

Radical Communication: Politics after 1968 in/and Polish Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Radical Communication: Politics after 1968 in/and Polish Cinema

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The anniversary of 1968 provides an opportunity to revisit its unique intersection of revolutionary politics and collective creativity, in which cinema was caught up as never before—in the production of a certain political affect, global in its scope. This dissertation pursues what followed in its wake, using the case of People’s Poland, which saw an unprecedented labour struggle in the region just as things had begun to dissipate elsewhere—from the mid-1970s on—culminating in one of the largest social movements in human history, in 1980, the independent and free trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity). In recuperating these years, we locate a corresponding, alternative history for Polish political aesthetics and radical cinema practice after 1968, using a combination of historical documentation, close reading, and theoretical intervention. Like the politics of 1968, and the horizontal organizing of Solidarity, these films put pressure on existing categories of “the political,” locating it an aesthetics of participation and the spirit of research, in which viewers play a large part in constructing meaning, rather than it being a function of a self-contained “political text.” Much of this grows out of the strong documentary tradition in Polish cinema, which the film artists under discussion then subvert, pushing beyond its limits. We see how, in different ways, contemporaries Grzegorz Królikiewicz (Ch. 1) and Krzysztof Kieślowski (Ch. 2 and 3) call into question this tradition—the former using an avant-

garde/film-theoretical approach, and the latter developing an immanent critique of the capacity of cinema to represent (i.e., speak for) political reality. Piotr Szulkin (Ch. 4) adds to these a haptic, affective element that explicitly theorizes *labour* as the subject of cinema. Finally, Andrzej Żuławski (Ch. 5) pushes these haptic, affective, elements *into the red*, using a visceral approach that marries genre cinema and historical embodiment, drawing on the traditions of Polish Romanticism and utopianism. In sum, these films use viewer participation to forge an embodied, affective, negativizing cinema aesthetic able to encompass a wider array of human experience than that circumscribed by Party politics or the (male) discourse of the intellectual opposition. This we call *radical communication*.

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Introduction

For the time being, it has turned out, we are extending the old civilization, continuing on the 'capitalist road'; compulsively, as it were, i.e. under very real compulsions, and in a most profound sense that involves our whole culture, rather than simply being a question of politics.

- Rudolf Bahro, East German dissident¹

Collectivism and autonomy/Are not mutually exclusive!

- Parquet Courts, "Total football"²

The cinema (a)esthetic will be social, or the cinema will do without an (a)esthetic.

- Andre Bazin³

Za wolność waszą i naszą!
(For your freedom, and ours!)

- motto of Polish internationalism⁴

In 1973, a now somewhat forgotten polemic was initiated between two giants of the intellectual Left, arguably more important for what it represented than the matter of their words. British socialist historian E.P. Thompson (b. Oxford, UK, 1924-1994) had recognized in Leszek Kołakowski (b. Radom, Poland, 1927-2009) a comrade-in-arms for the role he played in 1956 and after in Eastern Europe. As a once-loyal Communist Party philosopher who began speaking truth to its power during the upheaval of the Polish

¹ Marxist writer and inventor of the now-common phrase "really existing socialism." Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, Trans. David Fernbach (London: NLB, 1978), 7.

² Parquet Courts, "Total Football," track #1 on *Wide Awake!* (Rough Trade Records, 2018).

³ André Bazin, *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance: the Birth of a Critical Aesthetic*, ed. Francois Truffaut (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981), 5.

⁴ Believed to originate with the Polish military contributions to the US War of Independence, this slogan of international Polish aid to liberation struggles rang out through the 19th and 20th century. Its most notable modern usage is in the Polish support of the Popular Front in the Spanish Civil War, in the banners and cry of the Dąbrowszczacy brigade (named after the military commander of the Paris Commune, Jarosław Dąbrowski). See *For Your Freedom and Ours: Polish Progressive Spirit from the 14th century to the Present*, ed. Krystyna M. Olszer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981).

October,⁵ Kolakowski became one of the most prominent and influential Marxist revisionists⁶ in the Eastern European region. Thompson himself had been one of the most eloquent and forceful English-language left-communist critics of the Soviet Union after its brutal repression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and in his subsequent advocacy for a revitalized “Marxist Humanism.”⁷ In sum, in their respective activism and nimbleness of thought willing to break with Party dogma, they were the epitome of the early New Left.⁸ However, by the early 1970s, Thompson’s influence, though not his ardor, had waned, while Kolakowski, persona non grata in the Polish People’s Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, hereafter PRL or “People’s Poland”), and now living in the UK, had renounced Marxism utterly, in influential⁹ if indiscriminately published¹⁰ dissident essays. Thompson saw fit to use a platform given to him by the Socialist Register in 1973 to write an “Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski,” lamenting—at great length—over what he saw as the inglorious fall of a socialist humanist, as well as evidence that the tradition they had both represented was dying or dead.

We both passed from a frontal critique of Stalinism to a stance of Marxist revisionism; we both sought to rehabilitate the utopian energies within the socialist tradition; we both stood in an ambiguous position, critical and affirmative, to the Marxist tradition. We both were centrally concerned with the radiating problems of historical determinism on the one hand, and of agency, moral choice, and individual responsibility on the other.¹¹

⁵ Explored in chapter one, the near-revolution of this year began with a workers’ uprising in Poznań, predating Hungary.

⁶ More to follow, but briefly defined it was the belief that state socialism could be reformed (i.e., at the Party level).

⁷ See his essay “Socialist Humanism,” in E. P. Thompson, *E. P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left - Essays and Polemics*, ed. Cal Winslow (Lawrence And Wishart, 2014), 49-88.

⁸ Thompson, “The New Left,” in *E. P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, 119-136.

⁹ In particular his essay considering the paths open to political opposition in Poland in the 1970s, “In Stalin’s Countries: Theses on Hope and Despair,” trans. Kevin Devlin, *Kultura*, Vol. 5-6 (Paris: 1971)

¹⁰ Among them was one written for a right-wing journal, *Encounter*, funded by the CIA. Scott Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory: E.P. Thompson, the New Left and Postwar British Politics* (Manchester University Press, 2013), 134.

¹¹ E.P. Thompson, “Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski,” *The Socialist Register* 10 (1973), 1.

The Polish philosopher's response was typically witty, but failed to ignite further argument; mostly it criticized Thompson for allegedly soft-pedaling the crimes of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and denied the very possibility of socialist democracy. The two men were talking past one another.

There will never be and there cannot be any economical or industrial democracy without political ("bourgeois") democracy with everything it entails.¹²
...for many years, I have not expected anything from attempts to mend, to renovate, to clean or to correct the communist idea. Alas, poor idea. I knew it, Edward. This skull will never smile again.¹³

0.1. 1968 and 1980: Poles of Radical Communication.

In fact, ironically, despite their sparring, the two men were united in drawing somewhat different, and less radical, conclusions from the time period than many of their younger peers; specifically, that which lay in the wake of the global upheavals of 1968—in the despair but also the hope, shielded with pessimism, that something new had been born, in the furious art-making of which cinema was an integral part; and finally, in the seemingly irrevocable gap this opened between not only the Left of the Soviet bloc and that of “free” Western Europe, but also, and perhaps more importantly, with previous ways of doing Left politics. For, however contested, 1968 is largely associated in the Global North with rebellion: a politically progressive *break* with the past, whether that be along cultural,¹⁴ political,¹⁵ or other lines. In Soviet bloc countries, “1968” usually begins and ends with the

¹² Leszek Kolakowski, “My Correct Views on Everything: A Rejoinder to Edward Thompson's “Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski,” *The Socialist Register* 11 (1974): 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ As representative of this approach, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ As representative, and a corrective to the counter-culture-only approach, see Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Czechoslovak Prague Spring, which had sought, at the very least, to detach socialism from the bureaucratic statism of Soviet Union; in short, it was a time as heady as that in Paris, if not more so.¹⁶ Looming larger, sadly, than this great moment of freedom and festival was what came next, and herein lies its meaning for the reformist Marxists above: the invasion of Warsaw Pact armies and tanks to crush the Prague Spring, and put an exclamatory end to the dream of socialist democracy, one that Thompson and Kolakowski had shared; it announced an end to Marxist revisionism generally.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned break with previous Left politics was felt, East to West, in ways that could not be contained by repression nor discourse—twin pronouncements, as it were, on the death of democratic socialism in Eastern Europe. Globally, movements for liberation extended well into the 1970s,¹⁷ accompanied by radical art that was in many cases inextricable from the politics themselves, as we will see in chapter one. In this, cinema, globally, played an integral part—both in the festival atmosphere that reigned in the year 1968, and the developments that came after. Indeed, the magnitude of cinema’s role within emancipatory politics was heretofore unseen, and it turned on a question of form, as Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi remind us in the new collection *1968 and Global Cinema*.

¹⁶ “Prague during the occupation looked no less like a local manifestation of the Situationist International’s ideas. People pulled down street signs, signposts disappeared, citizens changed street names, and took down house numbers. In short, they made the city their own: accessible to those who knew it and excluding those who did not belong, such as the occupying Soviet Army. Prague was transformed into an “urban labyrinth,” and its walls were inscribed with May ’68-style slogans.” Judit Bodnar, “Making a Long Story Longer: Eastern Europe and 1968 as a Global Moment, Fifty Years Later,” in *Slavic Review* 77, Issue 4 (Winter 2018): 873-880.

¹⁷ This dissertation accepts the definition of what is variously called, “The Long Sixties,” “The Long 1968,” etc., following, like others, Fredric Jameson in his influential essay “Periodizing the 1960s.” Jameson locates its energies in the late 1950s and judges the “Sixties” as bottoming out by 1974 with the end of the Vietnam War, including the dissipation of the fervor it had inspired in Western emancipatory movements, as well the decline of various revolutionary movements in Latin American with the militarization of many regimes following the Chilean Coup (1973). Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text*, No. 9/10 (Spring - Summer, 1984): 178-209.

(The) period differs from the era following World War II (with its exploration of new realisms) insofar as film culture displays an awareness of its role in articulating political concerns. As Hermann Kappelhoff notes, "consistent film poetics arose in this time precisely from the diagnosis of the failure of political publics." What Kappelhoff describes as a film poetics refers to an explicit attention to changing the forms of representation. This shift in film language, arguably influenced by the Brechtian method, can be seen in political cinemas around the globe.¹⁸

Further, in elaborating what constituted the heightened sensibility of this shift, to that which Film Studies has often labeled "political modernism,"¹⁹ the cinema of 1968 sought to render visible a new social reality. In Kappelhoff's words,

What was to be analyzed were the historically developed conditions of sensory horizons of experience, whether these were defined by symbolic, discursive, or media contexts; what was to be made visible was the sensory, concrete, physical positioning of individual existence in the shared space of social life; what was to be called into question were the perspectives given by this positioning, in which social life was only represented in the most fragmentary way.²⁰

This dissertation attempts to understand what cinema communicated and indeed *how* it communicated, in the wake of this "failure of political publics." Unlike Kappelhoff, we link this phrase with *realism*,²¹ not in the admirably flexible Brechtian sense of it as a strategy with diverse tactics for portraying the world,²² but in the tendency of film narrative to purport to

¹⁸ Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi, eds., *1968 and Global Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 5.

¹⁹ The term is taken from Sylvia Harvey (who in turn takes it from Jameson); its influence was furthered by David Rodowick's disciplinary account of avant-garde film theory and cinema practice. For her part, Harvey distinguishes the avant-garde "materialist cinema" approach from that of Brecht. Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 81. David Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

²⁰ Hermann Kappelhoff, *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 15.

²¹ Kappelhoff's project is on "Cinematographic realism" vis-à-vis community, whereas we are in part considering the articulation of the *affect* of community in narrative cinema in ways that emphasize the limits of realism, or indeed explode it altogether as a notion. Ibid.

²² As he wrote, "Our concept of realism must be wide and political, sovereign over all conventions." Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs," in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics. Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno* (London: NLB, 1977), 81.

reflect reality, and in so doing reify historical complexity and foreclose on political possibility, despite, occasionally, the best of intentions.

In particular, Polish cinema's own engagement with social reality in the 1970s presents us with a rare opportunity to extend "1968" both as idea and as political struggle beyond Fredric Jameson's terminus of 1974,²³ both because of the extent to which it has been miscategorized as consisting largely of documentary-influenced realism, but also in the way that which has been occluded—the *radically communicative*, we will argue—corresponded to another revolutionary date. 1980 is usually remembered far differently in the Global North than 1968, as a year that began with war, in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and ended with the consolidation and triumph of reactionary forces, begun the previous year in Margaret Thatcher's election in the UK, with the landslide election of Ronald Reagan to the US Presidency (to which John Lennon's assassination was perhaps a final insult). Quite out of step with this narrative is the hopeful time of the Polish August of 1980—the culmination of a massive revolt of the working class initiated in 1976, which felt revolutionary indeed in its organizational and aspirational dimensions.

The extent to which this trade union movement, *Solidarność* (Solidarity), so-named for the way in which it grew, strike by strike and city by city, is now forgotten, or willfully passed over, may be seen in the fact that urbanist David Featherstone's otherwise excellent book on the small-'s' concept, gives it nary a mention.²⁴ Though originating on the Baltic Coast, Solidarity was a decentralized, grassroots (i.e., popular, including in its diffuse means of communication with itself) movement that had very much actualized Lenin's theorization of the *dual power* of the Soviets of the Russian Revolution to take hold of and transform society,

²³ Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s."

²⁴ David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

“i.e., a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and *not on a law* enacted by a centralised state power.”²⁵ This horizontality made it, ironically, a profound challenge to the top-down “high modernism” of Leninism,²⁶ the intellectual and structural debt of the Stalinism imposed on post-war Poland.

If 1968 should be understood as Judith Bodnar has recently suggested, not merely locally or transnationally but as a “key moment in global history,”²⁷ the formation of Solidarity in 1980, beginning on the Baltic and radiating outwards, was something more like, as several young Polish intellectuals have put it, provocatively suggesting it was the only communism Poland ever experienced, an *Event*, in Alain Badiou’s radical sense. Solidarity altered “the situation” by opening up a radically new “space of possibilities,” potentially inaugurating a new political subject.

We have to remember that what an Event opens up, is a space of **possibilities** and **not necessities**. Event’s consequences depend solely on (the) subject's fidelity to it. This is the reason we believe it is worth going back to this misinterpreted event of early 80-ties and to look for the ways of – to put it metaphorically – “defreezing” its emancipatory potential.²⁸

This conclusion is wholly embraced by this dissertation, which seeks to connect the militancy of the global 1968,²⁹ to the seemingly isolated, independent Polish workers’

²⁵ V.I. Lenin, "The Dual Power," *Pravda* No. 28 (April 9, 1917). Trans. Isaacs Bernard, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm>

²⁶ James Scott’s critique of Leninist state planning. Scott, “The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis,” in *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 147-180.

²⁷ She writes that it “requires searching for connections between the events, making comparisons and outlining explanations while steering between continuity and synchronicity” and advocates for a temporal, historiographical, spatial-geographic expansion. Bodnar, “Making a Long Story Longer,” *Slavic Review*, 875-877.

²⁸ Jakub Majmurek, Kuba Mikurda, Jan Sowa, "Event in the Icebox. The Carnival of Solidarity (1980-1981) as an Outburst of Political Imagination," Paper presented at "On the idea of Communism" Conference, London (2009): 4.

²⁹ As the editors of *1968 and Global Cinema* put it, this is a phrase, and a word, “global,” that used to possess militancy, before more recently coming to be associated with the flows of finance capital. "(O)ur goal in this volume is also to point to what was once an entirely different approach to understanding the global, often signified under different terms such as *international*...the potential then implied by the term ought not lose its

movement that led to the victory of Solidarity in 1980. We seek to do so, and understand the meaning of this relation, through a certain refraction of its collective, affective politics as gleaned in Polish cinema in the intervening decade. The altered “situation” of Poland is thus also to be *reconstructed* herein—this is to say our aims are both historical and speculative—as an extended case study. We do so out of the conviction that Solidarity’s lessons as a social movement, in terms of both the direct actions and affective, symbolic repertoire of its labour organizing, have scarcely been learned by the Left in “The West,” which has long been suspicious of horizontality—at least with respect to its connection to revolution, as we will see below—and emotion in politics.

In this respect, “defreezing” Solidarity as a political model can help shift our understanding of what constitutes *the political* in cinema more broadly after 1968, emphasizing but also moving beyond the aforementioned emphasis on the primacy of form in interrogating the politics of representation. To explain this, we must first say a bit more here about how the cinema of People’s Poland—its connection to the radical aesthetics of 1968 seemingly tenuous—has been discussed, until perhaps recently. This phrase, *political cinema*, has long been especially fraught in critical reception of Polish films, not unlike the state socialist cinemas of its neighbors, with the tendency of critics, whose vocation it is to coolly reflect, to “read” each film as an expression of political turmoil, irrespective of its aesthetics. Marek Haltof, in his recent foreword to a new edition of his classic text *Polish National Cinema*, which admirably concedes its author has played a part in perpetuating this tendency, quotes the great Silesian filmmaker Kazimierz Kutz on the lack of critical attention to aesthetics.

potency simply due to the way it is understood in contemporary discourse." Gerhardt and Saljoughi, *1968 and Global Cinema*, 4.

Polish cinema in years past, propelled by anticommunism of the West, benefited from the permanent discrediting, because the theme had been always more important than the style. It never had to compete intellectually; we were allowed to enter salons in dirty boots to describe communism, which the public wished a quick death.³⁰

Kutz resents, in critics as well as filmmakers, the lack of attention to filmmaking aesthetics and cultural value independent of dissidence—this seems to be Haltof’s abiding concern—but if we are generous (and given his subtle and complex filmmaking, we ought to be) we can also see in his quote the demand that film texts be mined for deeper meaning whose political efficaciousness is, or should not be, not so easy to determine, or for that matter instrumentalize.

On the one hand, cinema made within People’s Poland has been seen as overwhelmingly consisting of documentary-influenced, intellectually-oriented, realist art cinema (“moral realism”³¹), filmmaking that is often self-consciously political, in that it takes a narrative stance, subtle or no, *against* the Party. On the other, beyond overt pro-Party filmmaking, which we do not discuss here, there were certain directors of the 1960s and 1970s whose formal and geographic divergence—though exiled, they occasionally returned to Poland to make films—puts them at a seeming, and also literal, remove from this first political, realist grouping. These include film artists like New Wave-era Jerzy Skolimowski, animator-turned-alleged pornographer Walerian Borowczyk, Romantic renegade Andrzej Żuławski (discussed in chapter five), and others. Whether due to the difficulty or the auteurist devotion inspired by their “excessive” form, or their perceived status as transnational filmmakers,³² the cultural specificity of their political content has often been critically

³⁰ Quoted in Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema: A History* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 4.

³¹ This is a reductive but quite useful shorthand we will occasionally employ. See Michael Goddard, “Beyond Moral Realism: The Subversive Cinema of Andrzej Żuławski,” in *Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, eds., Ewa Mazierska and Goddard (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 2014), 236-257.

³² For a collection that uses this approach, see Mazierska and Goddard, *Polish Filmmaking in a Transnational Key*.

overlooked—this is likewise true of some of the lesser known but no less gifted filmmakers to which they bear some similarity who worked solely within People’s Poland.

We seek to avoid this binarism of “anti-regime realism vs. artistic visionaries,” and so on, by considering several diverse methods—one in each chapter, with chapters two and three in tandem—used by Polish filmmakers after 1968; these methods do not comfortably fall under either the “realist” or “experimental cinema” moniker. Our approach here shares something with Gurshtein and Simonyi’s recent “big tent” usage of the term “experimental” in exploding these critical binaries towards state socialist cinema. They examine

films that prioritised transgressing or violating the visual and narrative conventions of both fiction and non-fiction film...experimental works often sought to expose the viewer to formal devices that deemphasise and destabilise storytelling. At the same time, we took ‘experimental’ to mean unconventional approaches not just to the final cinematic product, but to the many processes involved in its production, distribution, exhibition and reception, as well.³³

While radical approaches to “production, distribution, exhibition and reception,” lie somewhat outside the realm of this dissertation, this is in part because we wish to position films and filmmakers within its unique system of *zespoly filmowe*, or film production units.³⁴ As discussed primarily in chapters two and three, these only solidified into their celebrated form half a dozen years after 1968, providing young Polish filmmakers with plenty of early opportunities to think outside the box, as writers and producers, as we will see.

Further, and significantly for what I see as the conceptual innovation this dissertation provides to post-1968 cinema, the directors we discuss here were not necessarily avowedly,

³³ Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi, "Experimental Cinema in State Socialist Eastern Europe," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 7, no. 1 (2016): 2.

³⁴ It is for this reason too that the avant-garde is only considered in relation to its influence on narrative and documentary cinema. In the case of the subject of chapter one this influence was pronounced.

militantly leftist—indeed, most were not. Instead, the politics of their works comes from a certain willingness of these film texts to embrace the *participatory* democratic³⁵ spirit of 1968, one *enacted* by the Solidarity movement, that would make a partner, or accomplice, of the viewer.³⁶ The common feature of these films, which in this dissertation goes by the name of *radical communication*, is their desire, as it were, to communicate with the viewer—also in tandem with the viewer—in ways that go beyond and the discursive and rational level of politics, which is to say in their affective break with psychological realism in the development of narrative. In this, if an early 1960s *Cahiers du Cinema*-like enthusiasm can be permitted, these films evince a certain kind of *faith in cinema*—a social aesthetic, as Bazin once put it.

Such an openness of approach to the experience of the viewer—a *democratic* approach to cinema, Grzegorz Królikiewicz, subject of chapter one, would put it—allows them to overcome a particular kind of anxiety³⁷ arguably pervasive among Polish artists, including the directors we examine, regarding *class* in Poland. There will be more to say on this in the next section, which also introduces, broadly speaking, intellectual currents within Poland and without after 1968 that have significant bearing on the dissertation. These are important to hold up to critical review, for the political subject “First Solidarity,” i.e., the eighteen months of the initial Solidarity movement until it was silenced by the Martial declaration of a “state

³⁵ Though we seek to define this broadly—rooted in specific practices, but also a general approach to the organization of political life, including the collective feelings thereby engendered—Staughton Lynd locates the coinage of “participatory democracy” in the Port Huron Statement of 1962, written by Tom Hayden. On the most basic level it can be said to be the desire of persons to “control the decisions that affect their lives.” Staughton Lynd, “The New Left,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 382, (March 1969), 70-71.

³⁶ For this reason, I prefer, like others, the phrase *film viewer* to *spectator*. I wish to sidestep the latter’s connotation of passivity, not least because Polish audiences were highly engaged viewers during these years.

³⁷ As an aside, we note that the name of the dominant trend in 1970s Polish filmmaking, “Cinema of Moral *Anxiety*” (*niepokoju*), discussed in chapter three and throughout, is a word that subsequent critics in English also felt anxious about, apparently, changing it to the more neutral *Concern*.

of war” (*stan wojenny*) by Polish general Wojciech Jaruzelski, was not among the victors of history who get to write it. This introduction, therefore, sketches the general intellectual argument of the dissertation while surveying the literature on the sociopolitics of People’s Poland, within and without, and the meaning of culture and politics in Poland in the 1970s generally, again from within and without, during these tumultuous times and also recollected after, with a few necessary historical detours.

0.2. Intellectual History in/of Poland after 1968

One of the interesting and seemingly paradoxical problems facing an account of Polish intellectuals’ role after 1968 is the gap between the germane, concrete actions they took, after 1976, that advanced social struggle, and their theoretical prescriptions, which despite their influence largely failed to predict the groundswell of Solidarity in 1980, and arguably undercut what it stood for in the long run (i.e., after 1989, and present day). The reasons for this are complex and hardly settled, but this section introduces one of threads of the dissertation and at the same time provides an essential overview of the literature on/in Poland, both primary sources of political theory in the mid-1970s, and subsequently without, moving from 1980 to the present, that attempts to account for the reasons behind the Solidarity phenomenon. Secondly, in tracking some of these arguments we will mention a certain historical social stratification in Poland, as compared to some of its neighbors, as well as what this has to do not only with Polish cinema—very much in concert with intellectual currents in this way—but the geopolitics surrounding the struggle of 1968.

The political scientist and “Poland watcher” Michael H. Bernhard has spoken of the program of Polish intellectuals hostile to the Party and the PRL as one of *opposition*, rather

than dissidence, and as a decidedly post-Revisionist development beginning in the mid-1970s, already alluded to in the Thompson/Kolakowski kerfuffle.

In essence, dissidence was a form of moral suasion; it addressed grievances to the party-state, demanding that it behave better. After revisionism failed to reform the party-state from within, some critical Marxists continued to struggle for a more humane socialism. However, in the post-1968 climate in the bloc such dissident Marxists were marginalized within ruling parties or forced to leave them. At this juncture Marxist-inspired reform began to lose its appeal, and would later become largely irrelevant with the shift to opposition resistance strategies. Other dissidents made their appeals from outside the framework of party and Marxism, most often on the basis of liberal or traditional values... Ultimately, dissidence came to represent nothing more than the articulation of an agenda of change without any concrete program to implement it except the hope that those in power would listen. *Opposition*, by contrast, “concentrated its efforts on *society* [**my emphases**],” a realm separate from that of the state.³⁸

While the question of *who* is being addressed seems slightly misleading,³⁹ Bernhard’s definition of moral appeal vs. plan of action directed toward society is a potentially useful one. It can help distinguish Polish intellectuals’ involvement in concrete actions taken in social defense, about which more to come, from a dissident figure like Havel, for example, in Czechoslovakia, who despite his eloquence⁴⁰ was not involved in building parallel structures, nor working dialogically alongside a workers’ movement. However, we would suggest here a further distinction, one that in its way nudges dissidence and opposition back onto the same footing. *Opposition*, or “anti-politics,” to use its influential formulation by the Hungarian political theorist György Konrád,⁴¹ in its desire to separate itself, in concentrating on

³⁸ Michael H. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976-1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 8-9.

³⁹ For example, Bernhard implies that a non-revisionist revolutionary document like Kuroń and Modlelewski’s “Open Letter to the Party”—explored in chapter on—is a dissident example, simply because it is “to the Party,” despite calling for workers’ to rise up and (re)create workers’ councils as in 1956. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland*, 9.

⁴⁰ Havel begins his famous and influential “Power of the Powerless” essay by adapting Marx to say that a specter of “dissent” is haunting Eastern Europe. Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

⁴¹ György Konrád, *Anti-Politics: An Essay*, trans. Richard E. Allen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984). This is also the term favored by David Ost in his strong account of the (anti-)politics in of the Polish opposition. Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-politics* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ Press, 1991).

“society”—this we will elaborate upon below—is not necessarily the same as *political struggle* that uses direct actions in the service of its aims, as did the radical syndicalism of Solidarity, which built structures beyond mere “social defense” that inevitably brought it into conflict with the PRL state. Of course, there were clearly extenuating reasons that led both intellectuals and workers within in bloc countries to wish to avoid direct confrontation in this way—notably the fear of Soviet tanks as in 1968 Prague. It is nonetheless reasonable, especially in light of later, post-1989 developments that borrowed from their theorizing, to ask at the outset to what extent is there a gap between this “opposition thought” and the praxis of Solidarity.

0.2.1. Opposition voices: Michnik and Kuroń

We now examine the two leading voices of the opposition in People’s Poland in the 1970s, to understand what their discourse had to do with Solidarity, as well as to what extent it connected to the approach of film artists, many of whom also very much counted themselves as among this opposition. Adam Michnik (1946-), a student in 1968 who was already a seasoned participant in underground circles when he was notoriously expelled that year from Warsaw University, harbored many of the same hopes and fears as the US New Left, with whom he and his colleagues claimed an affinity.⁴² Michnik, after 1989 the editor-in-chief of liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, became arguably the most influential opposition theorist in 1970s Poland—in the West he is perhaps best known for his late 1970s book, *The Church and The Left*.⁴³ Shaped by the historical experience of popular revolt against state and Soviet repression, as well as his upbringing, similar to his dissident peers, as the child of

⁴² See David Ost’s introduction to Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left*, trans. David Ost (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1992), 5-6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Communist intelligentsia parents,⁴⁴ Michnik came to see a middle ground as the only way forward for resistance. In the words of Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, for Michnik, “neither revolution from below or reform from above would work as the strategy for achieving what was in fact possible.”⁴⁵ In Michnik’s influential essay “The New Evolutionism,” written in the key year of 1976, he calls for (public) solidarity with the actions of workers, but the largest takeaway is the need for the development of an oppositional public sphere as the (reasonable) way forward:

I believe that what sets today’s opposition apart from the proponents of those ideas is the belief that a program for evolution ought to be addressed to an independent public, not to totalitarian power. Such a program should give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves.⁴⁶

...T)hose voices, albeit weak and sporadic, are nonetheless authentic: they form an independent public opinion, with nonconformist attitudes and oppositional thought.⁴⁷

As effective as the opposition proved at building up a renewed public sphere, there is a belief herein in incremental change, or progress, which is ultimately anathema to seemingly impossible, revolutionary changes such as that experienced in 1956, 1968, or, in Poland, 1980. In this last date, moreover, despite later voices suggesting otherwise, the strikes on the Baltic Coast were no mere “spontaneous” insurrection given shape and substance by Warsaw opposition intellectuals, but had precedent in working class structures and tactics developed as we will see in key moments throughout the 1970s, different facets of which are explored throughout the dissertation. What we suggest, then, is there is something potentially dangerous here in Michnik’s conception—a belief in the power of *discourse* alone

⁴⁴ And whose persecution in 1968 was like so many others related to his Jewish background.

⁴⁵ Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 31.

⁴⁶ “The New Evolutionism,” in Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 144.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

to shape politics, and here we mean an enlarged sense of the word to encompass media, very much including cinema. Further, despite Michnik's fine words, this document, in its incremental approach, did not make a call to push forward, dialogically, alongside the worker militancy that had swept the entire country in 1976.⁴⁸

A political thinker who did see the gap between theory and praxis here was Michnik's former teacher and "red" scout leader,⁴⁹ Jacek Kuroń (1934-2006) himself the earlier author of a revolutionary document in the early 1960s, as we will see in chapter one. Noting the impatience of the Polish people in the face of a worsening economy that increasingly relied on Western credit, Kuroń began sketching out his own theory for how to organize society differently, one that rather than appealing to a public sphere simply sought to bypass official culture altogether and organize a new public life on its own, while at the same time taking care "not to lure the wolves out of the woods" with respect to Moscow, as he put it later.⁵⁰

(S)ociety should organize itself into social movements, interacting on each other expressing as fully as possible the aspirations of all...a country of integrated social action and thought. Once the nation is fully organized within a voluntary, social framework, it will be ready to impose the necessary self-restraints on its own sovereignty in relation to its own state and to outside Powers.⁵¹

In fact, Kuroń and his associates had already begun this work by the time of this writing, organizing a very concrete response to the worker strikes and direct actions of 1976 that had exploded most spectacularly in the factories of the Warsaw suburb of Ursus as well as the central Polish city of Radom. The *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (Workers' Defense Committee),

⁴⁸ Unlike the worker strikes in 1970, which were largely confined to the Baltic Coast.

⁴⁹ Active in the mid-1950s, they were known as the "Walterites," David Ost, Ost, *Solidarity*, 64.

⁵⁰ Kuroń, "Not to Lure the Wolves Out of the Woods," an Interview with Jacek Kuroń," in *The Solidarity Sourcebook*, eds. Stan Persky and Henry Flam (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982), 132-137.

⁵¹ Jacek Kuroń, "Reflections on a Program of Action," trans. Krystyna Aytoun, *The Polish Review* 22, No. 3 (1977): 69.

or KOR was formed to provide direct legal and financial aid to the working classes who were facing direct, ongoing repression by the Party. It also announced collaboration, or at least cooperation, between two groups who had for so long been perceived as on different tracks.

0.2.2. The historical (class) divide in Polish culture

The gulf thus bridged in the tentative union of workers and intellectuals was especially impressive in a nation like Poland, in which general cultural attitudes towards intelligentsia, governance and the production of art had long set it somewhat apart from others in the region. While Poland's *modern* history⁵² is certainly quite trauma-filled even when compared to other European countries—the three-sided Partition of Poland at the end of the 18th-century, the site of the most heinous crimes committed by the Nazis, etc.—a more internal look, immediately notices the deep, historical chasm between urban intellectuals and rural villagers (and later, of course, the proletariat—Poland was aggressively proletarianized after WWII, as discussed briefly in chapter one). This distrust, which had notoriously erupted into indiscriminate violence in 1846,⁵³ was famously dramatized in the influential Krakow artist Stanisław Wyspiański's best-known play, *Wesele*⁵⁴ (The Wedding, 1901), modelled on the wedding of one of the author's friends. In it, an intellectual from Krakow marries a peasant from the mountains, and the former is haunted by spirits from Polish folklore, representing in part the fear of violent backlash against a more comfortable

⁵² The standard history, including within Poland, is Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Vol. 2: 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Brian Porter-Szucs provides a fresher perspective that, as indicated in his title, dispenses with Davies's tendency towards what might be termed "Polish exceptionalism." Porter-Szucs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

⁵³ The peasants' rebellion in Austria-controlled Galicia, a complicated topic, is briefly recounted in Davies, *God's Playground: Vol 2*, 147-148.

⁵⁴ For a good account of the historical circumstances from which it drew, and those of its own time, see Ann Komaromi, "Wyspiański's "Wesele:" Poised on the Border," *Theatre Journal*, 54, No. 2 (May, 2002), 187-202.

urbanism that had failed to protect the historically oppressed peasantry against the aristocracy.⁵⁵

This historical anxiety, so to say, in Polish letters, is also readily apparent throughout Polish cinema history, and is a concern of this dissertation, particularly insofar as the term “realism” is deployed on behalf of seemingly universal, but actually highly selective, class-based perspectives. As Iwona Kurz has astutely analyzed, the lack of understanding between intellectuals and the working class or peasantry that characterizes Polish culture is manifest in the inability of Polish cinema, by and large, to portray “ordinariness,” something that is by contrast a distinguishing feature of Czech cinema and literature.⁵⁶ Kurz demonstrates this through a reading of Krzysztof Zanussi’s (1939 -) French New Wave-influenced *The Structure of Crystal* (*Struktura kryształu*, 1969), from which I will need to quote at some length. In contrast to cinema of the Czech New Wave,

⁵⁵ Pre-19th century Poland, ostensibly more democratic in that it had no absolutist monarchy, arguably had, right up until the time of Partition, a kind of feudalism. As Jan Sowa explains, in a brilliant polemic against the recent right-wing appropriation of post-colonialism in the Polish academy, the country was controlled by the landed gentry, the *Szlachta*. “From the late 16th onwards kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (a country covering much of Central- Eastern Europe...) were elected directly by the entire body of nobility gathering in person on election field in Wola, now a district of Warsaw. Every nobleman had a right to come there and vote for any person he regarded suitable for the job; not everybody could afford such a trip and in practice these events gathered around 50 – 70 thousand participants; ...The Polish parliament – *Sejm* – was equally under full control of aristocrats and did not function as an institution of class compromise as it did in Western Europe. Bourgeoisie was completely excluded from any part in the government and *Sejm* was used as a solely aristocratic instrument of exercising power in the interest of the nobility. This political regime was combined with an agrarian lifestyle of *szlachta* who remained utterly hostile to the city and deeply in love with their rural estates. The material base for their existence was provided by a manorial economy producing grain for the nascent capitalistic market. A form of slave labour was used for this purpose. It was called serfdom, however it functioned very much like slavery (with an important difference that individuals were not sold or bought; human trafficking took form of wholesale exchanges of entire villages with their peasant populations). Polish aristocrats believed themselves utterly superior or even racially different from the peasants. That was expressed by the myth of Sarmatian origins of the *szlachta*; a myth of colonial nature.” Sowa, “Forget Postcolonialism, There’s a Class War Ahead,” *nonsite.org*, Issue #12 (August 2014), 3. <https://nonsite.org/article/forget-postcolonialism-theres-a-class-war-ahead>

⁵⁶ In literature, this mode can be traced at least as far back as the somewhat grudging national symbol of the Czechs, *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1923), by anarchist novelist Jaroslav Hasek, but is perhaps best represented by Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997). Jiří Menzel’s *Closely Watched Trains* (1969) is the best-known adaptation of his work, but the Czech New Wave itself was kickstarted by the omnibus film *Pearls From the Deep* (1966), with each director adapting one Hrabal short story.

