What is the role of a filmmaker in that world, in Poland after 1989?

RG: It's a very difficult situation. The problem in Poland lies in the fact that there is no money to make films. There are too few films being made. It's difficult to produce a film. That's a significant problem. Yet, films are still being made, though not many. There are on average a hundred films released in a European country every year, for instance in England or Spain, not to mention France, which produces more. And in Poland there are ten. Supposedly here at the festival [of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia] there are twenty, but half of those are made for television. If we counted television films made in other countries, there would be hundreds if not thousands of them. And I am talking about films made for cinema screens. Here we don't have developed mechanisms of film funding and, as a result our cinema is very, very weak.

RM: Returning to the original question; what do you see as a function of a filmmaker in this new Poland?

RG: Ah, here. I don't know what it's about. I'm interested in other things. One is about being contemporary, its description, the description of what is

happening here around us, people, the contemporary world. Another thing I'm interested in is history, meaning what happened in the past and how people acted then. What historical processes or historical events built and shaped people's attitudes and how people managed them. I'm only interested in these two areas. If I make films, this is what they are about.

RM: That's why you are making a film about Katyń? How did you manage to get around to making this film? Other directors, including Andrzej Wajda, have been attempting to do it, unsuccessfully so far.

RG: Because money is the problem. It's the fundamental problem of that film. It's what I spoke about before; that there are no mechanisms, sufficient resources, to make a lot of films, to make films that say something about our history and about this country, and that's why a film about Katyń is having such a painful birth.

RM: There have been a few people at this Festival who have opposed the term "national cinema". You have just made a film [Long Weekend] about the recent past of Poland. Now, you are making a film about a historically significant crime committed on this nation. Would you be able to sign your name under a declaration of belonging to Polish national cinema?

RG: I think it sounds pompous. Long Weekend is a modest television film that describes people's attitudes, which take place now, but they are trailed by history. The history as it happened. People occupied different sides. That created different conflicts. So *Long Weekend* is simply a little, modest story [about it]. It can't be a national epic. Katyń certainly would be a bigger, stronger film. On the other hand, I don't want to make [a film about] Katyń as some patriotic, stiffened schlock, but as a film about real human conflicts. A dense film, an epic. I think we can refer to it as national cinema, but it will be a film about people who are faced with some important choices in their life and they have to make a decision. A story is related to the [Polish] nation, but I think that more important is not the nation, nor the history, nor the big words, but a human being, an individuality, how an individual behaves in the whirls of history, this history's events, this hell that history often brings. How does that individual behave? What choices does he make? How does he fight difficulties, evil? That's what the subject matter for the film is.

RM: How would you evaluate the state of Polish cinema and its role in this particular moment, apart from its financial problems?

RG: On the one hand, there are films – we refer to them as – “hamburgers”. These are films designed to be consumed, to make money. They are lighter, more action-oriented, sliding on the surface of various issues. They are little comedies. From time to time, there are more serious films. Those films usually have a more problematic life-history, because money for them is more

difficult to come by. This is the other side of Polish cinema. I think this is how it should be. I mean that healthy cinema should produce different films; lighter films, comedies, action films, and also films that carry a thought, lay bare the world and show what happens around us; films that make people think and discuss. I think this is what a real, rich cinema should be. In a way, this is what it looks like in Poland, except that its scale is smaller.

RM: What would you consider the most important film of the last 15 years?

RG: I don't know which would be the most important... I made a few films. Some are interesting, some poor, what can I say... And my colleagues also make an interesting film from time to time.

RM: Has there been a film that has been particularly important to you personally?

RG: I don't know. I don't want to play rankings here. Nothing comes to mind right now. In any case, I like to watch films in general. Whenever I have time, I watch films and enjoy them. Yet I don't have a kind of... "top-list".

RM: What would you consider to be the biggest successes and failures of Polish cinema over the last 15 years?

RG: I think the greatest failure is that we don't have legislation that clearly specifies means of film funding. Each European country developed this means, and it somehow is working. It is either a percentage of cinema ticket sales, or taxes on video releases, on sports, or on gambling. Everyone has come up with something, whether it be taxes on revenue, tax concessions or TV advertising. Many countries have worked something out, but not us.

RM: What would you like to see happen in the near future in Polish cinema?

RG: Most of all, I would like to be able to work, and I would like my colleagues, young and old, to be able to work, because cinema will then exist. [There is] a fantastic Portuguese director who is 95 years old and still makes films. His name is Oliveira. He wins awards at festivals and makes very interesting films, so I think that it's all about an ability to shoot.

RM: Thank you very much.

“Don’t trust film directors” or on falsehoods and anachronisms of national identity

Interview with Prof Mirosław Przyłipiak

15 September 2004, Gdynia

Professor Mirosław Przyłipiak specialises in American, European and Polish films, both fiction and documentary.

RM: During our last brief conversation, we started with the concept of “national cinema”...

MP: The term “national cinema” is foreign to my school of thought - it is popular in the Anglo-Saxon school of film [theory]. I’m trying here to find common points between you and Marek Haltof. If Polish national cinema exists, does there also exist Polish non-national cinema?

RM: That is an interesting question. For me, the existence of national cinema is axiomatic, and my focus for some time has been on identifying factors which determine the shape of that cinema; for instance, cultural continuity and unity and the continuity of film culture...

MP: I am still returning to a binary question. If there is a national cinema, then there should also exist a non-national cinema. If the term “national” was to encompass the whole cinema, then there would be no difference between national and non-national cinema, and national cinema is simply Polish cinema, and Polish cinema is the cinema realised in Poland. There are other options. It could be cinema realised by Poles, or cinema made in Polish. These are two other areas of definition. In this case, the adjective “national” doesn’t identify anything specifically, but simply all the films traditionally assigned to the history of Polish cinema. The ease with which Marek Haltof and I gave up the adjective “national” in the Polish translation [of Haltof’s book *Polish National Cinema*] is telling. I was somewhat doubtful, and he had no doubt that this title could not be translated literally. If it were translated literally, it would be misunderstood, because in Poland the word “national” functions in a different context. It functions in a political context, which is also associated with specific historical political moments, which are defined as a national movement. Apart from anything else, using that adjective in reference to Polish cinema immediately pushes it into that context.

It is possible to identify a narrow group of films in the history of [Polish] cinema, which somehow get a hook into the nationalistic ideology. This is how it would be understood in Poland - that it refers to films that share a

connection with the “Moczar ideology”¹ of the 1960s. In Polish literature on film, “Polish national cinema” does not exist as a concept.

There are other questions which also come to mind here. For instance, what to do with Jewish films that were made in Poland before and after World War 2? They were often filmed in Yiddish. Were those films Polish or not? Maybe they were Polish, but not national?

RM: Is the binary definition based on the differentiation between national and Hollywood cinema?

MP: Here it would suffice to say “Polish cinema”. If this were true though, the statement would be based on the assumption that Hollywood is not a national cinema.

RM: Wouldn't you say that is the case?

MP: I'm not so sure. I can understand the flow of [film] revenue etc, yet in my opinion Hollywood cinema grows out of specific Anglo-Saxon characteristics and ways of thinking. I mean rationalism. I mean causal relations. I mean descriptive precision. I mean the relationship between what can be perceived and what can't; what's material and what's not. It's all Anglo-Saxon, apart from the fact that it is trans-national. In the sense in which America is Anglo-Saxon, which in reality it isn't, Hollywood is a fortress of Anglo-Saxonness. So, I'm not so sure whether it's fair to say that Hollywood is cosmopolitan and that it has no national roots. I think it has quite precise national roots. So, I would question the juxtaposition of cosmopolitan non-national Hollywood with national European cinemas.

RM: In this case, is Never Ever a Polish film? Genre-wise it is Hollywood.

MP: It's a film that attempts to transplant into the Polish reality the most popular film genre of recent years, the romantic comedy. In this sense, it is more Hollywood than Polish, because it is a comedy, a romantic comedy. Yet it has a Polish context. In Poland it provoked statements that it questioned family politics.

RM: Ha, ha, ha.

MP: Yes, it's the context that is very clear for people who live in Poland, namely that of the pro-family politics of the Church, emphasised by its recognition of the family as the basic social unit. It's the context of a gloomy attitude to sex and the rawness of carnality with which the Church struggles, trying to reject what's bodily. In this context, *Never Ever* showed a

¹ An ultra-nationalistic and often anti-Semitic political faction of the Party under the leadership of Mieczysław Moczar. It expired at the beginning of the 1970s.

relationship between two people who are not connected with a familial bond, who are not concentrating on bringing up children, and who enjoy sex, something which is a rare sight in Polish cinema. Kałużyński wrote a long time ago that when people have sex in Polish cinema, they are very sad and sullen while doing it. And here it was different. In this context, this film constitutes a polemical voice for what used to be the case in Poland before. Of course, it is also an attempt to implement a commercial mechanism for romantic comedy in Poland.

However, if you would like to use it as an example of non-national cinema, it gets a bit dangerous, because from time to time in Polish cinema ideas to make popular films appear. And good popular cinema means referring to Hollywood patterns.

Yet just because you take up Hollywood patterns, does that mean a film ceases to be, say, "national"?

Firstly, the difference is not always so clear-cut. A wave of this sort of thinking appeared in Polish cinema soon after 1990 with the advent of the free market. On that wave, there came both *Pigs*, *Kroll*. Then it was said and written that it was an attempt to create American action cinema in Poland. When we watch these films today, they have less in common with American action cinema genres than with Polish reality.

RM: The most national film of all in recent years is, after all, Pan Tadeusz...

MP: [...] All historical films relate to the present, by definition. [...] No one in Poland cares about a 17th century Andrzej Kmicic² story. If people come to watch him [in the cinema], it means they find some relevance to their own issues in the story. This is the case with all the film adaptations of great Polish literature.

There have been at least three waves of these kinds of cinematic adaptations of Polish literature. The first took place in the 1920s, the second in the 60s, and the third at the end of the 90s. It is extremely interesting to trace what kind of problems each of those waves provided an answer to. It is no accident that they appeared when they did. Each wave was an answer to the current socio-political problems of the time.

That first wave was the most optimistic, because the country was young, coming out of 130 years of partitions and there was a desire to build a national identity based on the literary texts that had helped to previously build the country. In the 60s, the adaptation wave grew on the national ideology.

² One of the heroes of Jerzy Hoffman's *With Fire and Sword*.

March 1968³ saw an underlying base in the clash within the Party between a national faction led by Moczar and other centres. There was a strong emphasis on propagating Polish nationality and, strangely, adaptations of Polish literature got a backing.

The wave of the 1990s for the first time had a commercial base as it became clear that the films would make money, even if the box office success was somewhat artificial. The great success of films like *Pan Tadeusz* and *With Fire and Sword* was to some extent a result of children attending these films at the request of their schools. Yet there was a second reason for the wave of the 90s, which is definitely worth considering. It was a time when there was a need to define national identity in the context of the 1990s, when the old understanding of Polish nationality had become an anachronism: Poland was joining Europe, the world was changing and borders were disappearing. People everywhere felt the need to determine their identity, and this was also true of Polish people. The canon that was adapted in the late 1990s always identified Polish identity. However it determined it anachronistically, in relation to some parameters that did not exist in the 1990s.

RM: Could you please be more specific?

MP: Polish national identity, in my opinion, in the way it was shaped by Romantic literature of the 19th century by Sienkiewicz, Mickiewicz, was founded on at least two concepts. One was the problem of the non-existence of the [Polish] state and the enemy against whom it was necessary to speak out, but who was stronger. It was that question of Polish history - whether one should rebel against the enemy who could destroy you. If you don't rebel, your spirit shrinks. If you rebel, the enemy will destroy you. This is one set [of parameters].

Another was the understanding of Messianic idea of the exceptional role of the Polish suffering nation. This overlaps with the story of Christ and with Catholicism. Poland suffers, Christ [is] on the cross, so as a result Poles are an exceptional, chosen nation - terribly anachronistic. We can't define Polish identity in these terms at the end of the 1990s. The situation has changed. There is no non-existence of the Polish state. There are no powers that – if I may say so – used to oppress Poland that still exist, and if they do, they exist in a different space [...]. The whole Catholic-Messianic ideology belongs in a different world and a different time. [...]

What's interesting is the duality of these adaptations' basis at the end of the 1990s. On the one hand, the commercial factor was evident. Almost all of these films were made by old directors, for whom they represented a kind of a swan song. None of them made a film after that. Wajda did not make a film

³ The time of political, social and cultural purges, which eventuated in the forceful removal of prominent people of Jewish origin from their positions, and often from Poland.

after *Revenge*, neither did Kawalerowicz, nor Hoffman. On the other hand, there was the neglected fact that the works that determined national identity at the time were so over adapted that they completely lost their relevance.

RM: In many interviews, Andrzej Wajda lists his motivation for making these films, including nurturing Polish national heritage, pride in Polish cultural achievements, the beauty of Polish language... He also said that if the film in itself was no good, it would be taken off the cinema screens before schools had a chance to buy tickets.

MP: I don't trust directors. I don't pay any particular attention to what directors say about their films. They are in a particularly strange mental state. Making a film is a terrifying work. Agnieszka Holland once said that making a film is like building a factory. They have to expend a lot of energy to make a film. When you invest so much work and effort, you can't have an objective attitude to [your work]. [...] Nobody can be their own judge. Not even him. Additionally, the more complex a film they make, the less they know about it. It is a basic psychological rule, with which we easily agree in relation to all people with the exception of film directors, whom we treat as a credible source of information in their own films.

My wife is a schoolteacher, so I know how it functioned. Schools were coming to watch *Pan Tadeusz* from week one, the second day. The tickets were sold out before the film came onto the screen. However, none of these films had an interesting aesthetic proposition, none of them were good cinema. [...]

RM: Yet, at some stage these films made Poland the only country in Europe where box-office receipts for domestic productions overtook those for Hollywood ones. The significance of these films is that they are about national kitsch. They play on many embarrassing nostalgias, to which no one wants to admit, but they are there in the filmic, visual format and we can't escape them.

MP: Of course. However, I would be careful when applauding these films based on their box-office success, though it is not a simple matter. I lived in Poland at the time and know that no other film in the history of Polish cinema was as heavily promoted on television as *Pan Tadeusz* was. Television was filled with *Pan Tadeusz* a good two or three weeks before the premiere. There were continuous *Pan Tadeusz* video clips, promotional materials, interviews with directors, trailers, a full cannonade. [...]

RM: Moving on to other films, would you qualify Hi Tereska as a film specifically Polish?

MP: What do you mean by "specifically Polish"?

RM: *That's one of these concepts that some people know intuitively, but their precise definition is most problematic...*

MP: Because you are leading yourself up the garden path, badly. The first danger of that garden path is following the trail of stereotypes; for instance, the Romantic stereotype, that the Polish national specificity is determined by Romanticism, or is of Romantic character – here again depending on a definition – [determined] either by the duty of armed struggle, or by domination of the nation over an individual, or by a Romantic hero who has great intentions but they don't work out, because they usually don't work out for a Polish Romantic hero. This is one stereotype, which in my opinion is false. Of course, Romanticism had an important role, but it does not encompass all of Polish culture.

Can you show me the Romantic stereotype in *Hi Tereska*? Or in *Camouflage*, for instance? [...] Plus the whole very important theme of the absurd in Polish culture, which refers to the aesthetics of mockery by Mrożek or by Munk. [...] The Romantic stereotype is significant, but it doesn't exhaust the topic. It doesn't encompass all of it. A lot of Polish cinema remains in a very loose relation, or in no relation to it. [...]

RM: *How would you position films like Hi Tereska or Edi in the context of our discussion?*

MP: [...] *Edi* was received in Poland as [...] a Buddhist film, yet a little bit polemical. A simple social fact is that after 1990 all Poles were subjected to the strong propaganda of "entrepreneurship". There is no state and system that would do it for you; now your success is in your own hands." The media was full of it. [...] And this was the direction our cinema took. For instance, *Pigs* is an expression of such a stand. The characters of *Pigs* are people, who take matters into their own hands. They seek their own success. There were many films like this. [...]

The first film that questioned it – and this is the measure of its worth – was *Debt*. The heroes of *Debt* were trying to apply that maxim at the beginning. They want to do business. They have a business plan. Because they believe so much in the ideology of entrepreneurship, they get entangled in a horrible situation, where it transpires that there is somebody who is more entrepreneurial than them. They lose on both fronts. In this context, *Edi* was received as a film about someone who could resist that stand, that ideology; someone who could maintain independence and not want to be entrepreneurial. The same is the case with *Squint Your Eyes*. [...] *Edi* appeared as an alternative to the ideology of success that depends on you; that it's better to give in than to achieve success at all cost, because the moral costs may be too high.

[...]

RM: You've said earlier that Day of the Wacko is also important. Why?

MP: It is important and I liked it for several reasons. One has to do with my private *idée fixe*. [...] I believe that Polish cinema, or male characters in Polish cinema, are cursed with the "Piszczyk complex". That means that 95 per cent of heroes in Polish films are negative heroes. [They are] negative not in the sense of being criminals, for instance gangsters, but negative in the sense that they are losers, exactly like Piszczyk. They don't measure up. They are hysterical, treacherous, two-faced, deceitful. On top of that, they lack a spine, a strong identity, a strong personality, [...] apart from a few exceptions.

RM: What are the exceptions?

MP: [...] For some time, I thought that maybe Edi was a new embodiment of such a [positive] hero. But he is a tippler, an outsider, so it's a dual force. [...] In Poland there was a lot written about the wave of *Pigs*, that it shows a kind of superman in a misogynistic way, where women are whores and guys solve everything using force. Yet, these tough guys have butter-legs. Who is Linda? Linda is an ex-policeman who feels sorry for himself, because he was hurt in the past. It is a hurt man who relieves his hurt by using aggression, but he is not a strong personality. Not to mention that all *Pigs* is submerged in the problem of betrayal, because Linda is betrayed by everyone. The wife left him. The girlfriend goes to the friend. The police betray him. That's the problem. [...]

There is a way of describing these issues, which – if we are talking about Polish nationhood and history – indicate that Polish history elevates women. On the one hand it elevates them, but on the other it puts them in a difficult position. [...] Since the 19th century, women have had to take on all the burden of matters lost by the men, who – even if they did try – faced physical extermination or humiliation. [...] This is the origin of the wonderful Polish Mother who sews standards and sends her sons to uprising after uprising. [...]

All this leads to an explanation of why I like Koterski's film. I like it because it completes the "Piszczyk complex" in showing a Polish male as a degraded, strange creature. All Koterski's films are like that. They are masochistic from the male point of view. Adam Miauczyński as a total loser. Even his name is humiliating. Frustrated, degenerated Adam Miauczyński, who can't manage anything, who can't get his teeth into anything. That's the first reason why I like it

The second is that it reveals something very important: the level of frustration. In this sense, it is a mirror of Poland in the 1990s. A huge level of frustration

coming from different sources, combined with a sense of inferiority and uncertainty. This is all in this film.

Thirdly, I like it for formal reasons. I like films that are laconic, which don't contain superfluous elements, which are clear about which sphere of film work they fit into. Koterski has a great ear for dialogues. Sometimes different magazines print dialogue from his films and they are a great read.

Fourthly, the references to Romantic poetry, which you spoke about, are great, because they show the gap between that great poetry and reality. As an example, this is the fragment my students kept laughing at:

"Where are the Lithuanians returning from?"

"Fuck Lithuanians!"

It's refreshing.

RM: Returning once again to Hi Tereska, what role do you think the para-documentary methods played in the success of that film?

MP: That depends on how we define success. If we speak of critical acclaim, or success in terms of the aesthetic value of the film, then it really had an influence, because the film is coherent stylistically. All the consequences of the para-documentary manner of filming are present there. [...]

There is an interesting story of that girl in it. She is following a path, which seems to have been programmed for her in the film, meaning that she is moving in the direction of crime. She's recently ended up in prison, once again. The film gave her a chance to break away from that space. At a press conference after the film, Gliński was saying that she had a ticket to Hollywood. In Poland a ticket to Hollywood is something extraordinary. She didn't go, because she escaped from the orphanage. The time when she could break away was the time that defined her.

RM: How did you perceive that film in general?

MP: I like that film a lot. It is dual. On the one hand, it is a para-documentary story, which shows – I think – in a very real way Polish blokowisko and families which nest in it. There is also a high level of frustration there. It's visible in the person of Tereska's father, for instance. I like that there are no exaggerations in that film. It is not a deeply pathological family, nor one marked by crime. They are not weirdos. The father is simply a normal, ordinary man, who takes care of his children as well as he can, except that things slip away from him. In my opinion, it rings very true, as does the depiction of youth in this film. If you go into a suburb with tower blocks like,

for instance those in Gdańsk's Zaspą or Żabianka, you find suburban groups that act like the young people in the film. In this way, it is also true. At the same time, the film avoids the fundamental assumption that social conditions are to blame for an individual's behaviour. The important question here is whether this film can be aligned with the theory of social pedagogy that says all social evil is related to people's living conditions, or whether it moves in the direction of dark human nature, which does not depend on social conditions. This is the question that the film poses.

RM: How, in general, do you see the state of Polish cinema in the first 15 years after 1989?

MP: I would divide that period. It's not possible to treat all that time as one. There were at least three periods in it. The first was straight after 1989. In that period, there were two important phenomena. On the one hand there were a wave of "grudge" films regarding the most recent history. Then there was the attempt to make a good commercial film – the wave of so-called "bandit" cinema. This was the first period. At that time, it seemed that everything was falling apart because Polish audiences, who at last have a wide choice of commercial B-grade action and porno movies [on video] to choose from, didn't go to the cinema. All of a sudden, there came Pasikowski's *Pigs* and the whole stream of imitators, who attracted people to the cinema. There was a great value in those films. So-called "grudge" films were simply no good. Mostly, they were anachronistic ideologically. They kept trying to show reality in terms of divisions that were not valid any more. This was the first wave.

The second wave consisted of the adaptations, which I rate very lowly. The only positive aspect was that viewers came to see them. If a film attracts so many millions of people, that in itself is a good enough reason to make that film. Yet, it would be good if the same viewers went to see another film. But in the case of these big adaptations, this has not happened. Massive audiences consisted of people who were invited, or were led to the cinema by schools, or of people who don't go to the cinema at all, but went for sentimental reasons, because a great national epic was filmed. But nothing came out of it for the future of Polish cinema apart from one-off big box office returns. That audience didn't come to see the next Polish film, so it didn't move anything and gave no impulse for Polish film development.

RM: Then, there came a real low...

MP: Yes, exactly, after that there came a low. It didn't awake any creative wave in Polish filmmakers, because they were not inspiring films. I rate this period very badly. It was a black hole. Additionally, Polish cinema departed from what was being made in Europe and the world. Suddenly, we had a

Skansen here. A Skansen of formal filmic, ideological and any other anachronism.

On the other hand, I was very impressed by last year's festival [Polish Feature Films Festival in Gdynia], because there was something new and cool about it, for instance films like *Symmetry* [*Symetria*] or Barczyk's *Metamorphosis* [*Przemiany*]. [...]

RM: I have also divided that time into three periods...

MP: That's good. Apart from the three periods, there are also events, which do not fit into them, such as Kolski's films. It's a more interesting individuality, which emerged in that period. It's something new and separate. There was also Grzegorzek's *Conversations with a Man in a Wardrobe* [*Rozmowy z człowiekiem w szafie*]. We could find more single films like that. For instance, Kondratiuk's films made with Cembrzyńska. It's a private, intimate cinema. [...]

There are some phenomena, which are difficult to place in that scheme, because they don't stick to these cycles on the one hand, and on the other they are the films that traditionally oriented Polish cinema and hence they give more meaning to that division. [...] On the one hand, there were "grudge" films and there were many of them, and on the other hand the – so-called – bandit films, which made up a large group of films. It's both *Pigs*, *Young Wolves*, *The Bash* [Balanga], *Private Town* [*Miasto prywatne*], and also *Kiler* and *2 Kilers* – *Kiler* is a parody – and also *Debt*.

Debt evidently crowns that trend because it's a film that ventures into the ideological basis, which was assumed as given in previous films, namely, the ideology of success. *Debt* describes, or analyses and concerns the same ideology. [...]

Most definitely, the cinema that appears now is more and more normal in the sense that it does not act itself out in the shadow of national issues, because people are not driven by them any more. It's an unfortunate anachronism. I think it will become more a cinema that concerns various people's vicissitudes on the normal level, without all that "honour and fatherland" in the background, without that Romantic literature.

RM: Can we really escape that? Can people who were born before, say, 1981 escape it?

MP: Yesterday [at the Polish Feature Films Festival], there was an interesting film titled *Long Weekend* [*Długi weekend*] (2004). *Long Weekend* is a modest film, and very important in this respect. It is a film which portrays anachronistic ideological stands. Both ideologies that fought each other are

anachronisms. These people are connected by a television game show and a house that can be won in that game show. What's more important is that it was made by Gliński, who is someone very definitely placed on one [anti-communist] side of the barricade. After all, he made *Sunday Pranks* [*Niedzielne igraszki*] (1987), an anti-Stalinist film. After that he made *All That Really Matters* [*Wszystko co najważniejsze*] (1992), which clearly positions itself on the national side. Later he made *Hi Tereska*, maybe not national, but a serious film nevertheless. Then, he makes a film in which he mocks thinking in categories derived from [our] history as anachronistic and unsuitable for what's happening now. You can't escape your own history, but maybe it should be done in a different way.