Zanussi's characters are not so ordinary, but represent two possible modes of intelligentsia: an academic career (in the West, nonetheless) and the option for a quiet, provincial life. In deeper sense the characters embody two different philosophical paths: the Newtonian versus the Pascalian one. The ordinary people are the *others* [my emphasis], for example Jan's wife, the people who come for simple conversation (and, as sensible Marek observes, don't understand anything), or those who drink their daily glass of vodka and/or beer. *It seems that attitude towards these people is an important aspect of searching for insight into one's own soul* [my emphasis]. There is a long sequence in Zanussi's movie, when the two main characters are in a local joint and Marek asks Jan how he can live being constantly surrounded by "such faces." Jan replies that it depends on the way one looks. Then "these faces" are carefully presented in a long shot – faces covered with wrinkles and lines, silent and seemingly indifferent; their owners wear tattered hats and clothes, enjoy their banal talks and jokes, and chase their drinks with boiled egg. Zanussi simply displays them – leaving it up to the viewer, how to look at them. However, the film leaves no space for identification with these ordinary beer and/or vodka drinkers.⁵⁷

We can notice several important things here. Firstly, Zanussi's influential "intellectual" cinema, despite coming to be associated with the arts movement in the 1970s advocating the uncovering of "unrepresented reality" (as discussed implicitly in chapter two and explicitly in chapter three), was nevertheless symptomatically content to leave certain hierarchies undisturbed, to put it kindly; at worst, it contributed to the outright *othering* of rural Poles, as Kurz suggests. This is to say a definite class divide is portrayed, unproblematically, in *Structure of Crystal*, as something *natural*, or a given. The second "mode" Kurz describes of the intelligentsia in the film, meanwhile, is merely the petty-bourgeois dream of having the aristocratic life of the Polish landed gentry, the *Szlachta*.⁵⁸ Moreover, for all of Zanussi's adroit, distancing stylistics—he would push these further in his subsequent essay film-like *Illumination* (1973), but then notably retreat from formal experimentation—we get not a whiff of the sense of agency, or an interesting treatment of the lack of agency, of the non-

⁵⁷ Iwona Kurz, "'Our Folks': Ordinary People in Czechoslovak and Polish Cinema around 1968," in *Visegrad cinema: Points of Contact from the New Wave to the Present* (Prague 2010), 6.

⁵⁸ See note 56, Jan Sowa, "Forget Postcolonialism."

intellectual characters. In Polish cinema, this reified approach to “reality,” we contend in these pages, goes by the name *narrative realism*.

0.2.3. Beyond the New Left: Solidarity

Kurz’s wry observation that “It seems that attitude towards these people is an important aspect of searching for insight into one’s own soul,” not only corresponds to this “moral realism,” but seems illuminating vis-à-vis Polish intellectuals of the time, particularly with Michnik above, and perhaps not just those in Poland. I wish to use it to pivot us back to the intellectual/worker problematic more broadly. Consider for a moment the case of what was once known, in the Global North, as the *New Left*, or post-1956 socialist “laboratory work,” as E.P. Thompson had it;⁵⁹ another description, from North America, but which may cast the net most widely, from California to Warsaw, is “anti-anti-Communist.”⁶⁰ In other words, it was a project aimed at encouraging popular political capacities, or *participatory democracy*, in all avenues of life, and as such was vehemently against the top-down organization of society it saw in both the capitalist representative democracies of the West as well as the state socialism of “Soviet-type societies.”⁶¹ Partly for this reason, the New Left was quite self-consciously determined to make a break with the past and its

⁵⁹ Thompson, “The New Left,” 126.

⁶⁰ In the US context, see the founding document of the US New Left, *The Port Huron Statement*, written by Tom Hayden and others who would join (and radicalize) the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). On the one hand it broke with an (admittedly broken) older Left, of Communists organizing within the labour movement, though more important was the fact that it also parted ways with progressive anti-Communists, like Democratic Socialists of America (newly resurgent, incidentally) founder Michael Harrington, an early critic of SDS and the New Left for this “anti-anti-Communism,” which he saw as soft-pedaling the crimes and terror of Moscow. Ultimately this renunciation of the past, whose infamous slogan was “don’t trust anyone under 30,” was a source of both organizing strength and weakness that allowed for later regression (or militant acceleration into armed struggle, as with the Weathermen) from its principal leaders. Lynd, “The New Left.” Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: Vision Call of the 1960s Revolution* (New York: Thunders Mouth, 2006); also, for an excellent and clear-eyed overview of the New Left from an insider-outsider, see Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

⁶¹ This is a term—vague, but also precise—used by political scientists who write on Eastern Europe. More next chapter.

radical, Community Party forebears, for better or worse. The US radical lawyer and organizer Staughton Lynd sees the New Left's most "characteristic element" residing in its "existential commitment to action, in the knowledge that the consequence of action can never be fully predicted."⁶² A less generous way to put this, and one that gets at the slightly fetishistic belief in *action* among New Left intellectuals—in the US context, the ritual of the democratic assembly reigned supreme—was articulated later by Paul Berman as "a determination to take action not in order to win power (though that would be nice), nor in response to a call of history, but *in order to save one's soul* [**my emphasis, again**], to define one's personality identity."⁶³ Thus, the narcissism of action for action's sake—not action *to win*.

Yet, writing in the late-1960s and as one committed to strategies for emancipation, Lynd saw the early theory and actions taken by the New Left⁶⁴ as evolving into firm commitment to participatory democracy and "parallel structures." At its best, in utilizing this practice of dual power, says Lynd, "(P)articipatory democracy cherishes the practice of parallelism as a way of saying No to [*top-down*] organized America, and of initiating the unorganized into the experience of self-government."⁶⁵ As we will see in chapter one, this combination of the refusal that calls forth a community negatively with a creative,

⁶² "The New Left," Lynd, 64.

⁶³ Paul Berman, "Don't Follow Leaders," *The New Republic* (August 10 & 17, 1987): 28.

⁶⁴ He identifies the first action taken by the US New Left as the protest to the repression by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1960. Lynd, "The New Left," 72.

⁶⁵ Lynd also provides numerous examples of this work, mentioning the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and, especially, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a black-led organization that took a long-term view and sought to transform the lives of the poor, disenfranchised black population of the South day by day, as opposed to fighting with the more recognized, hard-nosed weapons of politics on the twin levels of direct action and Federal legislation (as did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Council). Lynd, "The New Radicals and Participatory Democracy (SDS pamphlet)," *Dissent* (Summer 1965): 328.

transformative—the prefigural, as it would be called in latter-day anarchist circles⁶⁶—is a common element from North America to France to, yes, Poland.

To come now to our most important point that underscores the importance of this seeming digression, Lynd recognized, even in the late 1960s, that such an approach, which would renounce the more hard-nosed weapons of politics in the patient name of organizing democratically, ultimately faces the choice of assuming revolutionary control over society or of being coopted by existing structures.⁶⁷ Here too was the problem of which Kuroń was well aware in his conception in 1976, and this indeed the choice, insofar as it was theirs to make,⁶⁸ faced by the Solidarity movement in 1980, when it posed a very real existential threat to the PZPR. For not only had the independent trade union swelled to over 10 million members in Poland within a year of its founding, by the spring of 1981, workers' councils had begun to pop up around the country,⁶⁹ the first step toward a national initiative towards worker self-management, which was to increasingly occupy the union nationally, from the summer on.⁷⁰ At issue was both political *and* economic control of worker enterprises; while the former posed a threat both to the “leading role of the Party,” a defining and sacrosanct feature of state socialism, the latter offered an alternative—increasingly attractive even

⁶⁶ See John P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York, NY; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). But negative thinking also was a hallmark of early anarchist thought—indeed it is the central subject of the essay containing Mikhail Bakunin’s famous comment: “The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too.” Bakunin, “The Reaction in Germany,” October 1842, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1842/reaction-germany.htm>

⁶⁷ Lynd, “The New Radical and Participatory Democracy,” 328.

⁶⁸ By 1981, “(T)he regime’s new strategy of disorganizing society by passively allowing the economic crisis to simply unfold with devastating results, many in Solidarity wanted to give up all self-limitation.” Andrew Arato, “The Democratic Theory of the Polish Opposition: Normative Intentions and Strategic Ambiguities,” in *From Neo-Marxism to Democratic Theory: Essays on the Critical Theory of Soviet-Type Societies*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 250.

⁶⁹ Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski and Christopher Phelps, “Solidarność in Łódź: An Interview with Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 73 (Spring, 2008): 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

among politically moderate workers—to a worsening economic situation.⁷¹ At the same time, as a result of the Polish August, including the solidarity strikes around the country that had helped force the government’s hand in the Gdańsk negotiations,⁷² qualitative changes—difficult to assess but palpably revolutionary—were occurring among Polish citizens. Suffice it to quote here from two workers in Jack Bloom’s excellent analysis of Solidarity in terms of its oral history.

Alicja Matuszewska: For the first time since the Communists took power, people were united: there was no more ‘Mr Engineer’, or ‘Mr Doctor’. A worker with a shovel used the familiar form when speaking with both. That was the greatest threat to the Communists. They could not divide the society any more.

Stanisław Handzlik, a Solidarity leader in the Nowa Huta steel mill outside Kraków: This democracy, this openness was bursting out day by day. Talents were released: organising, giving speeches, artistic talent even. And because of all that, a lot of people grew more valuable in their own eyes.⁷³

Here indeed was “socialism from below” overcoming top-down state socialism. Despite the repression soon to come, these changes did occur and as such are worth recuperating.

0.2.4. After s/Solidarity: Civil Society

For its part, the New Left, in any form, was effectively dead by 1980; it is no coincidence that soon after the suppression of Solidarity as an organization in late 1981 with the declaration of Martial Law, the less radical yet hope-filled discourse of *civil society*, which bears much similarity to New Left rhetoric, begins to take firmer hold. It indeed took many

⁷¹ For the most comprehensive account in English, see Henry Norr, “Self-Management and the Politics of Solidarity,” in *Worker Participation and the Politics of Reform*, ed. Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 267-297.

⁷² Jack Bloom, *Seeing through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 175.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 183-184.

of its features and cues from late 1970s developments in Eastern Europe,⁷⁴ especially as regarding an autonomous sphere of semi-political space apart from state power, as in Kuroń, and of which Michnik's aforementioned essay is something of a "third way" prototype.

In fact, some theorists, filled with hope about the Polish situation, began to advance it, as Kuroń had done only tentatively and strategically, as a progressive political model *in of itself*. Political scientists Andrew Arato—he had written extensively on Poland—and Jean Cohen saw in civil society:

...a program that seeks to represent the values and interest of social autonomy in face of *both* the modern state and the capitalist economy without falling into a new traditionalism. Beyond the antinomies of state and market, public and private, *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, and, as we shall show, reform and revolution, the idea of the defense *and* the democratization of civil society is the best way to characterize the really new, common strand of contemporary forms of self-organization and self-constitution.⁷⁵

In retrospect, despite this somewhat breathless formulation—indeed though, it must have seemed a breath of fresh air in the reactionary depths of the 1980s—the progressive hopes placed into civil society were deeply misguided, much in the way Lynd had forecast of participatory democracy. Neglecting the role of the state, specifically its political power vis-à-vis market economics—in a word, neoliberalism⁷⁶—the much-ballyhooed civil society melted away in the 1990s as Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe surrendered their hard-

⁷⁴ Tomaz Mastnak points out Czech writer Jacques Rupnik was the first to use it to analyze Eastern Europe. Mastnak, "The Reinvention of Civil Society: Through the Looking Glass of Democracy." *European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2005): 325; Rupnik, "Dissent in Poland, 1968-77: the End of Revisionism and the Rebirth of the Civil Society," in *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, Rudolf L. Tokes, ed. (London; Oxford: The Macmillan Press; St Antony's College, 1979), 60-112.

⁷⁵ Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political*, 30.

⁷⁶ For a solid introduction, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2014).

won autonomy to the economic shock therapy of market forces that was implemented across the region.⁷⁷

Though this also indicates a failure in victory, if we can put it that way, of Solidarity, this dissertation asserts and argues that *First Solidarity* (1980-1981) represents a model distinct from civil society, in part because the latter is by definition *independent of the state*, while Solidarity, a trade union movement, was always, dialectically speaking, enabled in its self-activity by what was always claimed to be a workers' socialist state; in such a way it was also possible for it to become a quite fearsome *challenger* to the state, rather than merely its stated opposition. To grasp what this meant, though it is beyond the purview of this dissertation to elaborate, we could look to anarcho-syndicalist models to understand this point⁷⁸; in any case, we will discuss it, as a political model, as not apart, but *immanent*. Similarly, I see this as a useful correspondence with the cinema under discussion, which did not separate itself from mainstream narrative like the (pure) avant-garde, but instead retains its structure—and power—while applying significant pressure to its overall operation. Secondly, and again in a way eminently compatible with another function of cinema art, Solidarity was also distinct from civil society in its appeal to *creativity and emotion*: in its tactics and overall strategy, it tapped into the symbolic level—of the historical imaginary of Poland as well as the revolutionary history of Europe. In sociologist Roman Laba's words, its

symbolic actions contain(ed) a historically grounded aspiration... (They) uniquely combined the European socialist tradition with nationalism. This it accomplished

⁷⁷ David Ost's excellent 2005 book, also translated into Polish, is the best account; it is also a corrective to his earlier book on Solidarity, which like most volumes of the 1990s overestimated the influence of intellectuals on its formation. Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ See for example, Kathryn Amdur, *Syndicalist Legacy: Trade Unions and Politics in Two French Cities in the Era of World War I* (Champaign, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

through its eschatology of a martyred proletarian and his imminent resurrection and triumph.⁷⁹

The plurality of its inheritance as well as achievements, as intimated by this quote (and explored in greater detail in chapters four and five), have unfortunately been buried, historically speaking, not only by neoliberal victory but through many subsequent years of the relative emptiness of the “Solidarity” name.⁸⁰ I argue here that cinema, still vibrant, can play a part bringing its early characteristics back to the foremost of our consciousness—and our politics.

0.3. Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

My approach to the theoretical apparatus that undergirds this dissertation was to consider what can best articulate what the radical cinema voices after 1968 were up to; what was lost after 1968, and what can be rehabilitated, politically speaking; what best suits Solidarity, the ultimate political model for this dissertation? To get there, we have to work our way through a few alternative formulations before arriving at our destination. Just above, it was suggested that civil society discourse, which had a tremendous resurgence by the 1980s,⁸¹ in no small part due to changes in Poland and Eastern Europe, is nevertheless insufficient to explain not only what *constituted* but what was *generated by* the Solidarity movement, surely the largest engine of change in the region at the time. Through the use of these two italicized words I mean to suggest that the concrete structures and tactics of

⁷⁹ Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 126. Laba was the first scholar to argue (“Worker Roots of Solidarity,” *Problems of Communism*, 35, No. 4 (1986)) based on extensive examination of the archives of Polish labour activists, that Solidarity was primarily achieved by Poland’s working classes. His writings will play an integral role in this dissertation.

⁸⁰ Besides transforming into a political party that became deeply unpopular following the shock therapy economic reforms, Solidarity is indeed still a trade union in present-day Poland, but nowadays a moribund and reactionary one that supports the current rightist Law and Justice government.

⁸¹ Again, much of this work is gathered and considered in Cohen and Arato’s immense *Civil Society*.

Solidarity produced feelings of revolutionary change that, while inscribed upon individuals, were not reducible to individualistic, rational explanation—nor adequately conveyed by psychological realism in cinema.⁸²

We instead look to a word, and notion, of unstinting attractiveness and communicability; perhaps for that very reason it is also potentially dubious, but interestingly so, from a theoretical perspective—namely, *community*. One of the most interesting philosophers of community is the Welsh literary theorist Raymond Williams, who sought to give it a further Marxian edge as a concept adjacent to *class*. In Williams's pivotal 1961 work *The Long Revolution* he describes the evolution, especially during the 19th century, of certain “keywords,” or abstractions developed and utilized by Western liberal democracy. What distinguishes *community* is its slightly different status as a *semi*-abstract, mediating term, used “to describe local and face-to-face relationships through which the great abstractions Individual and Society operate in detail.”⁸³ At the same time, far more than the other terms Williams mentions, it is a word that conjures a deep sense of *belonging*, a powerful affect and a secret best known to popular social movements. One thinks, for example, of the US Civil Rights struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, for Dr. King often spoke of seeking “the beloved community,” a kind of paradise to be forged here in Earth.⁸⁴

We can see this dual, semi-abstract sensibility of community as deceptively underwriting much of the discourse on civil society—too voluminous to discuss here—but also as related to the already mentioned writings of the Polish opposition. In the Arato and

⁸² It is not for nothing that the great Polish film about Solidarity has yet to be made. In fact, Polish cinema has struggled to tell *any* stories of hopeful times during the Solidarity movement.

⁸³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 78.

⁸⁴ bell hooks riffs on this sense of the word in a brilliant and moving collection of essays, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Cohen quote above on civil society, they reference the influential 19th-century concept of German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*—roughly translated, *community* and *society*. Here, *Gesellschaft* encompasses modernity, which means state and society are bracketed off together; one need only conjure an image of Blake’s “dark satanic mills” to understand the Romantic conception⁸⁵ that Tönnies is getting at, and how he sees *gemeinschaft* as a healthy alternative. Regrettably, Tönnies’s post-Marx progressivism is infected by an Edenic conception of community—as though it were a lost ideal humanity could return to, in lieu of engaging in struggle with the capitalist forces of the industrial present. Further, pragmatically speaking, as Benedict Anderson once reminded us, in a way somewhat opposed to Raymond Williams’s formulation, it is folly to think that

'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.⁸⁶

Kuroń and Michnik, like Arato, who drew on them, appeared to wish to usefully disrupt Tönnies’ separation of *community* and *society*, intermingling the notions and uniting the two against the state as a new political model. Michnik concludes his “New Evolutionism” essay in this way, in something of a dissident flourish (recall Bernhard’s “moral suasion”).

In searching for truth, or, to quote Leszek Kołakowski, “by living in dignity,” opposition intellectuals are striving not so much for a better tomorrow as for a better today. Every act of defiance helps us build the framework of democratic socialism, which should not be merely or primarily a legal institutional structure but a real, day-to-day community of free people.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The Romantic rejection of modernity plays a large role in chapter five. See Michael Löwy, and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁸⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

⁸⁷ Michnik, “A New Evolutionism,” in *Letters from Prison*, 148.

Like Havel in Czechoslovakia, Michnik here unfolds a post-New Left conception that also evinces something of the non-materialist existentialist bent of the ex-Marxist Kolakowski: through taking positive action in the world a new society/community will (eventually) emerge. But in its *gemeinschaft* suspicions of “institutional structure”—these are, after all, needed for governance in lieu of a more radical, left-communist/anarcho-syndicalist conception—it also seems to harbor affinities with the more conservative *communitarian* movement of the 1980s that embraced the essentialist “return to community,” and which indeed found some inspiration in the writings of Michnik and Kuroń,⁸⁸ as well as later cooptation in Blairite neoliberalism.⁸⁹

One way to provide some structural ballast to a feel-good but slippery term like community might be to consider marrying it to that of the *public sphere*, a concept best known through the various formulations of Jurgen Habermas. In his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Öffentlichkeit): *An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962; translated 1989), Habermas initially locates the term as an historically and geographically specific one, integral to the consolidation of the bourgeoisie under capitalism in late 18th century Western Europe. Like civil society—indeed Habermas is an influential theorist for civil society discourse—the public sphere is *separate* to that of the state. As Miriam Hansen explains, in Habermas’s original conception, the public sphere posed a challenge to traditional authorities such as the Church and the State, but came with historically determined disadvantages.

... a forum of discursive interaction that was ostensibly open and accessible to all, where private citizens could discuss matters of public interest freely, rationally, and as equals. The bracketing of social and economic status, however, not only masked the persistence of power and interest; it also entailed the idealization of the nuclear

⁸⁸ Aneta Gawkowska and Włodzimierz Wesolowski, ““Communitarian” Motives in Polish Political Thought,” *Polish Sociological Review*, No. 145 (2004): 15-31.

⁸⁹ Stephen Driver and Luke Martell, “New Labour's Communitarianisms,” *Critical Social Policy* 17 issue: 52 (1997): 27-46.

family, as the source of a private autonomy whose economic origin and contingency were denied.

Ultimately, upon collapse of these fictions, it deteriorated into

(an) ideology that naturalized the subjectivity of a particular class as "generally human."⁹⁰

The difficulty in Habermas's influential critique begins to arise when he attempts to siphon off from his historically and geographically specific model an *ideal* of this public sphere under Late Capitalism, one that nevertheless continues, just as the world around it, to mask and exclude difference, in favor of, to put it bluntly, the white, bourgeois, and cis hetero male among us.

In addition to the difficulty of *who* is counted as fit to participate within this public sphere, Habermas's later, adjacent notion of "communicative action" takes us somewhat further down this discursive rabbit hole in its additional slippage from the force of words *in public space*,⁹¹ to the seductive power of words alone to *bring into being a public*. This corresponds, likewise, with the movement from Kuroń's insistent articulation of *public action*, which KOR ably demonstrated, to Michnik's (over)emphasis on the influence of the public words of intellectuals.

Called a theory of communicative action, it restricts its attention to forms of consensually grounded social interaction which are discursively legitimated through the free give and take of verbal assertion, individual challenge and rebuttal, and the discursive redemption of a statement's validity claims through open discourse. From the viewpoint of communicative action theory, *material productive forces and the social*

⁹⁰ Miriam Hansen, "Foreword" in Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvii.

⁹¹ Habermas's original model here was the 18th-century coffeehouses of England, teeming with political talk that almost literally spilled onto the pages of publications—the "moral weeklies" of Richard Addison and Joseph Steele. See Terry Eagleton's vivid description in *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 2005), 24-26.

*relations that regulate man's productive life cannot be the source of these integrative sentiments and redemptive activities [my emphasis].*⁹²

The sociologists Harvey and Reed take Habermas to task here for entrenching and universalizing the highly particular and exclusionary notions of communication—the *what* and *who*, as it were—while foreclosing on the broader human experience that lay outside the free flow of rational discourse between alleged equals.

This Marxist perspective on Habermas had already been adopted, with considerable generosity and subtlety, by his contemporaries Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, beginning in 1971 in their critique but also reconception of his bourgeois public sphere as a *proletarian public sphere*,⁹³ now encompassing a far broader terrain of experience vis-à-vis the subjugating capitalist mode of production, as well as its degraded state socialist version.⁹⁴ Negt/Kluge would go on to develop, in their subsequent work together *History and Obstinacy* (1981)—a key text for the second half of this dissertation in particular—a now far more optimistic conception of the human capacity for *embodied resistance* to domination and subjugation along the lines of these broader realms of experience left unarticulated or excluded by the bourgeois public sphere. Here, we also find a significant opening for the affective terrain suggested by *community* and the praxis of 1968. In this conception, *obstinacy* (Eigensinn)

⁹² David L. Harvey and Mike Reed, "The Limits of Synthesis: Some Comments on Habermas' Recent Sociological Writings," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 4, No. 3 (1991): 351.

⁹³ Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience*.

⁹⁴ This is a much-contested distinction that we attempt to elucidate throughout the dissertation, but for now let us say this dissertation generally endorses the "world-systems" view of this time period, as theorized by Wallerstein. As he put it in his first work on the subject (albeit with some tendentious terminology), "(T)he "relations of production" that define a system are the "relations of production" of the whole system, and the system at this point in time is the European world-economy. Free labor is indeed a defining feature of capitalism, but not free labor throughout the productive enterprises. Free labor is the form of labor control used for skilled work in core countries whereas coerced labor is used for less skilled work in peripheral areas. The combination thereof is the essence of capitalism." Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-system* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 127.

denotes our bodily ability to hold some of our forces in reserve, as they put it; we thus possess an innate ability to fight back against attempts at “regulating man’s productive life” (Reed/Harvey), not through speech, but as rooted in that which engenders community, as they put it; namely, *human labour*. This is a vision we might call, as opposed to the gloomy analyses of power and discipline by Foucault, a *Marxist* biopolitics—one able to fight back. They see the role of theory, or art, such as that attempted by their *montage*-like book, or Kluge’s own cinema, as that which can provide a modest boost in assisting, not directing, our self-liberation in this fight from capitalist forces—within us and without.

Armed as it were with this sense of the connectedness of community and labour—the latter clearly conceived of quite differently than the Zhdanovite vision seen in Party-approved state socialist propaganda and cinema—we now turn to our similarly “micro” definition of community, derived from the theorist Georges Bataille (1897-1962) and his interlocutors. *Community* is understood, at root, as the communication and sharing between singular human beings. It is a process of becoming, of a shared lack of identity that precludes essence, one that always threatens to harden and fold back into (linguistic) stasis, into a *thing*. Yet as we indicated above, even when “community” is used to point to a group with purportedly fixed and essential characteristics—religion, race, class, etc.—it retains, dialectically speaking, strong elements of a connective *utopian negativity*.⁹⁵ This powerful collective affect was a secret also known to those who struggled in 1968, as we will see in

⁹⁵ This is what Bataille’s friend Maurice Blanchot, discussed in chapter one and throughout, meant when he said in the late 1960’s, “Communism: that which excludes (and excludes itself from) every community already constituted.” Quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 7. This conception later led to Blanchot’s Bataillean theorization of “the negative community” (i.e., “...of those without a community), which plays a large part in chapter three (and throughout). Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (New York, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988), 3-4. Compare Blanchot to Agamben’s Messianic Benjaminian, “the coming community,” which he claims is different from Blanchot’s through its non-negative emphasis on *belonging*, “without any representable condition of belonging.” Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 86.

chapter one—as *the friendship of the no*, in Blanchot’s phrase.⁹⁶ We look to Bataille’s theorization also because it was born of an historical need, in the 1930s, to combat the emotional, irrational appeal of fascism, against which this medievalist librarian and one-time student of master Hegelian Alexander Kojève attempted to construct a dialectics of affect and transgression. In brief, it was *the communication of communism*—community as the articulation of non-alienated, individuated beings no longer competing against each other as “individuals.”

This theorization underpins our understanding of Solidarity in this dissertation, as the *positive, realized* community apparently sought by Bataille, to which the cinema aesthetics under discussion correspond *negatively*, in their ability to isolate and clear away—through spatial and affective film experience—that which is anathema to human community. Thus, we finally approach the signal theoretical concept of this dissertation. *Radical communication*, though we seek to define it dialectically, chapter by chapter, in the collision of historical events and film texts, is characterized by the Batailleian sharing of lack, and the need to form connections that is constitutive of human experience. It cannot be reduced to mere language or discourse, much as community, a process, cannot be reduced to numbered physical groupings. Helpfully, Fredric Jameson once commented, “Aesthetics is something that addresses individual experience rather than something that conceptualizes the real in a more abstract way.”⁹⁷ And cinema has a unique potential, bodily and embodied, to address *collective experience*, as those few heretics among a 20th-century Left long suspicious of mass media and

⁹⁶ For a good overview of the evolution of Blanchot’s thinking in the 1960s, see Kevin Hart’s foreword to Blanchot, *Political Writings, 1953-1993*, Trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), xi-xxx.

⁹⁷ Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson (Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2011), 358.

technology have taught us.⁹⁸ However, cinema of course also effortlessly *visualizes* the real, through a photographic automatism that forever transformed what Bazin called “the psychology of the image.” No other art, as Bazin it, could “possess the irrational power of photography, in which we believe without reservation.”⁹⁹ In the film texts under discussion in this dissertation, disparate though they often are, we see a certain *embrace*, rather than *fear of*, this seemingly “irrational power” of communication possible through cinematic art, as well as the dialectical interrogation of this power. Such an operation intends to help us as film viewers, after the credits roll, if we can put it this way, in our otherwise credulous belief in so-called *reality*. To help us believe instead in something perhaps *utopian*, as Solidarity itself was, which is to say a belief in something *future-oriented* that does not seemingly follow from the crisis of the present.

Let us now look at an example from Polish film, and history, to more fully articulate what we mean, which should also serve to illustrate the methodology of this dissertation with respect to its interplay of historical events, speculative theory, and textual meaning. Six years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the occasionally exiled, iconoclastic Polish film director Andrzej Żuławski returned home to make his first film in Poland in 20 years, and his first ever in the wake of People’s Poland. *Szamanka* (She-Shaman, 1996) was received as poorly as one could imagine—infamously nicknamed “Last Tango in Warsaw” for its hypercharged depiction of the depraved relationship between a young female student and an older male professor she meets by chance. The societal issues its authors—including the controversial feminist Manuela Gretkowska, adapting her novel—implicitly confronted, about the rapid,

⁹⁸ Most notably, of course, this was one of the central emphases, *contra*-Adorno, of Walter Benjamin’s now ubiquitous “artwork” essay. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2008).

⁹⁹ André Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009), 8.

and various, qualitative changes undergone by a nation that had emerged from four decades of ostensible socialism to the brutal economic “shock therapy” of 1989,¹⁰⁰ were sidestepped by critics in favor of controversies surrounding its production and cast.¹⁰¹ As to the film text, we present from it an image, seemingly obscure but actually resonant enough to allow us to take it in multiple directions.

Towards the end of the film, anthropology professor Michal (played by popular star Bogusław Linda), who has sought to aggressively dominate, mentally and physically, his environment, his work, and particularly his lover, The Italian (Iwona Petry), has now reached something of a moment of resignation. Leaving his research, he appears at a railway station, spontaneously taking part in labour with the workers there—moving train parts, washing windows, cleaning the train. There is a small moment amid the seeming realism here that we as viewers may be disposed to experience, if not “read,” in a certain heightened way, given the overwhelming intensity of everything that has come before. As Michal speedily cleans the train windows from the inside, camera tracking him, a machine washes the outside. Because of this apparatus, the windows appear as strange blue screens—almost a mise-en-abyme—through which Michal, without pausing, glances, in an unassuming moment that nevertheless feels touched, like the film itself, by profane magic—a chance for some kind of escape?

¹⁰⁰ See Part One, “Shock Therapy,” of the late Polish economist and Solidarity advisor Tadeusz Kowalik’s *From Solidarity to Sellout* (New York: Guilford Publication, 2015), 21-172.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Bird, “Screw Loose: Notes on Andrzej Żuławski’s *Szamanka* (1996),” booklet essay for *Szamanka* (She-Shaman, 1996, dir. Andrzej Żuławski), DVD, Mondo Vision, 2010.



Fig. 1: Radical Communication in *Szamanka* (1996)

After cleaning the windows, he moves to the toilets, which are covered in shit. Michal intends to leave behind the “shamanic” power uncovered by his research, and its connection to his lover, “The Italian.” But indeed, it was “escape,” through this “real life,” that is ultimately what Michal had in mind—“My father was a railway worker” he says after. Far from being rewarded by his class nostalgia, when he returns home, upon telling the Italian, she—the titular shaman—promptly murders him, and then begins to consume the brain matter exposed by his smashed skull, accompanied by the white light of a seeming nuclear detonation.

This Grand Guignol, apocalyptic finish, perhaps the most overwhelming of Żulawski’s many, divisive attempts to understand human experience in the world through the prism of heterosexual relationships, obviously overshadows the falling action of the railway station. But while the overall vision of the film is relentlessly *negative*—that is, it harbors deep pessimism about the present, and seeks to alienate viewers further in order to convey this message—the moment of the blue windows provide something in an opposite direction not attained through cinematic identification techniques—something almost inarticulate. Put plainly, it seeks to communicate something of reality—human hope, I

would argue—beyond the level of rational discourse. This micro moment, refracting historical experience through cinematic affect, is what is meant in part by *radical communication*.

Further, taking it within the broader interpretation we have given of this scene, the moment of regressive fantasy described above—an intellectual believing in the cleansing simplicity of manual labour to absolve him of sins—may have very well resonated for some, unpleasantly so, in Poland in 1996, a few short years after which technocrats and intellectuals had sold out and enacted crushing austerity against the working classes who had brought them to prominence through Solidarity. However modestly, this constitutes the difficult to quantify small “s” solidarity of which cinematic art is almost uniquely capable, by virtue of its ability to render and arrange (i.e., in terms of mise-en-scene within the film frame) historical complexity and difference through images.

0.4. Secondary Texts

While this project is not primarily an historical study, it would surely have benefited from the presence of original language scholarship in Polish to build its arguments. Unfortunately, there was not adequate time and finances to become fully fluent in Polish in order to permit this; I therefore primarily rely on original English-language scholarship as well as translations from the Polish. Let me say two further things here, having made clear this unavoidable limitation. Scholarship on Polish history and Polish culture is something dealt with extensively throughout the dissertation. This is particularly the case, as we have already seen above and will see in greater detail chapter by chapter, with respect to approaches to intellectual history; it is also the case as concerns controversies surrounding the reception of the Solidarity movement. In the second section, moreover, I do lay out

secondary sources representing the more recent, welcoming change in the intellectual approach to *socialist cultures* generally, one that dispenses with the dogma that state socialist art and culture, but also political economy, should be seen and treated as separate from what was happening in Western Europe and North America. This is a body of work to which this dissertation seeks to humbly contribute. Secondly, in terms of scholarship regarding Polish cinema specifically, as well as cinema within the broader region generally, it is less a detriment to understanding approaches to Polish cinema *from Polish, Poland-based scholars* than it might have been in the past. Indeed, as we will see, it is altogether inaccurate at best, and outright insulting at worst, to conceive of a separate “Anglosphere” understanding of Polish cinema, given the long-standing give and take between scholars working in both languages, as I make clear below in this survey of secondary sources in the English language, past and present.

0.4.1. Polish Film Criticism and Theory

As the year 1989 drew near, English-language Polish film history of greater substance and specificity begin to emerge. Fascinatingly, one of these volumes was written by an Australian critic, Frank Bren, with seemingly no connection to Poland, but a deep knowledge of and sensitivity to its cinema history.¹⁰² In addition, one of the best books on Polish cinema history remains *The Modern Cinema of Poland* (1988),¹⁰³ by longtime Polish critic and screenwriter Bolesław Michalek and the Polish-American academic Frank Turaj. Aspects of this book are still unmatched, seamlessly combining as it does scholarly writing with an insider’s knowledge of the workings of the Polish film industry. Supplanting this volume, at

¹⁰² Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge (G.B.): Flicks Books, 1990).

¹⁰³ Bolesław Michalek, Frank Turaj, *The Modern Cinema of Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

least in terms of its comprehensiveness, and perhaps ushering in a new era, is the Polish-Canadian film historian Marek Haltof's well-researched and exhaustive *Polish National Cinema* (2002).¹⁰⁴ Although many of its assumptions go somewhat against the argument and emphases of this dissertation, which is to say, briefly, it does not necessarily challenge the bias towards realist narratives and historical dramas in Polish cinema, without it this dissertation would have collapsed in its infancy. Contained within it, further, are seeds of Haltof's excellent subsequent monograph *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (2004),¹⁰⁵ which contains arguably the most useful account in English of the director's pre-*Dekalog* (TV, 1988-1989), Polish-language work. Within the same series (Wallflower Press's "Directors' Cuts"), we should also speak about an edited volume on Andrzej Wajda, the undisputed heavyweight of Polish cinema, whose career spanned seven decades. What is particularly impressive about *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance* (2003)¹⁰⁶, besides the quality of its scholarship, is how it brings Polish scholars, in translation, into dialogue with contributions from UK and North American writers.

Similar to these—less ubiquitous perhaps, but arguably of equal importance—is *The New Polish Cinema* (2003), co-edited by Janina Falkowska and Marek Haltof.¹⁰⁷ This collection is noteworthy for assembling, through translation, trenchant work of some of the finest scholars of Polish cinema within Poland, including past and present generations—among them Alicja Helman, the doyen of Polish film theory, film historian Tadeusz Lubelski, and the wide-ranging film and cultural studies academic Mirosław Przyłipiak, particularly notable

¹⁰⁴ As mentioned already, it has just been published in a new edition, but this dissertation employs the earlier version: Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁶ John Orr and Elżbieta Ostrowska, eds., *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ *The New Polish Cinema*, eds. Janina Falkowska and Marek Haltof (London: Flicks Books, 2003).

for his work on non-fiction film. Finally, another important volume to mention with these is long-time Polish film scholar Paul Coates's monograph, *The Red and the White: Cinema of People's Poland* (2005),¹⁰⁸ which combines erudite philosophical and textual reflection with invaluable archival investigations of production histories of Polish cinema.