RM: How do you perceive Primate in this context? It seemed to be popular among its audience...

MP: Again there is an issue with the box-office. It's a film which priests encouraged churchgoers to watch. Again, the box-office there does not necessarily result from the appreciation of filmic values, but from the willingness to attend church. I'm afraid of films like that in Poland. It's obvious that if one makes a film about Wyszyński, it has to be hagiographic. There is a question of what level of hagiography would the film stop at; whether it would be terribly hagiographic, or just a little bit hagiographic. But it can't be anything else. That's why I don't like films like that. When someone makes a film, or anything, he or she has to have freedom. At the very beginning, a filmmaker should be allowed to do anything. And when one makes a film like that, not everything is allowed.

RM: Do you know of any film made in Poland after 1989, in which a communist would not be painted in black and white, internal conflicts or complexities?

MP: Have I seen a film like that? I don't think I have. I can't recall. That's it. All these films were a type of a weapon. I was also a Solidarity activist in 1980 and 1981, and it was clear to me that communists were sons of bitches and the truth was on our side. As a result, these films came to being in the condition of communist Poland, and they reassured us that we were right, regardless of the fact that reality was the way it was. This demanded of all the filmmakers we regarded [...] the moral duty to make films in this way, against communism. It was a trap, in which the young generation fell. For instance, there is a young generation that finished Film School at the beginning of Martial Law. They started, so to say, terribly, and many of them lost their energy. An act of making a film after Martial Law, in 1982, 1983, 1984 by wide circles of opinion-leaders in Poland was considered national treason.

When Kieślowski made *No End* [*Bez końca*] in 1984, the opposition circles crucified him just because he made a film, so he went on to compromise with the communist government. Because of it, making films was an act of treason, and when someone could make a film, they had to make it against. Lately, nothing has changed. That mental stereotype still functions in the public sphere. Gliński's *Long Weekend* was about that - mental stereotypes, from which it is very difficult to free oneself. [...]

RM: In an interview released recently on a DVD with Escape from Cinema "Freedom", Marczewski claims he was crucified for that film because he showed a human being in the censor, that the censor evolves and is not comfortable with who he is.

MP: I don't recall those sorts of criticisms. Maybe Marczewski enjoys the feeling of being persecuted. The film was received kneeling. Even if you accept what Marczewski claims, it is still the same story. That censor for his sins in communist Poland can only repent, and the only line he can take is that he was a bastard and he wants to be a better man. [...]

I was there at the Festival in 1990, when Marczewski showed that film. *Black Mass*. *Prayer*. Marczewski, who has not made a film in 10 years of communism. The underlying message was obvious. Those who made films fell low. A luminous character was one who refused to co-operate with the government. Those that maintained morality are on the roofs. What does it mean that they are on the roofs? It means that they didn't come into contact with the system. Those who came into contact with the system may only repent, just like that censor, if they can afford it. If not, then they have no other rights. In the room – the press conferences were then held in a room of the Musical Theatre – there were film journalists, filmmakers, all who lived here in the 1980s. What does that mean that they lived here? Well, they wrote articles, realised programs, made films. Poland of the 1980s was a strange country. All divisions were not clear. All people addressed Marczewski like a guru, or a Pope, who expressed some luminous truth; truth that concerns, of course, all these people. All of them could place themselves easily in the position of the censor, in the sense that they worked in that system. And all of them positioned themselves amongst those on the roofs, and thought that the film positioned them there. That division is false, because it is not how it was.

It was a gross oversimplification of reality. The only way to talk about a person was in regard to his or her attitude to politics. If it was positive, then they had no place in public life. But this is only in relation to the people from the ruling class. So called "society" lived on the roofs in that film, which is a nonsense and a heavy lie. If we speak of various maladies of this society, they concern everyone equally. Neither was it the case then, nor is it now that the sphere of politicians is singled out to be subjected to those maladies.

For instance, there is a lot of talk about corruption amongst politicians now. There are various corruption scandals. From where I stand, it seems that politicians are an ideal representation of the society in this respect. Polish society is unfortunately prone to the lure of corruption - the whole society, not only politicians. And the same was the case in the 1980s. The division which placed the luminous social majority on one side, and a bunch of communist pigs on the other, about which *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* speaks is fundamentally false. It is not what it was about.

[...]

RM: There seems to have been a shift in the role of a filmmaker, as you said, no longer concerned with national matters. What about critics?

MP: If we speak of film critics, there has been a shift in the sense that there appeared a kind of criticism not known before; the promotional criticism. Film criticism started to concern itself to a greater degree with promoting films, while before it was about analysing and interpreting films. In Poland before 1989, critics were not concerned with encouraging audiences to go to the cinema, with increasing audience numbers, because it was not important for that cinema. However, after the transition, on the one hand there appeared a whole range of colourful glossy magazines with photographs, pretty actresses, centrefolds, more pictures and text and content, that is everything what is comes as a package with commercial cinema. Texts or articles were often about copying promotional materials. This narrowed down the field of so-called serious, ambitious critics, who had to find their place in that new space. While the critics who grew up in the old times had a certain scale of values inherited from communist times, they wrote about films [...] using critical analytical tools to interpret and decide on the meaning of the films. The generation of critics which appeared later were more out of balance, because they came across a different pattern, in which the role of a critic was to encourage a viewer to follow the commercial offerings.

RM: What changes have you witnessed in academic critical thought?

MP: There appeared in Poland the trend for feminist analysis. It's not the same feminism [as in the West], for different reasons. Most of all, it is very late. After all, feminist analyses of cinema appeared in Poland in the 1990s, so there is a lot to make up for. [...] There are at least two or three descriptive stereotypes in that arena. One of them is by Elżbieta Ostrowska. As a result of historical processes discussed by her, women in Poland were put on a pedestal and deprived of the possibility to act. They are goddesses, Polish Mothers, who are owed respect, but they are totally immobilised, they have no voice.

The other stereotype that appeared clearly in the 1990s, which is something that Grazyna Stachówna wrote about in two or three articles, is that of women as whores. In *Pigs* it is evident that women are treated as whores, but there are other examples of it. Stachówna wrote sarcastically about it, listing a whole number of films at one of the festivals. For instance, there comes a boy to deliver a pizza. A woman opens the door, pulls him in and almost rapes him. It's obviously a filmic attraction, because there is sex on the screen, but Stachówna wrote that she didn't recognise herself in it. She doesn't act like that, and women she knows don't act like that, but these are male fantasies, which are about representing women as promiscuous whores, vamps. [...]

RML: What is the attitude of people born after 1976 to the communist past?

MP: In Poland there exists a phenomenon of nostalgia-forgetfulness. From the statistical data known to me, there appears that this nostalgia is exhibited by older people in small towns and villages, and people who gained little from the transitions and lost a lot. They lost the feeling of security, they experienced unemployment. They didn't gain much financially. They don't travel abroad, they don't know how to find themselves there, freedom of speech doesn't concern them, because they don't function in that sphere, and they lost material security. They haven't lowered their material standards because none existed before, and suddenly there appeared a huge gap, because there were proofs of material affluence, which could not be experienced or seen before. Those people are nostalgic for communism, for what was. Their very short memory contributes to that.

RM: Thank you very much for your time.

“Cinema is a commodity”

Interview with Lew Rywin

3 July 2003, Warsaw

Lew Rywin is the founding director of Heritage Film Production, one of the most significant Polish film production companies to have emerged since 1989, and the person convicted in the most significant media corruption trials of the early 2000s.

RM: You've been one of the most important people in shaping Polish film after 1989. Do you think that, as it stands today, Poland has its own national cinema?

LR: We can talk of national cinema if the cinema constitutes part of the government's policy, cultural policy, if the cultural needs of a nation are strong enough for this nation to identify with its own cinema. Surprisingly, this was the case in times past, in the system in which we lived in just over 10 years ago, where the government, the Ministry of Culture, assumed a moral duty over financing film production. Then co-productions were not often spoken of, just Polish films were being made. This was one leg of Polish cinema. The other leg was Lodz Film School, which maybe did not carry the same kind of financial weight as the Ministry and have the same financial means as the state's budget, but there was the source of moral basis for the cinema in it. Those two legs came together with support from distribution. We had a great number of maybe not such good quality but still functioning screens in Poland. I'm talking about the times of *Teutonic Knights* [*Krzyżacy*] (Hoffman, 1974), *Deluge* [*Potop*] (Ford, 1960), when millions of people came to see those films.

The government never perceived film as a commodity or a business. It rather codified it as a safety valve, a safe area which existed on the outskirts of politics. The state and party apparatus were involved in pressing those 'safe' topics, which usually had to do with literary historical adaptations, onto those intellectual layers of society that identified themselves with cinema. From time to time they would also let through a film that was a safety valve, through which they would let out the bad air. As a result Film Units [*zespoły filmowe*] came into being.

There were different stages in the development of Polish film, however I'd like to propose the thesis that without the financial, economic, organisational and legal support by the government, film as a national cinema cannot exist. If film is left in the hands of independent producers, decision makers, distributors and cinemas, which treat film, or have to treat it is a commodity, national cinema faces great difficulties. Of course, there are exceptions to

this rule. If we take, for instance, *Pan Tadeusz* (Wajda, 1999), one would like to refer to it in terms of Polish national cinema, however it was made mostly for money that came from outside of Poland. One would have to reach some common ground in defining what national cinema is. What do we understand national cinema to be? Is it about the subject matter of the film; is it about the means of production?

I wouldn't accentuate here that division. I would prefer to accentuate the possibility of creating national cinema even in the condition of the free market economy, as long as it satisfies the viewer. *Pan Tadeusz*, *Quo Vadis* (Kawalerowicz, 2001), *Old Tale* [*Stara basn*] (Hoffman, 2003), which is being made now, are addressed almost exclusively to the Polish nation, to the Polish viewer. *Pan Tadeusz* brought in seven million viewers. *Quo Vadis* brought in more than seven million. This kind of subject matter is endless in its potential.

I understand national cinema as films that can have great success in their own market, but not necessarily in the international market, because they may be not understood outside of their own market. The titles I mentioned here would fit into this category, with the possible exception of *Quo Vadis*, which is more universal, especially given that the Sienkiewicz novel received the literary Nobel prize for it. However, I can still assume that in a free market situation, although it is going to be more difficult than in the previous political and economic configuration, it is possible to make national cinema.

RM: Would you be able to say the same about the Polish national film industry?

LR: In my opinion, the film industry in Poland or in any country in Europe, does not deserve to be referred to as an industry. It is usually a very small group of people who are engaged in film production, or have something to do with it. In Poland, as with everywhere else in Europe, the film industry situation is very complicated. We could attempt to find out whether the Czechs think they have a national cinema. One could be tempted to say they do. They did produce a few films that won the world over. There was *Kolya* (Sverak, 1996), Forman's *A Blonde in Love* (1965) and many other titles.

We have more pretence to the claim that we have a national cinema, as we have produced a greater quantity of films that made an attempt at world screens. However, that industry is now astride. It is waiting to be defined. If it is left to its own devices, where only a commodity counts, it will get swallowed by the viewer, including television audiences. Television chaff is then the primary product. In Poland we have now resorted to television production and television series, sitcoms, Big Brothers and other reality shows, everything but feature films. Feature films are still attempting to fight back and are being helped in some way by the building of places to watch them, such as multiplexes and other such places. Their existence is also

problematic. Outlays are significant and returns minuscule. Capital is pumped out of Poland and it does not find its way back here.

Producers who try to inspire the creation of new films have been abandoned by the state. Cinema owners organised for themselves a different source of acquiring screening materials. Today feature films, which were the fibre of Polish private television at the beginning and which were foreign cheap products that crammed programming, have been pushed aside. A feature film hit is no longer the day's special. Now, it is an entertainment program, a talk show... Even sport has suffered as a result. It has been pushed aside to fill mono-topical channels devoted to it. The same has been the case with the cinema. We have mono-topical film channels like Canal +, HBO2.

Television, which at the beginning of its existence in 1950s, was going to be a threat to film and the film industry, appeared to be film's saving grace, because it was film's main client. Now, it is turning its back on film in general, and also on Polish national film, apart from public television, which has a duty to work with it. However, films of that type happen relatively infrequently. Therefore, the weight of production here gets spread out.

RM: In the light of all that you've said so far, would you be able to put a claim to the existence of Polish national cinema?

LR: I would have to return to the question of defining what national cinema is. We would have to agree on defining it in cultural terms, industrial terms, or political-organisational terms, or maybe even something else. The range of definitions here is too broad for me. Yet, if I were to dismiss the breadth of the questions, I would have to say that yes, we do have a national cinema and it is our national pride. Łódź Film School previously, due to its co-operation with some of the world's greatest directors, gives me reason to think that we do have some kind of film industry, which might not be at its strongest right now, but then the world in general is also facing a crisis. Polish cinema has written itself into the history of cinema, and it exists in its essential expression as Polish film and Polish cinema. One can watch a film and label it easily as a Polish film.

RM: Some time ago, soon after founding your Heritage Production, you said that one of the reasons for establishing it was to aid in the development of national cinema. How do you view that statement now?

LR: I started to work in film out of an economic imperative. Because I had gained a few skills by then, I started co-operation with international film companies. At some stage, I understood that I couldn't be just a waiter for the film industry, that I wanted to sink my teeth seriously into it. I had a few hopes, a few ideas, not all of which worked out. Some of them were a failure on either a financial or artistic level, however I kept pushing slowly ahead. As

the Americans say; 'you are only as good as your last film'. This is the opinion that holds true at the present. What happens earlier is the stuff of books. One is always judged based on their last product. It is an eternal game, an eternal risk. Film production is also especially difficult given our economic situation. At the moment, there is not a spare penny in the market that could be invested in film.

Arithmetic is the fundamental problem for us today. A film market of the size of Poland exists on the border of profitability. Its arithmetic is simple. If a film in Poland costs 3-4 million euro, for the same film to get its money back 1.5 million viewers have to see it in the cinema. That number of viewers is difficult to achieve. So what counts now is selling it to television, to other means of distribution and abroad. It is a fact of the matter that, apart from a few exceptions, statistically speaking, one could say that the success of a Polish film is decided abroad.

RM: In many cases the ultimate proof of the existence of national cinema is in its perception abroad. Would you agree with that?

LR: I am ready to support the thesis that national cinema rests on its international success. In the example of India, there is a national cinema, with a strong film industry, based on unique funding, organisational, artistic and production principles, however that cinema cannot break through anywhere. From time to time you may see some two-and-a-half hour or three-and-a-half hour long Hindu film, however that would be an exception. They rarely get through to festivals. I know the Indian film industry somewhat, and it is quite surprising to me.

I think technology will decide that and the costs will, however one other factor necessary to create national cinema is the star system, and I mean this in the positive sense of this word, together with the exclusivity of film directors. Stardom in its positive sense and not the Hollywood sense of this word is vital for creating a national cinema. It has already existed in Polish cinema. We had Olbrychski and other stars. They created national cinema. Today, life forces us into treating film as an industry, as a commodity, which is associated with artistic and aesthetic experiences or emotions, however most of all we look at it as a commodity. This makes establishing Polish national cinema more difficult. However, what can balance it off is the exclusivity of Polish directors and positive stardom of Polish actors, who have to be role models for the masses.

RM: You mentioned moral imperatives as one factor in deciding on the shape of national cinema. What kind of moral imperatives did you mean here?

LR: Moral imperatives are to me a particular kind of internal need in a director or an actor, screen writer, producer, in that narrow group of creators who would like to speak out on a topic in an individual way, and not

necessarily according to common expectations. They would like to do it to provoke thinking. For instance, the Cinema of Moral Concern was something like that some time ago, even though that name was maybe too grand. Moral imperatives to me define the internal desire to make a particular film.

For example, I have an internal need to make a film about Katyn. This doesn't leave me alone. That imperative meant for me an absolute conviction that I had to make Gombrowicz's *Pornography*. *Pornography* (Kolski, 2003) has happened, and just a few days ago I found out that it is going to be shown in Venice.

Moral imperatives are about acting on an internal need that pushes one in a particular direction despite anything. I've been trying for *Pornography* for almost nine years.

RM: Why Pornography?

LR: I think it's the mystery of one's individuality. Something works for us, something doesn't. If we take Katyn, and given that I made *The Pianist* (Polański, 2002), I took part in the making of *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993), my position here would be: "well, you've made those films, but there is another untouched matter that you should get into". It's a kind of conversation that one has with oneself while shaving.

I was very close to making it a few times, however there have been many problems with a script for it, and a few disagreements about it. I am still working with the script. Obviously, I am not intending to write it or direct that film, but I will be setting the directions for the film in general. This is what I can do, however I don't have any ambition or talent to be able to write a script or direct a film.

RM: If you could make decisions about the shape of the Polish film industry, what would they be?

LR: I can't talk about it with too much excitement, because it is never going to happen. I have been thinking about it for some time, and I would definitely make an attempt to introduce some of the structures I've considered. I would introduce a duty of investing in the film industry. This would mean a production obligation. As part of their licensing contract, television channels would have to spend a certain percentage of their profit on a certain number of feature films, which they would own. It's difficult to find money for film production, and they – so to speak – live on it.

I would also introduce a similar duty on cinema owners and distributors. This would be not about taking their money away, but obliging them to get involved with funding bodies, and financing film this way. Next, I would introduce

some order into the copyright law, which in Poland is probably the most messy in the world. It's a tragedy.

I would also look for solutions like tax shelters or other financial options that would allow companies and private investors to finance film production. This helped Canada and Australia to establish themselves. I would also look into the possibility of building studios together with educational facilities. Lodz and Wroclaw production houses have collapsed because the cultural centre is in Warsaw and no actors wanted to travel to Wroclaw or Lodz to make films. Some time ago, it was an adventure for them. Nowadays, time does not allow for that. Somewhere on the outskirts of Warsaw, we should have a studio and something like Andrzej Wajda's school, similar to what exists on the outskirts of Berlin. That would be one of my dreams.

I would also try to create financial mechanisms for producers to facilitate or encourage making films. I would limit the number of films that may be produced in any given year. This is because we have years of plenty, and then very lean years. I would have to say that this country is able to go through 25 films a year. This would have to be spread out in time. This recommendation would not be a popular or appreciated one, but this is what I would do, if I had the power to do so.

RM: How would you define Polish cinema on the cultural level?

LR: I don't know exactly what you mean by this question, but I will answer it by saying that when I watch Andrzej Wajda's *Canal* (1957), or *Generation* (Wajda, 1954), or *Teutonic Knights* (Hoffman, 1974), this to me is Polish cinema. When I watch these films, I know that they may be put away on a shelf, but we will be going back to them. If we, the Poles, keep going back for these films, if they have a Polish audience, they are what constitutes Polish cinema on a cultural level. Polish national cinema is for me 100 titles, and not all the trash that has been created.

By the same token, for me *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Weir, 1975) will always be an Australian film, regardless of the means by which it was financed. Peter Weir will always be an Australian director for me, regardless of where he makes his films. Agnieszka Holland is for me a Polish director, regardless of whether she makes *Washington Square* (1997), or a film that has nothing to do with Poland. This is the way I see national cinema and its industry, which would have not come to being if there was no Łódź Film School in the past. This is where the roots of Polish cinema lie. Obviously, now it's bigger than its roots once were. It is growing in different directions, but it had to have that kind of soil to grow in.

It had to have Zanussi, it had to have Majewski and so on. Also the series from those times, like *Four Tankmen and the Dog* (Czekalski and Nałęczki,

1966). This is the culture. This is what will remain. We can laugh at *Four Tankmen and the Dog*, but television will broadcast it every two or three years to a massive audience. This certifies the roots of our culture and the need for a positive hero. Why? We know that we were beaten badly in WW2, but there is in it a guy who is our hero in there, and we will love him. We need him.

RM: How do you see the authors of Polish film after 1989? Those directors like Jan Jakub Kolski, or Marek Koterski, who achieved their own particular style, but do not fall into any particularly united group of filmmakers... Can they define the new cinema of Poland?

LR: I think they can. We are talking about directors' individualities. If we broadcast Kolski's film without credits, and we ask in a quiz who the film's director is, a person who has a vague interest in film, would definitely say that it is Kolski. You would see a bit of Polish countryside, a bit of a Polish village, the moon, a dog, a cat shot in a particular way, and you would be able to say that it is Kolski. I take it for the goodness of this industry. The palette of these commodities is varied, isn't it? However, this is Polishness. I see Kolski as a great individuality of our time, and despite the differing reception of his films in Poland, his success came to Poland from abroad. He is part of national cinema. People in Japan, in Switzerland, wherever else he has been winning awards, saw great things in his films. At the same time in Poland he had been seen as a kind of a country director. Nowadays, it is different, especially after his last film, which I am very happy with. It is a film which in my opinion deserves full international attention. It is beautifully made. It is Polish. It is European. It is full of artistic values. It is a thriller, yet at the same time it says everything about Poland, about its people, about its history.

RM: Do you get approached by directors asking for finance for their films?

LR: No. We would usually talk about a project rather than a film. Or, I would get a script, and I think about who could make it. Or, it is my idea and I approach a director. However, without my personal involvement in the script, in its subject matter, I don't undertake it.

RM: What kinds of criteria do you use in deciding whether a script is worth your attention?

LR: It's very simple. If after fifteen minutes of reading a script I haven't put it down, it means it is likely that I'll finish reading it the same day. Next day I will read it again, because my first reading is very specific. It's almost skimming, very fast reading. If I'm interested, I read it again, and I ponder on whether it needs any changes. However, if after fifteen minutes nothing moved me, then I know it won't work for me. You can see there a shelf [with piles of scripts], which is cleaned up more or less once a month.

RM: *What scripts have impressed you most so far?*

LR: There were a few of them. The first that I wanted to quote to you made a great impression on me, but it didn't result in a good film. That's why I remember it well. I made a film called *Jakob the Liar* (Kassovitz, 1999) with Robin Williams. It was a script which fascinated me so much, it entertained me so much that I thought I was sitting on a pile of gold. It turned out to be an average film, a great disappointment to me.

RM: *What happened with it?*

LR: The chemistry was wrong; not the right director, maybe not the right producers. But most of all it was probably not the right director.

Another film that was a disappointment for me was Polish *Kidnapping of Agata* [*Uprowadzenie Agaty*] (Piwowski, 1993). I thought of it as a fast film, a prompt reaction to our reality, a film that was laughing at that reality. There, Marek Piwowski [the director] and I misunderstood each other. I wanted a happy ending. It was such a typical love story that it should have had a happy ending. Piwowski disagreed. He wanted a tragic ending. We agreed that he would make two endings, and we would look at them in the editor's suite. He made only one ending. It infuriated me, and the film failed.

Yet another film that disappointed me was *Virus* (Bruno, 1999). I was busy with another film while they were shooting *Virus*. They changed a few things as they went along. It was my fault for not keeping an eye on it. When I saw what they made out of it, I got very disheartened. It was a full fiasco.

What has been your greatest success in terms of meeting your own expectations?

I think it's *Pan Tadeusz*. *Schindler's List* was my organisational success, however I had nothing to say about the script. I only had a say on Polish casting. On the other hand, *Pan Tadeusz* was born here, on this desk, in conversations that I had control over. Andrzej Wajda at some stage wanted to pull out of it, so I spent a long time trying to talk him back into it, explaining what I wanted.

There are a few other films that I am happy with. For instance, I think that *Bandyta* [*Brute*] (Dejczner, 1997) is a film that got unfair treatment by the press. Dejczner made quite a good film. Of course, it could have been better, but I am happy with it.

Mother of Her Own Mother [*Matka swojej matki*] (Gliński, 1996) had huge hopes. I read the script on Thursday and on Monday I signed production papers for it. It also didn't work out. The relationship between the mother

and her daughter in real life was not the best at that moment. That film was made too early. It was too fresh for the actors whose real life experiences were described in the film. It couldn't have worked out.

*RM: You mentioned earlier that national cinema can be measured by international success. If we take *Pan Tadeusz*, it's a film that is an absolute success in Poland but internationally there is not and there cannot be any appreciation of it.*

I didn't expect international success for that film. I was more concerned with its reception in Poland, because we attempted a breakneck task to adapt poetry onto the screen. I have been showing that film without subtitles to international directors. They were not interested in the text. They wanted to see the film. Max Farberbock, a director for whom I made *Aimee and Jaguar* (1999) in Poland, wanted to see fifteen minutes of *Pan Tadeusz*. He didn't leave till the end. He said after that, "I understood it all, you can see it's a classical work." He could see the defining conflicts in the film and words were not significant to him. Obviously, that film had no chance of a wide international distribution.