If *New Polish Cinema* brought Polish-language film scholarship to an English-speaking audience, the past decade has seen an explosion of publishing in English not only from Polish scholars within Poland (i.e., in Western European and North American journals), but from publishing houses within Poland itself. There is a burgeoning scene of Polish film journals devoted to a pan-European approach to cinema and media that publishes articles either entirely or occasionally in English. A particular standout worth mentioning here is the journal *Images: International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication*, which has published since 2009, with a focus on Central and Eastern European film and art (though not only). In terms of monographs and edited collections, the Ha!Art Corporation is a stand-out publisher, whose occasionally daring volumes fits with their tongue-in-cheek motto: "all things unprofitable." Further, two influential, bilingual volumes of film criticism from within Poland are worth mentioning here, for their ability to excavate certain film texts and film directors that have been marginalized within critical discourse, or relegated to occupying rather idiosyncratic or prescribed critical roles—this, moreover, is a side objective of this dissertation. Ha!Art's *A Story of Sin: Surrealism in Polish Cinema/Dzieje grzechu : surrealist w kinie polskim* (2010),¹⁰⁹ taking its name from Walerian Borowczyk's notorious 1975 adaptation of a classic of Polish literature, collects some of the

¹⁰⁸ Paul Coates, *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Kamila Wielebska and Kuba Mikurda, eds., *A Story of Sin: Surrealism in Polish Cinema = Dzieje Grzechu : Surrealizm W Kinie Polskim* (Krakow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010).

best young writers and thinkers on Polish art—sociologists, art historians, philosopher and film critics—and wears its rather heady theoretical approaches with admirable lightness. Meanwhile, *Polish New Wave: The History of a Phenomenon That Never Existed/Polska Nowa Fala: Historia zjawiska, którego nie było* (2008)¹¹⁰ is one of several ventures that examines the recent fascination of Polish gallery artists-turned-filmmakers with more experimental Polish narrative cinema, in order to reconceptualize and reframe Polish film history. This is also evident from the book's title—their attempt to subvert the “New Wave” concept to encompass “harder” avant-garde approaches. In particular, the late experimental narrative filmmaker Grzegorz Królikiewicz, subject of chapter one, is one of their guiding lights. One of the editors, in turn, Łukasz Ronduda, is among the gallery artists turned film directors in question, making for a compelling gate-crashing element to what are too often cordoned off realms—that is, such work straddles the line between academe and art practice.

0.4.2. Regional cinemas and state socialist cultures

The most recent of these developments in Polish film criticism have taken place within a broader academic attempt to reframe our understanding of what constitutes, regionally, (post-)state socialist cultures.¹¹¹ Here we suggest not only the need to move beyond the *merely* dissident or oppositional (e.g., Kazimierz Kutz's complaint about “dirty

¹¹⁰ Łukasz Ronduda and Barbara Piwowarska, eds. *Polish New Wave: The History of a Phenomenon That Never Existed = Polska Nowa Fala* (Historia Zjawiska, Którego Nie Było. Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 2008).

¹¹¹ I follow the film scholars Mazierska, Mroz and Ostrowska in choosing to use the lesser-evil moniker “state socialism” where appropriate, to speak about what was practiced, politically and culturally, within these countries. As they put it, 1) “(I)n their original sense, which can be found in the writings of early utopian socialists, such as Charles Fourier, and in the classic works of socialism, namely by Marx and Engels, the terms ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ carry different meanings from those they acquired in the post-war realities of countries such as Poland, Hungary or the Soviet Union” and, relatedly, 2) “The advantage of ‘state socialism’ over other terms such as ‘socialism’ lies in its pointing to the role of the state as a ‘universal capitalist.’” Ewa Mazierska, Matilda Mroz, and Elżbieta Ostrowska, eds., *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia: Between Pain and Pleasure* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2018), 2-3.

boots in a salon”), but beyond some sort of previously un(der)recognized intrinsic cultural or expressive value. This is to say, the sociopolitical and philosophical import of state socialist cultures, such as those argued for within this dissertation, need to be understood on their own terms, yes, and also, dialectically speaking, brought to bear upon that of supposedly alien cultural experiences of the westerly capitalist states of the Global North. This means seeking out their commonality, something which can very well begin with the year 1968, and we have suggested above. Many years removed from only the economic “shock therapy” of 1989 across the Eastern European region, as well as its seeming bookend in the post-2008 recession and the subsequent disciplinary austerity undemocratically imposed by the EU across Europe generally,¹¹² this concept—the shared experiences of modernity among what used to be called the First and Second World—no longer seems so wild-eyed. We first consider literature as evidence of changing approaches to state socialist film and media historiography within the region, before moving to a broader consideration of state socialist cultures as well as political economy.

The collection *Post-New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*¹¹³ was an important early attempt, in 1989, that mapped correspondence between recent, regional cinemas leading up to that fateful year. This “post-New Wave” volume emphasizes cinema from 1976 onwards, which as we have indicated is a significant date for People’s Poland, as well as Polish cinema, as Frank Turaj’s contribution on the dominant Polish film trend of the 1970s, “The Cinema of Moral Concern” (i.e., Anxiety—*niepokoj*) makes clear. However, despite the book’s attempt at treating each major nation within the region, the collection is

¹¹² Most spectacularly, of course, in Greece.

¹¹³ Daniel J. Goulding, ed., *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

not unified by a strong sense of purpose, historical or theoretical, other than a plea for “greater openness” from the West towards Eastern European cinema. More recent interventions, however, have begun to highlight the extent to which the region itself continues to be contested space in terms of geographic and political allegiance and cultural specificity, and how this in turn is pictured on cinema screens. In this regard, Dina Jordanova's *The Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (2003), arguably the first comprehensive English-language account of the region's cinema, is an early example, taking its title from Czech-French political scientist Jacques Rupnik's influential book *The Other Europe: The Rise and Fall of Communism in East Central Europe* (1988).¹¹⁴ Rupnik's volume sought to dispel the Orientalist term “East” from the region, but in so doing largely subscribed to a cultural and political Othering of those geographically East of the countries under discussion. Rupnik argued for the (in effect) more prominent Soviet bloc countries as the place where the true “soul of Europe, the idea of Europe as a culture that transcends political divides, has been preserved.”¹¹⁵ However possessed of the spirit of those times, this sort of logic essentializes the “East,” i.e., Russia and the Baltic states, as, i.e., incorrigibly anti-democratic,¹¹⁶ as well as marginalizing smaller nations and cultures within a diverse region. This sort of thinking also seems to afflict Jordanova's otherwise fine volume, in its wish to treat Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia as a transnational but “unique cultural space.”¹¹⁷ The edited collection *The Cinema of Central*

¹¹⁴ Jacques Rupnik, *The Other Europe* (New York: Schocken, 1989).

¹¹⁵ Dina Jordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower, 2003), xi.

¹¹⁶ It also looks painfully dated in consideration of the fact that a majority of Eastern European political parties in the 2010s that are possessed of pro-EU rhetoric, running interference for neoliberalism, have recently been tossed out by voters in favor of right-wing nationalism—anti-Russianism with the gloves off, we might say. For indeed, the current aim of far right leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orbán is not to leave the EU but, indeed, to create an (An)Other Europe—one rabidly chauvinistic and hostile to racialized outsiders. This is as far as one could seemingly get from Rupnik's cosmopolitanism, but it is the arguable other side of his coin.

¹¹⁷ Jordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 5.

Europe (2004)¹¹⁸ places this *Mitteleuropa*-concept¹¹⁹ under a somewhat more critical light, considering its cinematic imaginary through editor Peter Hames' introduction and assembling an impressive, geographically diverse roster of contributors, who are limited however to discussing one film apiece.

More successful than these, in terms of theory-informed work that accounts for a diverse array of nations and cinemas previously counted as the "Second World" of the Soviet-sphere, are two collections edited by Aniko Imre. In *East European Cinemas* (2005), we see an explicit call for a "postsocialist reassessment," which seeks new methods and historiographic tools in treating cinemas in countries that have undergone an "accelerated transformation from state socialism to global capitalism,"¹²⁰ conditions which should also entail an epistemological shift in how they are approached. Although it is aimed at study of the present, the articles collected are evidence of how Imre's call is also applicable to the study of pre-1989 state socialist cinema (indeed, the first essay is an interpretation of Agnieszka Holland's Solidarity-era masterpiece *A Woman Alone* (*Kobieta samotna*, 1981). She observes a certain finality with which Eastern European film has been treated and interpretively instrumentalized by the West, including its post-Cold War abandonment, i.e., when it had outlived its political usefulness as "dissident culture." Whereas, on the contrary, these contributors see a critical reevaluation as only having just begun (and it would appear they are right). Moreover, the need for preserving the authenticity of voices within these cinemas led to the geographical nomenclature chosen for the project, one subscribed to also by this dissertation.

¹¹⁸ Peter Hames, ed. *The Cinema of Central Europe* (London, UK: Wallflower, 2005).

¹¹⁹ See also, another touchstone for many: Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," trans. Edmund White, *New York Review of Books* 31, Number 7 (April 1984).

¹²⁰ Aniko Imre, ed. *East European Cinemas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xi.

In order to consider the cinematic developments of the region in their spatial and temporal continuity, it is necessary to keep the designation *Eastern Europe*. However, it is equally important to do so conditionally and contingently, acknowledging the region's shifting boundaries, internal differences, and constructed identities... maintaining an "East European" perspective help to arrest...perpetuating a "national cinema" framework grounded in the assumptions of an essentialist "national character," and the erasure of the common regional histories associated with the term *Eastern Europe*.¹²¹

For this reason, seeking to provide "equal representational space is not the primary concern of this volume";¹²² this is left to the hefty tome *A Companion To Eastern European Cinemas* (2012), a collection which does an excellent job of treating more marginalized voices within the region, as well as approaching the formation of communities associated with production, as in Dorota Ostrowska's piece on Polish film production units, the first treatment of its kind in English.¹²³

These volumes of film criticism seek to disentangle specific cinemas from the many layers political baggage thrust upon them both before and after 1989—to do so in English, moreover, the *lingua franca* of capitalist hegemony, is no mean task. Alongside this, what would it mean to find or recover moments of transnational or international solidarity between state socialist film and media, or perhaps even between it and the capitalist West? Much good work has likewise been done in this regard, on state socialist cultures, *against* received wisdom on the subject. Is there common ground to be found in the meanings of modernity, not only within state socialism but on both sides as it were of the "Iron Curtain"? And perhaps also in the shared meaning of what Immanuel Wallerstein called the capitalist world-system? This is a trend that has only continued following the 50th anniversary of 1968, a year that, as we have noted, is increasingly seen as a *way in* to this understanding. This is

¹²¹ Ibid, xvii.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Aniko Imre, ed., *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

likewise the position of this dissertation—it is not *about* 1968, but the politics and art made in its wake; about how local, militant manifestations specific to Poland and state socialism can also speak to a global understanding of change. Thus, this “common ground” is not the *same*—it is about productive juxtapositions that allow us to recognize distinct but similar phenomena as it responded to hegemonic global pressure.

The Socialist Sixties (2013) is a collection that seeks to recuperate a “utopian and forward-looking” time of great hope within state socialist countries. As the editors put it, it was

a period in which these societies confidently engaged one another and the world outside, creating contact zones of mutual learning and emulation as well as conflict. And while serious literature and classical art forms continued to be produced, these socialist sixties, like their counterpart in the West, depended to a greater extent than ever before on popular culture and the media.¹²⁴

Like *1968 and Global Cinema*, therefore, it is drawn to but also emphasizes the limits of transnational approaches to a time of closed borders, opting instead for this global framework.¹²⁵ As we see in chapter one, with the *Open Letter to the Party* of Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski,¹²⁶ transnational correspondence did occur within radical political around 1968, but often in unpredictable and *untimely* ways; it is much like theory more generally in this regard.¹²⁷ *Sixties* makes excellent use of other recent work on approaches to *consumption* in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; especially worth mentioning here is Paulina Bren’s

¹²⁴ Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds. *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 16.

¹²⁵ *The Socialist Sixties*, 11. Also worth mentioning is the desire expressed in *1968 and Global Cinema* to recapture and make militant the term “global” over and above its connection to the capitalist “flows” of “globalization.”

¹²⁶ Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, et al., *Revolutionary Marxist Students in Poland Speak Out, 1964-1968* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972).

¹²⁷ Here I mean theory as something always *delayed*, not as immediately applicable praxis. This was a point of fundamental disagreement between the conception advanced by Western Marxism, for example, and the student activists of the (later) New Left. See Richard Langton, “Palimpsests of ’68: Theorizing Labor after Adorno,” in *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives*, eds. Daniel J. Sherman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 49-72.

important book *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism After the 1968 Prague Spring* (2010). In a similar spirit, the collection *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (2012), co-edited by Bren, makes a case both smaller and larger than 1968, approaching its topic in ways that can be traced to books that challenged monolithic notions of state socialist economics¹²⁸ as well as the radical fusion of political economy and urbanism that grew out of 1968. The editors of *Communism Unwrapped* argue that

histories of consumption in the West are relevant to the story of Eastern Europe. . . .until recently, consumption under communism had received little attention beyond generalized works on its “failure,” whether in reference to *pax Americana* or its stated Marxist ideal. Yet the story of postwar Eastern European consumption is a critical chapter in the larger history of global consumption, and indeed modernity. . . .Confounding binaries of “official” and “unofficial,” the interweaving of state and popular consumption and exchange was in many respects far more complex than under capitalism, and certainly more overtly political. Consumption, we propose, offers a window into these still shadowy interiors of everyday life and state-society negotiations in Cold War Eastern Europe.¹²⁹

Here too, we have a comprehension of the historical significance of the year as a “global moment” as in Bodnar’s quote above. It is in a similar spirit that we approach cinema in this dissertation.

Lastly, we end this section in a way that allows us to approach our final section on methodology and the selection of film texts, by discussing recent scholarship that, like this dissertation, embraces the newer approach to state socialist cultures, as well as theoretical interventions in both Polish culture and film studies that we have already mentioned. The journal *Studies on Eastern European Cinema* (SEEC) has produced some of the most compelling English-language film scholarship on the region in the past decade (since 2010). SEEC’s

¹²⁸ In the Polish context, a critical volume here is Janine R. Wedel, ed. *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

¹²⁹ Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

special issue on “the body,”¹³⁰ guest-edited by Matilda Mroz as well as the chief editor of SEEC, the indefatigable Ewa Mazierska, called for the filling of a gap with respect to theorized approaches to bodies and embodiment in Eastern European as well as, importantly, in its shared placement, Russian cinema. Why, they ask, are Western as well as Eastern theoretical approaches to the body not made use of in Film Studies the way they are so utilized in Western cinema? Although much of this may have to do with to a certain relegation of this region to “area studies” within Film Studies and therefore neglect, Mroz says, she going on to state the following.

One would think that the film industries of the former Eastern bloc in Europe provide particularly fertile ground for research into the cinematic body, due to their preoccupation with topics such as war trauma, migration, sex work, reproduction, memory as well as the ideal Soviet bodies propagated under the regions’ state socialist regimes and the dissident or comedic bodies that challenged them. Indeed, those authors who do take up the issue of bodily representation in the cinemas of Eastern Europe have identified corporeality as a central preoccupation of many of the films that have emerged from the region.¹³¹

Such a description, from a journal edited by two feminist Polish scholars, should do much to dispel the myth that Polish cinema generally consists of variations on documentary realism or historical drama.

In announcing the preoccupations of Eastern European filmmakers, it also conveyed a critical approach.

A key aspect is, of course, the composition of the body in the filmic frame, which is fundamentally fluid, in that it is subject to historical as well as aesthetic changes that exert pressure on bodily representations at specific points in time, as well as continually transforming within the films themselves. The articles gathered here posit the cinematic body as a site of paradox and flux. These bodies transform, modulating into and out of tableaux vivants, moving from the stasis of a corpse to the animation

¹³⁰ Matilda Mroz and Ewa Mazierska, eds “Special Issue on the Body,” *Studies on Eastern European Cinema* 7, 2 (2016).

¹³¹ Mroz, “Special issue on the body,” 99.

of life and back again, hovering indeterminately between symbol and material force.¹³²

This call was answered not only by the contributors of this volume, but in the subsequent edited collection *Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (2016),¹³³ edited by Mroz and Mazierska as well as Elżbieta Ostrowska, who herself has arguably written the most compelling and theorized recent reconsiderations of Polish cinema along embodied and feminist lines.¹³⁴ Important to this collection as well is recent feminist theory on the subject that has turned to a consideration of *more than*, as it were, discursive bodies—that is, the body as a *physical body*, capable of pleasures that are non-erotic as well as erotic. As alluded to by Mroz, and as we will see in chapter five, such an approach is eminently compatible with a long lineage in 20th-century Polish letters, one that was crying out for treatment—in the case of Żuławski’s films we may be permitted the expression “literally”—its editors argue, by just this sort of (film) theory.

0.4.3. Methodology/Selection of film texts/Chapter Breakdown

Cinema, as Herman Kappelhoff puts it,

may be imagined as a medium that makes the historical basis of our sense and perception faculties visible to us, our ways of sensing and our self-experience explicit without presenting history as truth or history as making sense.¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid, 101.

¹³³ Mazierska, Mroz, and Ostrowska, *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia: Between Pain and Pleasure*.

¹³⁴ Ostrowska and Mazierska had also already co-written an excellent books of essays on *Women in Polish Cinema*, including a guest introductory chapter by Joanna Sz wajcowska on the crucial national-historical conception of “The Polish Mother.” Mazierska, Ostrowska, and Sz wajcowska, *Women in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

¹³⁵ Kappelhoff, *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Realism*, xiii.

Kappelhoff's affirmative construction here implies a certain theoretical energy present in cinema relative to its role in articulating the capacities of our senses to illuminate our experience. However, in keeping with our focus in this dissertation on what we might call revolutionary pessimism—also very much in keeping with the relentlessly negative diagnoses of Polish cinema—we should direct emphasis, in a way true, I hope, to the insurgent founders of our discipline,¹³⁶ to cinema's historical role in naturalizing that which is merely contingent or selective. This is to say that, unlike Kappelhoff, and perhaps also those founders, we do not see a “way out” in *realism over illusionism*, however critically interrogated or generously construed. Instead, we here emphasize the need for a further theoretical energy from without.

This dissertation therefore presents *radical communication* as a conceptual hinge with which we may approach the interaction between Polish cinema that pushed beyond the limits of narrative realism and embraced affect and “surprise” (*niespodzianka*), to use a favorite concept of filmmaker Grzegorz Królikiewicz,¹³⁷ and the political struggle of Solidarity that did the same, refusing to accept “reality” or “evolutionism.” We explore this interaction not as a model of cinematic reflection or a broader political imaginary—not precisely—but as something of an alternate cinematic history, which is to say this work is 1) speculative (theory-based) 2) hermeneutic (text-based) and 3) always historically rooted and informed by the experience of popular political struggle as well Polish filmmaking made within the state system of film production units. As film studies scholarship that seeks to re/uncover texts whose aspects have been critically elided or indeed repressed, it is *not* a

¹³⁶ Here I refer to the left-wing, feminist writers of UK film magazine *Screen*. For a critical history, see Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009).

¹³⁷ Królikiewicz's film theory is collected in *Off Czyli Hipnoza Kina* [Off, or: The Hypnosis of Cinema] (Warszawa; Łódź: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury; Łódzki Dom Kultury, 1992).

story of reception, but one that insists upon the politically productive possibility of the historicized, theorized, (re-)interpretation of film texts. These texts have explored, as Kappelhoff's quote indicates, cinema's ability to speak to human perception and experience, and in a way that was militantly particular to the Polish situation, which nevertheless contained within it a generous universal aspiration and application—"For our freedom, and yours! (*Za wolność naszą i waszą*) as the old motto of Polish internationalism goes.¹³⁸ Herein lies its key, participatory aspect with viewer experience, and connection to popular political organization *contra* top-down bureaucratic statism.

How does this play out within the texts themselves? We must first ask, *Which* texts? The choices made in our selection of films lay not merely with arbitrary *feel*, but with what, it is argued, were distinct, historically contingent, approaches, that, as the example of Żuławski's film above would suggest, sought to destabilize, directly or indirectly, the dominant trend in Polish narrative cinema of "moral realism" after 1968, out of deeply felt ethical/artistic/political reasons. But perceptions to the contrary, these were not heroic individual *auteurs* raging against a broken state socialist system, nor against a monolithic opposition for that matter; instead, their contributions largely originated from within the Łódź National Film School and subsequently Polish film production units, which themselves developed in particular ways vis-à-vis a swiftly changing social reality, as we will see, in People's Poland after 1968. In part for this reason, however insurgent in intent, these films, among them shorts and features, non-fiction and fiction, cannot precisely be called

¹³⁸ For a recent and timely (re)consideration, which begins with the story of how Polish military personnel, during the Haitian Revolution, deserted France (whom they were fighting for), and joined up instead to help liberate Haiti, recognizing its oppression as similar to their own, see Pawel Wargan, "Polish Patriots Once Fought Alongside Rebellious Slaves. Where is that Solidarity Today?" *Newsweek*, 4/1/19 (also accessed) <https://www.newsweek.com/poland-nationalism-new-york-haiti-slave-rebellion-revolution-1382388>

countercinema in the sense that Peter Wollen reserved for post-1968 avant-garde cinema in Western Europe,¹³⁹ to say nothing of Third Cinema dialogism¹⁴⁰ in revolutionary situations in the Global South. These works do not stand *apart*, in that they are not necessarily consciously, militantly “against” dominant cinema. Instead, they give us something of arguably greater importance, at least from a critical perspective, providing an epistemological alternative to our dominant way of comprehending political-minded narrative cinema. Through their formal innovations and open-ended approach—their embrace of the contingent, the haptic, the visceral—they seek to put pressure on it immanently, through exploring how viewer sensory experiences interact with narrative, communicating its relationship to social reality largely obliquely. This is radical communication.

Another way to describe the approach of this dissertation, is we do not see these film texts as ones that seek out as it were the clever spectator able to *read* the politics artfully embedded in these works—this is how, for example, Janina Falkowska defines “the political” in the films of Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Kieślowski.¹⁴¹ Instead, particularly if we emphasize the democratic, non-hierarchical spirit of 1968, as is developed in chapter one, these films do not approach *form* in the way a modernist text might, as something that is able to *transform* the reader/spectator through the virtuosity of its style. Against this, we examine work that, however diverse, risks the embrace of that which is *participatory*, a word which implies not a finished product that is then able to be “read,” but an active collaboration in meaning between filmmakers and film viewers. That is to say, it is a collaboration not at the

¹³⁹ Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings : Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso and NLB, 1982).

¹⁴⁰ See Paul Willemen, “The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections,” in *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI Pub., 1994), 1-29.

¹⁴¹ Janina Falkowska, “The Political” in the Films of Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Kieślowski,” *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 2 (1995): 37-50.

level of production, but of spectatorship, with respect to textual meaning.¹⁴² These works seek out community *negatively*, as we have suggested above, in articulating shared social alienation and its historical and indeed bodily, labour-based roots.

How does this play out, then, in terms of the experience of the films? Chapter one emphasizes this historical approach to alienation in the region after 1956, and the gradual loss of its rootedness in the social reality of People's Poland vis-à-vis "oppositional" thought, something that the work of Grzegorz Królikiewicz contests, I argue, and counters. We see how his radical documentary approach to picturing social reality interacts with his theories of "film space outside the frame" and "democratic mise-en-scene," which provides a certain leveling effect in how viewers are able to perceive the world, and indeed organize space—mentally, and perhaps even when they leave the cinema. Królikiewicz later applied this approach to what we might call the repressed content of Polish history, in a trilogy of features focusing on a drifting *lumpen* character played by the same actor, who is seemingly revealed, in the final film, to be a displaced peasant. Chapter two charts the evolution of Polish documentary after 1968, the path from which Królikiewicz's avant-garde inflections consciously strayed, in its attempt at solidarity with the working class militancy that resulted in strikes, insurrection and state repression on the Baltic Coast in 1970. The camera, argued

¹⁴² Perhaps due in part to the historical social stratification explained above, resulting in the lack of collaboration between radical artists/intellectuals and the working class, Polish cinema by and large does not possess examples of radical approaches to *production*—that is, production as *community* in the sense of a militant grouping brought into being over the course of a film, or as a result of it. To my thinking, the most profound examples of *cinema as radical community* can be found in work that engages in *reenactment* of historical events. We could here mention the cinema of Peter Watkins, who recreated the Paris Commune (*La Commune [Paris, 1871]*, 2000) in an abandoned warehouse in the Paris suburbs, using those politically sympathetic portray the historical communards; afterwards, these actors continued to meet and formed an organization dedicated to fighting austerity in their communities.¹⁴² Another example, in perhaps a far more difficult risk/reward, situationally speaking, would be Third Cinema director Jorge Sanjines's reenactment of a mining massacre using the survivors and their families to portray themselves, in the film *El Coraje del Pueblo* (The Courage of the People, 1971). In both these cases the collaboration from actors dictated in large part the form that the film would take.

Krzysztof Kieślowski and his colleagues, in a manifesto from 1971, should be a scalpel, in their metaphor, that can peel away the distortions of reality and reveal a world *felt*, but not seen, by the Polish citizenry. In chapter three we see how Kieślowski began to progressively question this revelatory impulse in cinema, emphasizing instead the limits and indeed failures of storytelling to picture the totality of experience, slowly nudging the viewer towards a more personal understanding of social reality. Again, he placed a certain faith in the viewer—a “partnership,” he called it—to organize this material. This takes the form, I argue, of a *negative community*—“the community of those who have no community,” as Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot put it¹⁴³—in which affect plays a deceptively important role in organizing viewer experience, something which connects Kieślowski’s 1970s Polish features to his later, more internationally celebrated French co-productions.

Chapter four, marking something of a pivot as it attempts to locate a cinema that more closely *corresponds* with the work of Solidarity, also seeks to consolidate the strengths of the approaches of both Kieślowski and Królikiewicz, in the figure of Piotr Szulkin. Szulkin’s experimental non-fiction indeed seeks to *reveal* with the camera, but also applies distancing, even humorous techniques as well as a rather haptic approach to the material. These short films specifically identify *labour* as the social reality that is hiding as it were in plain sight in a so-called workers’ state, one which celebrates its reified historical image rather than labour as a social fact. Szulkin’s radically communicative approach to labour helps the viewer, in a way I identify as corresponding to Negt and Kluge’s “precision grip” that art/cinema/theory can provide for working class struggle, to see it as a repressed fact of the everyday. In films about garbage collection, and about the invisible labour women do

¹⁴³ Bataille quoted by Blanchot in epigraph, *The Unavowable Community*, 1.

in and out of the home, his camera tactically and strategically refuses to objectify its laboring subjects, something that “Kieslowksian” documentary often struggled with. Finally, chapter five seeks to expand many of the terms and strengths of this work along historical, cultural and in particular temporal lines, while examining what happens when the “micro” approach of Szulkin’s short films to affect and the haptic is ratcheted up and married to a visceral, almost genre-film approach, in the cinema of Andrzej Żuławski. In the chapter’s first half, we trace the tradition and radical energies of Polish Romanticism that lay deep in the DNA of Żuławski’s cinema, a lineage which he is not only able to adapt, but subvert, through a very 20th century, and indeed Polish literature-derived, understanding of corporeality. Here, bodies are bodies, not ideas or objects. This disrupts, I argue, our naturalized ways of seeing, which Negt/Kluge and other Left thinkers (e.g., Russian formalists) have often called for. It also interestingly corresponds to the historically, nationally rooted symbolic weaponry of bodies and the body politics that was deployed as propaganda by the labour activists of Solidarity. In the second half, we then see what happens to the affective energies of historical and genre subversion when they are applied to and translated through a futurist lens. The science-fiction experimentation of Żuławski, as well as in the features of Szulkin (indeed, it is his 1980’s SF “tetralogy” for which he is best known), are seen as ultimately corresponding, negatively, to the *positive*, radically utopian community enacted by Solidarity in 1980. Further, Żuławski’s partially lost film SF film, *On the Silver Globe* (Na Srebrnym Globie), begun in 1976 but only completed after *perestroika* had begun, is read as a utopian hybrid form that provides something of a blueprint, but only one, to how radical communication can be used in the cinema of the present day, and as research toward radical new beginnings.

Chapter 1

Negative Labour and the Avant-Garde: Grzegorz Królikiewicz and Polish cinema after '68

The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred.

– Walter Benjamin¹⁴⁴

But these burning trajectories only replace isolated humanness if there's some consent, if not to annihilation, then to risking yourself and, in the same impulse, risking other people.

– Georges Bataille¹⁴⁵

1968, taken as an event and a symbol, marked a profound rupture—political, economic, artistic, epistemological—experienced from Berkeley to Mexico City to Paris to Tokyo. We continue to mull over and contest its meaning, its successes and failures, even as we have reached its golden anniversary. A recent collection defines it broadly, highlighting the sense of its marking both a beginning and an end, as well as the powerful affects engendered by and part of this experience. “The Long 1968,” in this formulation, was

a pervasive search for new forms of social organization and political action, as well as new ways of thinking about them; an impatience, sometimes to the point of violence, with existing authority; an eagerness to find in other parts of the world, the more remote and exotic the better, the means of combating that authority and creating an alternative to it; disillusionment, but in some places the continued hope as alternatives were increasingly foreclosed.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Destructive Character”, in: *Selected Writings* 2.2, 1931-1934, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael Jennings & Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 541.

¹⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 26.

¹⁴⁶ The editors state that they were inspired by Chris Marker’s documentary *Le fond de l’air est rouge* (*A Grin Without a Cat*, 1977), a classic look at the “global reach” of 1968 that, like Fredric Jameson, sees its effects as

Our concern in this project is to explore how the sum of these elements—this desire for a new politics, and the hope and despair that marked the “search”—may have constituted, at best, a new way of being together, one which has occasionally but importantly been illuminated by the mass-mediated art form of cinema. In 1968’s intersection of politics and art, a certain radically negative affect emerged that pushed—forcefully, with bodies, as politics must¹⁴⁷—against the status quo, both instigated by and reflected in cultural practice like cinema.

This radical sense of communication, of what human community could mean and be, was also a question as it were of *where* and *who*? That is to say, if a nascent political subject emerged in 1968 it had much to do with a certain awakening or even *un*-working of individuated identities relative to the repurposing and redefinition of social spaces¹⁴⁸—a “crisis of functionalism,” as Kristin Ross puts it. In elaborating, she usefully quotes Rancière’s definition, one deeply marked by his own experience of 1968:

(P)olitics consists in transforming that space of circulation into the space of the manifestation of a subject: be it the people, workers, citizens. It consists in refiguring that space, what there is to do there, what there is to see, or to name. It is a dispute

extending well into the 1970s. I prefer this name to the more common “the long Sixties,” as it compels focus upon the specific events of year while still suggesting a larger historical outgrowth of causes and consequences. Daniel J. Sherman et al., eds., *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

¹⁴⁷ This is Rancière’s oft-cited definition of politics, and one we subscribe to here: “Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where there was only place for noise.” Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 30.

¹⁴⁸ I write “social spaces” partly to imply there is no “natural” space onto which “society” can be unproblematically imposed or projected, intellectually or otherwise, as urban theorist Manuel Castells would put it: “Space is a material product, in relation with other material elements—among others, men, who themselves enter into particular social relations, which give to space (and to the other elements of the combination) a form, a function, a social signification. It is not, therefore, a mere occasion for the deployment of the social structure, but a concrete expression of each historical ensemble in which a society is specified. It is a real question, then, of establishing, in the same way as for any other real object, the structural and conjunctural laws that govern its existence and transformation, and the specificity of its articulation with the other elements of a historical reality.” Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 115.

about the division of what is perceptible to the senses.¹⁴⁹

This “dispute” that engaged the senses in 1968, intertwined with actual physical dislocations and displacements,¹⁵⁰ whether by the state or self-directed, also necessarily involved, as we will see, juxtapositions of allegedly dissimilar subjectivities in a divided yet surprisingly transnational Europe. The representative democracies of the “free Western world” and the Soviet-type societies¹⁵¹ of “really existing socialism”¹⁵² of course both experienced massive upheavals in 1968—most notably in the “May events” of Paris and France and the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia. What united these struggles¹⁵³—the common ground on both sides as it were of the “Iron Curtain”¹⁵⁴—has much to do with what Henri Lefebvre that year famously called “the right to the city,”¹⁵⁵ or, as Kacper Poblacki has recently put it, “the peculiar role the state played in urban expansion” in the post-war period in Europe of collective consumption.

(T)his difference, East and West, was not necessarily parallel to an emphasis on the

¹⁴⁹ Rancière, quoted in Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ These “displacements...took students outside of the university, meetings that brought farmers and workers together, or students to the countryside—trajectories...that involved physical dislocation. And in that physical dislocation lay a dislocation of the very idea of politics.” Ross, *May '68*, 25.

¹⁵¹ This is the term, occasionally employed here, favored by political scientists, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. See for example, Ferenc Fehér, “Paternalism as a Mode of Legitimation in Soviet-type Societies,” in T. H. Rigby and Ferenc Fehér, *Political Legitimation in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 64-81.

¹⁵² The phrase originates with the Eastern German dissident Marxist Rudolf Bahro. See his chef d’oeuvre, Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, trans. David Fernbach (London: NLB, 1978).

¹⁵³ Of course, there is never a shortage of published opinions to the contrary. More recently, see for example the rather conservative collection on 1968 edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu. Despite a claim to hold historical revisionism toward 1968 in a critical light, the book as a whole sees Western Europe’s “1968” as consisting of rebellious and spoiled youth who played at anarcho-communism and did not appreciate the democratic freedoms they had vs. the youth of Poland, Czechoslovakia, et al., who were fighting for (liberal) human rights amid totalitarianism. Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁴ More broadly, of course, the idea that a single capitalist system held sway across the world, despite it taking on disparate forms, is one that was long held by Marxist tendencies like that of “Johnson-Forest” (CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya), who saw the USSR and its satellites as ‘State Capitalism’ (and who polemicized against Trotskyist tendencies), as well as, later, by the ‘world systems theory’ of Immanuel Wallerstein, first published in Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974). But as we saw in the Introduction, willingness to pursue this line of thought in detail in historical, theoretical and archival ways in the Humanities is relatively new, at least within academe, and perhaps a result of a resurgent Left.

¹⁵⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).

public versus the private. There would have been no automobile culture in the United States, for example, had there not been state subsidies of oil or a centrally financed interstate motorway system. By the same token, expansion of “public” housing in the socialist Bloc generated new strategies for appropriation of public space for private means. On the whole, in other words, the very same general development toward urban Keynesianism invited contrasting particular solutions on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Together, they constituted different facets of the urban crises of the 1960s.¹⁵⁶

This urban question is one I explicitly bring to the fore in the final section of this chapter, with the understanding that such problems continue to linger, past the “end of history,”¹⁵⁷ up to the neoliberal (i.e., state assisted privatization-driven) present. It is our conviction that they are best fought if we can understand the struggle as one. How do we grasp the increasing dissolution—post-Fordist and racialized—of our communities, from the 1970s to the present, East to West, from the Global North to the Global South, following the euphoria and disillusionment of 1968? The answer could well be found in cinema, the art form most capable—inarguably so in the decade in question—of capturing human experience and projecting it across peoples, classes, cultures and borders. What is yet to be learned and what can be learned, historically, from cinema’s response, beyond its primary exchange-value as storytelling with visuals, to the exigency felt by many at this time toward “reclaiming the sphere of communication, communicability, (and) intersubjectivity”?¹⁵⁸ This was a fight against the alienation of what we might call the “commodification” of social relations, which had advanced immeasurably in the bedazzlement of the post-war obsession

¹⁵⁶ Poblocki’s essay, “Knife in the Water: The Struggle Over Collective Consumption in Urbanising Poland,” about which more next chapter, is taken from an excellent recent collection that considers both the economic and cultural angle of consumption from the point of view of Eastern Europe. *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69-70.

¹⁵⁷ This is political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s well-known term to indicate “post-1989,” in which those who believed in history as a driving force for human emancipation seemed to have definitively “lost.” It sits alongside Margaret Thatcher’s infamous pronouncement, regarding Capitalism, that “There is no alternative.”

¹⁵⁸ Jan Verwoert, “Gestures Towards a New Life: The Avant-Garde as a Historical Provocation,” in Łukasz Ronduda, Floria Zeyfang, eds., *1,2,3 -- Avant-gardes : Film / Art Between Experiment and Archive* (Berlin; New York; Warsaw: Sternberg ; Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007), 38.

with consumption.¹⁵⁹ The dispute about the *sensible* thus relates to and is related by cinema on the level of the senses, or that which opens up and then becomes inextricable from politics in the wake of 1968.