If you wish, I see a parallel between *Four Tankmen* and *Pan Tadeusz*. It's the same type of commodity. It strikes at our ambitions, our sense of national pride, history, beauty. Most of all, *Pan Tadeusz* for me is a return to our childhood. We remember our childhood as something sunny and beautiful, and this is how I wanted to see that film.

Going back to your question though, yes, international success is one measure of a national cinema's success, but there are no definite rules that would forbid the existence of a national cinema if it has no international success.

I count on *Pornography* being well received abroad. Probably even better than in Poland. It is not a film for mass consumption. I also think that film critics in Poland will give it a warm reception.

RM: Just recently I have been told by a very young critic that young people in Poland nowadays see Polish films, especially adaptations of classic works, as something not terribly cool. Have you come across attitudes like that?

LR: I think that it's the question of growing up. The need to identify oneself with a national group takes some time to develop. For very young people, *Pan Tadeusz* is simply a book that has to be read at school. Later in life, they are bound to take it up again and then they will understand why so many people of my age quote from *Pan Tadeusz*. It's natural. That kind of audience would still go and see *Hexer* [*Wiedźmin*] (Brodzki, 2001). More

than a million people saw that film. It is made for those young audiences. They can then discuss why his sword is this way not that way. It's natural.

RM: The last question, and the most difficult one: what is Polishness for you?

LR: Polishness is about being in perpetual conflict with one and the other side, always being in between. This is Polishness. We have wonderful collective traits, and awful individual characteristics. We have to have a common enemy to bring us together. We are always quarrelling with our neighbours, and at the same time we are gallant and full of good manners. We are also devoted to the cult of the Virgin Mary. We adore women in any guise, in Catholicism, in erotica and everywhere else. Don-quixotism with a Polish sword... These are the basics of Polishness.

RM: Thank you very much for your time.

“Time of disillusion”

Interviews with Tadeusz Sobolewski

11 July 2003, Warsaw & 15 September 2004, Gdynia

Tadeusz Sobolewski is one of the most universally respected film critics in Poland, and one who shows unwavering support for domestic productions.

RM: What changes has Polish cinema undergone since 1989?

TS: Most significantly, the shock of the transition to the free market economy has been deposited somewhere in Polish cinema. This was expressed in the ambiguous attitude of Polish society toward capitalism. On the one hand, capitalism was a government's pistol during the times of the people's republic, on the other hand it was a myth of a free world, of a free market, of something desirable. The whole Solidarity movement, the idea of Solidarity, in reality grew out of socialism. All the thought of independence did not have economic liberalism programmed into it, because it grew from the seeds planted in the social welfare state, in which workers' unions are important. That shock, which was in gaining individual economic freedoms, was very sudden. It was expressed in film through almost apocalyptic pictures of that free world, which appeared to be a dangerous one.

Debt [Dług] (1999) by Krauze personifies that new evil, that kind of devil. It is not that the antagonist is evil in this film, but that the good guys killed him. That evil rubbed off on them. The heroes of the film undergo a tumbledown. They get involved in evil. From their idealism in wanting to set up a firm, to conquer the world, they end up as murderers. Therefore, that film shows not only a warning, but reflects a kind of anxiety of capitalist freedom.

On the other hand, we have popular films of so called 'thievery cinema' by people like Bromski or Pasikowski from the early 1990s. In Pasikowski's *Pigs [Psy]* (1992), we had the first shake up of the Solidarity myth, when internal security militia men [ubek] sing a song in which "Janek Wiśniewski fell", and an ex-militia man becomes a positive hero. It was a different kind of attempt to show that it is now a 'free for all'. No tradition is significant now. So, on one hand, we had the anxiety of the capitalist devil. On the other hand, the sense that all is allowed now. All traditions, myths, past, all that constituted the society's fibre until the 1980s, became appropriate for the 19th century. There was some real intuition in it. Maybe all these myths do belong to the old Romantic tradition, which has really expired.

All of this is turned into something like a syndrome related to the shock of freedom. However, there is something else to it. There is disappointment. It is disappointment with corruption, with the fact that this free market became a

bandits' market, that the mafia became part of our reality, that nothing is trustworthy any more.

Even the fact that all the way through the 1990s Wajda thought about making the third *Man of...*, and he never made it, is also symptomatic. Maybe it wasn't possible to make it. Maybe it wasn't the right time. Maybe those types of problems don't concern anyone any more. I believe that they still do. To start with, he got involved in politics himself. He became a senator. If he were to make another *Man of...* he would have to say some negative things about Solidarity, and he would be the last man to do so. He would have to bare the myth of Solidarity, because lives of Solidarity's people have been complicated and are often very dramatic, if not tragic. Many of them emigrated. Others got disappointed with politics after 1989. Others assumed some fanatical stands, they dug their own trenches, they even went left. That protective umbrella of Solidarity's myth, which kept people alive until the mid 1980s, was not replaced by anything that would give people a sense of collectivity. That very sense of collectivity was disturbed. It is not longer created by workers' unions, or the church. The disturbance to the sense of community and collapse of authorities were the main themes after 1989. It became uncertain what should be the basis of collectivity.

All the phenomena I just described made filmmakers' work more difficult, and they complicated the role of cinema. Before that, Polish cinema of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was ahead of social awareness in some way. In the background, there always existed the unsaid theme of freedom. Cinema led us to it. Films by Wajda, Munk, later by Agnieszka Holland, Kieślowski always made freedom problematic somewhere in the background. It could have been an individual freedom, social freedom or systemic freedom. That's why that cinema was wiser. It was referring to the knowledge that we had. The state was forbidding something, but we knew and they knew and that was enough. That got broke down. The cinema couldn't be that wise after 1989, because it was not financed by the state, and it had to fight for a viewer. It had to say popular or even populist things.

What I already said about disappointment, anxiety, all these things were quite obvious. Polish cinema couldn't afford to say the kind of thing that would be said by an average Hollywood film, which would show a person that manages his or her life well. This didn't work for us. Polish cinema is full of characters such as outsiders, losers. Often these outsiders are spectacular and fabulous. For instance, Kondratiuk's films are like that. They are very personal, very private. They get made in his private house, a little country house. They are films about the world seen from an enclave. They are films about an outsider, a home-bread philosopher who lives the way he wants to live, somewhere on the side.

RM: Are you maybe also referring here to the Romantic myths of an outsider?

TS: Not in the case of Kondratiuk. Those films are full of irony. He laughs at those myths. He is a clown of that reality. There is nothing in him about that Romantic Pole.

Our Polish outsider is also somewhat different from a classical one. He escapes. He doesn't go against everyone and everything. He escapes. For instance, in old films by Skolimowski of the 1960s, he himself created that type of an outsider. Symptomatic was the gesture by Kieślowski in *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), which has a Polish and a French part. It is about 1991, and the Polish Weronika is a witness to a demonstration in the old town square in Cracow. It is not a Solidarity demonstration any more, because it is happening in the time of democracy. However, we don't know what the demonstration is about. Any way, Weronika turns away from it. The film's heroine doesn't care. Just like Kieślowski. He wanted to say there that at last he was free of that burden, of that problem, that he was not interested in society, but an individual. One person. One person that faces her life dilemmas.

It was a telling turn. Everyone expected that someone like Kieslowski, who said so much about our society in the 1970s, would say something significant about it again. In the film *Three Colours: White* (1994), he also showed the same disappointment. Disappointment with deception. The world, social relations started to be based on deception and money. Money is evil. Money demoralises. Partially, it is true. On the other hand, you mentioned Romanticism... Yes, that was romanticised. The attitude towards money is romanticised in Poland.

Still relevant is Boleslaw Prus's *The Doll* [*Lalka*] as a novel. Today, when I watch the old adaptation by Hass made in 1968 which says that nothing can work out in Poland, I see something contemporary in it, really. However, there is something missing in Polish cinema. Maybe the young ones will show it. The lack of claims on reality is what is missing. Polish cinema and the viewers' mentality was such that one had to lay claims. Claims to history, to fate, to the political system, to the government, to the party. And at one moment we found ourselves in an unfortunate situation where there was no one to lay our claims to. It is now us who vote. We voted for the people that turned out to be crooks. What can one do in such a situation? The Soviet Union doesn't pose a threat to us. We are in the UN. We are just about to join the European Union. Around us are plenty of thieves. The governing party is compromised. The opposition is weak. So, whom can we lay our claims to? It is a problem for a filmmaker.

I think that a few young filmmakers managed to make free films. I'm referring specifically to a film called *Louder Than Bombs* [*Głośniej od bomb*] (Wojcieszek, 2002). It is an attempt to make a film about someone who, despite everything, wants to live his life the way he wants to live his life, in his own way. He wants to stay in Poland, not to emigrate. The matter takes place during his father's funeral. He stays in his father's house after the funeral, and there he tries to convince his girlfriend that they should stay in his father's house, and not leave for the States, which is what her parents want. The parents are played by a well known couple of actors from the 1970s Solidarity films. Now, they are disappointed, crushed. They want to push their daughter out from a little town in the Lower Silesia into the world. During the wake, he proclaims his love for her and pulls her towards him. It's a play of generations. The old generation, the generation of Solidarity, of Moral Concern, has been in a tumbledown. Wojcieszek, the director of the film, is a young man who likes old Polish cinema and who would like to do something similar to those old films. He doesn't quite yet know how, but he is trying and it has worked out quite well so far. He wants the parents to agree with this new situation also. We are all in the same boat.

RM: This film has been recommended to me by several people, whose opinion I respect. Andrzej Wajda and Małgorzata Hendrykowska both recommended this film as one of the best if not the best manifestation of young Polish cinema. Why?

TS: It is a rare case of a film that is well received by both the old and the young. That means that I found myself in it, and so did my daughter. It attempts to fill in the inter-generation gap. The problem that Wojcieszek saw works not only because he is a superb director. He is a young man, who is trying. However, his master is Ken Loach. He looks towards that kind of cinema. He wants to show in a family conflict something more. He simply has an idea to show something that everyone knows. The old system and the one we live in now can equally use and abuse an individual. These are two different traps, simply two traps. He wants to show that. He also wants to show that there is no point in laying claims. There is no point. Only fighting for survival is left, just as you suggested.

*RM: Here it is difficult not to ask a question about Trzaskalski's *Edi* (2002). When it was shown in Australia, I eavesdropped on commentaries after the film, and a few people were rather angry that *Edi* was not fighting, that he was in essence a loser. How was this aspect of *Edi* received in Poland?*

TS: It is one of the very few Polish films that was very successful everywhere in Poland. Everywhere. In provincial Poland, in film discussion clubs, in the festival in Warsaw... Even in the festival in Berlin, it was received enthusiastically by Germans and international audiences. It is not about the portrayal of Poland. This is not what this film is about. The same thing could

happen in New York. It's the question of a sacrifice, of sacrificing oneself. In this film, as you know, there are two typical heroes of our times. One of them is a gangster. The other is a pauper. There could not have been heroes like these in the 1980s or 1970s. There were gangsters, but there was no visible mafia. Now we have it. There was not as much visibly absolute destitution, not as many social rejects, because everyone had nothing. The average was very low and money didn't matter, and there was social welfare.

Trzaskalski positions the two heroes in a very interesting way, because Edi wins, and he does win, be it in a Christian or Buddhist way, by sacrifice, by giving up. Therefore, it is a film about a winner. It says that you have your life and no one can take it away from you. That film appeals to a certain kind of anxiety, which is quite common, that we will have things taken away from us, that the superannuation will disappear, the bank will collapse, that money will have no value. People don't have a sense of durability of it all. This film appeals to that. At the same time it points out to, well, a spiritual solution. This film is based on a Buddhist tale of a lonely monk who had a prostitute convince him that her child was his. She gave the child to him, and then she took that child away.

RM: Would you suggest that Edi is an answer to the search for a new hero in Polish cinema?

TS: He is capable of sacrifice. It's about being rather than having, because he exists by giving everything away. Of course, it is not some sort of social programme. It is about the sense of winning despite everything. They won't take everything away from us. They can't take everything away. One has to invest oneself in something else. That film is bracing. It is not a film that spreads some sort of anxiety. No.

It works to show that everyone can find oneself in Edi's situation, because people lose their possessions, they lose work, home. They can find themselves on the pavement. It is available for everyone. This is our fate. There is a moment of identification there, where Edi is God's man, a philosopher, who fights his alcoholism. It's he who frees himself by giving a present to a child. On the one hand, there is in this film a sense that we can lose everything. There is a moment of anxiety. On the other hand, there is overcoming of that anxiety. We still have our lives.

Polish cinema, which was very society-based, focused on the nation, has had to be reprogrammed to individuality, where life is an individual struggle. Polish cinema always lacked in individuality, in individual heroes, because they were not part of our tradition.