1.1. People's Poland as "Case Study"

In the decade to follow, among the "Eastern Bloc" countries, it was to be the citizens of The Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, or PRL; hereafter: People's Poland) who waged the most vigorous, sustained struggle against their Soviet-type state, controlled by the Polish United Workers' Party, or PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*).¹⁶⁰ This struggle played out against the backdrop of a desultory political and economic situation following the death of Marxist Revisionism in 1968, violent repression in 1970, and an only temporarily patched up economic situation (about which more to come). In spite of or due to this, there was at the same time, a feeling of something like optimism about what was possible in these changed circumstances. For its part, Polish cinema, always innovative, experienced a creative ferment in this decade, issuing challenges to both artistic and political representation in several distinct directions, as explored throughout this dissertation. In this chapter, we stay mostly at the level of ideas and intellectuals—what we will call Polish oppositional thought, i.e., that which sees and is seen as separate from and against the Party line—and relate these to the filmmaking practice that both grew out of the

¹⁵⁹ As Marx puts it in his famous description in *Capital, Vol. 1*, chapter one, of commodity fetishism, "the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things...Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra sensible or social." The object into which the worker has poured her life, has indeed returned to "confront" her, but this time in the marketplace; our ability to relate to each other in a non-alienated way is thus notoriously substituted by "the fantastic form of a relation between things." Karl Marx, *Capital Vol 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 164-165.

¹⁶⁰ PZPR was the ruling party from 1948-1989, which I will also refer to, as is customary, simply as 'the Party.'

political rebellion of 1968 and emerged as a counter to entrenched aesthetic traditions in Polish cinema in both feature and documentary filmmaking. We explore the tension between the opposition intelligentsia that presumed to speak for the Polish nation, and films whose subject matter and manner of treating it challenged their presumed universalism.

In the initial part of this chapter, we trace the history of the post-war ideas and cinema of People's Poland, the intellectual inheritance that Polish cinema after 1968 in some measure responded to or rebelled against. Subsequently, we look at a more radical, left-communist element¹⁶¹ present, here and there, as both praxis and theory, in post-war Poland. While the latter was by and large something of a road not taken for the intellectual opposition, we argue its relevance for theory that grew out of 1968 in France, represented here by thinkers like Maurice Blanchot (as well as Blanchot's intellectual predecessor and friend Georges Bataille) and Jacques Rancière. I use these latter to throw light onto what I see as a theory-riven, negative affect, which is to say an embodied appeal to collective refusal, and its connection to spectatorship present in post-1968 Polish features. This is referred to as *radical communication*, a concept slowly unpacked throughout the dissertation, always gesturing toward the ultimate resolution of these tensions—at least for a time, and hopefully again one day—in the radical community of the Solidarity free trade union movement.

In the chapter's second half, we proceed to test and refine these claims using the

¹⁶¹ I use this phrase partly allude to a certainly lineage that goes back at least to Lenin's rather pejorative use of it, in attacking what he saw as the excessive anti-authoritarianism of his early political opponents. See his pamphlet *'Left wing' communism, an infantile disorder* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920).

work of filmmaker/film theorist Grzegorz Królikiewicz (1938-2017) as a representative if idiosyncratic figure. Królikiewicz's watchword could be said to be Godard's well-known call to "make films politically" rather than make "political films." Beyond the eschewal of straightforward political *content* this implies, it is further to say that representation and identification in the service of telling stories took a back seat to formal concerns, albeit within a narrative structure. These concerns, moreover, following Peter Bürger's definition of the avant-garde as creative militancy within a particular set of historical relations,¹⁶² were not merely *modernist*, as such, not merely, in cinematic terms, the "elaboration of a formal poetic...toward film as a text that is a play with meaning rather than a vehicle for it."¹⁶³ Rather, cinema like that of Królikiewicz, recognizing as it did the extent to which dominant cinema effectively shores up dominant ideology, represents the limit, immanent to narrative, of the avant-garde's use of form as a weapon aimed at the radical disruption of existing societal relations.

While opposition intellectuals in the early 1970s painted a picture of an increasingly abstract, totalitarian reality in People's Poland,¹⁶⁴ in order to, paradoxically, rally strength against an implacable, Party-led foe,¹⁶⁵ radical film artists like Królikiewicz documented its

¹⁶² Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). This is also the position of the undisputed doyen of Polish art history, the late Piotr Piotrowski, Piotrowski, Piotr, *In the shadow of Yalta: Art and Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski. (London: Reaktion Books, 2011). For a comparable position among film theorists, see Paul Willemsen, "An Avant-garde for the 1990s," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: British Film Inst. Publ., 1994), 141-161.

¹⁶³ "Introduction to *Citizen Kane*," in Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (New York: W. Norton & Co., 1985), 61.

¹⁶⁴ The key text here in the development of this updated (i.e., post-Arendt) "totalitarianism thesis" is expatriate philosopher Leszek Kołakowski's "In Stalin's Countries: Theses on Hope and Despair," trans. Kevin Devlin, *Kultura*, Vol. 5-6 (Paris, 1971) (The translation here renders his conception as "socialist despotism.")

¹⁶⁵ See Andrew Arato's treatment of how Kołakowski and opposition intellectuals argued for the existence of totalitarianism in 1970s Poland. Arato finds their argument specious, but claims they did so out of a desire to more fully mobilize "society against the state," which had a long history for the Polish nation. (More on this later.) Andrew Arato, "The Democratic Theory of the Polish Opposition: Normative Intentions and Strategic

fragmented, permeable, and specific nature, asking viewers to engage with the detritus and despair of everyday life, including that which has been (historically) repressed, through the mediation of film form and spectatorship. Królikiewicz's avant-garde gesture, I suggest, lies with what Georges Bataille thought of as *radical communication*—risking one's own “isolated humanness” through transgressive experience in forging a connection with others. This tearing down and (re)assembling reality, within the film and within one's own head, in contraposition to the tendency of the medium towards automatism and ideology,¹⁶⁶ is what we will call the *negative labour* of the viewer. The emphasis here on the *participatory* is also eminently paradigmatic of radical artists globally after 1968; thus, it is examined it as a transnational phenomenon across Europe in which Królikiewicz and People's Poland are implicated. But firstly we must orient ourselves with respect to the political and social environment leading up to intellectual and filmmaking practice after 1968, in Poland and beyond its borders, beginning necessarily with the social and political changes forged after the end of Stalinism in the 1950s.

1.1.1. From the Death of Stalin to the Death of Revisionism

Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller succinctly encapsulates the personal and political sea change wrought by the year 1956 within the Soviet sphere of influence and beyond: “Two events should be singled out...the 20th Party Congress and the revolts in Poland and Hungary. During the six months separating these two events, we changed

Ambiguities,” in *From Neo-Marxism to Democratic Theory: Essays on the Critical Theory of Soviet-Type Societies*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

¹⁶⁶ Królikiewicz: “At a screening I am thus in a double role, that of studying and being studied.” Quoted in Łukasz Ronduda, “Skolimowski, Królikiewicz, Żulawski, Uklański: Excerpts from the History of Polish New Wave,” in *Polish New Wave: The History of a Phenomenon That Never Existed = Polska Nowa Fala*, Ronduda, Barbara Piwowarska, eds., (Historia Zjawiska, Którego Nie Było. Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 2008), 31.

radically.”¹⁶⁷ At the 20th Party Congress, three years after the death of Stalin, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev (in)famously denounced Stalin and his cult of personality, opening up the way to limited reforms while taking special care to avoid criticism of the Party itself. The people of Hungary, who had been thoroughly brutalized after the war,¹⁶⁸ took this deeply to heart and mind and made revolution, which was violently suppressed by Khrushchev’s tanks.

Months earlier had seen Poland’s own uprising, a working class rebellion, brutally put down in the city of Poznań.¹⁶⁹ This episode served not only as inspiration for the imminent upheavals of the Hungarian Revolution, but led to the more peaceful, year-long, “Polish October,” seemingly opening a path to true worker-led socialism through the factory elections of national workers’ councils as well as a parliamentary vote pledging “The workers council manages the enterprise in the name of the workers.”¹⁷⁰ These events—others of prominence included prison strikes in the Soviet Union, and a highly disruptive if abortive general strike in the German Democratic Republic three years earlier—prompted Leftists from East to West to leave the Communist Party in droves, and in the same moment inspired a great many of the same to believe that a different sort of socialism¹⁷¹ was possible, and indeed worth fighting for. The direct experience of revolutionary praxis had left its

¹⁶⁷ Agnes Heller, “Marxist Ethics and the Future of Eastern Europe,” *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978-79), 154.

¹⁶⁸ Heller: “(B)etween 1953 and 1956, Hungary was the “model country” of Europe. It was the model country for a possible transformation precisely because it was the model country of Stalinist terror. The government justified its extreme terrorism by narrowing the alternatives open to Hungary, Hitler’s last ally: “Red terrorism” or fascism. That this “choice” completely contradicted the facts was disregarded by the government ideologists.” Heller, “Marxist Ethics,” 154.

¹⁶⁹ For the best account in English, based on a piece written by Solidarity activists in 1981, when archives were newly opened, see Ch. 2 of Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁰ Zbigniew Kowalewski, “50 years since the Poznan uprising,” *International Viewpoint* (June 2006): 4.

¹⁷¹ I use the word ‘socialism’ rather than ‘communism,’ because, as Katherine Verdery reminds us, this is how the Party themselves, country to country, referred to themselves, as socialist republics. The latter was a future-oriented term, i.e., “on the path to Communism.” Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 235. Further, as mentioned in the Introduction, when speaking about what was actually practiced in these countries, I qualify it as “state socialism.”

mark, even if its further potential would lie dormant for over a decade. In sum, the force of these worker insurrections and revolutions in Soviet-type societies and the intellectual ferment behind them announced, though was not tantamount to, the beginning of “Marxist Revisionism,” the belief that bureaucratic state socialism, beyond its capacity for de-Stalinization, could truly be reformed through pressure applied at State level—that is, top down—and given a “human face.”¹⁷²

Poland, energized, emerged as one of the intellectual loci of this tolerated but increasingly heretical (at least in 1956) insurgent Marxism. Leading up to and during the Polish October, creative writers and poets¹⁷³ as well as students and engaged intellectuals¹⁷⁴ waged uncompromising attacks on Stalinism that cut far deeper than those of Khrushchev. These could even be found, occasionally, in officially sanctioned PZPR literature, which engaged in revisionist polemics against Party publications in neighboring countries like Czechoslovakia.¹⁷⁵ This heady time ended eventually peacefully, unlike in Hungary, yet in much disappointment, as new, Party Secretary Władysław Gomułka¹⁷⁶ consolidated his power, offering some reforms but renegeing on many promises. Gomułka, following post-war political imprisonment, had risen to power in 1956 on the back, popularly, of his earlier

¹⁷² It was a post-1956 development, in this less-radical sense. Adam Michnik, a teenager in its heyday and the 1970's most eloquent dissident theorist (the Polish Havel, in that sense), describes it thusly “The revisionist concept was based on a specific intraparty perspective. It was never formulated into a political program. It assumed that the system of power could be humanized and democratized and that the official Marxist doctrine was capable of assimilating contemporary arts and social sciences. The revisionists wanted to act within the framework of the Communist party and Marxist doctrine. They wanted to transform “from within” the doctrine and the party in the direction of democratic reform and common sense. In the long term, the actions of the revisionists seek to allow enlightened people with progressive ideas to take over the party.” “The New Evolutionism,” in *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 135.

¹⁷³ Adam Wazyk's politically incendiary, widely read “Poem for Adults” (1955) is the touchstone here.

¹⁷⁴ Respectively, in the journals *Po Prostu* and *Nowe Druki*.

¹⁷⁵ See L.B. (name unknown), “Revisionist Poland: Charting a Different Course,” *The World Today*, XIV, 252.

¹⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that as late as 1964 some sympathizers in the West still mistakenly saw Gomułka as a reformer. For a symptomatic case see Richard Hiscocks, “Some Liberal Marxists and Left-Wing Catholics in Contemporary Poland,” *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*. Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb 1964), 12-21.

slogan as a pre-war left-wing leader, “The Polish road to socialism,” and *internally* through pitting warring Party factions against one another.¹⁷⁷ Eventually Gomulka succeeded in getting much of the intelligentsia on board with his milder program, subsequently transforming the militant National Workers’ Councils into empty shells, obedient to the Party apparatus.¹⁷⁸

Across the region, *alienation* became something of a key word, much as it would be conceptually for the New Left writ large. Importantly, revisionists, at least in the early stages, understood it not in an existentialist manner, Leftist or otherwise¹⁷⁹ but as a (Marxist) historical category. They were at pains to point out that human development was held back under Stalinism in a similar way to that of the West, which is to say the working class under bureaucratic state socialism was similarly exploited and alienated from the product of its labour, as it was under Capitalism. A Yugoslav sociologist, at the end of this era, sums up revisionism by referencing one of its key texts, Marx’s “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)”¹⁸⁰

(N)ot only - as Marx puts it - does his work become an object, an outer existence but it exists apart from him, independently, alien to him; it becomes an autonomous power facing the worker, so that the life he has given the object is facing him in a

¹⁷⁷ These were known as the *Natolin* and *Pulawska* factions, named after where their members liked to convene, in and around Warsaw. Gradually, he replaced them on both sides with his own people. The former was right-wing and nationalist, and its (ex-)members were largely responsible for the periodic waves of anti-Semitism, which finally hit their mark in 1968, by which time this clique had succeeded regrouped into something even more virulent, the “Police faction.” See Chapter 9, “The ‘Polish October’” in Michal Checinski, *Poland : Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism*, trans. Tadeusz Szafar (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1982), 104-122.

¹⁷⁸ The greatest threat to the Party was this pre-Revisionist, radically conceived Workers Council movement. These were brought under heel, and later gutted, through the PZPR’s class-based technocratic appeals to liberal intelligentsia; the prestige of the Councils’ militants was cleverly transferred to new Party leadership, who in 1957 derided the idea of a National Congress of Councils as an “anarchist-type utopia.” This situation was later dissected by Kuroń and Modzelewski in their “Open Letter,” as we will see. For an account of the canny ability of Gomulka to embody the changes various groups wanted to see, see David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ Press, 1991), 42.

¹⁷⁹ See the early Sartre and his polemics with Marxists (of which he was to later become). Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France : From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

¹⁸⁰ In Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth; London: Penguin ; New Left Review, 1975), 279-400.

hostile and alienated manner. Under Stalinist rule man could not live a life appropriate to his kind or to his individuality. It was made impossible for man to develop his personal identity as a human being and his own self. As an immediate consequence followed what Marx called "the alienation of man from man" and "if man is facing himself he is facing the other man."¹⁸¹

As Heller indicated, the transformation of those who had experienced 1956 was complete. But with this, putting an end to high Stalinist terror was not enough; they had fought for post-war socialism, and understood it as uniquely capable of ending human alienation, as rooted in the exploitation of labour. Out of these struggles, Polish intellectuals like the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski and the economist Włodzimierz Brus (1921-2007) articulated a philosophical Marxist Humanism,¹⁸² and a modified socialist-democratic political economy,¹⁸³ respectively, that found wide purchase across the region, reflecting the belief that reform could occur from within.¹⁸⁴ As substantive and philosophically significant as were the writings of the Revisionists, their primary value was seen to be instrumental, which is to say they sought to increase individual freedom of thought in countries that had barely emerged from Stalinist repression. To this end, Kolakowski, by the late Sixties a towering figure on the Left from Warsaw to London, promoted the importance of Marxist theory and discussion over dogma and stagnation, emphasizing morality and individual human freedom as the hallmarks of true socialism, over and above "the dictatorship of the proletariat," or in any case its reification in the hands of Party philistines.¹⁸⁵ This ethos,

¹⁸¹ Yugoslav sociologist Rudi Supek writing in 1966, quoted in Tibor Hanak, "Neo-Marxism in Eastern Central Europe," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 30, no. 4 (1985): 381-382.

¹⁸² See Leszek Kolakowski, *Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today* (New York, N.Y.: Grove, 1978).

¹⁸³ Brus's work grew out of the eminent tradition of radical Polish political economy of Michal Kalecki (whose predated Keynes) and Oscar Lange, both of whom collaborated with the younger Brus. See Włodzimierz Brus, *The Economics and Politics of Socialism: Collected Essays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

¹⁸⁴ To these we can add, especially, the intellectual circle known as the "Budapest School," surrounding long-time Marxist theoretician Georg Lucacs, the "Praxis Group" in Yugoslavia, and, later, intellectual voices in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring in 1968. See Hanak, "Neo-Marxism."

¹⁸⁵ This was a division that began to emerge elsewhere as well, between the "humanist" younger Marx and the apparently more overtly economic/materialist or so-called "scientific" Marx, whose standard-bearer came to be Althusser. It seems clearer now that this choice is a false one; a dialectical understanding of changing historical reality requires changing, not fixed, terminology, and there would seem to be greater continuity in Marx's

whether directly acknowledged or not, helped shaped the values of the new generation of emerging artists and intellectuals, including as we will see the predominant Polish School film tendency, even leaving its mark on post-'68 theoretically-minded work like that of Królikiewicz.

However, revisionists, much as their emerging New Left counterparts in Europe and North America, largely did not see the role of theory in an overarching, Western Marxist sense of thought as something necessarily late or delayed (i.e., not immediately realizable vis-à-vis social reality). Rather, it was in part an instrument toward loosening the environment in which it was possible to make common struggle *against* alienation and *for* human freedom—for action. In a widely translated and read essay from the late 1960s, “Responsibility and History,” Kolakowski reiterates many points made in his flurry of writings in intellectual journals during the Polish October, and develops them further, carving out space for (further) thought—and action. He locates the figure of alienated “man” in the despised category of the escapist “clerk.” The French writer Julien Benda, a political moderate,¹⁸⁶ had originally conceived it, between the wars, in a positive sense—the clerk as an eminently rational citizen, a thinker with the good of the realm on their mind, unswayed by and uncommitted to nationalist mythology or populist politics.¹⁸⁷ According to Kolakowski, the clerk, in its new straw man version in Party literature, has selfishly washed their hands of

thought than not. To give but one example relevant here, on the relation of two terms seen as representing *earlier* or *later* stages in his thought, Marx saw “the genesis of alienation to correspond to the emergence of forms of exchange from tribal distribution and the stages of alienation to be congruent with developments in the means of exchange. That is, Marx repeatedly insists that exchange does not originate within a primitive community, but at the points of contact between different tribes.” Edward Andrew, “Reviewed Work: *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, by Bertell Ollman,” *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1973), 163-166.

¹⁸⁶ The term obviously doesn't translate very well into English, but, interestingly, a new edition in English has appeared that sees its argument appropriated by anti-intellectual right-wing forces under the guise of “common sense.” Julien Benda, *La Trahison des clercs* (The Betrayal of the Intellectuals, 1927).

¹⁸⁷ “Responsibility and History,” in Kolakowski, *Toward a Marxist Humanism*, 89-90.

history and the brutality that accompanies difficult choices.

Disguised as a guardian of universal human values, a costume lined with cowardice and hypocrisy, the clerk in reality longs to protect purely personal, private values that matter to no one but himself...He calls upon men to forsake action because decent people shouldn't become personally involved in the dirty business of settling historical accounts. Actually, refusal to act is in itself an action, though a purely negative one since it consciously abandons the field to the forces of social reaction. Since social nature abhors a vacuum, the holes made in it by the escapist are immediately filled by the brutal aggression of reactionaries...He is, therefore, not ignorant but hypocritical, not a philosopher with clean hands but an active abettor of reaction.

Kolakowski calls out the seemingly never-ending argument between this “private” escapism or ‘utopianism’—in effect, the renunciation of action/commitment—and the hard-nosed “political realism” of the PZPR (“intellectually barren...so long as it is not a concrete debate about the real limits of *applicability* of that concept”¹⁸⁸) as a false choice that should be flatly rejected.

Contemporary escapism as the ideology of renouncing choice results from the confrontation of two social facts: the ideological consciousness of the anti-Stalinist left on the one hand, and a reality that bars this consciousness from asserting itself in public life on the other.¹⁸⁹

Hard-nosed intellectual advocacy for accountability, he argues, is here the only position available to concerned socialists, a role that is nevertheless somewhat vaguely defined, lending the ‘moral’ aspect of the position, as opposed to the historical, Marxist one, a somewhat troubling foothold. For now, in any case, Kolakowski positions the revisionist as the true (moral) pragmatist,¹⁹⁰ defending, after the early Marx, the freedom of the ‘individual’

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 109.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 108.

¹⁹⁰ Despite the perspicacity of his arguments, one can also detect, perhaps in the existentialist tenor, something of his later abandonment of the socialist project entirely. By the early 1970s Kolakowski had renounced Marxism; it is important to remember that it is from this perspective from which he wrote his lengthy three volume study, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

to act against ideological and bureaucratic stagnation.

However intellectually sound his rejection of this “false choice,” in favor of the productive socialist action of the reformer, the despised “clerk”— incidentally, the class origins remain somewhat vague—was a figure that would simply not disappear. Vaclav Havel’s later formulation, the equally despised—this time among the opposition—figure of the “greengrocer,”¹⁹¹ the lead employee who obediently puts up a ‘Workers of the World, Unite!’ sign in the shop window rather than “living in truth,” feels something like dissident’s version of this straw man.¹⁹² I point this out to wonder about the terms on which these intellectuals hitch their wagon, given that it drifted, in the later 1970s, away from a rigorous understanding of collectively experienced alienation (rooted in labour), and towards a general sense of *unfreedom* for the individual in the face of an increasingly abstract “totalitarianism” (or “post-totalitarianism,” in Havel’s phrase), as opposed to a historically specific *state*, as before. In Polish cinema, as we will see, such ‘clerks’ are present during the films of the Thaw, as well as in the 1960s, albeit in a more positive, anti-heroic sense.¹⁹³ What is perhaps more surprising, as we shall see, for a non-Marxist artist like Królikiewicz, *alienation* remained a touchstone, and retained deceptively specific historical rooting in Polish reality—now returning, after 1968, in a more virulent form.

¹⁹¹ See Paulina Bren's significant examination of post-Prague Spring Czechoslovakia, in which Havel's concept plays an important role, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁹² See David Ost's recent, well-aimed provocation in an otherwise largely celebratory special issue devoted to Havel's influential “The Power of the Powerless” essay of the late 1970s, which argues that Havel unfairly pins the political blame on the “resource-weak,” inspiring, in the long-run, the sort of populist backlash against liberal intellectuals we see in the current moment. Ost, “The Sham, and the Damage, of Living in Truth,” *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 301-09.

¹⁹³ See especially Jerzy Skolimowski's “angry young man” Polish films of the 1960s, culminating in the censored *Rece do góry* (Hands up!, 1967/1981).

1.1.2. The Polish School responds

1956 also heralded the debut of the much-celebrated Polish School of filmmaking, whose artists were graduates of the new National Film School, founded in Łódź in 1948. As opposed to their peers in the press and intellectual journals, Polish School film artists did not launch direct attacks on Stalinism, but, as children of WWII, particularly devastating in Poland, its screenwriters, cinematographers and directors looked with open eyes at the trauma of their experiences in the 1940s, through a passionate but also wry historical lens. While this work is far removed from the radical aesthetics of post-1968, avant-garde influenced filmmakers, this work would nevertheless be unthinkable without it; like the filmmakers of the Polish School, Królikiewicz responded in his art to a particular national trauma, but for the latter this wound was somewhat hidden, as we will see. The Polish October, it is generally agreed, and with it the gradual discarding of the Stalinist aesthetic doctrine of ‘socialist realism,’¹⁹⁴ was the main catalyst for this sudden wellspring of creativity in Polish filmmaking, though the films themselves are somewhat heterogeneous. In the somewhat narrow version of its history, however, which works for our purposes here, its leading figures, usually placed critically somewhat at artistic odds with one another, were Andrzej Wajda and Andrzej Munk.

The early historical features of Andrzej Wajda (b. Suwalki 1926-2016), while both aesthetically and thematically bold as well as nuanced in terms of characterization, struggle at

¹⁹⁴ The broader cultural policy of the Soviet Union towards aesthetics, from 1946 until 1953, was known as *Zhdanovshchina*, or the Zhdanov Doctrine, after Stalin’s lieutenant in Leningrad, Central Committee member Andrei Zhdanov. The policy he developed could be summed up as “a cultural war against innovation, modernism, liberalism, and Western sympathies... The writer was to work to educate and unite the people in Bolshevik idealism... (Zhdanov) combined anti-Westernism with a reassertion of Soviet patriotism, with its Russian nationalist undertones, and depicted Russian culture as unique and distinct from anything the West had produced.” Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment : Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 370.

times to escape the Zhdanovite heroic socialist realist imagery that had not yet died with Stalin.¹⁹⁵ Scholarship, especially within Poland, usually sees Italian Neorealism as a countervailing artistic force¹⁹⁶ that helped younger filmmakers like Wajda (especially in his second film, *Kanał*, 1957) break free of aesthetic-cum-political dogmatism. The expressive final film of his celebrated “war trilogy,” *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popioły i Diament*, 1958), proved a further advancement, and is also usually taken to be the apex of the Polish School.¹⁹⁷ Starring the young Zbigniew Cybulski, whose charisma and self-effacing masculinity led him to be dubbed “the Polish James Dean,” it is usually recognized as having reached out, stylistically, to the West,¹⁹⁸ if not quite as a “New Wave” precursor.

Wajda, though he creates some distance for the viewer through dramatic irony utilizing Cybulski’s performance as Maciek, links his story and protagonist to the grand liberal tradition of Polish Romanticism, dating back to national bard and political thinker Adam Mickiewicz.¹⁹⁹ Maciek, torn between the soulless efficiency of the (Moscow-driven) Party and the Nationalist Right, the latter of which tasks him to be an assassin, is a tragic martyr for the Polish nation, set upon by misguided extremists. The character’s portrayal is consistent with the typical Wajda heroes throughout his long career²⁰⁰ who, however

¹⁹⁵ For a sensitive account of the balancing act Wajda and his collaborators had to perform in these years, see Stuart Liebman, “The Art of Memory: Andrzej Wajda’s War Trilogy,” *Cineaste* 32, no. 1 (2006): 42-47.

¹⁹⁶ Mateusz Werner points out that Poland had to wait until the Stalinist Thaw to have its own neo-realism, given that its film industry was shaped by hardcore communists like the filmmakers Wanda *Jakubowska* and Aleksander Ford. This meant in part that when it later came time in the 1960s to have its own “new wave,” some industry players—its screenwriters—bucked the trend not by experimenting formally like the Nouvelle Vague, but by initiating a trend toward the known (Western) pleasures of commercial genre cinema. Werner, “Rebellion a la Polonaise” in Ronduda, Piwowarska, eds., *Polish New Wave*, 6-15.

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter 5, “The Polish School Revisited,” in Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 73-109.

¹⁹⁸ Marek Haltof quotes the novelist and filmmaker Tadeusz Konwicki, recalling it as the film that “tamed Communist Poland for the Western viewer, rendering it palatable, acceptable” *Polish National Cinema*, 87.

¹⁹⁹ I explore this tradition in much greater detail in the final chapter.

²⁰⁰ Wajda’s very longevity—his stamina and ability not only to lead but also to adapt and collaborate—is also part of this story. He released his final film, *Afterimage*, at the beginning of 2017, on a subject relevant to this chapter—the Polish avant-garde artist, and close friend to Malevich, Władysław Strzemiński, in his rather personal battle, as an artist and teacher, against Stalinism and socialist realism. *Afterimage* (2016).

reluctantly, sacrifice themselves/are sacrificed for *Matka Polka* (Mother Poland)²⁰¹ and the greater good, a somewhat conservative image nonetheless derived from the militant tradition of progressive Romantic nationalism in Poland.²⁰² Polish School films, and those of Wajda in particular, thus show the plight of individuals alienated if not in a Marxist sense then certainly by particular social forces, and like Kolakowski's escapist clerk unable to comprehend the tasks assigned by history—or, better put, *ideology*. If such citizens in number have reached something of a critical mass, that is a problem for and with society, the filmmakers and revisionists appear to suggest.

While the thematically-similar work of Andrzej Munk (b. Krakow, 1921-1961) does not appear to refute this ultimate diagnosis, it takes such a vastly different approach to the Polish situation such as to arguably be in contradistinction to Wajda, as well as Kolakowski. Having completed only three features before his untimely death in 1961, Munk casts a long shadow in influence through his rather cutting and unsentimental approach to historical and cultural memory amid war and its aftermath. In Munk, our attempts as a viewer at identification are inventively thwarted through a kind of laughter in the dark, one might say. His perspective goes beyond pointing out the irony of history; in his mature works he is an unsparing satirist, whose likenesses in literature are Jaroslav Hašek, anarchist writer and originator of the grudging national symbol of the Czechs, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, and Joseph Heller, creator of its later, highly American cousin, the anti-war novel *Catch-22*. Munk's

²⁰¹ One of the most famous Polish hymns, "Matka Polska," was originally the Polish National Anthem in the 18th century. When Poland was conquered and partitioned at roughly the turn of the century the anthem was banned, but resurrected, as it were, in a newly allegorized religious ode to Mother Mary (who safeguards the Polish nation). See Joanna Szwejowska's guest-chapter, "The Myth of the Polish Mother," that opens Ewa Mazierska and Elzbieta Ostrowska, *Women in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 15-36.

²⁰² In this guise, "nationalism" stood for pluralism, not chauvinism. (Again, we return to this in the final chapter). For an excellent book-length study on this complex subject, see Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

“heroes” are dubiously past their prime (*Man on the Tracks*), vacuous Candides (*Cross-Eyed Luck*, *Zezowate szczęście*, 1959), grifters, or false heroic idols²⁰³ (*Eroica*, *Heroism*, 1957), caught up in the gears of history and unable, or perhaps only Pyrrhically, to redeem themselves through action, i.e., that called for by the revisionists.

At the same time, in Munk’s early documentaries, in their status as exemplars of socialist realism, i.e., the glorification of shock work and collective labour, as well as his *Rashomon*-like feature debut *Man on the Tracks* (*Człowiek na torze*, 1956), some recent critics detect more than mere lip service to doctrine, but a committed socialist in his own right, one who was searching, like many, for a filmic language in which to express this faith aesthetically.²⁰⁴ Perhaps, then, the ‘clerks’ of Munk, traumatized by war but undeserving of (cinematic) identification, are a far more intelligent rendering of the Party’s critique? In his subsequent, best known films, Munk’s faith, perhaps transmuted, blossoms into merciless, though far from mirthless, deconstructions of heroism on all sides, as it were. His films harbor what another revolutionary pessimist, Walter Benjamin, called the “destructive character”—the need for clearing historically-obstructed paths around oneself through negation and darkness.²⁰⁵ It is this approach to his characters that provides a model, as we shall see, for Królikiewicz, among others. In sum, Munk’s critique of progress, of *action*, was something of a needed corrective to the Wajda tendency to fetishize action in a visceral artistic medium, to make films as if they themselves were praxis—that is, political action²⁰⁶—a

²⁰³ This last protagonist was a popular and recurring type for Polish citizens in Polish films, the man who has to carve out a space for himself by any which way in People’s Poland.

²⁰⁴ See Dorota Niemitz, “The Legacy of Postwar Polish filmmaker Andrzej Munk,” *World Socialist Website*. October 13th, 2014. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/10/13/munk-o13.html> Also, this was true of later *czarna seria* (black series) documentaries, as well as the feminist filmmakers of the 1970s who sought to find a way to express women’s labour. This I deal with in the next chapter.

²⁰⁵ “The Destructive Character,” Benjamin, *Selected Writings*.

²⁰⁶ This tendency may indeed not be worlds away from the more global reach of Italian Neorealism, for example. Recently, Karl Schoonover has polemically read it as a body genre, using Bazin against himself, in effect. Neo-realism then becomes a sort of NGO running interference for the Marshall Plan and liberal

tendency I believe they share with revisionists like Kolakowski. It is as though these visual and discursive representations sought to secure, by themselves, the political good—that is, against their stated aims, doing so merely rhetorically, *without* action.

1.1.3. Revisionism calcified: Intellectuals and the 1960s

The pessimism of Munk, and his collaborator, the screenwriter Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, proved well-founded, in art as in politics. Nearly as short-lived as the Polish School, by the early 1960s cracks began to show in the Revisionists' dream to, as the saying goes, change the system from within. Indeed, while Revisionism was effectively dead by the early 1960s, punctuated with the sudden, if relatively quiet, removal of Khrushchev from power, the promise of reform hung on quite a bit longer in certain circles. One reason for this in Poland was economic: the "little stabilization" of the economy in the early 1960s meant that those with connections enjoyed modest luxuries and tended to look the other way regarding the lack of deeper reform.²⁰⁷ As revisionist hopes lessened, this tacit sort of agreement eventually broadened throughout the region between Eastern European populations and the elite of their respective Party apparatuses. The Czechoslovak writer Antonin J. Liehm called it the "new social contract."

According to this contract, the citizens hand over to the State all of their individual and collective rights, and the State assures them in return stable employment at an average wage for a minimum contribution of labour and personal initiative. While the two parties respect the "contract," a certain equilibrium obtains between them. As soon as one of them breaks the contract, the equilibrium disappears, provoking a crisis or an explosion.²⁰⁸

democracy in Europe and beyond. See his Schoonover, Karl. *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

²⁰⁷ This "little stabilization" and the increasingly consumption-focused portion of the Polish population, which in the 1970s was raised to an overt economic, propagandistic strategy, which we explore briefly next chapter.

²⁰⁸ Antonin J. Liehm, "Intellectuals and the New Social Contract," *Telos*, no. 23 (Spring 1975), 156–64.

While this contract found relatively broad acceptance by the “intelligentsia,” by which he means something akin to Gramsci’s *organic intellectuals*, i.e., those ‘white collar’/managerial workers who serve a particular class, it was incumbent, Liehm felt, upon *true intellectuals* (traditional, in the Gramscian sense), rather, to speak their minds most forcefully in the event the equilibrium *did* break. In so doing these intellectuals effectively self-incarnate as a class.²⁰⁹ In Soviet-type societies, this ‘contract’ and its equilibrium was very much threatened with the downturn of the 1970s, which I explore a bit more in the second chapter.

Liehm’s admonition of these would-be traditional intellectuals was a *post*-Revisionist development; indeed, it first must be said it was they who were in part responsible for the other major reason for the seeming long half-life of Revisionism. By this I mean their fostering of the *appearance* of communication, including the legitimacy and influence it promised, between Party leaders and the revisionists. Prior to 1968, intellectuals and students had maintained at least the feel of a stake in a fragile public sphere. “For non-elites, the end came quickly,” as political scientist and long-time Poland watcher David Ost puts it, with the gutting of the 1956 workers’ councils and the restriction of true land reform for peasant farmers, despite promises. For the intelligentsia it was a slightly different matter.

Socioeconomically, little changed in the state socialist countries after the death of Stalin...But because these systems were political monopolies, those who produced political or ideological outputs—that is, the Party elite and intelligentsia—now had greater freedom in which to perform these jobs...The situation changed most dramatically for the literary and academic intelligentsia because of their unique social role...The intellectuals’ “job,” is to think and write about society. They are the creators of the public sphere. If they were to pursue *their* jobs, political differences with the Party were inevitable, because the Party’s post-Stalinist principle of legitimation embraced social democratic principles that had nothing to do with the reality of the system. The writers could not be denounced for defending an official principle of legitimation, but since the principle clashed with reality, their output

²⁰⁹ György Konrád, and Iván Szelényi. *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Brighton, Eng.: Harvester Press, 1979).

would unavoidably contain an oppositional content.²¹⁰

This situation, a classic contradiction that, in Marxist terms, would tend to produce its opposite, in which the Party had effectively armed intellectual workers with the (social democratic) tools to bring about its demise, nevertheless contained a built-in, and rather effective, safety valve. It is similar to what Liehm speaks about with respect to “intellectuals” when he says, of the “new social contract,”

The observation of the contract by the two parties does not lead beyond the reproduction of the status quo in the economic, political and social domain. *In no sphere of activity does the contract free any creative potential.*[my emphasis] This is why a living tension perpetuates itself ceaselessly in the guise of stability and a certain prosperity.²¹¹

How did this tension manifest itself in 1960s Poland? Ost relates an anecdote that shows how the Party was able to preserve the illusion of the possibility of reform.

In March (1964), thirty-four prominent Polish writers and intellectuals signed a short letter...drawing attention to the potentially tragic consequences of “severe press censorship” and other official policies. The letter continued with an appeal for “a change in the Polish cultural politics in the spirit of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution...and in harmony with the welfare of the nation.”²¹²

The letter was met with, as Ost puts it, both “repression and recognition.” It was denounced, its ringleaders briefly arrested, and yet a very public discussion ensued in which the signers met with the Premier; it was denounced again by a top Party member, Zenon Kliszko, who was himself attacked by a group of Warsaw writers, who in turn invited Kliszko to their meeting to make a reply. These series of encounters were “acrimonious,” says Ost, and they ultimately went nowhere, with Party leaders making the classic excuse that they simply wanted to keep criticism in-house, to avoid the pernicious influence of outsiders

²¹⁰ Ost, *Solidarity and Anti-Politics*, 46.

²¹¹ Liehm, “New Social Contract,” 159.

²¹² Ost, *Solidarity and Anti-Politics*, 48.

(for example, the U.S. government-supported Radio Free Europe, a favorite target) who did not understand Polish affairs. And yet, Ost continues,

there was still a feeling on both sides that a discussion was both possible and desirable. Neither side challenged the right of the other to speak. Antagonists on both sides were largely drawn from the same social milieu, and they seemed to maintain a certain grudging respect for one another.²¹³

We should read as implicit in the “same social milieu,” to which Ost refers, something like the state socialist version of the bourgeois public sphere, consisting especially of elites and their offspring in Warsaw.²¹⁴ The classical version of the public sphere, as formulated in 1962 by Habermas,²¹⁵ promoted a discursive space within which the realm of “letters” had the seductive, seeming power to influence political reality.

The very act of utterance discloses a quasi-transcendental community of subjects, a universal model of rational exchange, which threatens to contradict the hierarchies and exclusions of which it speaks. The public sphere in some sense resolves the contradictions of mercantile society by boldly inverting its terms: if what is embarrassing for bourgeois liberal theory is the process by which an abstract equality at the level of natural rights becomes transmuted into a system of actual differential rights, the bourgeois public sphere will take those differential rights as its starting-point and convert them back, in the region of discourse, to an abstract equality. The truly free market is that of cultural discourse itself.²¹⁶

As we have seen above, the effective belief that oppositional discussion within the public sphere *in and of itself secured the political good*, bending the progressive elements of the Party toward reform, held out for much of the 1960s. In so doing it arguably blocked the sorts of changes intellectuals were themselves calling for, or at least prevented the larger

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ For an in-depth look at this phenomenon, see Marci Shore’s intellectual history of postwar Poland. The confidence and optimism of young intellectuals and student leaders like Adam Michnik lay in part with the fact that their parents had effectively built this system—thus, it could seemingly be reformed. Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven, Conn: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

²¹⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

²¹⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 2005), 14-15.

contradiction of a “workers’ state” without workers’ power from coming to a head. Ost’s anecdotal *afera* (affair) above provides evidence at how effective the Party was at turning dissent to its advantage, maintaining an image of tolerance, of listening, as demonstrated not only within Poland, but, importantly, given an increasing reliance on foreign credit, projected abroad. As such, it is strikingly similar to how representative democracies obscure the oligarchic interests that dominate them by donning the cloak of open communication—the “Town Hall” in the American context—as though it were the same as real action. 1960s Revisionism, too, implied ongoing (mediated) discussion, with and against those in the highest levels of society, even if this was only in appearance.

While such appearances were precisely the form of communication that was silenced and suppressed after 1968, the lesson was perhaps not immediately learned by Polish intellectuals, which is to say this disproportionate understanding of their role seemed to linger. Ost seems to concede that this public sphere communication is not *real*—that is, something upon which to apply pressure and force action—but nevertheless he and many other Poland watchers on the academic Left (and Right, for that matter), in the 1980s and ‘90s saw revisionism as a precursor if not the beginning of the “third way” of the Solidarity movement, explaining in some measure the concerted focus, from both Anglo and Soviet sphere, on *civil society*. The modest activism inherent in civil society, or parallel structures independent of the State in which organic intellectuals predominate, was increasingly promoted by Polish dissidents like Adam Michnik, opposing what he saw as the naïve revisionism of the past. No longer engaging with the State, in order to, however unproductively, enlarge human freedom, the ex-revisionists would now dispense with the State entirely.

However, the sentiment of the US labour activist Staughton Lynd on the double-edged *participatory democracy* encouraged by the North American New Left in the 1960s bear repeating: the dualism that would renounce the more hard-nosed weapons of (macro-) politics ultimately faces the choice of allowing itself to be co-opted by existing structures, or assuming revolutionary control over society.²¹⁷ As with Havel's "power of the powerless," the pressure of Micznik's "new evolutionism" was no longer properly of the Left—not the left-communism of the workers' councils²¹⁸ of 1956, nor of reformist Marxism.

The anti-statism of civil society was of a different brand. As the state-civil society distinction came to be seen as constitutive democracy, as democracy's *conditio sine qua non*, civil society - becoming both the aim and the all-embracing actor of the democratic was equated with democracy per se. That logically false conclusion underpinned the ideology that disconnected democracy from the state. And with the communist state representing the reality of the ideal, democracy was dissociated from socialism. The dissociation between socialism and democracy, in turn, was believed to be the "end of ideology". Self-complacent as such a belief might be, it facilitated the cooperation of individuals and groups of differing, even contradictory, world outlooks and political convictions.²¹⁹

These shrewd observations, by a Slovenian political scientist, sweep from the 1970s to well after 1989, but it gives us an understanding of what oppositional thought ultimately meant for the working/resource-poor of Poland and beyond, ultimately left behind in all of this talk. However, in the 1970s, this as yet undefeated working class, diverse in makeup as we will see in subsequent chapters, would stage the three significant uprisings of the 1970s, in a grassroots, economically-driven revolt of *labour*—that is, something immanent to the ("workers'") State, not *apart* from it. Fortunately, Polish opposition intellectuals, to their

²¹⁷ "Like the conscientious objector, the participatory democrat has unfinished business with the question: Is what's intended a moral gesture only, or a determined attempt to transform the American power structure?" Staughton Lynd, "The New Radicals and Participatory Democracy," *Dissent* (Summer 1965), 329-333.

²¹⁸ On the worker self-organization that used to be known as *council communism*, see Anton Pannekoek's classic 1946 text *Workers' Councils* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2003)

²¹⁹ Tomaz Mastnak, "The Reinvention of Civil Society: Through the Looking Glass of Democracy." *Archives européennes de sociologie* 46, no. 2 (2005): 334.

great credit, became increasingly aware of this, and finally, in 1976 (explored in later chapters), workers, students and intellectuals began to stand together, tentatively unraveling the “givenness” of their identities in the spirit of 1968. It was a prelude to the festival atmosphere of Solidarity in 1980, in which a new working class—one no longer so very easy to categorize—awakened and indeed assumed its role in history.

1.2. Revolution and Affect: 1968 and Participatory Art

It is this non-public sphere sense of what I am calling *radical communication*, in part an effort towards a *decentralized democratic socialism* that was to come to prominence with the rise of Solidarity, that I wish to begin to trace in the remainder of the chapter, vis-à-vis cinema. Herein lies, I will show, the political aesthetics of 1968 and what they have to do with the work of a filmmaker like Królikiewicz, who was very much concerned, as we will see later, with working out radically democratic principles within the space depicted in the film frame (and without), in concert with the viewer. In People’s Poland the first steps toward recovering the radicalism of the Polish October came in 1964, when a document appeared whose vehemence and critique anticipated the European revolts of 1968. Two youngish Marxists, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, broke with the incremental appeals of revisionism in Poland and issued a direct challenge to the *nomenklatura*²²⁰ of the PZPR in their “leading role” as guardians of socialism. Kuroń, a teacher who headed up a left-communist scout organization known as the “Walterites,”²²¹ had among his young disciples a number of activists within the burgeoning student movement, including Adam Michnik, and

²²⁰ This was the name for the “characteristic feature (of Soviet-type societies)...the practice of setting aside numerous important public posts for candidates selected by the Communist party. The list of both the posts are the candidates are secret.” Michnik, *Letters From Prison*, 35.

²²¹ Ost, *Solidarity and Anti-Politics*, 64.

would become the most prominent labour activist of the 1970s outside of Lech Wałęsa. Kuroń and Modzelewski's manuscript, which assailed bureaucratic state socialism and defended the need for a truly democratic socialism in quasi-Trotskyist fashion—that is, it saw the revolution as having been betrayed—was quickly confiscated by the authorities, then hastily rewritten and circulated as “Open Letter to the Party (*List otwarty do Partii*).” This action resulted in its authors' almost immediate arrest, and subsequent conviction and sentencing to prison terms of several years each. The *Open Letter* is a rather impressive revolutionary manifesto of roughly 75 pages that charged the Party with introducing alien concepts and structures, i.e., “state ownership,” into the living philosophy of Marxism. It called for the parasitic bureaucratic class to be overthrown through a return to the promise of worker controlled structures—the councils of 1956—and elimination of all vestiges of parliamentarianism. The revolutionary watchword “All power to the Soviets” was thus once again on the program—this time in earnest.²²²

Kuroń's growing influence aside, there was not a worker, nor (powerful enough) student movement behind the *Open Letter*; although Poland indeed later had its own “events” in 1968, this was in part a behind-the-scenes provocation,²²³ one with devastating consequences for Polish Jews, who were scapegoated and purged from prominent positions

²²² While it also sought to incorporate some of the innovative socialist market reforms proposed by Revisionists like Brus, its “roadmap” (as opposed to its diagnostic first half), prompted eye-rolling or nervousness from other dissident intellectuals who later formed KOR in 1976 with Kuroń. The comments of KOR member (and its chronicler) Jan Józef Lipski (1926-1991) are revealing of how oppositionist intellectuals, wedded to as they were and about to break with an already moribund revisionism in 1964, were unable to conceive of non-authoritarian socialism. Though more left-wing than some of his peers, Lipski saw the Letter's “anarcho-syndicalis(m)... a kind of utopia, which seemed to me irrational and not very attractive. I don't like the idea of a utopia that would exclude me as a citizen.” Jan Józef Lipski, Video Interview, “Open Letter of Kuroń and Modzelewski,” *Web of Stories*, October, 1986, filmed by Marcel Łoziński and Jacek Petrycki. <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jj.lipski/85>

²²³ This is still a deeply contested area—though in English, perhaps *under*-contested. It is discussed in a bit more detail in subsequent chapters. The most thorough account is Checinki, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism*. See also Polish historian Dariusz Stola, “Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968,” *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 175-201.

by the hundreds.²²⁴ Yet the *Open Letter*'s call in its very untimeliness resounded in far-reaching ways. The document had not only urged the radicalization of Polish youth and workers, and demanded real intransigence from opposition intellectuals, it signaled a newly, if unpredictably transnational character to the coming radicalization throughout Europe in the 1960s and beyond. Two years after it was written the manifesto was translated into French, through the efforts of the influential expatriate literary journal *Kultura*,²²⁵ in Paris, where it had a not-insignificant influence on the emerging student movement.²²⁶

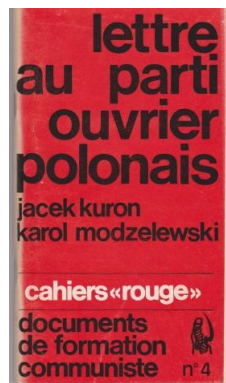


Fig. 2: Kuroń and Modzelewski's "Open Letter"

In the UK it was published in pamphlet form alongside a milder Revisionist response by the son of a Party member, Antoni Zambrowski, and introduced by Polish expatriate and

²²⁴ This included Poland's greatest film historian, and head of the Łódź Film School, Jerzy Toeplitz, as well as the most powerful post-war film industry player, director Aleksander Ford, and Jerzy Bossak, arguably the most prominent post-war documentarist.

²²⁵ For an account of the incredible reach of this journal, an organ of revisionist and literary thought founded by Jerzy Giedroyc and with Juliusz Mieroszewski as its chief political commentator, see (though only the abstract is in English) Lubor Jílek, "L'observatoire Du Mensuel *Kultura*, Entre Londres Et Maisons-Laffitte" (*Kultura* as an Observatory between London and Maisons-Laffitte) *Relations Internationales* 148, no. 4 (2011).

²²⁶ Polish historian Jerzy Eisler explains the connection between Kuroń's radicalized students like Michnik who called themselves the Commandos (*Komandosi*) and French anarchists, as well as the Trotskyist organization *Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire*, through which they were able to publish the "Open Letter" in French. "In May 1968 this became the most widely circulated text among the students occupying the Sorbonne. During the trial of student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, when the judge kept demanding his name, he finally answered "Kuroń-Modzelewski," which indicated an important ideological tie." Eisler, "March 1968 in Poland," in *1968: The World Transformed*, Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 244.

Trotsky biographer Isaac Deutscher.²²⁷ Meanwhile the neighboring Czechoslovaks, always watching Polish developments closely, saw it as a fount of resistance in the lead-up to the emancipatory festival atmosphere that was the Prague Spring of 1968,²²⁸ where the essay was likewise translated and distributed widely.²²⁹ Indeed, Polish youth would reciprocate during their March demonstrations, with the cry, “All Poland is waiting for its Dubcek!”²³⁰ The answer to this demand, of course, would be answered in Poland much later in the form, we might say in retrospect, of another revolutionary slogan—something like “we are the change we are looking for!”—the 10 million-strong Solidarity movement.

The combination of revolutionary critique and affective exuberance—one thinks again of the *Open Letter* being rapturously declaimed before an enthusiastic crowd—is the true legacy of the “Long 1968,” a praxis of refusal felt, for a time, by ruling classes across the globe.²³¹ The impact of its aesthetics, of renewed interest as we have reached its 50th anniversary, may yet be the best window onto the political and cultural modality of changes rung across Europe and beyond, including its influence upon deceptively political Eastern European filmmaking like that of Królikiewicz. Noit Banai, in her essay articulating the

²²⁷ Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, et al., *Revolutionary Marxist Students in Poland Speak Out, 1964-1968*. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972).

²²⁸ For a source on approaches, past and (near) present, to the Prague Spring, and its repression by the Warsaw Pact tanks, see Maud Bracke’s 2003 overview, which argues that despite archival gains, “A critical and sophisticated understanding of the *political project* [**my emphasis**] of the Prague Spring is to some extent lacking.” (p. 376). Bracke chides researchers for shying away from making political value judgments alongside their historical research despite implicitly doing just that, with some frequency. But with time and a new intellectual climate this has already begun to produce more adventurous monographs in Czech, English, etc (the work of Paulina Bren, for one, as we’ve already mentioned). Maud Bracke, “The 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis: Reconsidering Its History and Politics,” *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 3 (2003): 373-383.

²²⁹ During the Prague Spring of 1968, “(A) mimeographed translation of Kuroń and Modzelewski’s *Open Letter to the Party* was put out by the Student Union in Prague.” Jacques Rupnik, “Dissent in Poland, 1968-77: the end of Revisionism and the rebirth of the Civil Society,” in *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, Rudolf L. Tokes, ed. (London; Oxford: The Macmillan Press ; St Antony's College, 1979), 105 (note 19)

²³⁰ (Alexander Dubcek was the reformist head of state during the Prague Spring, later removed by the Soviet Union as the Warsaw Pact tanks arrived to quell the movement). See Michnik, “The New Evolutionism,” 38.

²³¹ We should emphasize the unifying nature of global opposition to the escalation, also in 1964, of US imperial war in Vietnam, for which the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) was a precursor.

nature of the “sensorial” as a site of subjectivization in the 1960s and beyond, shows how this new aesthetic-cum-political regime was evoked in a classic photograph of the time of the most prominent French student leader, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. In the image Cohn-Bendit is insolently grinning, a bit like Alfred P. Neuman, at a faceless policemen, who, his back to the camera, towers over “Dany le Rouge.” The photograph is notable, she points out, not simply for the evocative display of the “David and Goliath” power dynamic, but in how “the real communicative force of (Cohn-Bendit’s) mischievous smirk” becomes an affective, “collective souvenir,” conveying “the protests’ shared libidinal investment in the struggle, the privileging of spontaneity as a form of political dissent, and perhaps a small dose of irony.”²³²

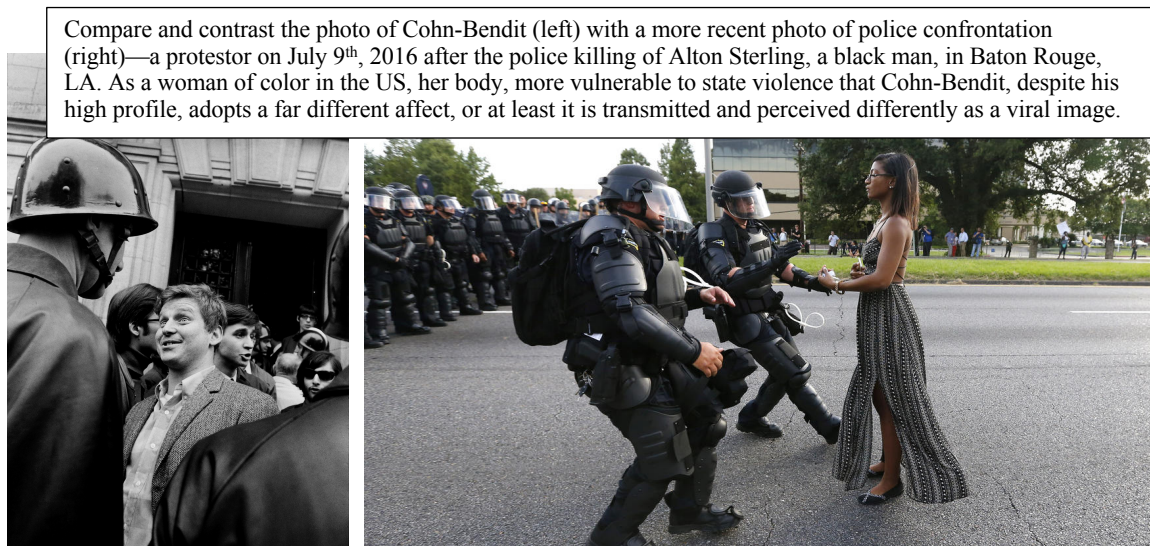


Fig. 3a,b: Confrontations, 1968 and 2016.

Banai’s description aptly conveys this sense of spontaneity in communication, but it is also important to map out something of the longer period of gestation that enabled such moments. The historical roots of the politicized art-making of 1968 are arguably traceable to

²³² Noit Banai, “Sensorial Techniques of the Self: From the Jouissance of May ‘68 to the Economy of the Delay,” in *The Long 1968*, Sherman, ed., 299.

1957 with the founding of the Situationist International. Its manifesto, written by Guy Debord, can give us some insight into how cinema would later respond to the collective aesthetic practices that began to transform subject-objects relations in the 1960s.²³³

We have to define new desires in relation to present possibilities. In the thick of the battle between the present society and the forces that are going to destroy it, we have to find the first elements of a more advanced construction of the environment and new conditions of behavior — both as experiences in themselves and as material for propaganda²³⁴...Our central idea is the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality. We must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to and which radically transform it.²³⁵

There is an acute understanding here of the relation of spatial and affective categories—one might even call it a cinematic sensibility.²³⁶ The concerted focus on “concrete construction” and its material nature also indicates the importance of form for any political aesthetics.

While form and the nature of the medium was certainly important to the *Nouvelle Vague* and other “new waves” shortly to burst onto the scene, including, in the Polish case, what Ewa Mazierska has described as Poland’s “soft avant-garde,”²³⁷ these were largely individualistic—certainly this is the case with the French New Wave, for better or worse the standard bearer—with their well-known emphasis on the personal expression of the author.

To tease this point out further, in identifying how that which is affective can include the experience of collectivity—that is, the radically communicative—let us consider another

²³³ It is also worth noting that Debord’s highly Lukascian (i.e., alienation-focused) critique of the image-based alteration of social relations under capitalism, *The Society of the Spectacle*, was written a decade later, in 1967.

²³⁴ Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007), 36.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²³⁶ For his part, sometime avant-garde filmmaker Debord had an abiding hatred of the *Nouvelle Vague*.

²³⁷ We will touch on this more below. Ewa Mazierska, “Retelling Polish History through the “Soft Avant-Garde” Films of the 1960s, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*. 53, 1, (2012): 22-39.

phenomenon common to revolutionary historical moments: collective writing. In Paris, 1968, an exemplary figure providing a window here is the writer Maurice Blanchot, due to his nearly unrivalled devotion, for a notable intellectual,²³⁸ to the medium of the streets, as it were. Blanchot's passion for the struggle of the students and workers saw him disappear, authorially speaking, into the collective itself, producing not simply considered, sympathetic reflections or theory but a great deal of copy—for the Student-Writers Action Committee.²³⁹ These ephemeral texts, meant to accompany a movement as well as *movement* itself—its rhythms—were not “attributed to any author and, on the contrary, tend in their very mode of writing to appeal to the demand for anonymity, the loss of name, the refusal of individuality, as though in this whole period the experience of a community.”²⁴⁰ In a remembrance, Blanchot tries to get at the heart of the use-value of this exuberant speech that accompanied the students and workers engaged in struggle.

May 68. Let me also reproduce, barely modified, another anonymous text from the Committee, which sought to describe some of the features of this movement which was neither individual nor collective, but brought closer the other's distance in his or her proximity, making each of us a companion to whoever or whatever did not accompany us: ‘Revolution...destroying all without there being anything destructive in this, destroying, rather than the past, the very present in which revolution was taking place, and not seeking to provide a future, extremely indifferent to any possible future (its success or failure), as if the time it sought to open up was already beyond these standard determinations.’²⁴¹

²³⁸ Another well-known writer and friend of Blanchot's alongside him on the barricades—a comrade for over a decade, fighting also against French colonialism in Algeria—was Marguerite Duras. The theorist/filmmaker, indeed, developed similar intellectual currents to Blanchot, especially as regards the thinking of friendship and community. See the second half, “The Community of Lovers,” of his book on community, which is in part a dialogue with Duras's work. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 29-47.

²³⁹ See the collection of Blanchot's post-war political writings, including an introduction that features remembrances by friends like Derrida, who was taken aback by the strength of Blanchot's commitment. Maurice Blanchot, *Political Writings, 1953-1993*, Trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

²⁴⁰ Maurice Blanchot, “Do Not Forget,” trans. Leslie Hill, in “Responses and Interventions,” *Paragraph* 30, no. 3 (2007): 34.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 34-35.

Blanchot presents 1968 as non-discriminate *fraternité* that did not have a specific project (“provide a future”); it takes shape as a negativizing, radical force of community,²⁴² across space, *dans la rue*, through a near suspension of time, an elastic, proleptic temporality for the “long 1968” and its attendant struggles. Moreover, it is perhaps with us still, however paved over, de-fanged and otherwise appropriated by consumer capitalism.

The key category here that undergirds this new collective political aesthetics, analogous to the decentralized political struggle of the New Left, is that of *participant*. To return again to Banai with a quote that situates the multi-faceted nature of this word:

Intertwined with the intensified economic rehabilitation of the postwar years and the democratization of consumer culture, the subversion of the artwork and author went hand in hand with the formulation of the receiver as an active, generative “participant.” Central to this historical transformation was the emergence of the *field of the sensible* as a sociopolitical, aesthetic, and bodily layer in which the public and private realms intermingled and were given new articulations.²⁴³

At the level of participation, then, how was this “sociopolitical, aesthetic, and bodily layer in which the public and private realms intermingled” indeed “given new articulations”? Claire Bishop, whose bracing, Rancière-inspired work has helped force the art world to self-critique in the ostensibly political realm of participatory art,²⁴⁴ reminds us that such art can go about its business two ways, generally speaking.

²⁴² Blanchot, “The Negative Community,” in *The Unavowable Community*, 1-28. This construction, quoting Bataille (“The community of those who have no community,”) is his response to Jean-Luc Nancy’s essay “The Inoperative Community,” itself a response to Blanchot’s own prior work and on-and-off engagement with Bataille’s thinking of community and communication. See also Nancy’s concept of “literary communism” in his book *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

²⁴³ Banai, “Sensorial Techniques of the Self,” 294-295.

²⁴⁴ Her essay “The Social Turn” and subsequent work caused a mini-scandal with its attack on practitioners of Nicholas Bourriard’s curator-driven “relational aesthetics,” then in its ascendancy, which Bishop saw as positing participation in art (beyond the museum) as a good act *in of itself* without due consideration of 1) the social relations it was inhabiting beyond the immediate “happening” 2) a regard for impact of the aesthetic and visual aspect central to any artwork 3) the credulous way in which such work submits itself to the neoliberal regime by substituting art for actual politics. Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn : Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum International*. 44, 6 (2006): 178-183.

(P)articipatory art aims to restore and realize a communal, collective space of shared social engagement. But this is achieved in different ways: either through constructivist gestures of social impact, which refute the injustice of the world by proposing an alternative, or through a nihilist redoubling of alienation, which negates the world's injustice and illogicality on its own terms. In both instances, the work seeks to forge a collective, co-authoring, participatory social body, but one does this affirmatively (through utopian realization), *the other indirectly (through the negation of negation)* [my emphasis].²⁴⁵

The first, affirmative variety of participatory art had historically attempted to colonize a new sphere of communication through “gestures of social impact”—albeit to sometimes divergent political ends.²⁴⁶ However, in the Central and Eastern European region the wounds of Stalinism, including the instrumentalization and/or censorship of artists under the Zhdanov Doctrine, were still fresh; this was not an attractive option. If, for these reasons, “the political” was, for experimental artists generally, something of a dirty word,²⁴⁷ it is worth mentioning that some Polish avant-gardists with film/media training took the optimism of the 1970s Gierek era at face value, in their rather impressive attempts at affirmative participatory art and happenings, toward a “New Socialist Realism.”²⁴⁸ This represents quite an exception, however; while “Soc Art,” as it was also known, had some ties

²⁴⁵ Bishop's example of this “negation of negation” is the work of the pre-Surrealist Dadaists in Paris, which, many years before 1968, “took to the streets,” in hijacking existing social forms (later theorized by Debord as *detournement*), that they saw as stultifying and alienating, like the guided tour and the trial. Bishop, “Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?” in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. Nato Thompson, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 36-37.

²⁴⁶ E.g., the communism of Constructivism, but also, eventually, the fascism of Marinetti and Italian Futurism.

²⁴⁷ However, this tendency among “gallery artists” has been somewhat overstated by Western observers like Bishop, when she says that participatory art in the region was, as opposed to the “agitational” intent of the West, “a means of experiencing a more authentic (because individual and self-organized) mode of collective experience...to operate, instead, on an existential plane: making assertions of individual freedom, even in the slightest or most silent of forms.” Ironically, the latter half of this quote was truer of the increasingly ossified ‘dissident position,’ to which she opposes avant-garde art. Bishop's chapter on “The Social under Socialism,” in her, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso Books, 2012), 161. For the definitive word on the complexity and vastness of the output of the avant-garde generally under post-war Soviet-type societies, see Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*.

²⁴⁸ Also known as “Soc Art,” their art practice, including multimedia events and happenings, attempted to deal with the wounds of the present in order to pave the way to the (socialist) future. See Łukasz Ronduda's fascinating essay “Soc Art, or The Attempt at Revitalizing Avant-Garde Strategies in the Polish Art of the 1970s,” in *1,2,3 -- Avant-Gardes: Film, Art between Experiment and Archive*, Łukasz Ronduda and Floria Zeyfang, eds. (Berlin; New York; Warsaw: Sternberg; Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007), 40-57.

to the radical film avant-garde (and more about them to follow), the latter generally favored the redoubling of alienation, the second variety, i.e., the “negation of negation,” as did Królikiewicz, with the added historical specificity to which he as a trained documentarist was prone. The desire to forge a “collective, co-authoring, participatory social body” would thus take place through a celluloid negation that was creatively destructive with respect to an alienated social reality. This was certainly the starting point for a young filmmaker like Królikiewicz, filled with ideas about exactly how mainstream cinema was complicit in damaged social relations before he ever picked up a camera.

1.3. Grzegorz Królikiewicz and Theory

1.3.1. Early film experiments and theorizations

Initially trained as a lawyer, Grzegorz Królikiewicz nevertheless began theorizing about cinema prior to his admission to the Łódź Film School, whose directorial track he entered in 1967. In his first student films he enters into oblique dialogues with earlier Polish films, as well as with surrealist cinema, itself a precursor to the Situationism praised by Debord in the manifesto quoted above and very much part of the inheritance of 1968.²⁴⁹ In so doing, Królikiewicz also began carving out the somewhat idiosyncratic formal territory he would inhabit. His earliest student short, *Wjście* (Exit, 1965), feels somewhat shorn of context when compared to his later work. If its title possibly references Sartre’s play *No Exit*, its subject matter surely refers to the other pole of French existentialism, Albert Camus. A

²⁴⁹ Mirosław Przyłipiak sees Królikiewicz’s cinema as borrowing the language and address of surrealism—this being almost wholly unique, as he sees it, in Polish narrative cinema, as opposed to magical realism—as a kind of meta-discourse, in order to critique it. Przyłipiak, ““We Are Ruled by Imagination, not Matter”: Surrealism in films of Grzegorz Królikiewicz,” (Paper presented at “Surrealism in Polish Cinema” symposium, Yale University, February 17-18, 2012).

transparent meditation on the plight of Sisyphus, it is equally a daring experiment at putting his theorization of “film space outside the frame (*przestrzeń filmowa poza kadrem*),” about which more to follow, into effect. The director chose a friend who was struggling with alcoholism to portray an abject, possibly deranged man. In the opening moments this character appears to be literally cast off from society—that is, directly into a landfill. After the man unsuccessfully attempts to reach the summit of this hill of waste, before tumbling back down again, the camera dollies back slightly, framing him through an apparent grate or cage. He notices it, and slowly walks towards it/us. The man is unable to escape his situation, and we experience his pain and suffering in close-up.



In these final moments of the film, the camera then rearticulates the space via the cut and a reverse angle, showing again the man's apparent entrapment. It then pulls back to reveal that the grate itself is quite small, a shift that suggests instead a kind of self-imprisonment, as well as stating the capacity of the film camera to reveal this condition.

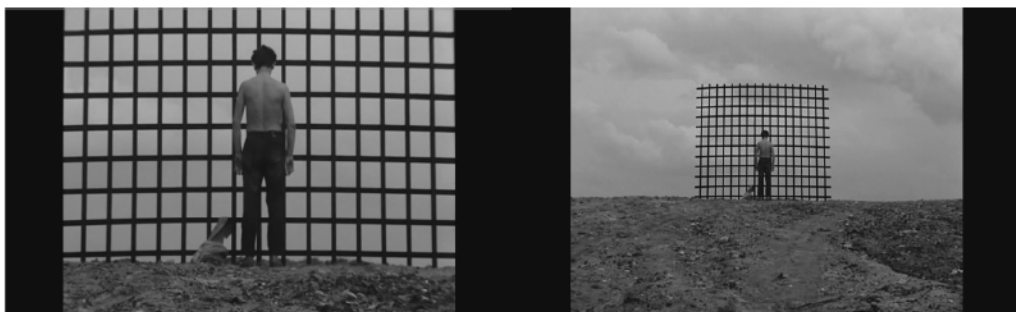


Fig. 4a-c: *Exit* (1965)

While the early experiment may appear as, as we will see, as uncharacteristically didactic, what is impressive is that, unlike with the “Kieslowskian” strain of realist documentaries,²⁵⁰ Królikiewicz here points out how the camera (and with it the *fabula*, the raw material of narrative), in *revealing*, also shows itself to be *always already* reinforcing this condition.²⁵¹ This is to say that placing one’s finger on the situation does nothing to alleviate the problem—it simply gives us the (false) resolution typical of narrative and its closure. *Exit* therefore acts as a kind of gauntlet thrown down: Królikiewicz’s entire *oeuvre* will be a fierce, long-term attempt to subvert, not avoid or transcend, this entrapment by film narrative, through the key categories of form and spectatorship. Polish critics would, until perhaps somewhat recently,²⁵² charge him with repeating himself, but this would seem to be to miss the point of his cinema, in not taking it on its own terms—as radical aesthetic research with no intent of forming a whole.

If *Exit* sets itself a problem—the problem—to be solved, Królikiewicz’s next student film, importantly indicates an affinity with the *countercinema* of Jean-Luc Godard and Straub-Huillet, as theorized, with Russian avant-garde antecedents, by Peter Wollen.²⁵³ This is to say, it is a cinema that consciously, relentlessly opposes itself to dominant narrative cinema through structures of formal innovation. Unlike countercinema, Królikiewicz does not wish to *replace* dominant cinema; his critique is *immanent*, though this would only become clearer in

²⁵⁰ This was the adjective used in the Polish press to describe realist documentary of the time, after its undisputed leader; however, in subsequent chapters I show how Kiesłowski’s own documentaries were somewhat more ambivalent on the question. See a recent, well-regarded study in Polish on the style of documentary he became known, Mikołaj Jazdon *Dokumenty Kiesłowskiego* (Poznań 2002).

²⁵¹ In the next chapter we explore in part how Kiesłowski’s move to feature filmmaking is an acknowledgement of this failure of representation in cinematic narrative art.

²⁵² Królikiewicz has recently been influential for a new generation of gallery artists turned film directors (an unusual path for Polish cinema), who call their work “Cinema-Art” or “Cine-Art,” admiring Królikiewicz’s willingness to approach narrative problems in extra-cinematic ways (as we will see). See Andrzej Jachimczyk, “Polish Cinema Art: The Search for Content,” *Millennium Film Journal* No. 66 (2017): 28-37

²⁵³ See Peter Wollen, “Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d’Est*” and also “The Two Avant-gardes,” in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-strategies* (London: Verso and NLB, 1982), 79-104.

later, mature documentaries and narrative features. *Każdemu to, czego mu wcale nie trzeba...* (Everyone Gets What He Doesn't Need, 1966) on the other hand is a wildly unpredictable, reflexive dialogue with and about cinema, punctuated by surrealist montage. Indeed, it directly references the cinematic collaborations of *Luis Buñuel* and Salvador Dalí, with a nearly subliminal insert of the white of a pried-open eye as Królikiewicz's enigmatic voiceover "introduces" what we are seeing. It begins in playfully reflexive mode: the first half of its eleven-minute running time almost plays as a parody, though arguably one with a purpose, of the framing conceit of Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*, with a member of his Królikiewicz's being-filmed student film crew, the sui generis cult film director and fellow renegade documentarist Marek Piwowski (*Rejs*, *The Cruise*, 1970), running around being shouted at ("Marek, get out of the frame!"), seemingly lazy and indifferent where Vertov's cameraman brother Mikhail Kaufman was industrious. Meanwhile, in voiceover, we hear the words of the filmmaker, a rare moment in Królikiewicz's work in which his theoretical voice from the page is literally heard in a film, as though an essay film has intruded upon the proceedings. Eventually, the crew stop their work and attend a film screening. What initially appears to be dailies of their own footage is suddenly, disturbingly transformed into a kind of thriller film about the rebellion of concentration camp prisoners. Ultimately, the bodies of swimmers and models, seen earlier, are juxtaposed with those of death camp victims. In however provocative and scattershot a manner, Królikiewicz seems to be dramatizing what he sees as ideologically-riven "authoritarian" mise-en-scene (*inscenizacja apodyktyczna*), or that which cannot liberate, even if its content in this case—the rebellion of the prisoners in the film within a film—wants quite otherwise, so to speak. In other words, the film manifests a

typically avant-garde position against “realism.”²⁵⁴ In sum, John MacKay’s words about Vertov’s radically reflexive major works are germane here, when he says such cinema “radically undermine(s) the self-evidence of 'life as it is' by showing our relation to that life to be wholly dependent on the work of representation.”²⁵⁵

In these formal and political impulses, these student documentaries are also the precursor of an early 1970s radical documentary trend in Poland known as *Dokument kreacyjny* (Creative Documentary). This loose grouping of film directors who were trained in documentary at the National Film School broke with their past and current colleagues along radically aesthetic lines—that is, not merely political ones, as with the new “realists” like Krzysztof Kiesłowski, discussed next chapter. While the trend is perhaps best known for the formally adventurous work of Wojciech Wiszniewski, maximalist yet Brechtian historical deconstructions of Polish and PZPR symbols and traditions, its significant element to creative documentary may have been its virtuosic cameramen, Bogdan Dziworski and Zbigniew Rybczyński. It was Królikiewicz who seemed to best take advantage, in his later features, of their audacious, even outrageous handheld camerawork. The sudden close-ups, odd camera riggings, a lack of fidelity in the use of foley in conjunction with his actors’ stylizations, and a busy, discombobulated mise-en-scene—it all evinced a fascination with the startling²⁵⁶ and unfinished aspects of *affect*, eschewing an aesthetic of perfection or

²⁵⁴ Przyłipiak, analyzing Królikiewicz’s rejection of “traditional” film language, observes, “the processes of schematization bear with them the risk of surrender which signifies a separation of oneself from the world. It occurs when we give up the constant annexation of the bits and pieces torn away from us by the stream of life and enclose ourselves for good in well known stereotypes, once and for all considered permanent. Then we have “immediacy”; an intercourse with the world which does not threaten us and does not pose any riddles. Then, in art, we have realism.” That is, in this sort of realism, film narration overtakes and reduces us to a body in a seat being acted upon. Quoted in Łukasz Ronduda, “Excerpts from the History of the Polish New Wave,” 32.