The first thing Polish young cinema has to do is shake off the sense of defeat. That sense is barren, because defeat can also happen in the United States. Defeat is universally available. It is not the speciality of the poor suffering

Poland. It is a stereotype dating back two centuries. One must get rid off it, get rid off spreading defeat. On the other hand, we need an individual hero.

A very interesting thing was said by a Russian film critic recently, when he was asked what was happening in Russian cinema. He said that very little is happening. There are some films being made, but no one watches them. However, there are plenty of television series, which are based on American patterns. He said, "for us these patterns are very good, because in an American series, there is an individual hero, whom we have never had in Russia, because our hero always had to be supported by its social class, party, nation, or anything; and now he is by himself." It is a change in mentality.

In Poland, it is more complicated because Poland is a nation of individuals. However, these are individualities who fight each other, who express themselves in losing. What's missing is the sense that "yes, life is terrible, horrible, but this is how it is". This is a departure point, not a destination. That is why *Edi* is such a good film. For an average Polish film it would have been its destination. For *Edi* it is a departure point. An average film would show how horrible life is, that there are plenty of thieves everywhere, a man is at the mercy of his fate, capitalism and money. *Edi* starts with that and says "this is how it is; now you have to save yourself; you, nobody else." There are no other films like this.

RM: How do you see the role of films like Crows [Wrony] (Kędzierzawska, 1994), Blockers [Blokersi] (Łatkowski, 2001), Hi Tereska [Cześć Tereska] (Gliński, 2001) that show the helplessness of Polish reality?

TS: Hi Tereska is the most important of these, because it was really popular. It is quite a clever film. On one level, it shows a world in which all authorities have fallen. The church, school, family are meaningless. They can't change Tereska. However, it later said something more. It said that the origins of evil are unknown, that evil may be imminent, that maybe there is no one to be blamed. Later, this found its confirmation in the fate of the heroine and the actress herself. She didn't want to make use of all the privileges that the film brought to her. She didn't want to go to the States. She didn't become an actress, but she in a way developed an attachment to the character. She started to live like her. Not only was she already evil, but she also got contaminated with Tereska's evil. That might be strange, but it was Tereska that impressed me at some stage. She didn't want to leave what was hers. She rejected school, normal life, her grandmother.

In a way, that film was also a small step forward, because it showed that evil is not only a social issue. There exists something like evil in itself, in general. And, we need to confront it. We can't help it.

Excerpts from the interview conducted in Gdynia 15 September 2004.

RM: A year ago you spoke about the problems of transition to a capitalist or democratic system in Poland. Have these problems changed in last year?

TS: The situation in Polish cinema is at the brink of something. Our cinema has great potential, not as an industry, but as a social indicator because there are many young and also old people who carry interesting ideas. Poland could easily make 30-40 films every year. It's not even about quantity, but about the rejuvenation. I think that in the last few years, we feel the emergence of a new way of thinking, a 21st century way, which differs generally [from the old one] in that before [when] a Polish film director tried to appeal to some sense of hurt in the viewer. That hurt had to do with Poland's history, system, fate, geographical position and so on. Today it is no longer the case. There is no one to direct these complaints to and this creates a situation in which we need heroes who can manage their lives.

[...]

RM: Which of the films made after 1999 would you consider Polish to the bone?

TS: After 1999? *Debt* was like that. *Day of the Wacko*. This film, to the greatest extent, touched painful wounds. There was *Edi*. At this festival [of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia], there was *The Welts*, *My Nikifor*...

RM: Why The Welts?

TS: [You mean] that it is not national, but universal? It's like with *Squint Your Eyes*. It was film that showed very nicely a moment of freedom. It even gives a symbolic picture of a domesticated eagle, which, tied to a milk can, while being taken to the doctor, escapes together with that can. It's a nice symbol that he can still fly even with that burden. We are not going to get rid of this burden [...], but we have to manage it. We have to fly with it. This is one of these nice scenes of the good new kind.

RM: Is it how this scene was generally interpreted?

TS: Someone has said that, someone has written about it. At the seminar that I put together this year in Łagów, titled "The Time of Disillusion," I wanted to show together with different speakers that we are subjected to a time of disillusionment. This is what's new. Illusions are gone. Gone. Gone are the illusions of capitalist happiness, because there is plenty of poverty and unemployment. Gone is the illusion that Europe is going to give us something [...or that] America will give us something because of our

participation in the Iraq war. All this means that we are in the state of disillusionment.

On the other hand, this film causes us to hold our heads high, because there is no point in childish complaint, our immemorial Polish complaint, because this disillusionment demands that we stand up to it, that we demonstrate the strength of our character. It's not enough to watch in the cinema that it's all bad, because I have already read about it in a newspaper, or I know that because I saw it on a current affairs program. Cinema has to show a way out. This is what Western European, [for example] Spanish cinema does.

[...]

First, we had to show all the evil. Get out in the open what was not allowed to be talked about before. Once this was gotten out, we had to show lives of ordinary people. After all, contemporary life is also filled with disappointments, barriers. For instance, there is no censorship of the press, but magazines which are published mould their editors to suit their needs, order them to write in this and not the other way. So there is a comparison. One has to find a different way of fighting that. [...]

RM: You mentioned earlier Day of the Wacko. Could you please tell me how you perceive Polish comedy, films that are not favoured by Polish critics in general.

TS: Polish comedy follows two paths. One is that of a kind of comedy fairytale, for instance *Never Ever*, a film which was a great box-office success, but which is a kind of a photo-story from a colourful magazine that appeals to the lowest common denominator. Polish high comedy is fundamentally very sad. One example is *Day of the Wacko*. Munk's films were also like that. Great films. Including *Bad Luck*. This was an example of a comedy, which was psychotherapeutic, which wrings a viewer and shows either our stupidity or our complexes. There is compromise. There is little chance for a comedy hero of the French or Italian type, one that walks through life with a spring in his or her step. On the one hand we have Machulski. Yet comedies contain some criticism, or they are a reaction to the evils of life, to bandits and thieves.

There is no half-way in comedy, which would allow a viewer to identify with somebody likeable, because it is difficult in Polish cinema to create a likeable hero. Poles don't like themselves. There is a complex here. *Day of the Wacko* represents that very well. It's a show-case comedy, which is a horrible unmasking. You have to fall to the bottom to be able to reach a comic catharsis.

RM: Thank you for your time.

“Why Not Have Our Own World?”¹

Interview with Andrzej Wajda

3 July 2003, Warsaw

Andrzej Wajda is one of the founders of the Polish School, the Cinema of Moral Concern and one of the Polish directors most acclaimed internationally.

RM: Over a decade ago, Poland left behind fifty years of socialist order and embarked on a path of political and economic reform that has been changing the social and cultural fibre of Polish society. What have these changes meant for the film industry in Poland?

AW: One might have thought that the most significant change in the film industry that would come about with a transition from the communist economy to capitalism would fundamentally concern the sources of funding. Our market is relatively small, like many other countries of Europe in which films are made for people that speak one language. Our films speak only to 40 million Poles in Poland and a few more millions abroad.

In the first years after 1989, films were partly financed from the state's budget as well as by public television. Still, except for a few special cases, most films are made this way. The difficulty with the present state of affairs is that there is no legislation on the sources of funding for the Polish film industry. There is no legislation concerning filmmaking. And, there is no legislation on television that would be beneficial to film making. These two sources of support have not been resolved, and they decide the existence of the national cinema.

In Europe, there is no television filmmaking legislation that could assist film production because private broadcasters are not interested in supporting Polish film. There is no filmmaking legislation because distributors are not interested in sharing their money with the film industry, for instance, by giving a percentage of ticket sales back to film makers. Given this situation, therefore, it was not the funding structure that was decisive in shaping a post-socialist Polish cinema. It was film audiences that influenced it most.

In the first years after the systemic transition, our screens showed American entertainment that had not been available before, or had been available only sporadically. Suddenly, the screens were dominated by American entertainment to the extent of something like 95 percent. As a result, audiences turned away from the kinds of films that we used to make. Also, the problems depicted in films made in the old, communist reality, like my

¹Pending publication in *Senses of Cinema* (<http://www.senseofcinema.com.au>).

Man of Iron, or Wojciech Marczewski's *Shivers*, or Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation* or Agnieszka Holland's *A Woman*, or Feliks Falk's *Top Dog*, these problems suddenly ceased to exist. New young audiences started to come to the cinema for American films that are targeted at them. Previously the same Polish audiences would have been pressured into seeing cinema made for adults, films made by us about those spheres of life that were significant for us and which should be significant for our society.

By dint of that concern and because that society was willing to examine its particular reality, Solidarity could come into existence. Solidarity could demand workers' rights. Intellectuals could join in. And the cinema could play a critical part in it. At least the thought that this was the case is what I would like to cherish when I die. However, that old mode of Polish filmmaking virtually disappeared.

Films made in the spirit of the past continued to be made. For instance, I directed *Holly Week* based on Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel, *The Ring With a Crowned Eagle*² but it turned out that those films did not address any audience. Before, those films were censored. One couldn't make films like that.

RM: How a clever filmmaker managed to smuggle political messages into a film to get it past the censors had often been one measure of a film's success. In what ways did that change with the end of formal censorship in Poland?

AW: So what that political censorship was abolished? With it adult political audiences abandoned cinemas. In their place appeared a void. That previous political audience migrated to the seats in front of their TV. Cinemas gained new young audiences who wanted films made for them. The first real success of the Polish cinema was entertainment films, which were made showily, following American patterns, with heroes shadowing the American ones, with shootings, with all that constitutes popular American cinema. Those films got assimilated into Polish cinema. They were the only successful Polish films at the time. And, they were soon followed by even more successful Polish films, which were historical films based on Polish literature.

Seven million people came to the cinema to see the first one of those films, *With Fire and Sword*, based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel of 1884. No one could believe that a cinema audience of that size existed in Poland. And in reality this audience doesn't exist. They sit in front of TV and watch what they can find there. This audience came out of their TV rooms to see a film that

² The eagle is the emblem of Poland. Throughout Polish history it has been depicted in a crown. During the communist period, the eagle was portrayed without a crown, so the reinstatement of the crown after the collapse of communism had symbolic significance, indicating the historical continuity of an independent Polish state. [Translator's note]

was made for them. After that, there was the success of *Pan Tadeusz*, which was seen by six million viewers. Then came *Revenge*, which had two million viewers, while *Harry Potter* had 2.5 million. All that shows that audiences did, after all, expect a film of this kind from Polish cinema.

What happened there? I think that adult Polish audiences, while observing what was happening in Poland, started to give in to a particular kind of anxiety. 'What will happen to us?' 'We are to join the European Union, but what is it going to be like to be part of it?' 'Who are we going to be within in?' Putting it bluntly, we took onto the screen all those things that moved our historical authors, be it Adam Mickiewicz when he was writing *Pan Tadeusz*, Henryk Sienkiewicz with his *With Fire and Sword*, and in a way also Aleksander Fredro when working on his *Revenge*, all these concerns started to move Poles again. This kind of film gained an audience, because the times shown in those films shared similar problems with those of the new political situation, in which Poland now found itself.

RM: With this kind of redefinition of Polish collective identity, and keeping in mind the achievement of Polish cinema before 1989, is there anything occurring now that would recall a national cinema?

AW: The clearest expression of that type of filmmaking is exemplified by grand historical films. Some audiences came to see those films because they were used to filmic spectacle in American films, and the grandeur of these historical films matched that. All the attempts at making other kinds of contemporary Polish films were treated by them as films made for television, not cinema. 'If you want us to see that film, broadcast it on TV. If you want us to go to the cinema, show us a big spectacle, just like Americans make them, but with Polish national themes.'

A novelty in Polish filmmaking was that it was possible to find funds for a big production. However, at the same time, the state budget committed less and less money to filmmaking. Eventually, the state's funding covered only the stages leading to presenting a film project to potential funding bodies. It was enough to produce a script, indicate casting, and put together a budget to present it all, but nothing beyond that. It was all that the state's budget could afford. Those projects needed to look for proper funding elsewhere. About 50 percent of those films that got made were helped by public television.

Even better, there were established two separate committees deciding on state film funding. Firstly, there was the 'Package Board' [Komisja Pakietowa] set up by the Cinematography Committee [Komitet Kinematografii] and then it was television. This resulted in a difficult situation in which television was not willing to take many risks, and it turned away from young directors, who also were in a difficult position, lost in a new reality. They were lost in it, because they had no allies in good writers.