²⁵⁵ John MacKay, “A Revolution in Film (Dziga Vertov),” *Artforum* (April, 2011), 203.

²⁵⁶ “Surprise” (*Niespodzianka*), was a key category in Królikiewicz’s theory of filmmaking, in order to break the ideological automatism, as he saw it, inherent in the apparatus, helping the viewer find “new symmetries.”

narrative closure.²⁵⁷ This demonstrable lack of interest in beauty and what usually passes for seriousness in cinematic art corresponded well with 1968—cinema, again, as research into “explosive communication,” with the viewer participating as co-conspirator as it were.

1.3.2. What is participatory cinema? Aesthetic Communities and Negative Labour

At this point, however, we need to be far clearer about what we are talking about when we talk about the *participatory* in cinema. Participation, naturally, is part of the definition of cinema, as a collectively made artistic medium, yet this labour is overwhelmingly effaced behind the finished product. There are interesting examples from the late Sixties in which cinema has intervened in politics at the level of production, so to speak, as in the Medvedkin Group in France, which used a collective filmmaking approach during an autoworkers’ strike as a utopian model for a different set of social relations and indeed mode of production,²⁵⁸ or, alternatively, cinema as forging a participatory link with the audience outside their role as spectators.²⁵⁹ But the debates regarding participation within the history of cinema have typically taken place at the level of spectatorship and *textual meaning*, even in radical circles.²⁶⁰

Grzegorz Królikiewicz, *Off Czyli Hipnoza Kina* (Off, or: The Hypnosis of Cinema), (Warszawa; Łódź; Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury; Łódzki Dom Kultury, 1992), 24.

²⁵⁷ In this he is like Chilean director Raul Ruiz, whose work, also full of “surprise,” is also comical on a formal level, and whose narratives are never finished—a virtue the viewer carries within herself when the lights go up.

²⁵⁸ See Trevor Stark’s fascinating account of this time, ““Cinema in the Hands of the People”: Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film,” *October* 139 (2012): 117-150.

²⁵⁹ For example, the use of actual townspeople as actors in a film about a small town, as in Milos Forman’s uproarious allegory, and film in Czechoslovakia, *Firemen’s Ball*. At a special screening for the town itself, the Party tried to turn this fact against its creators by rallying the townspeople against what it claimed was a gross distortion of themselves, but, fascinatingly, this backfired—on screen, the people (mis)recognized themselves as something *different*; they loved it. Anecdote from Milos Forman interview, *Firemen’s Ball* (1968), (Criterion Collection, 2002), DVD.

²⁶⁰ This is a problematic, moreover, that this dissertation, which concerns itself with the negativizing power of *narrative* cinema, seeks to interrogate, not overcome—in any case, for reasons discussed in the introduction in terms of a cultural and class divide, there was not a Polish version of the Medvedkin Group that sought, *contra*-Godard, to put “cinema in the hands of the people.” Although, on a smaller scale, the utopian artist Pawel Kwiek, with a foot in both the fine arts academy and the film world, did some interesting things in the 1970s in collaborating with village youths using cameras and film to document their lives, in order to “give a voice to those who so far had been denied it.” See Ronduda, “Soc Art,” 52.

These have included, notably, filmmakers-theorists like Królikiewicz, from Dziga Vertov in his dream to use cinema's objective-mechanical "Kino Eye" and montage to fashion a revolutionary new way of looking and being in time and space, to radical film feminism of the 1970's use of psychoanalysis to illuminate the (male) subject-position of the spectator, and their subsequent attempt at demolishing traditional cinematic pleasure and building something new in its place.

It is not our intention to wrench the focus away from spectatorship, or re-invent the wheel so to say. Even so, none of the above, though influential for Królikiewicz as we saw with his second short film especially, quite articulate what he and others like him were up to after 1968 if we speak about the *participation* of the viewer—a less loaded word, perhaps, than the sense of passivity we get with *spectator*. If possible we would like to avoid reproducing the divide between the discursive formations of intellectual opposition to global hegemony and the actual struggle on the ground—that is, an “us and them” mentality anathema to the radical, all-embracing community of Solidarity. Perhaps even more to the point is the fact that the political efficacy of art is far less straightforward than the energies required by political organizing against state oppression. To this end it is worth examining Jacques Rancière's attempts to disentangle the spectator/spectacle antinomy. Rancière argues that Debord's focus on the spectacle, or at least the focus of its critique in the domain of visual culture,²⁶¹ has found us reinforcing hierarchies and inequalities in art and beyond through our assumption that a spectator is inherently passive and something to be “activated”;²⁶² he

²⁶¹ Claire Bishop, noting we are prone to misuse of the Debordian conception of “spectacle,” reminds us that “spectacle doesn't describe the characteristics of a work of art or architecture, but is the definition of social relations under capitalism (as well as totalitarian regimes),” Bishop, “Participation and Spectacle,” 36.

²⁶² See also this concerted focus in film manifestos of the time, e.g., Peter Gidal: “The mental activation of the viewer is necessary for the procedure of the film's existence. Each film is not only structural but also structuring.” “Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film,” Gidal, *Flare Out: Aesthetics, 1966-2016* (London: The Visible Press, 2016), 41.

sees us as effectively policing here, above and beyond the instance of cinema, as it were.²⁶³

But rather than countering the politicized aims of subjection-position theory with the cognitive-based models of universal “comprehension”²⁶⁴ of meaning, or the related realm of the presumed universality of affect within spectatorship,²⁶⁵ Rancière tries to locate politics within textuality differently, by unpacking what he sees as the *rupture of our experience*, explained below, that he says film as an artwork produces.²⁶⁶

His most interesting articulation of that which occurs through our experience of art is the “aesthetic community” produced by the artwork that wishes to achieve socialization and participation. In keeping with the spatial-oriented spirit of 1968 in the streets as outlined by Blanchot,²⁶⁷ and what that might have to do with cinema, the aesthetic community produces its effects through the tension between separation and togetherness that is part of our experience of any artwork, which results in a productive rupture seemingly temporal in nature.

The paradoxical relation between the ‘apart’ and the ‘together’ is also a paradoxical relation between the present and the future. The art work is the people to come and it is the monument of its expectation, the monument of its absence. The artistic ‘dissensual community’ has a double body: it is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself: creating a new community between human beings, a new political people. And it is the anticipated reality of that people. The tension between ‘being apart’ and ‘being together’ is tied up with another tension between

²⁶³ His initial argument on this matter concerned education. See Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991).

²⁶⁴ See, David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). See also the classic call (and polemic against politicized film theory) for this “middle-level” research, Bordwell and Noël Carroll, *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

²⁶⁵ I am speaking here of the type advocated by someone like Carl Platinga, in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

²⁶⁶ Rancière states his justification mostly plainly here: “Film, Video art, photography, installation, etc. rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such they may open new passages toward new forms of political subjectivization. But none of them can avoid the aesthetic cut that separates the outcomes from the intentions and forbids any straight way toward an ‘other side’ of the words and the images.” Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art,” *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, No. 1 (Summer 2008): 15.

²⁶⁷ And as theorized, most significantly, by Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: The One-volume Edition* (London: Verso, 2014).

two statuses of artistic practice: as a means for producing an effect, and as the reality of that effect.²⁶⁸

At the same time, speaking of the ambiguity of the mediation of art, he points out

...the collapse of the nature that sustained the coincidence between the law of composition of the representation and the law of its ethical efficiency. What is broken is the continuity between the thought and its signs on the bodies, between the performance of the living bodies and its effect on other bodies. Aesthetics first means that collapse; it first means the rupture of the harmony that allowed the correspondence between the texture of the work and its efficiency.²⁶⁹

It is here that this rupture, the “collapse,” can be productive, and the aesthetic community—a community of sense²⁷⁰—can be generated, in a way that may unwork social relations, predetermined roles and regimes of domination under capitalism. As an experience of the notion of the rupture of “the thought and its signs on the bodies, between the performance of the living bodies and its effect on other bodies,” Rancière proceeds to describe an aesthetic experience. Quoting from a revolutionary workers’ newspaper in the hotbed of 1848 France, a worker imagines himself experiencing the space of his workplace differently. Significantly for Rancière, this is not a journalist; it is the worker himself, writing in the third person:

Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room, so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out onto a garden or commands a view of picturesque horizon, he stops his arms and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighbouring residences.

Rancière:

This is what the aesthetic rupture produced: the appropriation of the place of work and exploitation as the place of a free gaze. It is not a matter of illusion. It is a matter of shaping for oneself a new body and a new sensorium.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community,” 5.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷⁰ He is also engaging here with Deleuze and Guattari, in books like *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (New York: Portmanteau Press, 1992) and *What Is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 2003).

²⁷¹ Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community,” 10.

It is just these redistributions of the sensible, in a way, as I have begun to indicate, that captures altered bodies within the space of the film frame and without, and how this is constructed through what I am calling the negative labour of the spectator—for, again, this work is negativizing and destructive of meaning, not affirmative—that I see as the politics of the mature work of Grzegorz Królikiewicz, described below. If the experiments of the more militantly materialist avant-garde cinema sought to seize the sphere of communication through the shock produced by the cut, by montage, for Królikiewicz, a trained documentarist, spatial orientation within the film frame and how we experience this space as viewers was paramount.²⁷² The aesthetic community he “gathers” is intended as liberation from the double bind of a desultory social reality and its reinforcement by the ‘zero-style’ narrative, to use a concept popular in filmic discourse in Poland,²⁷³ typical of dominant cinema. This project, at once historically specific and vehemently *untimely*, in Królikiewicz’s desire to work, indeed, not “agitationally” but for, as he says, “the future.”²⁷⁴

To make what I hope is a germane analogy in illuminating this last point, and to situate Królikiewicz within the post-1968 landscape, consider: If the two Marxists Kuroń and Modzelewski had effectively asked, like Chernyshevsky had done in Russia a century earlier, the impudent utopian question intended as a *break* with current thinking, *What is to be done?* then Królikiewicz was in a way their sneering, antagonistic Dostoyevsky, even though

²⁷² It should be noted though that non-narrative interest in social space was a noted feature of Polish avant-garde films, especially for Jozef Robakowski of the Workshop of the Film Form. See his *Rynek* (Market Square), 1970, 4'20". 35 mm

²⁷³ It is derived from Mirosław Przyłipiak’s influential book of the same name: *Kino stylu zerowego*/Zero Style (1994, sec. edition 2016).

²⁷⁴ This was the title of an interview he gave with two well-known Polish film critics. Piotr Kletowski and Piotr Marecki, eds. *Królikiewicz. Pracyę dla przyszłości* [Królikiewicz: I work for the future; A book-length interview]. (Krakow: Korporacja Ha!Art, 2001).

“equally messianic and anti-bourgeois.”²⁷⁵ If both these (libertarian) Marxists and the seemingly misanthropic filmmaker stood apart from the Party as well as revisionist thinking, the work of Królikiewicz left some baffled with its potentially dubious politics, as suggested by a seeming obsession—and perhaps an identification—with the underbelly of life, with the *lumpenproletariat*. Like the Russian novelist whose *Crime and Punishment* was to provide a model for his feature debut (*Na Wylot*, 1972), Królikiewicz’s films decried the inhuman degradation of living in a predatory, acquisitive world, but equally they assaulted (cinematic) rationalism and human attempts at progress.²⁷⁶ If there is any kind of “salvation” to be found in Królikiewicz, it is not transcendental, as for the Christian Dostoevsky, but in relation to, however modestly, what work can be accomplished together with the viewer. This work may have no wish as it were to be instrumentalized in the present reality *outside* of cinema, and yet there is, as we will further explore, *within* these films a radically negative call to community—an “ask” of the viewer to progressively organize the interplay of affect and space in/out of the film frame.

1.3.3. Film, Form and “The Search for Content”

Like Królikiewicz, the Warsaw-based avant-gardists of the Workshop of the Film Form (*Warształ Formy Filmowej*) shared an interest—as well as an inventive cameraman, the (later) digital cinema pioneer Zbig Rybczyński²⁷⁷—in investigations into the untapped formal possibilities of cinema vis-à-vis social reality. Film Form were, it is usually acknowledged,

²⁷⁵ This sentiment is taken from Darko Suvin’s excellent discussion of the two sides of Russian utopian writing of the 19th century (to which we return in the final chapter). See Suvin, “Preface,” in *Other Worlds, Other Seas: Science Fiction Stories From Socialist Countries* (New York: Random House, 1970), xvi.

²⁷⁶ This is arguably the main thrust of Królikiewicz’s second feature *Wieczne Pretensje* (Endless Grievances, 1974). It is also central to the thinking of community by Bataille/Blanchot disciple Jean-Luc Nancy.

²⁷⁷ Królikiewicz was himself an occasional guest participant within Film Form.

“the most important group in Central and Eastern Europe to work with structural film.”²⁷⁸

Yet despite their work’s more-than-surface similarity to the structural/materialist film taking place in the Anglosphere (and elsewhere, e.g., the Viennese Actionists), the practitioners of Film Form were graduates of film school, not art school (as with Peter Gidal, Malcolm le Grice, etc. in the UK). Nor were their films roughly hewn and made on the cheap—they were quite impressively shot on 35mm film, and at the same time, playful.²⁷⁹ Most significant perhaps is the fact that they concerned themselves less with the *material* of film and its apparatus, and more with the *relations* depicted and produced by it—but significantly *human* relations, not merely formal ones, i.e., sound and image. A Film Form work could deconstruct the sound of a scream, but it was still a scream—an expression of human pain.

Further, and most germane to Królikiewicz’s work, Film Form’s leading figure and theorist, Józef Robakowski took a similar interest into spatial possibilities within the film frame. Perhaps ironically, Robakowski’s work here was perhaps even more sociological at times than that of Królikiewicz, as in the former’s *Market Square* (Rynek, 1970), a study in extreme long shot, and time lapse, of Poles converging and dispersing from the center of town.²⁸⁰ Ultimately, what Film Form shared with Królikiewicz, besides the spirit of filmmaking as research—indeed, the Film Form participants saw their audiovisual experiments as potentially being taken up by future film professionals²⁸¹—was a commitment to the participatory aspect of art; or, the experience of the viewer in relation to

²⁷⁸ See Łukasz Ronduda’s solid introduction to their work within a small volume that accompanied an exhibition and DVD release. *The Workshop of the Film Form, 1970-1977: Early Film Work From Poland*. (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix; Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 2004), 27-67.

²⁷⁹ See Stephen Ball, David Curtis, "Poles and Angles: A Late-Night E-mail Conversation About Polish and English Structural Film," in *1, 2, 3 Avant-Gardes*, 59.

²⁸⁰ It should also be noted that my colleague Eliza Rose is writing her dissertation on precisely this aspect of Robakowski, et al. It should prove illuminating.

²⁸¹ Łukasz Ronduda, *The Workshop of the Film Form*, 37.

form—but also, as implied with the scream, content.

This “search for content,” in the influential phrase of early 20th-century film theorist Karol Irzykowski, is something of the final piece of the puzzle that produced an artist like Królikiewicz. It comes from an older, equally rich native tradition: Polish Constructivism. Kamila Kuc, in her overview of the history of the Polish film avant-garde, offers this straightforward definition of Constructivism in general in its heyday in the 1920s, “(A) constructivist work of art was primarily concerned with the properties of materials and their existence within three-dimensional space.”²⁸² Here is a definition compatible with the work of Królikiewicz as well as Film Form—if, that is, one were to add the human subject. In the late 1920s, as the political winds shifted, and Europe grew cognizant of the threat of the right-wing threat, Hans Richter and others called on European artists to abandon the determined Constructivist focus on the rigor of form, and to adopt political themes that concerned humanity.²⁸³ It was Polish film artists, taking up this call, who managed to forge a kind of hybrid, long after Constructivism elsewhere ceased to be relevant and Stalinism was fully ascendant, by the early 1930s.²⁸⁴ This Polish variant had already been articulated by

²⁸² Kamila Kuc, *Visions of Avant-Garde Film: Polish Cinematic Experiments from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 114.

²⁸³ “The first Avant-Garde Film conference in 1929 at La Sarraz, Switzerland (Richter, Ruttmann and Eisenstein were present), had as its topic ‘the art of the cinema, its social and aesthetic purposes’. A year later in its final session in Brussels, the congress unmistakably announced a shift of purpose in its statement that the avant-garde as a purely aesthetic movement had passed its climax, and was on the way to concentrating on the social and political film, mainly in documentary form. In his unpublished book *The Struggle for the Film* (1937), Richter argued that political tensions ‘made poetry no longer suitable’. The age demanded ‘the documented fact’, he concluded, under ‘the social imperative.’” A.L. Rees, “The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde: Warsaw -- Paris -- London,” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film, 1916-1989*, Kamila Kuc, Michael O’Pray, eds. (London; New York: Wallflower Press Book, 2014), 53-54.

²⁸⁴ More specifically, Boris Groys pinpoints the Spring of 1932 as when Stalin and his clique began to systematically reshape culture in the Soviet Union, by decree of the Central Committee that disbanded prior artist groups and began organizing “creative workers” along its own lines. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism : Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, Trans. Charles Rougle (London; New York: Verso, 2011), 33.

Irzykowski. The Polish avant-garde's "search for content,"²⁸⁵ should hold fast to 'sociological' while also militating along formal lines, to "reawaken" the image in art.²⁸⁶

Irzykowski claimed that the cinema can bring together 'the visible and the invisible': the perceived and the imagined object. Cinema has this capacity because it can manipulate and alter images, restructuring them through montage editing.²⁸⁷

The phenomenological antinomy Irzykowski raises here finds something of an echo in Grzegorz Królikiewicz's own theoretical writings, with his signal idea of film space outside the frame.

Once I make a decision regarding the placement of the camera, I lose the possibility of registering the space outside of the frame. But I do not lose the possibility of interpreting that space... The movement of the viewer's thoughts, imagining the space outside of the frame must enjoy the same privileges as the movement within the frame.²⁸⁸

The 'search for content' in these films takes place always through space—both the "visible and invisible" of frame/off-frame, but equally how they interact through the "movement of the viewer's thoughts. To this end, and to clear away the ideological rigidity always threatened by the automatic way in which moving images seem to appear in the psyche,²⁸⁹ Królikiewicz wants his camera to be almost scientific, or, more correctly, "anthropological,"

²⁸⁵ Irzykowski is also known for many things, including an experimental novel that some have said anticipates Joyce and others, but his critical chef d'oeuvre is *Dziesiąta muza: Zagadnienia estetyczne kina* (The Tenth Muse: Aesthetic Problems of the Cinema, 1924).

²⁸⁶ Though it is beyond our scope here, this was realized in the 1930s by the Polish married couple known as the Themersons. Like Królikiewicz, to whom in their radical documentaries they have been compared, they continue to inspire a new generation of artists coming from the gallery world. Rees, "The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde."

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 51.

²⁸⁸ Królikiewicz quoted in Ronduda, "Excerpts from the History of the Polish New Wave," 33.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 31.

as he has said in interviews.²⁹⁰ This also seems to be a word that indicates the marriage of (documentary) content and form mentioned above.

1.4. Królikiewicz in the 1970s: Radical Communication

It is this “anthropological” in Królikiewicz, the moment of radical communication, that crystallizes the participation of the viewer. As theorized by Georges Bataille, in the same time period as the pivot made by Richter and Constructivism, human experience is only possible insofar as it is shared by someone else²⁹¹; existence *is* nascent communication, and it begins (or not) as soon as one risks exposure to the world. Community is then defined as that which resists completion. Process, not a product, it therefore does not occur between an already demarcated “sender” and “receiver,” for this would indicate they precede communication—they do not.²⁹² This is itself a foundational element to the explosive communication of 1968—a desire to smash the *form* by which one is oppressed.

If one could grasp this dialectic of radical communication—that which is at once collective and differentiated, yet not individual—it would be possible to fight not only fascism, but what Bataille saw as the atomization of society relentlessly pursued under capitalist liberal democracy. How, though, do we communicate, do we reach each other, enclosed unto ourselves as “individuals”? Only, he says, through a radical and transgressive act of communication. Given this, communication—radical community—is not the Enlightenment realm of rational thought, leading to the political sterility (or worse) of the bourgeois public sphere, but that which concedes our immanent relation to death and the

²⁹⁰ For example, in an interview with the weekly magazine *Kino* (Film) 32 (1971), translated by a popular website that promotes Polish art, “Grzegorz Królikiewicz, Biography,” Accessed Saturday, March 18, 2017. <https://culture.pl/en/artist/grzegorz-krolikiewicz>

²⁹¹ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 21-22.

²⁹² Andrew J. Mitchell, and Jason Kemp Winfree, “Editors’ Introduction: Community and Communication,” in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille : Community and Communication* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 9.

void.²⁹³ True community, perhaps impossible, is that which opens us and continually exposes our lack to the other. It to be found in affect and sensation: in laughter and tears, excrement and eroticism.²⁹⁴

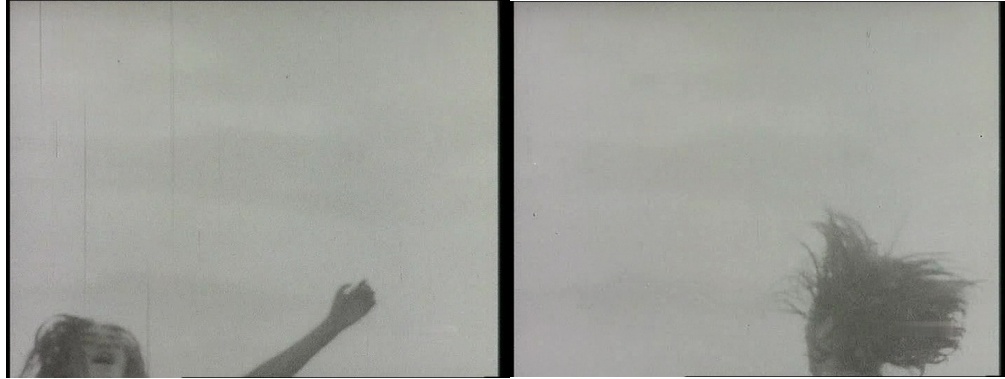
1.4.1. Documentary. Community and the Film Frame

Blanchot saw the aptness of his friend's theoretical approach confirmed in 1968—in the streets of Paris, and, indeed, Poznań and Prague. In one of Królikiewicz's first great works on film, he manages to convey the enticing and disturbing ambivalence of this promise of radical communication in an documentary short made after 1970, but just prior to his feature debut. *Don't Cry* (*Nie Placz*, 1972) captures the tradition of young conscripts gathering at a train station to depart for compulsory military service, bidding farewell to their loved ones, and indeed to their youth. What we witness is something almost carnivalesque: a ritual in the service of something conservative is transformed into ecstatic communication.

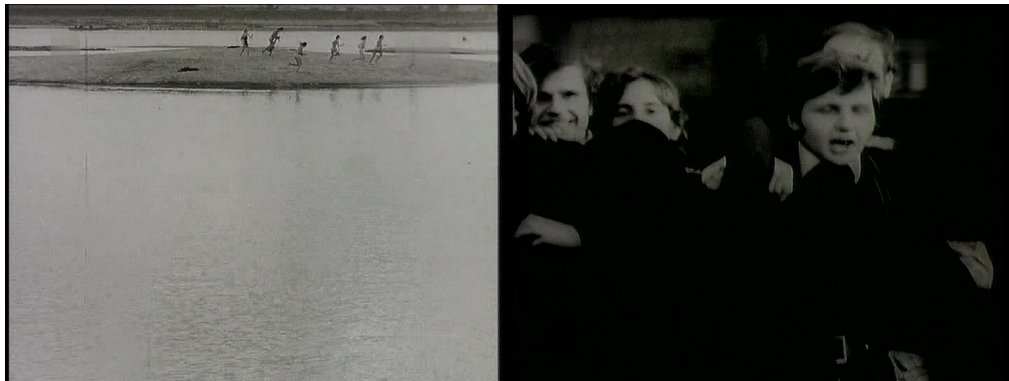
Królikiewicz begins with negative space and a dance with the viewer, ecstatic bodies with the long hair of the summer of love jumping into and out of the film frame.

²⁹³ Roberto Esposito, across several books and articles, has discussed both community, or *communitas*, as well as the Hobbes-associated concept of *immunitas*, or the attempt to beat back this void by creating an even greater void in its place, which would deny human communication in favor of separation through law. On the particular point above see his essay "Community and Nihilism," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 24-36.

²⁹⁴ See Alphonso Lingis's interesting essay "Contact and Communication," in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*, 119-132.



The transition cut, to the train station, moves these bodies as it were from the freedom of what we realize now is a beach to a darker shot with a sheen that makes them younger than they are.



The celebration outside the train is suddenly in full swing, bodies moving in and out of the frame as the young men grasp each other as if for dear life, and kiss passionately.



As chaotic as the scene it, it becomes more oppressive as they begin loading into the train itself, and are trapped behind windows, frames with the frame, separated from their loved ones. Finally, all falls quiet, as the trains prepare to depart.

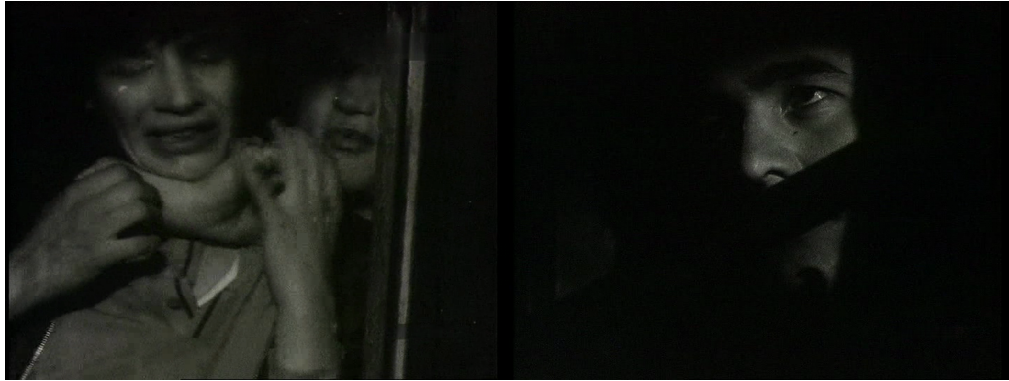


Fig. 5a-h: *Don't Cry* (1972)

Here, Królikiewicz shows us not only the ecstasy and promise of radical communication, but illustrates its opposite: the second part of the danger, for Bataille, of false, reified community, community-as-thing—that is, fascism. In *Don't Cry*, through the violent agent of military service, we may see the danger of this communicative play of bodies (and minds) hardening—the threat of the communication of lack becoming a single, undifferentiated *communion*—in Królikiewicz, murder and violence—or of folding into utter atomization and solitude. It is to be this labour of the audience in parsing these bodies, and these looks, an ordering of conflict and chaos, that is to liberate us from this horror.

1.4.2. The Peasant Trilogy features: the hidden wound

What, then, is the precise nature of this horror, for Królikiewicz? It is not mere 'existence'; I have said above how his cinema is grounded in certain realities of Polish life in the 1970s, an era in which the new Polish premier Edward Gierek, facing a ruinous economy and embittered public sentiment, encouraged consumption (and foreign credits) and a

populist optimism in which his own background as a decorated miner. For a time, he succeeded in paving over the deep wounds of Polish life. These included not only 1968 but the event that propelled his regime to power, the insurrections on the Baltic Coast that led to the massacre of dozens of workers in Gdynia in 1970 (about which more in subsequent chapters). Królikiewicz's focus is not on the struggle against state violence or "totalitarianism"—nor portraying the latter allegorically, as with the Cinema of Moral Concern—but on the results of the wounds themselves, some of which, economic in nature, were hidden in plain sight. As a trained documentarist, however unorthodox, Królikiewicz sought to portray the resulting intellectual and moral confusion he felt around him, beginning with those barely clinging on to their humanity—giving the lie to the resurgence of good times through Gierek's temporary stabilization of the economic and optimistic attitude.

The ecstatic play of *Don't Cry* finds an echo in the opening minutes of Królikiewicz's first feature, *Through and Through* (Na Wylot, 1972), made later that same year, in a raucous party scene at an apartment, in which the inebriated and horny carouse noisily and somewhat desperately in and out of the frame, and the line between play and violence appears fluid. Here, Bataillean radical communication meets the aesthetic community of Rancière—what is this space, and for whom? These characters are deeply alienated, and at the moment, from their bodies as well. Dialectically speaking, we are not being asked in this scene to place them in a recognizable narrative framework; at the same time, nor is it *mere alienation*—the product of abstract "totalitarianism," as in the increasingly human-rights focused discourse told us in the late 1970s. Królikiewicz has, rather, an acceptance of how the viewer's mind does not stop, so to speak, at the edge of the frame.

Authoritarian staging explains everything more aggressively and—in its own belief—to the absolute end. Democratic staging employs a relativism of accents, it leaves things unsaid, it begs to guess...These missing bits, called to life through the mechanism of stylistic figures, are created in my imagination...(and) should serve for finding deeper meanings.²⁹⁵

Moreover, this is not a subjective sequence (i.e., from the standpoint of a drunken haze), for we have no character to identify with, to whom to ascribe the disorientation. It instead folds back onto us, as a viewer, to begin to sort it out.

However, unlike in most of his short films there is, finally, a particular protagonist within this scene, we come to realize—a *last man*, to steal the title from another film that opens in a similar manner (*Der Letzte Mann*, dir. F.W. Murnau, 1924), not revealing its protagonist immediately and letting the non-identifying viewer float freely, as it were. In *Through and Through* the protagonist, so deeply abject that he communicates principally non-verbally, is portrayed by the hang-dog, round-faced, Franciszek Trzeciak, a compelling actor who nevertheless makes audience identification difficult—importantly so. He also looks something like his director (seen here together).²⁹⁶



Fig. 6: Director and Actor— Królikiewicz and Trzeciak

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Ronduda, “Excerpts,” 33-34.

²⁹⁶ Trzeciak, “looks,” says Królikiewicz, “typical to great numbers of people who have come to the cities from the countryside, of those laughed-at, irregular, angular facial features.” Quoted in Przyłipiak, “**We Are Ruled by Imagination, not Matter,**” though the original text is the interview with Piotr Marecki and Piotr Kletowski, *Królikiewicz. Pracyje dla przyszłości*, 91.

The three films in which Trzeciak stars constitute a trilogy: *Through and Through* is based on an infamous, pre-war murder case committed against an elderly couple by a dejected, jobless married couple in Poland; *Endless Grievances* (Wieczne Pretensje, 1975) is about a dissolute drifter who becomes the put-upon factotum for a brutish Party man; and finally *The Dancing Hawk* (Tańczący jastrząb, 1977) adapts a socialist realist novel about the rise to societal prominence and power of a young peasant, and depicts his fall from grace, twisting one of the founding myths of Soviet-type societies inside-out and giving it a *Citizen Kane*-like flashback structure, whose “Rosebud” is a hen (*kura*).



Fig. 7: “Rosebud” in *Dancing Hawk* (1977)

It is this final film of the trilogy that provides the key to the whole, the repressed “content” for which Królikiewicz has in effect searched. For it retroactively suggests that the *lumpen* character Trzeciak plays—unable to find work, drifting into criminality—in the first two, largely urban-set films is explicitly, as in *Dancing Hawk*, a displaced peasant.²⁹⁷ Such is the ‘public secret’ of Poland in the 20th-century, that in its rapid industrialization and proletarianization during the war²⁹⁸ and after, millions of Polish peasants, alienated from an

²⁹⁷ My thanks to Mirosław Przyłipiak for encouraging me to pursue this line, which he touches on himself in Przyłipiak, “We Are Ruled by Imagination, not Matter.”

²⁹⁸ They were moved in particular to Lower Silesia, annexed by Nazi Germany. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2012), 19. Also worth reading on this point is Jan T. Gross, “Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of

urban mercantile class for centuries,²⁹⁹ were uprooted and relocated to cities. In part this was due to plain and simple need—the capital of Warsaw was almost totally destroyed—but it was also the strategy of a Party that had taken its personnel and authority from elites in Moscow, not the working class power (or their leaders) at home in Poland, despite popular enthusiasm.

The (PZPR) communists staked their political success on urban youth and the great wave of peasant from the countryside... By 1950, newcomers made up more than half of Poland's adult urban population... (T)he state hoped that such workers, along with young workers of any background who came to the factory three or four years after the war, would overwhelm the old labour community and its contentious habits.³⁰⁰

At the same time, the idea was not to forge a *new* working class shaped by the peasantry as its base; rather, the competition of pitting two groups (and generations, in large part) against each other would eventually produce allies: “It was not the 'working class' and the 'peasant class'...who supported stalinism, but the people who advanced out of these groups.”³⁰¹

It is this type of a character played by Trzeciak in *Dancing Hawk*—a poor farmer’s son who moves to the city and rises inexorably to a position of power, i.e., a typical socialist realist narrative that historical reality did not bear out.³⁰² Although the Trzeciak character finds “success” by abandoning his peasant wife and taking up with the daughter of an elite,

Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 1 (Mar 1989), 198–214.

²⁹⁹ As we indicated in the introduction, the deep divisions at the heart of Polish life lay not only in class divisions, but even *racialized ones*, with the ancient Polish nobility (the *szlachta*) of the belief that their legal privileges arose from being derived from a separate, Asiatic people. For worthwhile studies on Polish peasantry in the 19th century and their eventual proletarianization, see Stauter-Halsted, Keely, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914*. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004) and Stefan Kieniewicz, *Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

³⁰⁰ Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 291-292.

³⁰¹ Hanna Swida-Ziemba, quoted in Kenney, 292.

³⁰² “What the party was promoting, however, was not (social) advance but the *idea* of advance...In reality, relatively few workers advanced off the shop floor.” Kenney, 294.

he encounters resentment, and suffers psychically for betraying his past—at several moments he is acutely conscious of his life as a performance.



Fig. 8: Doubling in *Dancing Hawk* (1977)

Trzeciak's acting and behavior are not markedly different from the previous films, in which his characters resemble nothing so much as itinerant workers, such as those who indeed traveled all over Poland in the 1970s to earn their way and were often scapegoated during periods of labour unrest.³⁰³ Such persons gave the lie to economic improvement trumpeted by the Gierek administration in the first half of the 1970s, including a liberalized housing policy that largely benefited an intelligentsia (and of course the Party *nomenklatura*) already in urban settings. In addition, migration, and with it, mobility, had once again slowed from the country to the city.³⁰⁴ Taking these characters together, then, they represent the hidden wound of a phantom body politic become flesh.

Królikiewicz's experiments with form and viewer participation in creating meaning should now take on a deeper register. Trzeciak's *lumpen*/peasant character in *Through and Through*, despised and ridiculed by the suave urban professionals who consistently refuse him work (as a draughtsman), often hovers just on the edge of the frame, or obscured by

³⁰³ Such a person—an itinerant ex-con, trying to survive on the outside—is the protagonist of Kieślowski's *Calm* (*Spokoj*, 1976), discussed briefly next chapter.

³⁰⁴ Ewa Mazierska, *Poland Daily: Economy, Work, Consumption and Social Class in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 94.

darkness, a mockery of the “rule of thirds” since no one thing could fill in the space of the park and the hill behind him.



Fig. 9a,b: *Na Wylot* (1972)—The Edge of the Frame

At the same time, there is a paradoxically strange freshness afforded by the unpredictability of a plot centered around a character who cannot seem to act, or change his situation. His idleness and uncertainty, couple with a feeling of documentary veracity in out-of-doors shooting—Królikiewicz also includes Trzeciak in interesting rituals that could have been part of a realist documentary, such as the ringing of a cathedral bell—pushes the viewer to consider the pro-filmic behind as it were this character, and its relation to his misery.

In a scene that feels like a fragment of the pastoral, something far from the city (though it is not), the man and his new bride, following near-tragedy, experience sexual fulfillment, and forget about their problems for a moment (while he remains comically half-clothed—an urban gentleman from the waist up).



Fig. 10a-d: *Na Wylot* (1972)—Bliss

This is a rare moment of freedom, to which the spectator herself contributes, in articulating the space, which alternates between the man in an extreme long shot and the woman in close-up, that seems to touch on Rancière’s worker wish to remake the space wherein they labour—enjoying its fruits for themselves.

However, the viewer is not encouraged to identify with the Trzeciak character, even when he is in the most pain. One of the most commented upon scenes in a Królikiewicz film is to be found in the provocative *Endless Grievances*, possibly his most complex film, in which the play of off-frame space extends its reach even deeper, through a labyrinthine mise-en-scene and a pronounced liminality of spaces (which continue to develop in *Dancing Hawk*, by degree).³⁰⁵ It is sometimes unclear as to the nature of the space we are experiencing, as

³⁰⁵ For a fascinating Lacanian reading of this scene, see Kuba Mikurda’s piece “Suprareality. An unfinished project” in *A Story of Sin : Surrealism in Polish Cinema = Dzieje Grzechu : Surrealizm W Kinie Polskim*, Kamila Wielebska and Kuba Mikurda, eds. (Krakow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010).

well as *how* Trzeciak is experiencing it—is it in the diegesis, in his mind, in “documentary” reality, or simply in our mind as viewer? As Królikiewicz himself puts it, recalling the earlier formulation of Rancière, “A room is neither a banality of interior design, nor an imaginary phantom. The geometry of this particular mass becomes saturated with the psychology of my being in it. To employ a metaphor: my day becomes saturated with my night, and my rationality with my imagination.”³⁰⁶

In one particular scene in *Endless Grievances*, Trzeciak has apparently been sleeping—perhaps with nowhere else to go—at his place of work, where he is tenuously employed as a factotum and lackey for a Party man. He rises, and awakens also to the pain of his situation and his apparent inability to change it; he is slowly building toward a meltdown. Meanwhile, the surrounding space itself has been created, by the artist Zbigniew Warpechowski (also a member of Film Form), as an *actual installation* in a gallery, in Wrocław. City residents were apparently encouraged by the filmmakers to come view the installation, from the windows outside, apparently unaware a film scene was shooting and that they themselves were to be filmed. These ‘spectators,’ no longer pro-filmic, as it were, watch wide-eyed as Trzeciak in character falls into despair and begins destroying parts of the installation, which consists largely of well-stocked small refrigerators. He begins throwing a tantrum and screaming, and our perspective shifts as Trzeciak varies his form of (angry) address, directing it toward different spaces.

³⁰⁶ Królikiewicz, quoted in Ronduda, “Excerpts,” 36.



Fig. 11a-h: *Wieczne Pretensje* (1976)

Mirosław Przyłipiak describes the scene thusly.

(T)he hero, who finds himself in this weird laboratory, is constantly being watched and socially assessed. After all, as Marecki aptly notes, “all of Poland is looking on”. The camera itself is also a kind of a window, putting the hero on public display. By addressing the camera, the hero addresses the film director as much as the viewer.

His words, as well as the subsequent egg-throwing at the window, with the people outside, signify a protest against the pressure of norms and social expectations.³⁰⁷

Przylipiak's piece is about Królikiewicz's dialogue with surrealism—what may or may not be surreal, as he says, “depending on the system in which it takes place.”³⁰⁸ Przylipiak—correctly, I think—finds no surrealist liberation in the film, given the dire straits in which the character—aged 32, the same age as People's Poland—finds himself, and so too the nation. But Królikiewicz's reservations here also reminds one of an infamous opponent of the Surrealists, Georges Bataille, who criticized what he saw as the “Icarian” tendency of “Surrealism” that seemed to wish to rise above and overcome oppression through art—and, thus “above,” authoritarian-like, running the risk of identifying with the oppressor.³⁰⁹ In this way, find Królikiewicz's suspicion here of hierarchical social norms a healthy one (i.e., not reactionary). By assembling his *democratic*—in this scene the word takes on a whole new level—mise-en-scene, he is asking the audience to clear away the darkness, so that something else may take its place. Our *negative labour* is thus able to mediate, amid the seeming chaos, at the level of form—not, that is, as an individual *style* that would separate the artist, as well as viewers, from their subject.

This affective, collective participation, or *radical communication*, is, we have shown, the “public secret” of 1968—a resurgent weapon against human alienation. It is to take place, of course, not only in the mind, but in some measure in daily life—to work, with Królikiewicz, for the future. In the next two chapters, we explore an approach to politics in cinema not

³⁰⁷ Przylipiak, “We Are Ruled by Imagination, not Matter,” 4.

³⁰⁸ Przylipiak is now dialogue here with Kuba Mikurka's piece, “Suprareality,” in *Story of Sin*, 62.

³⁰⁹ See in particular Bataille's essay attacking Breton, et al., and which laid out an alternative plan, i.e., “from below,” “The “Old Mole” and the Prefix Sur in the Words *Surhomme* and *Surrealist*,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927 – 1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 32-44. I return to this in detail in chapter five.

rooted in formal innovation, but in the patient accretion of documentary reality, as represented by the work of Krzysztof Kieślowski, who took the possibilities afforded by this style of filmmaking as far as they go. In exploring the limits of the revelatory impulse in cinema, he sought to forge a “partnership” with the viewer over and above that which was cinematically represented. In this he was not worlds away, as we will see, from the participatory, democratic aims of Królikiewicz.

Chapter 2

Kieślowski and Realism, Part One: Polish documentary and Partnership

Living in an undescribed world is hard.
You have to try it, to know what it feels
like. It's like having no identity. Your
problems and sufferings disappear, they
disintegrate. To put it more radically, you
feel completely cut off from other people.
You cannot refer to anything, because
nothing has been described and properly
named.³¹⁰

If we are ashamed of there being some type
of single thread that connects our life
through all those years, if we break that
thread, there will be a void left. And it will
turn out that all we have lived through until
now is worthless.³¹¹
- Krzysztof Kieślowski

In his voluminous study of the decade of Polish worker struggle that began in 1970 and culminated in the birth of the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) free trade union movement and the 1980 Gdańsk August Accords, American historian Lawrence Goodwyn quotes Thomas Jefferson approvingly: “A great deal of knowledge about the revolution is not on paper but only within ourselves.”³¹² The immediate objective of scholars like Goodwyn, writing

³¹⁰ These thoughts come from a documentary portrait of Kieślowski, made by his assistant director. *I'm So-So*, directed by Krzysztof Wierzbicki (Poland: 1995).

³¹¹ “A Normal Moment,” *Kino* 6 (1990): 19-22. Taken from an interview with the director's most trusted interlocutor, film journalist Tadeusz Sobolewski. *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, Renata Bernard, and Steven Woodward, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 80.

³¹² Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102. Goodwyn's aim was equally that of sociologist Roman Laba, whose work we especially discuss in the final two chapters, in his more succinct volume of the same year, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991). If I hesitate to cite Goodwyn's work with more frequency, relative to its insight, it is because many specific details have been challenged as an extrapolation /misinterpretation of archival sources and data by a non-Polish speaker. Nevertheless, given the vehemence of response, especially among North American and British academics, the nerve he touched is telling. The book, coming from an outsider whose specialty was US agrarian social movements, was a veritable kick in the pants for “Poland watchers,” called out by Goodwyn for their failure to dig deeper into what had been a superficial scholarly consideration, in Poland and the Anglosphere, of the gains and knowledge of Polish workers that led to the structures and tactics of Solidarity in 1980; instead, they subscribed to what Roman Laba calls the “elite thesis,” which understands intellectuals of the official opposition as responsible for Solidarity. In my opinion, the most generous treatment/overview of this “minor skirmish” comes from a review of another book that fills an equally large gap, which neither of the prior groups

against the current just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, was to topple the hegemonic, Western-inflected understanding of Solidarity as having been largely wrought by Warsaw-based intellectuals rather than through the hard-won, bloody praxis of the working classes of Poland. But already by the early 1970s, documentary filmmakers in Poland, led by Krzysztof Kieślowski (1941-1996), had sought to amplify the voices of the working and underclasses, showing their roles in this (revolutionary) process. This is perhaps surprising to those only familiar with the 1990s French-language co-productions that made Kieślowski an internationally-recognized auteur; whether loved or reviled,³¹³ these later films, seemingly focused on ethical or philosophical puzzles, featured protagonists who by and large³¹⁴ seemed disconnected from day-to-day material concerns.³¹⁵ What unifies these temporally-disparate periods in Kieślowski's career, including his Polish language features discussed next chapter, was the belief that cinema, understood/conceptualized by Polish documentarists as research into human communication, could bring out into the world a similar kind of knowledge of change "within ourselves," in Jefferson's words. These documentaries, embracing the open-endedness of short non-fiction in their treatments of subjects, invited the same openness from the viewer in connecting with this material. In this respect, it seems the revolution would, in fact, be televised, at least in terms of a record of

had treated—the role of women in the Solidarity movement. Padraic Kenney, "A Solidarity Still Unexamined," Review of Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Habsburg, 2007).

³¹³ For many US film critics, especially the followers of Pauline Kael, Kieślowski was something of a *bête noire* in the 1990s—their favored example of what they saw as narratively impenetrable, obtuse European art cinema, which is of course (somewhat) ironic given his documentary roots.

³¹⁴ An exception would be *White* (Blanc, 1994), in which a Polish national separated from his French spouse is down-and-out in Paris, but in his tonal shifts and sexism this is arguably the weakest of his later films.

³¹⁵ This trend towards characters who were artists or white-collar professionals who nevertheless do not seem, on screen anyway, to need to earn a living, in fact began in his *Dekalog* (1988), the television co-production which brought him international recognition in a feature film adaptation of one of its episodes, as *A Short Film About Killing* (1988).

the harder-to-see human changes taking place alongside political developments. Our inner lives would then no longer be hidden, but made accessible—like a public archive.

Kieślowski documentaries:

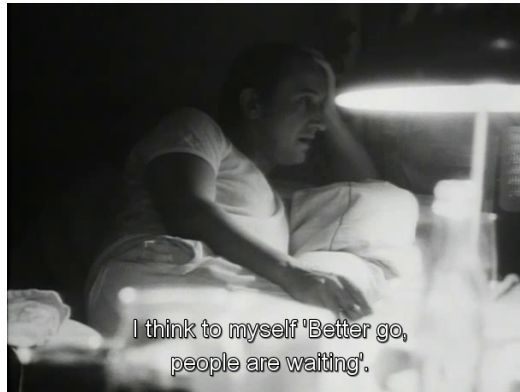


Fig. 12: *Hospital* (1976)



Fig. 13: *Overexposure* (1974)

It has been variously argued that Kieślowski’s subsequent turn to fiction filmmaking in the mid-1970s was motivated by a presumed loss of faith in the revelatory capacity of documentary,³¹⁶ by mere political pragmatism/expediency to get his message out to a greater number of people and escape the tampering of authorities,³¹⁷ or due to his accumulating doubts about the political efficacy of cinema as a whole.³¹⁸ We can find truths in all of these claims, so long as we historicize and understand the external political and socio-economic factors that prompted these artistic changes. What we are concerned with here, however, is a certain continuity but also dialectical movement within his artistic development. It is rooted, firstly, in this open-ended approach of the documentarist that

³¹⁶ See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI Pub., 2001).

³¹⁷ Tadeusz Lubelski argues his features were substitutes for subjects that were “inappropriate or impossible” as documentaries in People’s Poland. Lubelski, “From *Personnel* to *No End*: Kieślowski’s Political Feature Films,” in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski*, ed. Paul Coates (Townbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 54-76.

³¹⁸ This was the consensus among Polish critics of his 1990s work—his then-completed, so-called “metaphysical turn.” Marek Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 121.

refuses the tendency of film narrative towards (ideological) closure. This was resisted too, we recall, by Królikiewicz, who saw such a gesture as integral to the fight against “authoritarian” thought, in cinema as in life. But while Królikiewicz did so through the participatory construction of “democratic” film space in narrative, over and above naturalized “realism,” Kieślowski, as we see above in the illustrations and will explain below, sought to counter this reification of human life, with his peers, through cinema’s capacity to not just mirror, but interpenetrate and *reveal* social reality. It was nevertheless something he came to progressively call into question over time, as we see next chapter. Herein lies the relation between his early documentaries (roughly 1968-1975) and his subsequent Polish features (1976-1985),³¹⁹ with the latter especially undervalued in English language scholarship.

In this chapter and the next, then, we will be thinking along these lines with regard to this body of work during the tumultuous decade of political struggle in the 1970, as it relates to Kieślowski’s important role as a reluctant artistic leader within the larger community of ‘left’ oppositional Polish filmmaking. We have a sense from the previous chapter of what it meant to be an opposition intellectual in People’s Poland; within filmmaking circles, it was commonly understood as work within those film units that self-consciously produced films opposing the policy of the PZPR, as well as denoting individuals, such as avowedly anti-Party left liberals like Andrzej Wajda (himself happily influenced by the new documentarist generation). Framed broadly, then, how did this oppositional current, which drew in large part on Polish documentary traditions, respond to

³¹⁹ Given that the acclaimed ten-part TV-drama *Dekalog* (1988) was a co-production, and due also to the fact that Kieślowski and his co-scenarist Krzysztof Piesiewicz consciously aimed for a global audience, I do not include it here.

a decade that saw three major worker insurrections that were to grow into the free trade union and social movement of Solidarity in 1980? As I will show, these questions were shaped on the level of filmic narrative as well as within the constitution and manner of production of their working groups.³²⁰ For Kieślowski, it was a question of personality meets pragmatism: "As a documentarist, he worked in a group. This was not only because—as a natural leader—he felt good within a group, but also because it represented a more effective means of bringing pressure to bear on the institutions that funded filmmaking."³²¹

At issue here, and illuminated by the way in which this filmmaking functioned, is the notion of *community*. In the previous chapter I introduced the term *radical communication* to articulate a tendency within political aesthetics that drew on radical political traditions within the Polish nation as interpellated by the European "Long 1968." Here, and in subsequent chapters, I begin to speak more about what is radical, and perhaps also not, about *community*, and what it had to do with the workers' struggle that grew into the Solidarity movement. With the knowledge that community as a word is always at once somehow both concrete and abstract,³²² I mean to suggest the positively realized, but processual way in which local, industrial worker struggles in Poland—both celebrated (the Gdańsk and Szczecin shipyards) and overlooked (female textile workers in Łódź)—were transformed, through working class self-activity and grassroots communication strategies, into an all-inclusive, multi-enterprise, nationwide, and indeed extra-national mode of

³²⁰ The much-celebrated system of Polish (feature) film production units is discussed in detail next chapter.

³²¹ Namely, the Wytwornia Filmow Dokumentalnych (Documentary Film Studios) and Polish Television in Warsaw. See Lubelski, "From *Personnel* to *No End*," 57.

³²² Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 78.

experience, one opposed to the dominant political order yet refusing to harden into a classifiable stance.³²³

In order to understand the implications of this radical community in its particular structures of feeling as well as concrete structures of praxis, which I deal with at greater length in the final two chapters, I examine here the parallel filmmaking practice of Kieślowski and his documentarist comrades, who sought to place a finger on human and institutional relationships and their weaknesses through patient observation of life in People's Poland. Kieślowski's documentary diagnoses of political failures not only made him arguably the single most influential and prominent Polish filmmaking voice of the decade, but provided a negative grounding for understanding the *positive* radical community that was to come in Solidarity. Kieślowski was at once a searchingly optimistic, accomplished leader within Polish filmmaking as well as an inveterate, pessimistic outsider unable to find happiness. As we will see, Kieślowski and his colleagues began their first phase in earnest just as the insurrection on the Baltic Coast kicked off, in 1970. In what way, I ask, did they bear witness to the stirrings of radical community in their focus on the ideologically elided category of the *everyday*—an historical lack within Polish national cinema.³²⁴ What limitations were discovered in their attempts to (aesthetically) represent workers in a “workers’ state,” without an accompanying political praxis?³²⁵

³²³ In Giorgio Agamben's words, it was a *positive* community of belonging without “without any representable condition of belonging.” Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 86.

³²⁴ Again, see Iwona Kurz's paper contrasting this aspect of Polish cinema with Czechoslovakia's uncomplicated focus on working class/villager characters and “ordinariness.” Kurz, ““Our Folks”: Ordinary People in Czechoslovak and Polish Cinema around 1968,” in *Visegrad cinema: Points of Contact from the New Wave to the Present* (Prague 2010), 99-110.

³²⁵ I want to allude to the Third Cinema usage of “dialogism,” in which radical filmmaking consciously accompanies revolutionary praxis. (This has never been a feature of Polish cinema, from the Polish School to Kieślowskian documentary, etc.) See the writings especially of Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, who coined the term “Third Cinema,” and also Paul Willemen's Bakhtinian theorization of dialogism in their writings, as well as that of Teshome Gabriel and revolutionary Latin American film movements more broadly

Finally, a great virtue of this work, responding to the problem of representation, and the tendency of film narrative to fix or reify political subjects—again, evidence of a certain type of documentarist ethic³²⁶ that sought to tell “*with* reality,” as Kieślowski often put it, rather than tell “*about* reality”³²⁷—lies in how it sought to form a “partnership” with the viewer³²⁸ in assembling the meaning of the filmed material. In some measure this meant confronting ourselves as viewers with the repressed Other: “I want to have a conversation (with the films I make)...a conversation is about finding in someone else what you don't have in you.”³²⁹ As with Królikiewicz, what we are seeing here, differently, is the gathering together of fragmented, negative strands of experience, with the participation of the spectator—a pessimism of the senses, perhaps. In an interview, Kieślowski was once asked him if he agreed with Antonio Gramsci's famous formulation, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” The director said he absolutely did, and he would like to advance it a step further—towards feelings. As we shall see, this attitude towards the world in which he lived increasingly determined his aesthetic choices and overall approach, which edged more deeply into the senses, as it were, as his political pessimism increased.³³⁰ I suggested in the previous chapter there was (and is) a political importance to such pessimism. That is to say, the doubt it carries within itself of teleological progress, of the felt need to pull the

that began in the 1960s. Willemen, “The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections,” *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI Pub., 1994), 1-29.

³²⁶ Though it is not our main objective here, one might wish to oppose this approach to auteurism, or at least the kind of auteurism so often (re)constructed through film criticism/cinephilia, which raises up the individual bodies of work of predominantly white, male film directors. Kieślowski, for his part, often referred to himself as an artisan, rather than an artist, *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 19.

³²⁷ This idea was formulated as early as his MA thesis for the Directing Dept. of the Łódź Film School, on which the writings of Robert Drew and Richard Leacock were a strong influence. Kieślowski, “The Dramaturgy of the Real, 1968,” in *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 5.

³²⁸ Again, this was first formulated in his MA thesis; he continued to use this phrase, “partnership,” despite the ostensible significant changes in his filmmaking, as late as 1995, the year before his death. ““The Inner Life is the Only Thing That Interests Me”: An Interview with Krzysztof Kieślowski,” Paul Coates, *Lucid Dreams*, 162.

³²⁹ Sobolewski, *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 75.

³³⁰ “A Conversation with Kieślowski,” *Lucid Dreams*, 163.

emergency brake of history, to borrow Benjamin's attempt to reorient Marxism for the 20th century. The aesthetic form this pessimism takes—in Kieślowski, too—is a very much a legacy of 1968.

2.1. The Evolution of Polish Documentary

2.1.1. Polish Documentary after 1956: The Black Series to Karabas

Last chapter we discussed the exuberance and art-making of refusal of 1968, on the one hand, and the (productive) political failures, on the other with how they reflected a pronounced epistemic break in aesthetic and political thought. Here, we examine the *socioeconomic milieu* in Poland before 1968 and the subsequent, concrete political struggles faced by the Polish working classes after 1970, in relation to a Polish documentary cinema with deep roots in the sociological, for such was the inheritance of Kieślowski's documentarist generation, as we shall see. The story begins, unsurprisingly, just after 1956, with a sudden burst of creativity in Polish documentary film. Led by filmmakers with wartime experience like Jerzy Bossak,³³¹ documentary began to break away from older, socialist-realist forms at around the same time as The Polish School, which is to say after The Thaw.³³² These documentaries came to be known, after their fierce exposure of negative aspects and “phenomena” of People's Poland, as the *Black Series* (Czarna Seria).

³³¹ Bossak, a very influential figure at Łódź Film School, had forsaken socialist realism as his politics shifted, in favor of this newer style. See the detailed description of Bossak throughout the article by Jadwiga Glowka, "How Do Polish Documentary Filmmakers Maintain Their Identity?" in *Aspects of Audiovisual Popular Culture in Norway and Poland*, Wiesław Godzic, ed. (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 1999).

³³² This commonplace for the period of “de-Stalinization,” after Khrushchev's “secret speech” of 1956, actually originates from the title of a Russian novella by Ilya Ehrenburg, written in 1954.

Such films were “uncompromising in their wish to show the reality behind the official image of Polish people’s democracy.”³³³

These ambitious “sociological” films, full of accusatory, sometimes amusingly sarcastic voiceover, shakily moving camera and rough reenactments, now seem somewhat dated, despite their daring and withering irony. More recently, they even been accused of copying the formal aspects of state propaganda in their “authoritarian” approach toward workers and the vulnerable,³³⁴ even if in their formal wildness and content they railed against the official version of things. In this they bear traces of the well-meaning yet firmly “middle class” British GPO Film Unit (1933-1940) led by John Grierson, whose striking yet occasionally condescending documentaries about poverty and government neglect,³³⁵ were, along with Italian neo-realism, a powerful influence on the Black Series documentaries. At the same time, in their undeniable vigor, in the ironic twisting of the traditional documentary “voice of God,” and the unabashed liberties they took with staging actuality, they are often placed within the artistic realm of the antagonistic successor of Grierson’s tendency,³³⁶ the contemporaneous British Free Cinema.³³⁷

As the Gomulka regime became increasingly censorious on the cultural level at the end of the decade, an informal ban on Black Series screenings in 1959³³⁸ effectively ended the movement. The First Secretary’s further consolidation of power in the early 1960s

³³³ Bjorn Sorensen, “The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement,” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, Aniko Imre, ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 188.

³³⁴ See, for example, Ewa Mazierska, *Poland Daily: Economy, Work, Consumption and Social Class in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 138.

³³⁵ See, for example, *Housing Problems* (1935, dir. Arthur Elton and Edgard Anstey).

³³⁶ Though it is beyond our purview, for more on the class-character of the liberalism of Grierson’s filmmaking—how it functioned/shaped Grierson’s approach, particularly with respect to the “Third World,” see Lee Grieveson, *Cinema and the Wealth of Nations Media, Capital, and the Liberal World System* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 217-218.

³³⁷ See Sorensen, “The Polish Black Series.”

³³⁸ This is according to Kazimierz Karabasz. Sorensen, “The Polish Black Series,” 199, note 3.

coincided with a new focus on collective consumption in the so-called “little stabilization,”³³⁹ something that was to be raised to an all-out economic and propagandistic strategy by Gomulka’s successor in 1970, Edward Gierek. Already in the 1960s, however, the Polish economy found itself on somewhat shaky ground. The young Polish filmmaker Roman Polański, who himself had made a rather singular youthful foray into creative nonfiction, trenchantly diagnosed the problem as early as 1962, in his feature debut, *Knife in the Water* (Nóż w wodzie, 1962). Polański’s film mercilessly satirized, in the deceptive form of a tense Hitchcockian three-hander, the state socialist version of “keeping up with the Joneses.” As a film critic said at the time, it was the first “polemic with the cult of refrigerators and television sets.”³⁴⁰ While the main conflict is between an older and a younger man, it is not a merely an allegory of (young) freedom denied by (older) entrenched power, as one would often later see from the Cinema of Moral Anxiety. Crucially, and with deep cynicism, this apparent generational conflict is finally revealed to merely be a question of envy. The young interloper who is taken aboard the speedboat of the married couple is not a criminal or political rebel; he merely wishes to access the male bourgeois dream of a perfect wife and privileged social status, as the female spouse character herself points out to him. Polański anticipated, argues Kacper Poblocki, as we already alluded to at the beginning of last chapter, the coming fights over urban space in 1968, East to West, by projecting a general malaise over private accumulation in a seemingly socialist society. It plays out here within a boat on the open sea.

In the film, water—consumed not only for basic needs but also for leisure—becomes a powerful symbolic vehicle for articulating pent-up grievances. It played

³³⁹ This wry term comes from the poet and later opposition activist Tadeusz Różewicz, in his *The Witnesses, or Our Little Stabilization* (1962).

³⁴⁰ Maria Kornastowska, quoted in Kacper Poblocki, ““Knife in the Water”: The Struggle over Collective Consumption in Urbanizing Poland,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Postwar Eastern Europe*, Paulina Bren, Mary Neuberger, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

on the common yet difficult-to-translate Polish phrase, often evoked in public debates of the 1960s, *jestesmy narodem na dorobku*: “we are a nation of upstarts” or “as a nation we are still getting ourselves established materially.”³⁴¹

What gives the film its power, however, goes beyond symbolism. As in the later films of Królikiewicz, sense of space here is crucial. For viewers it is alternately claustrophobic in its confinement on the boat, and disorientingly, expansively alone on the water. The fight over *collective* consumption is thus experienced individually, through competition, as the post-war dream of collectively-achieved state socialism has atrophied into mere acquisitiveness amid a corrupt and unequal system. This lesson was well-learned by Kieślowski, et al., as we will see.

We saw last chapter how these conflicts were in part a result of the PZPR’s post-war wrangling, and displacement of the population, to build something like a constituency to give it support; however, such maneuvering was merely putting off the problems inherent in a top-down organization of society that would elide or run roughshod over persistent inequalities and difference in a broader world-system. One-time Solidarity labour activist and political economist Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski articulates the nature of the economic forces at work in People’s Poland since the rapid post-war industrialization ordered by the Party, and the growing discontent that was to boil over by 1970.

The bureaucracy was not a genuine dominant class but a parasitic stratum (Post 2000); its political domination was not rooted in a specific mode of production, yet it was able to extract surplus labour from the workers. The exploitation to which the workers were exposed was but a pale reflection of the dominant relations of production in the world capitalist system. The inability of the bureaucracy to develop new productive forces, or to “really subsume” those that it disposed of, generated strong tendencies toward the overexploitation of labour power (the extraction of absolute surplus labour) and desocialization of productive forces.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Pobłocki, 71.

³⁴² Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski, “Give us back our factories! Between resisting exploitation and the struggle for workers' power in Poland, 1944-1981,” in *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*, eds. Immanuel Ness, and Dario Azzellini (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 191-192.

The explanation for the coming fight was not the moral, heels-dug-in resistance to an all-pervasive “totalitarianism,” as Leszek Kolakowski had it,³⁴³ nor precisely explained in Vaclav Havel’s phrase “post-totalitarianism,” which is to say the authority still exuded by even a discredited ideology and the false consciousness of a people who had not found the courage to overcome it (i.e., Havel’s “living in truth”). Instead, it was largely economic, as state socialism had begun to dig its own grave³⁴⁴ on the industrial level, in the Marxian sense.

In the years leading up to 1968, Polish documentary film responded to these changes through a transformation of the overt political stridency of the Black Series. The latter had taken a particular intellectual position—including *as* intellectuals, meaning something of a class position, as we saw last chapter—and thus separated itself, as with Grierson, from the political/economic phenomena it depicted, as well as its subjects. To take but one example, one of the most infamous films, *Article Zero* (Paragraf Zero, 1957, dir. Włodzimierz Borowik) makes use of a hidden camera in its look at impoverished women who engage in prostitution, and in so doing does not exactly forge empathy with sex workers, needless to say.³⁴⁵ These new documentaries, on the contrary, sought something of a self-effacing intermingling with their material, as rooted in the tendencies inherent in documentary film to observe, enabled by lighter-weight equipment—in short, the “observational mode,” in Bill Nichols well-known formulation.³⁴⁶ Foremost among them

³⁴³Kolakowski, “In Stalin’s Countries: Theses on Hope and Despair,” trans. Kevin Devlin, *Kultura*, Vol. 5-6 (Paris, 1971).

³⁴⁴ It was of course political in a larger, *geopolitical* sense, in that the Capitalist “West” applied no small amount of pressure; its financial support was less altruistic than designed to erode the foundations of state socialism.

³⁴⁵ Mazierska argues this use of a hidden camera gives the lie its apparent progressive boldness in allowing its (taboo) subjects to speak, denying them agency and instead evincing moralistic “ideological conservatism.” The takeaway? Formal daring is not enough. *Poland Daily*, 140.

³⁴⁶ See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010). In this they were similar to the contemporaneous, so-called “fly-on-the-wall” Direct Cinema in the US pioneered by the Robert Drew Associates, but more modest perhaps, for better or worse, in their aspirations:

was Kazimierz Karabasz, whose early work was to usher in something of a golden age for an increasingly popular Polish documentary cinema.³⁴⁷ Karabasz's stark, patient approach began to flower in films coming at the tail end of the Black Series, like *People From An Empty Zone* (Ludzie z pustego obszaru, 1957) and *From Pomiśla...*(1958). These were hushed where earlier Black Series films were hectoring. Karabasz's work, as well as that of contemporaries like Krystyna Gryczelowska and Irena Kamińska, was a delicate balance of the sociological and the poetic, possessed of the ability to forge empathy with the films' often forlorn subjects. The overall, stated ethos tended towards letting the truth about the event, situation or subject slowly reveal itself.

2.1.2. Kieślowski and The Krakow Group: Documentary and Struggle

Such qualities were to prove deeply influential to Kieślowski's ambitious next generation of documentarists, for whom Karabasz especially served as both professor and mentor in the 1960s at the National Film School.³⁴⁸ It was Kieślowski's first student film *The Office* (Urząd, 1966), that took the first steps toward more formally heterogeneous rendering of the Karabasz style, and one edging closer once again to politics. A recently compiled dossier on this seemingly straightforward little film has rightly unearthed further complexities.³⁴⁹ Elżbieta Ostrowska points out that its dynamic use of montage, unusual

"I believe that, from time to time, we all need a moment to contemplate, reflect upon the world, and the reality surrounding us. A good, profound documentary allows us to experience such great instants, in which we notice something new in life, or in the world, something we had been blind to until someone pointed it out to us." – documentarist Krystyna Gryczelowska, "Observation and Synthesis' survey," *Cinema*, 1978, 22.

³⁴⁷ "The importance of documentary cinema in Poland is...evidenced by the annual Festival of Short Films in Kraków (Krakowski Festiwal Filmów Krótkometrażowych) inaugurated in 1961. Kazimierz Karabasz's celebrated documentary *Muzykanci* (Sunday Musicians, 1960) became its first winner." Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski*, 2.

³⁴⁸ *The Musicians* (*Muzykanci*, 1960), mentioned just above, a sly, tender look at an amateur orchestra whose members are tram drivers by day, was a particular touchstone and favorite among Kieślowski and his colleagues. *Ibid*, 4.

³⁴⁹ Special issue on Kieślowski's *The Office*, *Short Film Studies* 5, No. 1 (2015).

anyway for an ostensibly observational documentary film, equally frustrates spectator attempts to identify with the point of view (i.e., in eyeline matches) of the “characters” who are stymied by bureaucracy.³⁵⁰ This fragmentation complicates our ability to more clearly grasp, and allegorize, the “Kafkaesque” situation being depicted, in terms of narrativizing it. At the same time, Kiesłowski’s humane depiction of both workers and those clearly suffering—they directly acknowledge his not-so-hidden camera—makes it much more than a dry intellectual exercise. The somewhat unsettling ending repeats one of the office workers’ queries, now echoed in voiceover: “what have you been doing throughout your lifetime?”



Fig. 14a,b.: *The Office* (1966)

³⁵⁰ See Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Formless world and ‘paperless’ people,” in *The Office*, *Short Film Studies*, 53-56.

We as viewers threaten to disappear, along with the lives of those in line, into an endless archive of paperwork on the screen, which Ostrowska calls the “entropic vanishing point of such reproduction and representation.”³⁵¹ This gives us insight, early in his career, into something Kieślowski would further pursue a decade later as he began to make features, and is pointedly suggestive of his lifelong doubts about his chosen profession, as about the efficacy of realistic representation as a whole. At the same time, a documentary such as *Office*, in its negative, formally complex diagnosis, seeks a reversal of the situation articulated in the closing images. It seeks popular, human communication, not the reductive *legibility* of state records.³⁵² In this, it may very well suggest, dialectically speaking, another sort of space, for the viewer, in their real life experience.

While the deceptively layered *Office* initiated something of a grassroots call to arms at the Łódź film school,³⁵³ it was subsequent historical events that pushed Kieślowski and his like-minded colleagues to avow a more militant stance. In the few short years after 1968, First Secretary Gomułka, convinced of the need for drastic action to improve Poland’s standing in the world market, had ordered a rationalization of the economy, accompanied by enforced higher productivity and heavy-handed, industry-wide organizational meetings.³⁵⁴ The ineffectual mobilization of the managerial class to stop the bleeding as it were is startlingly captured in another influential Kieślowski short, *Factory* (Fabryka, 1970). In a subversion of “talking heads” using fly-on-the-wall (“They were busy and consumed by

³⁵¹ Ibid, 55.

³⁵² Legibility is a concept drawn from the work of political scientist James Scott, discussed in more detail in chapter four.

³⁵³ Anna Misiak, “Trapped by bureaucracy: Kieślowski, his masters and the making of *Urząd*,” in *The Office, Short Film Studies*, 21-25.

³⁵⁴ Michael H. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976-1980*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 39.

their own very important business...³⁵⁵”), it captures the bickering factory heads and foremen of a tractor plant in a district of Warsaw dealing with pronounced shortages and systemic incompetence. The men come across, in Kiesłowski’s typically humane rendering, as relatively sincere and well-meaning, yet bland and incapable, with the striking exception of one of their slightly porcine, energetic lead members, who spends much of the time pointing out errors and angrily grouching at a situation of system-wide failures in which they are supposed to nevertheless successfully produce.

For *Factory*’s cameraman, reminiscing, this “character” (*Fig 14b*) was a profound example of a director or audience surrogate, asking the difficult questions and ripping the proverbial band-aid off, while his colleagues look on, defeated and glassy-eyed. Polish audiences had heretofore not seen anything like it, a cinematic witness to internal confessions of industrial failure.³⁵⁶ At the same time, footage of the filmed meeting is intercut throughout with workers bending their backs to the work irrespective of managerial and economic impediment, needing to somehow complete their tasks despite shortages and the threat of factory closure.

³⁵⁵ *Krzysztof Kiesłowski: Interviews*, 18.

³⁵⁶ From a wide-ranging, illuminating video interview with Kiesłowski’s long-time, off and on cinematographer Jacek Petrycki, DVD supplement to *No End* (*Bez Konca*, 1985), Kino Video, 2004.



Fig. 15a-d: *Factory* (1970)

The final shot is of a finished product, of tractors leaving the factory—workers producing in spite of all this dysfunction. The film thus presciently suggested that something had to give in an arrangement in which industrial workers were giving their all and still not getting ahead. Despite the increasing societal atomization—“desocialization,” in Kowalewski’s Marxian phrase, as depicted in Królikiewicz—workers’ desire remained to fulfill the historic role promised by pre-war socialism. It was something that was to be deceptively accessible from within the official state institutions in which they toiled, hidden in plain sight—that is, through labour organizing.

Polish workers, in response to these changes and rumors of further changes by the Gomułka regime, did as they had done in 1956—they began to “develop new forms of

association and programs that were partly strategic, as they answered the need to oppose the stated, and also deeply aspirational, as they answered repressed desires for democratic association and social and economic equality.”³⁵⁷ Things came to a head on December 11th, 1970, as Poles everywhere began the long preparations for *Wigilia* (Christmas Eve), when the Party announced, with spectacular ill-timing, across the board food price increases. It was the last straw for workers and their families on the especially overworked, largely young, workforce along the Baltic Coast, as this move had followed an adjusted “piecework” (i.e., non-hourly waged) system, “the (combined) effect (of which)...was to reduce workers’ real wages by about 45%.”³⁵⁸ In the ensuing wave of strikes and nationwide protest, but especially on the coast in Gdańsk, Gdynia (known as, with the smaller spa town Sopot, the Tri-City, *Trójmiasto*) and, three days later, in Szczecin, workers, marching on the city, faced down repression by *milicja* (police) and the Polish military by striking back and out at Party municipal buildings, Party headquarters were sacked.³⁵⁹ The ensuing coordinated military reprisal was at its worst in Gdynia, where workers were massacred with machine-guns in a morning ambush at their workplace; across the coast several hundred were wounded or dead, conservatively estimated.³⁶⁰

Most significant for the future of Polish worker resistance was Szczecin, whose workers initially came out in a solidarity strike with Gdańsk/Gdynia, eventually winning workplace concessions. Here, despite the short-term failure to successfully back down the

³⁵⁷ Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity*, 57.