In the same period, Polish literature also underwent some significant changes. From social-political literature, which had a great tradition and strong motivation to be that way, Polish literature changed its focus to a psychological rather than a social one. Many young women surfaced as writers. They wrote about themselves. This sort of material was not very useful for film. Young directors had no choice but to throw themselves into writing scripts. That did not have a positive effect on the quality of Polish cinema.

On the one hand, we had great filmic spectacles that brought in big audiences, adults as well as primary and secondary school students. On the other hand, there were attempts to create contemporary Polish film. There had been between ten and twenty of those films in the first ten years after the transition. Those films, however good they were, did not create a decidedly unified generation like that of the cinema of the Solidarity times in the 1980s.

At the same time, television theatre became more visibly active. Television theatre, as is implied in its name, should rely on adaptations of scripts written for the theatre. In Poland it became in a way an independent third gender, so to speak, between the cinema and theatre. On the one hand, young theatre directors were coming to television theatre, because they wanted to get closer to the cinema, despite having studied and worked for the theatre. It was progressively more difficult to find work in the theatre, also. I must say that many of these television theatre pieces could not have been made as films or as non-television performances. The difficulty of writing a good theatre play set in new reality was even greater given that the level of similitude to life that is allowed in a film would not work on the stage. Television theatre played a significant role after the transition. It prompted many young directors to attempt to show in that medium our new reality. Nevertheless, in the theatre, and in the cinema, the contemporary reality of Poland has been represented only to a minuscule degree in the last 12 years.

As I said earlier, there are no writers who could create a literary vision of the new reality. There are some talented young directors, however their talent doesn't necessarily translate into a literary talent.

Admittedly, this new reality is difficult to capture. It seemed to us, the people affiliated with Solidarity, that everyone thought like we did. We expected that people were just waiting for the collapse of the Soviet Union, or at least for its retreat, and they were going to be full of initiative in all areas of life; in culture, in economy and in politics. They all would start to work effectively. They would start to think rationally. In short, Poland was to be transformed in a day into a Western-European country. It transpired that this was not the case. In the forty years of the people's republic, some of the worst historical traits were preserved in our people. These included even the common characteristics

developed in the economic reality of the time of partitions in the 17th and 18th centuries.

It turned out that the country was helpless in the face of a new reality. Also a great part of Polish industry proved to have existed only to support the Soviet military industry, and it became superfluous and incapable of being transformed into anything else. We did not foresee that or the magnitude of these phenomena.

RM: Returning to the more localised question of what Polish national cinema should or could be, what would you expect from it to satisfy the fundamental requirements of its existence?

AW: National cinema can be defined most of all by its language. It is spoken in the language used or understood by its audience. This is the cinema that by default addresses the audiences that speak a particular language. Why does there exist a global American entertainment industry, but there isn't an equivalent coming from France or Italy? This is the case simply because the English language opens the whole world to the American cinema. We exist in that world also, except that for us the necessary condition of a national cinema lies in creating films in our language. Could Fellini's actors have spoken English? If they had spoken English, the whole history would have had to be different.

When a film is created, it is created in a language, which is not only about words, but also the way that very language encodes our perception of the world, our understanding of it. This is how we get the language. That is why it is so difficult to find a common denominator for the whole of Europe. There are tens of interpreters in Brussels, but I think it is quite a safe assumption to say that at night when everyone comes down to a bar they communicate in English to establish what is happening, so next day they know what to think about a given matter.

Language also encodes our past. We want to know who we are. To know who we are, we have to know who we used to be. Consequently, our literature, written in the past, anchors us in that past. That is where our experiences are described; experiences to which we keep referring. These are not the experiences of **other** nations. Hence the question that is often asked is whether anyone from the outside can understand that. For most of my life I would have said: 'yes, that's beautiful, but is anyone going to understand that?' But I would rather make films for those who understand than those who don't. Bergman and Fellini also made films for those who understood.

Of course, Ingmar Bergman's films were more psychological than political, because his sociological problems were not as significant.

Our situation is more difficult. This is because our history is, unfortunately, our exclusive property. The historical journey of our loss of independence, regaining independence and then again falling into dependence, shaped us in the way that we cannot simply reject and say that we are starting everything anew on Monday because it happens that on Monday we become a free country. We carry that past with us, whether we want it or not.

Suddenly, on Monday, many political parties got formed and they represented a multiplicity of views on the future of our country. Most of all, they projected their own egoism, which Solidarity did not have. At the same time, the Left did not disappear. It proved that they became effective defenders of the old. They were the ones to defend big state factories. Ironically, Solidarity also defended the same big factories. They defended farmers who were inefficient and unproductive, but Solidarity defended them as well. Suddenly, there was a clash that we could have not foreseen, the clash of what in politics is referred to as the left and the right.

RM: Isn't that clash what could have become Polish contemporary national cinema?

AW: Yes, but all attempts at making such films failed because audiences did not want to come to see them in the cinema. There, people wanted to see things they could not see on TV. In the Polish People's Republic, there was censorship, coercion and it was impossible to see representations of the real political life. Lies were printed in newspapers and were coming out of TV. All this resulted in a situation in which the truth we managed to show in some ways in film, each allusion was decoded by the audience and was the reason for them to come to the cinema. When the same audience could watch the very thing on TV starting at 7 am, and after it all had been written about in newspapers, they abandoned their interest in it. Even more surprising is that they ceased being interested in politics at all. Politics became a domain of a minority of this society, and possibly one of its worse minorities. The better ones got busy with business and new economic freedoms.

RM: What does this mean for the shape of cinema in Poland, comparing to the pre-1989 period?

AW: A big part of the success of Polish cinema in the times of communism relied on the fact that we had more freedom than any other country behind the Berlin Wall, so we could express more easily what was happening behind that Wall, what people wanted and where they were going. Because the Cold War permeated the atmosphere of those times, the world was interested in who inhabited that land, and what it would be like if the war really happened. So they watched strange films, our films, because they wanted to see the other side of the world. At the moment when the Berlin Wall came down, automatically we became part of Europe, and now Polish cinema is

experiencing exactly the same problems as those experienced by French, Italian or German cinemas.

In my youth, my *Ashes and Diamonds* and *Canal* were screened in American cinemas. In New York, one could see them in the cinema. Today, it's almost impossible that a European film would make it to a commercial cinema chain. It may be shown in university cinemas. I'm not diminishing the value of university audiences. After all, these are the people who could shape America's views and tastes, so it is a positive thing that the students can see European theatre or cinema. However, the limitation in the possibility of reception of European films results in them more and more addressing their own audiences. Therefore, they remove themselves from the question that I always have at the back of my mind; 'will anyone understand this or that film?'

There are jokes that we would laugh at, but no one else would. There is English wit that we would not laugh at. Why not have our own world, then? And why would the cinema not belong to that world? You could answer this question by saying that it was wonderful when Polish cinema was informing the world about what was happening here, what kind of a place this is. Yes, it was wonderful, and we were proud of what was called the Polish School in film. The Polish School began in a strange way and that beginning had a decisive influence on the freedom of that cinema, in that it was possible to make films like Munk's *Bad Luck* (1960), and later *Shivers*, or *Interrogation*, or *Man of Marble*, or *Man of Iron*, or many other films. In any case it was our aspiration to communicate with the world. This aspiration has now progressively diminished, amongst other reasons, because the world doesn't expect it from us. The world is not interested in us. It has turned away from us.

Professor Brzeziński, a Pole who advised the most powerful players of the American political scene, and to whom I've just recently spoken in Wrocław, would be able to tell you how Europe is going to manage its relations with Poland and America. However, I can tell you that there is definitely a new surprising dependence developing here. Also, our joining Europe does not have to mean that we would start making films the same as everyone else. It might mean that we would be making films that no one else would make, because we would be the only ones to need them.

Paradoxically, to make a film in Germany is the same as making a film in Poland. It is the same as making a film in Russia. It doesn't open up the world. It doesn't change anything, and festival successes and awards do not translate into a box office success.

RM: Apart from historical literary adaptations, are there any other films that for you define what Polish national cinema is about now?

AW: Yes. I noticed the film *Louder than Bombs*. It was made by an amateur director. This is one film I like. It is young cinema made by someone who can make films and can direct them. If I were to list only one good recent film, that would definitely be it. I think there are a few more films. Trzaskalski's *Edi* was well received. However, it was well received because it's a story of such an agreeable hero. This type of simple yet enlightened man, almost taken from a fairytale, rarely appears in the cinema and especially in Polish cinema. This is where the success of that film comes from.

Two other films screened recently are also worth mentioning. The film *Squint Your Eyes* is exceptionally beautiful and original, but also the film *Warsaw* (Gajewski, 2003) speaks to me with its gallery of life-like characters.

Yet, I can't see any unity in them. They don't want that unity. They are not looking for some type of glue to unite them. Young film-makers can't fight for their films. They are not interested in filmmaking legislation, although they know that without it nothing can be done. They wouldn't lift a finger regarding that. This again, in my opinion, is a new phenomenon of the inertia of film circles, which used to be for years the most active politically.

The strength of the earlier Polish cinema was in the unity of a group of film makers who worked together in their common interest. Perhaps, that kind of unity will be created again. Wojciech Marczewski and I very much strive for that in our school [Master School of Film Directing], because we think that it would point new people in the direction of the cinema of social issues. This is the only tradition in Polish cinema that carries strength. There is no other artistic tradition in Polish cinema apart from that of a 19th century artist with social responsibility to participate in all its problems. In short, this is our artistic tradition. Artists should pry into what happens socially. They should be displeased about the current state of affairs, in the name of what should be. If that tradition returns, if young people understand that this is not only their responsibility, but is also a filmic topic, then Polish cinema will regain its distinctive shape. It won't imitate other patterns, just like our old films didn't.

I think that what happened here is something that we are yet not fully aware of. America exhausted its exploitation of European cinema. American cinema took what it could from what was happening in Europe. However, we can't turn that process around to benefit us and European cinema.

In this situation, can we have a common European cinema? Some would say that we can. I think that so far all the attempts in which an Italian would go to France and with a Frenchman together they would go to England, stopping on the way in Sweden, resulted in Euro-pudding. Everyone keeps making that dish, but no one likes to eat it.

Now, there are no limits. So, this openness has to be reflected somehow in cinema. Maybe there will be a cinema in which the Poles, Italians, French,

Germans and Swedes will co-exist together, as we do within our respective countries. Who would be able to write for cinema like that? Who would be able to direct it? Who would be able to make a film about such a broad reality with its problems? I don't know. I haven't seen a film like that so far.

RM: Was this also a motivation for setting up your and Wojciech Marczewski's film school?

AW: There were many reasons for setting up that school. One was the lack of unity that I have already discussed. The group of directors that started at that school brought with them a group of camera operators. Then followed scenarists, actors. So, from the initial number of 12 or 13 recruits, we have a few tens of people cooperating with our school.

The second reason for setting up that school is that people should learn filmmaking in a practical way, in film workshops. There should be less lecturing by directors on how they made their own films and more practical hands-on experience offered to students. How I made my films is unimportant to young film-makers. Completely inconsequential. It is completely inconsequential for my students that some time ago I made *Ashes and Diamonds*.

The third motivation came from the dissolution of the old film units [zespo_y filmowe], which grouped film-makers into artistic unities. With their disappearance, there came a need for a place in which young people could benefit from the experience of their older colleagues. Hence, the idea for a school that would offer that kind of unity. If it manages to survive and incorporate experiences of a few generations. In September this year I am starting to work with students who don't yet have their matriculation. Maybe we will help to construct a unity with some kind of future to it. They don't all have to become film directors, but they will know that cinema is something splendid, and that cinema is also something important. There is already a structure for that, but if we manage to create such a group, they will know about each other. I count on these young people, and this is the legacy I would like to leave behind.

RM: Thank you very much.

“Different vector of communication”

Interview with Mateusz Werner

11 July 2003, Warsaw

Mateusz Werner is a film critic, a representative of a generation whose childhood and teens belonged to pre-1989 Poland.

RM: Polish film directors who were able to take part in political debates before 1989 often bemoan the lack of such debates in Polish cinema after 1989. Is it possible, however, that the political changed its form and subject matter, rather than disappeared completely?

MW: You are right. There are explicit and implicit appeals. One can, in an overt or even flagrant way, appeal to political metaphor, to national symbolism, or one can do it in a coded way. The reason for such coding might not lie in escaping censorship, but in the fact that the language of national symbolism in Poland has been exploited so much since Romanticism that artists are sometimes ashamed to use it.

One could analyse the artists of the Polish People's Republic on three levels of national identification, or according to three models of national consciousness. One could then ask the question of whether the models proposed by Walicki reflect reality and, therefore, are functional. Other questions that would follow from there would be: 'what happened after 1989? Did Polish cinema after 1989 cut itself adrift from the old ways of national self-identification; or did it abandon the language of national self-identification; or did it abandon those issues; or maybe it developed a new code of national self-identification?' This is a task for you.

You can take on one hand Andrzej Wajda's film *Man of Iron* [*Człowiek z żelaza*], where there is a scene in which Janek Wiśniewski falls during the events of December 1970 in Gdańsk. Then, you have the same scene in Pasikowski's *Pigs* [*Psy*], where Janek Wiśniewski also falls, but it is drunken militia [ubecy] who are singing about it. And, while in the case of Wajda's film, the cinema audience would applaud to express their enthusiasm for this confirmation of a particular kind of a hierarchy of values, fifteen years later at Pasikowski's film, the audience would applaud again. They are enthusiastic again. However the vector of communication is completely different. There is enthusiasm at the sight of a particular artistic process, which relies on trampling those previous values.

It is a separate sociological, political or historical matter to ask what has happened with this nation, or to ask whether it is the same audience. Is the laughing and applauding done by the same people who were doing it before?

Most certainly not. It seems that different people started to go to the cinema. Your task here could be to observe changes in the artistic language of the cinema.

Pasikowski introduced here, as one of very few filmmakers after 1989, a dialogue with the inherited language by destroying it, by deconstructing it, by spitting on it. I am an ideological enemy of Pasikowski. I could even say that I hold him in contempt for what he did. He is not the only one. He is a certain exemplification that achieved success, a spectacular success at the time. It is an exemplification of a process that had a much wider reach. Urban in his weekly *Nie [No]* was doing the same. Many other journalists were doing the same. The beginning of the 1990s in Polish media and in Polish mass culture was filled with similar processes of reversing, deconstructing, spitting, demeaning all that high language of self-identification, which we inherited from the time of Marshal Law, from the 1980s. The same was happening everywhere; in fine arts, in literature, in the cinema, in cultural criticism. You can look at the text by Jerzy Sosnowski that appeared a few days ago in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Sosnowski, as one of the troublemakers of the beginning of the 1990s, busied himself in a way more effective than Pasikowski did, with deconstruction of the high Romantic language. Now, he repents. It is those who at the beginning of the 1990s were doing everything to 'loosen up' a certain linguistic rigour, who are responsible for the moral tumbledown visible in politics, for lowering of the life of social discourse of the street, work place, home. They ridiculed, debased the high stilted language.

Obviously, it is not the case that all people were motivated in the same way. Each of them had a different motivation. Sosnowski, I presume, was motivated aesthetically and by his liberalism. He wanted normality. He wanted us to overthrow that ballast that started to sit heavily in our stomachs, because we didn't need it any more. However, Pasikowski did it as cynically as Urban did it, knowing that he was going to get easy applause, that people would like it. People like it when authorities crumble. It's always spectacular. It's enjoyable to watch.

RM: Are you referring here mainly to young people?

MW: Yes. When Mao Tse-tung wanted to deal with his political opponents during the Cultural Revolution in China, the military arm of the party consisted of secondary and primary school students. The same students who didn't like their teachers. Firstly, they killed the teachers they didn't like because they were "people's enemies", that is intellectuals who were not "ready" for a class-less society. In the first order, the people's wrath turned against the teachers. Later, it was the others' turn.

This is what Pasikowski's audience is about. When one went to the cinema in 1992 in Przemyśl, Sanok, Ciecchanów, Siedlce, one looked at the audience

laughing their heads off, tooting, trampling, grunting during Pasikowski's film. These were two-bit market traders from Warsaw's 10,000 Year Stadium market, who came with beer and pop-corn to see how a popular actor says 'fuck'. In this way, they could validate who they were. Their attitude, their lack of standards in everything, in the way they were brought up, in the way they thought, in their everyday lives was gaining validation and legitimisation on the big screen.

RM: Was that type of audience a new phenomenon also? Did they not exist in the pre-1989 Poland?

MW: Riff-raff has always been around. Boorishness has always been around. Lumpen-proletariat has always been around. However, they have never been treated as a target group in show business in Poland. Only after 1989, they were recognised as a target group for mass culture as it is the case everywhere else in the world. New managers and artists appeared and they started to address their products to those groups. This came as a shock, because it was a new phenomenon.

Of course, when we are watching *Big Brother*, or television products, our soap operas etc, which are targeting specifically lumpen-proletariat, we have no doubt that it is not high culture, and it is not something worth discussing as an art form, a particular symbolic, notional or ideological form. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, a few filmmakers appeared, because it was not only Pasikowski, there was the author of *Young Wolves* [*Młode wilki*], and many others, who mixed two different spheres in their films. They introduced the mixture of their own polemic with the high language in the products addressed to lumpen-proletariat. They themselves were intellectuals. They felt a need to express themselves. They were not making products in an artistic language, however they were not consistent to a high degree.

Pasikowski kept saying in his interviews that he wanted to make action films and films about gangsters, that he didn't give a shit about anything else, because he wanted to make money from his films. He was assuming a position of a professional filmmaker, an American professional filmmaker who makes action films, not art films, not films that refer to reality.

He lied. This wasn't true. It was perfidious at that. His film was successful because of it. Because of it, the film was an event. This was due to the kind of scenes he included in it, due to casting of Bogusław Linda as an internal security militia man [ubek]. This was due to scenes like Janek Wiśniewski's fall, due to the tripling of the ostentatious use of vulgarities on the screen.

Vulgarity can be acted out in different ways. One can make a film in such a way that a vulgarity won't be visible. It can be shown as a street language. This is how the French go about it. If you watch *The Little Thief* [*Le petit*

voleur], a film by Erick Zonca everyone swears in it constantly, but one doesn't hear it, because it's enough to look at the protagonist to see that he is not able to build a sentence in any other way. On the other hand, if you look at Linda, he has the face of an intelligent man. Furthermore, he used to be cast in the 1980s as an intelligent man in Agnieszka Holland's and Krzysztof Kieslowski's films. He was a leading intelligent face of Polish film in the 1980s. Suddenly, that leading intelligent hero, a symbolic character, transforms into an ex-militia man [ubek], who chases gangsters a little bit, and a little bit is a gangster himself, who constantly swears, who humiliates that high discourse. This is an artistic provocation. It is not only a mass product directed at a mass audience in the way Pasikowski was trying to coquet with the mass media. He did it in a very clever and precise way. He is a very intelligent man. I think that this demands more attention.

If there are in the cinema of 1990s pronounced references to the discourse of national self-identification before 1989, references, which attempt to enter a dialogue either through continuance or deconstruction, then Pasikowski would constitute one of the most important case studies of that phenomenon.

RM: How would you compare films by Kędzierzawska or films like Blockersi [Blockers], films that are cynical depictions of helplessness in the new reality to Pasikowski's films?

MW: Would you say that Urban is helpless? I think he has a demiurgic influence on Polish reality. The feeling of helplessness may be a psychological justification of cynicism, however cynics are usually people with power. To me, cynicism is an acceptance of evil coupled with an ostentatious lie, or rhetorical manipulation of the discourse of values. I mean here manipulation in the way in which someone internally accepts evil, but externally pretends to be a saint, at the same time doing it in the manner that leaves no doubt as to his or her sincerity. Therefore, I wouldn't identify cynicism with helplessness.

RM: I will have to give it some more thought, but the flood of films exploring the helplessness of human existence in this new reality translated for me into cynicism. Films by Kedzierzawska and others that I mentioned, including also Hi Tereska [Cześć Tereska]...

MW: Do you really think that those films are cynical? If you saw Robert Gliński's first film made in the 1980s, Sunday Pranks [Niedzielne igraszki], then you would have seen a classical film about morality. It is a film about morality, but at the same time it is not a moralising film. It refers to the best traditions of the Cinema of Moral Concern. It is a film that has a moral message. It is a film about the Stalinist times, about the ways in which a totalitarian society of the Stalinist times was constructed. It shows them using an example of a group of children, who while playing in a backyard transfer

into their games all the horrifying methods of social oppression of the Stalinist times. It is an adaptation of the book by Krystyna Kofta, *Pavilion of Young Extortioners* [*Pawilon młodych drapieżców*]. This is a realistic film that is also clean and beautiful, however it doesn't mean it is moralising. It doesn't mean it is a film full of certainties. It is not a film that says "let's do good". It is not a preaching film. It is a film showing evil in the making almost in a documentary way. If you compare his debut to *Hi Tereska*, that is his last film, you would see great similarities. Only the language he uses has changed. The language became more literal. The method of working with the protagonist and with the problem in it is more documentary in *Hi Tereska*, without sparing the viewer's eyes and ears. This is because those eyes and ears can stand much more today, also thanks to Pasikowski and all the other things that have happened in the Polish cinema, media etc. This is a film that has as strong a moral message as the film *Sunday Games*. It is not a cynical film.

On the other hand, Pasikowski laughed at and destroyed the language of the Cinema of Moral Concern, showing that everyone has touched shit, that there are no heroes in our reality, that that system poisoned everyone. Because this is the main thought of Pasikowski; that we are all up to our ears in shit. The world is a big cesspool. It's a nihilistic vision. Gliński's film has equally strong vantage points. He is also not escaping the reality. He shows the reality equally degraded as Pasikowski's reality. Despite that, he doesn't deconstruct the moral language, and he presents a way of continuing that method of responsibility for the reality that was assumed by film directors of the time.

Directors in the 1970s and 1980s felt responsible for their reality. Kieslowski, when he was making *Decalogue* [*Dekalog*], or when he was making *Blind Chance* [*Przypadek*], had an ambition of influencing reality, not only commenting on it. It was a very strong connection between a filmmaker and an audience. Andrzej Wajda, Agnieszka Holland, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Marcel Łoziński, and also in a different way Krzysztof Zanussi, they were all authorities for the major part of the intelligentsia, not for the lumpen-proletariat. Their voices were taken into consideration in the same way as books by Michnik, Kuroń, or Wałęsa's or Bujak's speeches were. It was the same source of shaping a certain type of discourse. That way of communicating with audiences after 1989 ceased to be possible.

Filmmakers gave up on it for different reasons. On the one hand, they said to themselves that it couldn't be done any more. On the other hand, they were influenced by phenomena like Pasikowski, who proved that it's young people who went to the cinema and if cinema was to pay for itself, it had to address a different target group from the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia appeared to be a weak target group. Politicians also understood that. It's not possible to organise in Poland a party that could address the middle class or intelligentsia, because we have eight per cent of people with higher education

in Poland. Therefore, we cannot rely on them. If cinema is to earn its keeping, it has to be made for people with lower levels of education. This brings certain aesthetic and other consequences. Pasikowski derived some conclusions from that. Machulski derived some conclusions from it, as did tens of others including Jacek Bromski, Olaf Lubaszenko. They make films for the plebs and they completely gave up attempting to convey some values to the plebs, to pull them up by their ears, to show that there is something else in the world, something better that they could aspire to, something that they maybe should do. This cinema gives them exactly what they want; violence, sex, vulgarities, primitive jokes. This is profiled in exactly the same way as Berlusconi's or Murdoch's television, that is 'let's give to the plebs what they want, if the plebs want *Big Brother*, let's give them *Big Brother*, if they got bored with bikini girls, let's undress them and show them naked. Simply, "let's give them what they like."

Even though Robert Gliński also struggled in the 1990s, because he didn't believe that it was possible to make the cinema the way it was made before, he then made a film that referred to the cinema of the 1980s, and he achieved success in that. It appeared that everyone went to see that film, that many people were awaiting a film like that.

RM: Who do you mean by "everyone"?

MW: First of all, intelligentsia who were waiting for a film like that, and who were not watching films by Lubaszenko or Pasikowski. They very quickly understood that the cinema that was on offer was not satisfying for them, so they stopped going to the cinema. Or, they would go from time to time to see Woody Allen, Almodavar, Wenders. They started to watch the Americans, the English, the Germans. Films like that stopped being made in Poland. There exists a niche of distributors who decided that even though maybe these audiences were not as numerous as the lumpen-proletariat, there was still some money in it. There is Roman Gutek [film distributor] who makes money on them. It is less money than Syrena Entertainment [the largest film distributor in Poland] makes, but it's still something.

Also, on the one hand we have seven to eight per cent of people with higher education, but on the other hand in 1990 we had in Poland 400,000 students out of a population of 40 million people. Now we have 1.7 million, which is almost the same as the Germans, who have a population of 80 million. That means that, in ten years, the number of people studying in Poland has increased four-fold. And these are people who feel that they must grow, who have some aspirations. Because of this, I presume that slowly that "target group" will expand.

RM: Thank you for your time.

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