³⁵⁸ From Edmund Baluka, a strike leader and spokesperson in the Szczecin strike. Baluka and Ewa Barker, “Workers’ struggles in Poland.” *International Socialism* (first series) 94 (1977).

³⁵⁹ The most thorough account in English is in Laba, “Massacre and Memory: Gdansk and Gdynia, 1970” and “The Three-Day Worker Republic: The General Strike in Szczecin,” *The Roots of Solidarity*, 16-82.

³⁶⁰ A “Workers Commission,” formed in Szczecin following these events too observe and hold accountable the new Gierek government, did investigative work into worker deaths, ultimately estimating that 700 had died in Szczecin alone. Baluka and Baker, “Workers’ Struggles in Poland.” [note: it is not possible to determine page numbers on my copy]

price hike (this would come), “the development of forms of resistance and democracy reached their highest level...The demand for free trade unions independent of the Leninist state was the core of the Szczecin workers’ program.”³⁶¹ The Polish working class had thus gained invaluable experience and concrete knowledge in creative approaches to resisting the Party, something not immediately empirically observable to those outside the working class, but which was indeed captured, fleetingly, by engaged documentarists—that is, by cinema.

If Kieślowski had from his earliest efforts shown an affinity for documenting the working, resource-poor of People’s Poland,³⁶² he and his like-minded colleague Tomasz Zygadlo now plunged seemingly headlong into the struggle of the working classes against the so-called workers’ state. Following the events on the Baltic Coast, they spearheaded a collectively-made documentary, *Workers ’71: Nothing About Us Without Us* (Robotnicy ’71: Nic o nas bez nas, 1972). As described by its co-director, Kieślowski,

Workers ’71 is my most political film because it gives no humanistic point of view. It was intended to portray the workers’ state of mind in 1971. At that time, this was still the ruling class. That’s what it was officially called in Poland anyway. It seemed to us that it would be a good idea to show that this class did think and that it thought in what I then considered to be more or less the right way to think. That is, aiming for democratization everywhere: in places of work, in administrative districts, in towns throughout the whole country. ... We tried to show people who, in small towns, villages, and factories, had organized the strikes and had, through various government representatives, tried to convey to Gierek in Warsaw, the idea that people in Poland awaited changes; more visible changes than those Gierek was making... We travelled all over Poland and tried to film those heated times before they disappeared. Because we all knew they would end. We had to film them.³⁶³

This attempt at holding a mirror up to the state of Polish working class, taking the

³⁶¹ In addition, workers now had the structure, the Interfactory Strike Committee, or MKS, to go along with the signal demand that would propel them forward to 1980—free and independent trade unions. This I deal with at length in the final chapter. Laba, 57.

³⁶² Besides the already mentioned *Office*, I am thinking here of his diploma film, *From the City of Łódź* (*Z miasta Łodzi*, 1969), which is remembered for featuring the city’s notoriously eccentric underclass—see also Marek Piwowski’s *Fly Killer* (*Muchotłuk*, 1967)—but it also documents, with warmth, the aforementioned women textile workers.

³⁶³ Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, ed. Danusia Stok (London: Faber, 1995), 55.

‘collective hero’ as subject,³⁶⁴ is a fascinating document of the resumption of the struggle against the state that began in 1956—the bottom-up “democratizing” that represented a different kind of socialism. It captures a mood that was alternately optimistic and bitter, as Kieślowski put it.³⁶⁵ Dividing themselves into multiple units, the material each collected was then edited to appear to take place over a twenty-four hour period, and the film was further divided into chapters with titles like “hands,” “heads,” and “the division of labour.”

However, in a lesson that Kieślowski would learn, the hard way, again and again, the very instrumental *act* of its production—the solidarity it evinced—was arguably more important than its finished product, which in any case was censored by the state, reedited, and slated for Polish television as propaganda.³⁶⁶ It seems correct to see this film, made by artists and intellectuals in solidarity with workers, as a prelude to the political alliances to come—particularly the formation of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) in 1976. Indeed, the film also inspired in form, content, and even name, the also collectively-directed *Workers ’80* (Robotnicy, ’80, 1981), made during the Carnival of Solidarity and the Gdansk August accords. In this sense, the production of the film was more important than its finished product, even had the latter been granted the form its authors intended.

In the same year, 1971, as this attempt at political intervention, the documentarists created a statement-of-purpose manifesto, written by Kieślowski and Zygadło as well as an old hand from the Black Series, Bohdan Kosiński—in fact a rebellious Party member. The “The Kraków Group” manifesto, as it was known, theorized their work to come as

³⁶⁴ Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 10.

³⁶⁵ *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 8.

³⁶⁶ It was re-edited and re-titled as *Gospodarze* (Housekeepers) and slated for Polish television. Kieślowski, meanwhile, much to his bemusement, found himself accused of smuggling contraband to Radio Free Europe when a number of sound rolls for the film were lost from the production. He adds that, were it just himself or Zygadło alone, they never would have agreed to the tampering, but each had the other’s wife and child to think about. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 57.

revelatory “film-protest(s),” with their camera the scalpel and human behavior the object. By articulating a film-making approach with some basis in the writings of American Direct Cinema pioneers Richard Leacock and Robert Drew,³⁶⁷ yet perhaps also with a wink to Robert Flaherty’s idea of cinema as a creative tool,³⁶⁸ The Krakow Group intended to penetrate the social thought that lay behind the individual’s “gabbing” in close-up.³⁶⁹ Ironically, this militant statement diverged from the more *direct* intervention attempted by *Workers ’71*, which in the end was something of a one-off within this Kieslowkian documentary tendency—or “Krakovian,” as the manifesto called it. Quoting Bertolt Brecht: “reality must be looked at not stared at,”³⁷⁰ they would seek to apply pressure not in obvious places, but towards an everyday reality that was unseen, but nevertheless very much felt, by the Polish people:

We are interested in that place where everything appears to be right, normally, but where there is also hidden some concealed disease. We try to find this disease and bring it to light. We treat situations like this as models, using them to reveal the nature and repeatability of a phenomenon and to question the inert structures that distort the meaning and substance of social affairs.³⁷¹

These “inert structures” were tackled in portraits of average women and men trapped within beleaguered institutions, like Frederick Wiseman in miniature, in eponymously titled

³⁶⁷ These two were cited in Kiesłowski’s dissertation at the Łódź Film School. Their actual films had not yet reached Poland. *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 28.

³⁶⁸ He quoted this with approval in “The Dramaturgy of the Real, 1968,” *Krzysztof Kiesłowski: Interviews*, 3.

³⁶⁹ The presence of “talking heads,” whether *in situ*, as in Kiesłowski’s masterful, humanist *Hospital* (Szpital, 1970), or directed at a camera, as in the children of Zygadlo’s sly *Primary School* (Szkoła podstawowa, 1971), was a notable feature of their films, as opposed to Karabasz’s quieter *The Musicians*. Kiesłowski later even playfully titled a rather *Verite*-like (i.e., shades of Rouch’s *Chronicle of a Summer*) documentary *Talking Heads* (Gadające głowy, 1980).

³⁷⁰ “Documentary Filmmakers Make Their Case (Poland, 1971),” Bohdan Kosiński, Krzysztof Kiesłowski, and Tomasz Zygadlo (First published in Polish as “Dokumentarzysty o dokumencie,” in *Polityka* 28 (1971)),” in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, Scott MacKenzie, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 467. Elsewhere around this time, Kiesłowski defined documentary similarly, as film that should “look broadly. Even if it looks narrowly, it should look at those issues that are happening in reality. It should bring cognizance of what is, not what should be.” “Interview Not For Print (1973, Andrzej Kolodyński),” *Krzysztof Kiesłowski: Interviews*, 12.

³⁷¹ “Documentary Filmmakers Make Their Case,” 465-466.

films like *Factory*, *Primary School* (Zygadlo, 1971), *Hospital* (Kieślowski, 1975), and so on. As different as these films have been from the work of the ‘creative documentary’ filmmakers, they shared a committed sensitivity to form as it intersects with human behavior as the best way of articulating a changing Polish reality—that is, of making film *politically*.³⁷² This commitment as well to the “unseen” perhaps explains why Królikiewicz himself was one of their signatories,³⁷³ even though he would, we recall, repudiate the sort of ‘realist cinema’ that grew out of these documentaries, as discussed next chapter.

The sense of urgency in the manifesto,³⁷⁴ along with other cultural developments discussed in the next chapter was of course very much correlated with the bloody events of 1970. However, its careful linguistic formulation also included an odd but telling wink of a line, “We’re not abandoning the humanist position! We’re not just not the emergency service!”³⁷⁵ It seems to imply the danger in artists thinking they can solve political problems merely through their finished films, echoing, intentionally or no, the painful experience Zygadlo and Kieślowski went through in losing their collective film to the knives of the censors, and being threatened by the authorities. This is confirmed in the determined way in which they end their manifesto, by affirming their steadfastness not merely from an artistic standpoint, but an institutional one:

(I)t is precisely in the summer of this year (*i.e., one of deep turmoil and debate*) that we will not abandon the positions we have been able to gain and occupy. Positions that are at once intellectual and aesthetic and—most importantly now from a practical standpoint—organizational.³⁷⁶

³⁷² The difference lay in the continuity Kieślowski and Zygadlo expressed with Karabasz’s generation in their formal approach. Kieślowski himself resented the press’s attempts to paint him as in rebellion from Karabasz, his friend and mentor. “Conversation with the Laureate (1976,) in *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 19-20.

³⁷³ Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 1990), 135.

³⁷⁴ Bill Nichols comments that film manifestos in general, in their incantatory language, seek to bring the very thing they are calling for into being through writing, prefiguring the change they seek. CITE

³⁷⁵ “Documentary Filmmakers Make Their Case,” 466.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 469.

2.2. Łódź: Film, feminism and radical community

Prior to this “Krakovian declaration,”³⁷⁷ no place had proved a more fertile area for such research than Łódź, the singular city in which Kiesłowski and his colleagues trained. Beyond its legacy as an industrial hub and earlier hotbed of socialism in the early 20th century, Łódź was to play a key role in the political drama taking place even as they penned their manifesto. Despite the significant bloodshed on the coast and the toppling of Władysław Gomułka, the workers’ movement had stalled, and without backing down the price hike, after all. By late January of 1971, the second wave of strikes concluded, as newly installed first secretary Edward Gierek had successfully appealed to workers to put aside immediate concerns over food prices in favor of the loftier, socialist-nationalist goal of building ships for the economic resurgence of People’s Poland.³⁷⁸ Gierek had previously distinguished himself not only as a worker himself—almost two decades as a miner in France—but as a popular, benevolent government manager in the 1960s in Lower Silesia. With this impeccable working-class and leadership background, and indeed given how events developed, he was at once a true representative of the national mood and a deceptively cunning, paternal propagandist.³⁷⁹ In facing renewed resistance to the hikes, Gierek, on television and in person, utilized a masculinized, worker-to-worker, patriotic

³⁷⁷ As a city, Krakow, more religious and conservative, was also further removed from the Party’s political center of Warsaw, as well as the interference of the politicking of those within the national film school in Łódź.

³⁷⁸ However, Roman Laba has argued, based on archival materials including interviews, that these workers remained unconvinced, and instead were let down by their representatives on the Interfactory Strike Committees, including in the militant heart of this insurrection, in Szczecin, ““Simply stated, party members of the negotiating committee were more impressed by the change from Gomułka to Gierek than was the work force. Their readiness to place their trust in Gierek was therefore an expression of party psychology, a last gasp of the 1960s ‘revisionist’ impulse in party circles. The mistake became vital to the maturation of the strike leaders who were already party members, but the rest of the shipyard’s work force was already well ahead of them.” *Roots of Solidarity*, 78.

³⁷⁹ Most notoriously, his regime broadcast faked footage of strikers on the coast voting unanimously in favor of Gierek’s new program (actually taken three years before), which, once the confusion died down, furthered embittered much of the Baltic workforce against him, even as it becalmed some nationally. Baluka and Barker, “Workers’ Struggles in Poland.

form of address—“Will you help us?” was his constant refrain.³⁸⁰ Barely concealed elements of chauvinism and assumptions of patriarchal authority beneath professed socialism found ready purchase in Poland’s male working classes along the coast, and perhaps more to the point among their leadership, who agreed to end the strikes.³⁸¹

Nationalism, and its handmaiden patriarchy, had never disappeared under Soviet-imposed state socialism in a Catholic country—to say the least.³⁸² A central tenet of Stalinism was in fact “to encourage maternity and large families along with part-time industrial work,”³⁸³ with the latter offering poor compensation. Stalinism, and what followed,³⁸⁴ was effectively the only form of “socialism” Poland had ever known. Indeed, the situation had even been somewhat exacerbated in Poland *after* the Thaw of 1956 and the advance of revisionism, due to a concerted emphasis on the economic gains of Gomulka’s “little stabilization.” Here, *stability* meant patriarchy—the “evocation of tradition-nation and family in particular—and attention to the problems of daily life, including consumption.”³⁸⁵ Gierek’s affective, patriotic-brotherly rhetoric mentioned above was thus the flipside of his doubling down on collective consumption to the point of making it a leading policy. Yet in this he was sowing the seeds of his later demise. People’s Poland remained on a collision

³⁸⁰ Gierek: “The only solution, believe me, is painful...it’s hard to say...but it is that you work harder and still harder—so that our economy produces its maximum...So I am talking to you the way I spoke to my miner friends in Silesia. I say to you: Help us! Help me!” Transcript, “Polish Workers and Party Leaders—A Confrontation (meeting in Szczecin Shipyard 23 Jan. 1971),” *New Left Review* I/72 (March-April 1972).

³⁸¹ Padraic Kenney, “The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 104, Issue 2 (April 1999): 409.

³⁸² Padraic Kenney argues the early communist goal/promise in the Soviet Union of sexual equality was “the easiest to shed in the face of the daunting challenge of rapid modernization,” adding that this is the most researched aspect of a generally under-researched area, women’s history in Soviet-type societies (he provides a helpful list of volumes in a footnote), “The Gender of Resistance,” 403.

³⁸³ Kristi S. Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland’s Solidarity Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 130.

³⁸⁴ The post-Thaw success of Gomulka’s cry of “Polish road to socialism!” was heavily indebted to nationalist sentiment, expertly exploited. See Michal Checinski, “The ‘Polish October’” in *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism*, trans. Tadeusz Szafar (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1982), 104-122.

³⁸⁵ “The Gender of Resistance,” 405.

course with the concrete reality of massive food lines and shortages, which could not be chased away through Gierek's brief period of consumer-oriented growth, including temporarily beneficial assistance of Western credit.³⁸⁶ This was painfully obvious to Polish women, who stood in those official, public lines while also navigating semi-private, unofficial economic channels.³⁸⁷ Their invisible labour mitigated and maintained the increasingly relied-upon social/private sphere as opposed to that of the political/public, as the economic holes Gierek attempted to plug through collective consumption and credit increasingly showed themselves from the mid-1970s on.³⁸⁸ This fragile divide, as alluded to above, had never been resolved in what were decidedly post-revolutionary societies, which is to say these two (discursive) realms were, as in the West, highly gendered.³⁸⁹

It was scarcely different among the official opposition with respect to its overall praxis, which placed value upon abstract political discourse—coded public, male, and indeed assigned to men³⁹⁰—and devalued the social, which is to say the everyday experience

³⁸⁶ Malgorzata Mazurek, "Keeping it Close to Home: Resourcefulness and Scarcity in Late Socialist and Postsocialist Poland," in *Communism Unwrapped*, 299.

³⁸⁷ This was known as *Środowisko*, or social circles/milieu. See the important work of Janine Wedel that inspired the consumption-centered work of Mazurek and others, which itself draws on what Polish historian Kazimierz Wyka (1910-1975), drawing on his wartime experiences, dubbed, "the excluded economy." Janine R. Wedel, ed. *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

³⁸⁸ Though it takes us slightly beyond our scope, it is important to quote a recent contribution here, from political scientist Mazurek, which indicates the extent to which this social/private and political/public divide was nonsensical in 1970s Poland. "The 'Polish crisis,' a period of economic slump during the late 1970s and 1980s, was a crisis of the centrally planned regime of consumption. But at the same time it constituted the revival of other forms of provisioning and procuring goods, including that organized by one's own family (together with their circle of friends) and for one's family. What (Janine) Wedel dubbed "familial society" was a consumer society in which family members formed a socioeconomic cooperating through private arrangements in a semi-official economy." "Keeping it Close to Home," *Communism Unwrapped*, 298-99.

³⁸⁹ On how women in Central and Eastern Europe were best positioned and able to traverse these two realms, see Hana Havelkova's thoughtful "A Few Prefeminist Thoughts," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds. (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 62-73.

³⁹⁰ This was not, however, true of Solidarity, as we will see in the final chapter. But of the 1970s, one need only read the first chapter to Jan Jozef Lipski's history of the Workers Defense Committee, KOR, to see how these things are framed. The men are assigned, and credited with, the prominent positions, while their spouses, despite their contributions, not meriting their own entry, merely mentioned in passing beneath the entry of that of the man. Jan Jozef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 51-58.

of women,³⁹¹ and by extension the working classes. On a deep symbolic level relative to gendered divisions, Polish women were doubly damned: firstly, through their placement on a pedestal in the national Romantic/Catholic imaginary as *Matka Polka* (Mother Poland), who, throughout Poland's turbulent history, had tended to and strengthened Poland's fighting, martyred men;³⁹² and secondly, as socialist labour heroes who could fulfill the work quota in abundance—the stuff of Zhadnovite icons and statues. This topic, particularly as concerns the latter, was taken on in the 1970s by the maverick documentarist Wojciech Wiszniewski (1946-1981), best known as the leading light of the anti-observational “creative documentary” film trend, who had also headed one of the film units for Kieślowski and Zygmunt Zygadlo's *Workers '71*. Wiszniewski's *Wanda Gościmińska, A Weaver* (Wanda Gościmińska, Włóknianka, 1975), employing a Brechtian deconstruction of Party/nationalist iconography, focuses on Gościmińska, one of the nation's best known “exceptional workers”³⁹³ from the Stalinist era. Wiszniewski makes her, if perhaps only seemingly, a collaborator in this film about her life, finding common elements in his distancing tableaux between old Polish traditions and those of the People's Polish Republic. In voiceover, Gościmińska speaks with tender pride about how there was a poverty of work in Poland before the war, and how afterward Poland had to literally be rebuilt through the strength of regular Polish men and women. This has the merit of being factually unimpeachable, but Wiszniewski,

³⁹¹ One can see this divide in the underground press, whose proletarian women writers argued that, as Kenney puts it, “everyday experience was key to seeing the disintegration of the communist system,” “The Gender of Resistance,” 407.

³⁹² See Long, *We All Fought For Freedom*, 133-136.

³⁹³ Another name for “model worker.” About Gościmińska, Mazierska informs us “(S)he was chosen as one of *Ludzie Trzydziestolecia* (“People of the 30 Years [of Socialist Poland]”): an exclusive club of those who contributed in an *exceptional* way to People's Poland's growth and prosperity.” *Poland Daily*, 53.

eschewing the interactive mode had used in a previous, similar film,³⁹⁴ does not press her on the secular canonization of labour heroes, nor on the actual specificities of shock work.

The seemingly paradoxical, humble dignity with which the film treats the mythic model worker figure of Gościmińska, despite the apparent irony implied in its formal approach, could be read as a filmic gift of returning, dialectically, a measure of respect to workers who had been used and abused by the (Stalinist) Party. Understood in this manner, control of historical images is wrested away from State actors and restored to the Polish working classes. However, would this even be enough? Ewa Mazierska sees it quite differently, recently charging Wiszniewski with postmodernist hand-wringing, effectively charging “Szajbus (lunatic),” as he was known, of indeed being a useful idiot for the Party. Mazierska’s objective is in part to demystify filmmakers like Wiszniewski who are sometimes labeled, in Poland, like Wajda, who she nevertheless prefers for his rich narrative thrust, as “romantic dissidents.” She argues, compellingly, that Wiszniewski largely fails to challenge his historical material, at best deconstructing its unquestioned symbology, yes, but at worst simply rearranging/displaying it,³⁹⁵ like the proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic. Working as the film does on the level of received, ideological “History,” it fails to

³⁹⁴ I refer to his short film *A Story of a Man Who Filled 552% of the Quota* (1973), about another exceptional worker, Bernard Bugdol, whom Wiszniewski places in a more interesting and critical light, though the film itself is less formally adventurous. More on this film in chapter four.

³⁹⁵ “The techniques of monumentalisation and even sacralisation, in which Wiszniewski indulges, do not mean, as Mała-Malatyńska claims, that Wiszniewski mocks socialist realism and by the same token Stalinism, but merely that he recognises that this period belongs to the past. Moreover, the fact that he uses these techniques, only exaggerating them, rather than offering us a distinctly different view on Gościmińska’s life, suggests that, like a model postmodernist, he is unable or unwilling to move beyond what his predecessors (artists representing socialist realism) created. His response to socialist realist “lies” about the shock workers, is not to offer us a competing narrative about them (which would be the case in Wajda’s “Man of Marble”), but merely exaggerating the salient features of this narrative, as in the case of paying homage to earlier works.” Ewa Mazierska, “The Portrayal of Workers in the 1970s Films of Wojciech Wiszniewski,” *Culture Crossroads* 10 (2017): 56

interrogate the material realities behind its images,³⁹⁶ removing Gościńska's agency as a woman and worker just as surely as did the Party propaganda.

In contrast, the fluid relation of women to labour both and out of the home—that is, not merely divided into a public image and a private image—had been captured by the aforementioned earlier decade of Polish documentary, in the work of proto-feminist documentarists like the aforementioned Kamińska and Gryczelowska. This was particularly evident in the latter's crowning work, *Our Friends From Łódź* (*Nasze Znajome z Łodzi*, 1971). These films did not engage with mythology and thus hazard its visual, symbolic reification, as did Wiszniewski; instead, they patiently eroded artificial private/public divisions through their emphasis on the unity of everyday moments in and out of the workplace as well as the home. For his part, Kieślowski, in his diploma film, *From the City of Łódź* (*Z miasta Łodzi*, 1968), takes not a singular weaver, but the female factory workers as a whole as his protagonist, along with other idiosyncratic and neglected inhabitants of the city.³⁹⁷ As critic Michał Oleszczyk puts it, "Almost every shot introduces us to someone new, thus contributing to the truly democratic feel of the piece."³⁹⁸ Here, Kieślowski had already achieved a complex portrayal of that which he sought to achieve in his "war-time" film *Workers '71*. Here, an attempt is made to integrate women's lived experience into that of the city as a whole.³⁹⁹ Cinema, it is suggested, is an integral if humble part of this process.

³⁹⁶ However, this is precisely what his contemporary Piotr Szulkin accomplished, as I argue in chapter four.

³⁹⁷ For a more surreal, and earthy—indeed, it feels Czech—take on Łódź's denizens see Marek Pirowski's *The Fly-Killer* (*Muchotluk*, 1966), set in a local bar has been filled to the brim with locals, for the purpose of filming.

³⁹⁸ Michał Oleszczyk, "Kieślowski at Tribeca," Roger Ebert.com, November 18, 2013. <https://www.rogerebert.com/balder-and-dash/Kieślowski-at-tribeca>

³⁹⁹ However, Elżbieta Ostrowska has recently argued that Kieślowski, unlike his more veteran female colleagues, is unsuccessful in tearing down this private/public divide. Ostrowska, "Vanishing Women. Łódź Women Textile Workers in Polish Documentary Cinema." *Studies in Documentary Film* 11, no. 2 (2017): 128-129.

This concrete depiction of everyday reality in all its complexity by cinema was a thus an important step toward undermining ossified but entrenched notions of gendered roles⁴⁰⁰ in a country that had not seen a real socialist revolution, and whose most prominent public women existed less as flesh and blood and more as symbols, like Gościmińska. But concurrently, in late 1971 in Łódź, these volatile dual national identities for women—the mother and the labour hero—were suddenly ignited. Two weeks after the strikes in Szczecin had concluded, a sudden, vehement, city-wide general strike, first initiated by the Marchlewski cotton mill women textile workers who noticed a wage cut in their pay checks,⁴⁰¹ successfully backed down the Party’s price hikes. Bypassing the tactics of previous strike leaders,⁴⁰² they caught the regime on the back foot, avoiding the bloodshed of 1970 in the Tri-City: “It was precisely the “unstructured” nature of the strike that forced the regime’s reversal, as the party had difficulty both talking with the strikers and understanding their motives.”⁴⁰³ These textile workers inverted, and publicly performed, in Judith Butler’s sense,⁴⁰⁴ their social roles as women, embarrassing the regime. Rather than imitating the male shipyard workers, they took up, with some irony, the gender roles assigned to them in the sphere as wives and mothers expected to feed and maintain the traditional family unit, and dragged them out, literally, into the light of day of the “political

I will return to this discussion in chapter four, since it bears upon the impact of another sort of approach to such material, by Piotr Szulkin

⁴⁰⁰ Though it is a topic beyond our discussion here, it is worth mentioning that neither had 1968 succeeded in dislodging these ideas in the West, as the 2016 election of the vicious misogynist Donald J. Trump as President of the United States made all-too painfully clear.

⁴⁰¹ Kenney, 410.

⁴⁰² Indeed, the very nature of what it meant to be a “strike leader” was always heavily gendered. Kenney, 412.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 411. But the term “unstructured” is taken from Barbara Jancar’s solid overview, “Women in the Opposition in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s,” in Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer, eds., *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe* (Durham, N.C., 1985), 168-188.

⁴⁰⁴ See Judith Butler’s ongoing reconsideration and refinement of her concept of performativity in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), in which she engages with (and challenges) Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the public sphere, in order to shed light upon recent social movements. This I explore in greater detail in next chapter.

sphere.”⁴⁰⁵ This was true not just in a “women’s city” like Łódź (i.e., where women were a majority of workers) but also in Szczecin, where the Party attempted to break strikes by reminding men of their role as consumers of that which women would secure for them at home.

In exchange for renunciation of “political” demands, the regime thus promised that it-and the housewives of Szczecin-would take care of the strikers’ needs. The men chose to believe the state and its new leader, Gierek; it was not long before their wives reminded them of this: as one shipyard worker admitted, “I believed like crazy. Then every time I had an argument, with my wife when we ran out of something, she would say: ‘Go, let Gierek give it to you.’”⁴⁰⁶

As in the Tri-City, women’s protests in Łódź took on a class character, when elite Party officials who had arrived to placate the strikers were accused, following the Party’s emphasis on guaranteeing consumption and full bellies over freedom and politics,⁴⁰⁷ of hoarding goods not available to workers. As one worker who called out the visiting Polish premier put it, “Your wife Mrs. Jaroszewicz loads ham on her sandwiches, while my children eat dry bread!”⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, all across in the city women refused hierarchical strike leadership, eschewing elected representatives and yelling out their demands from the shop floor.⁴⁰⁹ They elsewhere refused to engage with Party officials at all, with reports of a “spontaneous” group crying jag as well and fainting episodes—“methods seemingly appropriate to their community”⁴¹⁰—breaking out among workers at arranged meetings, or

⁴⁰⁵ Again, women, like workers, were not expected to contest the political sphere, which, as we saw in chapter one, was limited to (male, intellectual) discourse, and forbidden in the sense that one could not question the “leading role of the Party.”

⁴⁰⁶ Kenney, 413.

⁴⁰⁷ I remind us here of Antonin Liehm’s “New Social Contract” along the Eastern Bloc, detailed in the previous chapter, which was clearly in tatters, for the time being, in Poland in 1970.

⁴⁰⁸ Laba, 82.

⁴⁰⁹ Jancar, “Women in the Opposition,” 175.

⁴¹⁰ Kenney, 416.

in more than one case simply shouting down the famous Gierek line now being used by his lieutenants: “Will you help us?” “NO!!!”⁴¹¹

In all of this,⁴¹² women workers successfully complicated—that is, rendered practically useless—standard two-way communication that could be managed and manipulated by the Party. This (non)-method was very much in the radically communicative spirit of 1968, as we saw last chapter. A germane concept in this regard can be found in a book written one year after these events, by German filmmaker Alexander Kluge and sociologist Oskar Negt; namely, that of the *counterpublic*, or proletarian public sphere. In their translator Miriam Hansen’s words,

(W)hile mounting a radical critique of the dominant public sphere, Negt and Kluge maintained an emphatic notion of publicness derived from the systematic negation—whether by political exclusion or economic and ideological appropriation—of large realms of social experience by the former. By grounding their notion of a counterpublic (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) in a more comprehensive "context of living," they offered a conceptual framework through which a number of diverse movements could identify and generalize their concerns.⁴¹³

It is true that, as perhaps opposed to Western Europe and North America, the complexity of social experience in state socialist People’s Poland vis-à-vis “unplanned” or private aspects of the Polish economy would, as I have indicated, seem to call into question the usefulness of retaining this sense of *publicness* when discussing the region. Even so, the counterpublic “context of living,”⁴¹⁴ describes well the complexity of social experience

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 410.

⁴¹² Ibid, 415. Kenney also points out that women had memory on their side—that of a similar strike decades earlier that saw 50,000 women in 20 factories across the city come out. See his "Working-Class Community and Resistance in Pre-Stalinist Poland: The Poznaniski Textile Strike, Łódź, September 1947," *Social History* 18 (January 1993): 31-51.

⁴¹³ Miriam Hansen, “Foreword” in Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xv.

⁴¹⁴ The concept itself was hugely important as a catch-all of resistance for a West Germany Left fighting the state and its own fragmentation in the 1970s, Ibid.

embodied by the wildcat strikers, who turned the identities accorded to them by the state to them as women inside-out, in a kind of jujitsu.⁴¹⁵

In addition, their very 1968 spirit of negation or refusal—making the familiar (roles) unrecognizable—suggested a new kind of community as well. The radicalization and transformation of the militant particularisms of women’s “community values” immanent to the state, pushed Poland to adapt and grow from below amid an increasingly moribund Party apparatus that the traditional, abstract discourse of nation (and freedom) was unable to dislodge. It is something like what Maurice Blanchot means when he says that (radical) community “is what exposes by exposing itself... (it includes) an exteriority that thought does not master, even by giving it various names.”⁴¹⁶ The *inaccessibility* in this regard of the *form* of this struggle to state actors (i.e., the Nomenklatura, but to a certain extent also the intellectual opposition), while at the same time also taking place within State institutions, should very much be seen as a prelude to the radical communication and rapidly evolving community of Solidarity. This is something I unpack in far greater detail in chapter four, but it is worth mentioning here that this combination of an excluded subaltern with the political immanence to the State is close to what the postcolonial theorist Partha Chatterjee refers to as the hidden potential of *political society*,⁴¹⁷ as opposed to dual power built independent of the state that we think of as *civic society*. The latter, always desirable for its (discursive) independence from state power, nevertheless also risks speaking as it were from this *outside position*, i.e., away from the actual populace, including those most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the state itself. We have already seen something of the class-character of

⁴¹⁵ See the concept of “media jujitsu” in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 2014), 328-333.

⁴¹⁶ Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 12.

⁴¹⁷ See for example Chatterjee’s *The Politics of the Governed* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006).

this dynamic last chapter; in subsequent chapters we will see how these were lessons learned and internalized by an increasing labour militancy, which was soon manifest on a massive scale in 1980 in the Solidarity movement.

In closing, we should think back once more to the collective documentary *Workers '71*. Its production, I have suggested, was more important than its product; while radical cinematic collaborations with the working class—a possible guerilla path suggested by its experience—was not something Kieślowski, nor any other Polish director, would pursue, its failure taught him a vital secondary lesson. Pragmatically speaking of course, the Krakow Group and their supporters and colleagues understood the need to begin making features, with which their observations could be fictionally rendered, and larger scale events could be (re)constructed as fully as possible.⁴¹⁸ But for Kieślowski—somewhat uniquely among 1970s realist feature filmmakers, as we shall see—it also confirmed the manifesto's intuition about the relative unimportance of a finished artistic product; filmmaking was, rather, a kind of never-ending research for the purposes of human communication and betterment. The lesson was absorbed, then, not on the level of production, but on the level of reception. This sense of a “partnership” with the viewer in the open-ended description of reality was carried into Kieślowski's subsequent Polish features. The extent to which this late 1970s cinema it inspired succeeded, or failed to evolve, in a way compatible with subsequent political developments, is the subject of the next chapter.

⁴¹⁸ In a kind of “final straw” moment for Kieślowski the documentarist, Polish authorities confiscated footage of his *Train Station* (*Dworzec*, 1980), when they learned a rather heinous murder had been committed in the station during the hours he had filmed. Nothing was found, but Kieślowski was appalled with the knowledge that this was the kind of “evidence”—for the State—he was inadvertently gathering as a documentary filmmaker. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 81.

Chapter 3

Kieślowski and Realism, Part Two: Negative Community and the Politics of Interest

The principle of representation is not able to grasp that the nothing that it should compensate for is not a loss of substance, foundation, or value, which suddenly dissolved a previous order but the very character of our being-in-common.⁴¹⁹

- Roberto Esposito

In the previous chapter we discussed Polish documentary after 1968 as research into human communication⁴²⁰; that is, for Krzysztof Kieślowski and his colleagues, cinema as the articulation of the everyday reality of citizens in as yet “undescribed” People’s Poland. These films quietly engaged in a dialogue with workers’ resistance on the ground around the years 1970 and 1971, as we have seen. While the youthful, student aspiration of the person who became de facto leader of this movement, Kieślowski, may have been to displace realist feature filmmaking altogether with such work,⁴²¹ it was the near-constant experience of state censorship,⁴²² the related, growing feeling that there were some places a camera could not or should not go,⁴²³ and the sense of protection afforded by the

⁴¹⁹ Roberto Esposito, “Community and Nihilism,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 29.

⁴²⁰ This is a notion popular with Third Cinema theorist/director Fernando Solanas, See quote in Paul Willemen, “The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections,” in *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI Pub., 1994), 9.

⁴²¹ Kieślowski, “The Dramaturgy of the Real” (1968, MA thesis), in *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, Renata Bernard, and Steven Woodward, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 6.

⁴²² In recently-translated 1973 interview, to which we have referred last chapter, which was deemed too despairing for publication during Kieślowski’s life, he expresses his frustrations regarding censorship and being unable to engage with viewers. (KK: “4 of my 6 films sit on the shelves... it was f***ing swiped!” ...AK: “Aren’t you too young to be bitter?”). “Interview Not For Print (1973, Andrzej Kolodyński),” in *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 12, 14.

⁴²³ For example, see his short documentary *First Love* (Pierwsza Miłość, 1974), a portrait of a couple trying to conceive; Kieślowski regretted the intrusions of his camera. Slavoj Žižek, among others, has referred to this Kieślowski’s “fright of real tears,” after the filmmaker’s colorful characterization (“Now I have glycerine!” i.e., to make fake tears) of his subsequent “ethical” turn (Žižek’s term) away from documentary. Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI Pub., 2001).

organizational aspects of feature filmmaking in Poland as opposed to documentary, as we will see in this chapter, that turned their attention to the production of fiction features.

In this chapter, we discuss the evolution of this application of documentary methods to feature filmmaking in the latter half of the 1970s, a time that coincided with an increased alliance, and indeed, by 1980, a blending of workers and intellectuals actively struggling against the state and the PZPR. Kieślowski once again serves as our lodestar, for the dual ability of his work to both embody—and indeed lead—these filmmaking changes, but also to put gentle but insistent pressure on the question of the political efficacy of film representation. If the documentarists of the Krakow Group had committed to a political and aesthetic program in a time of upheaval that in their own way was just as committed as their contemporary Królikiewicz to “making film politically,” the subsequent features that became known as the Cinema of Moral Anxiety (*Kino moralnego niepokoju*),⁴²⁴ regarded their work, unlike the documentarists, as, first of all, part of the intellectual opposition to the PZPR, as we will see. This work was what we might call realist political art cinema, of the type one associated elsewhere in Europe with a Costas-Gavras or a Ken Loach, with aesthetics and form, though important, remaining a secondary concern.⁴²⁵ Kieślowski’s features deceptively complicate this approach, as we shall see. This is discussed in two interrelated ways: 1) the films’ structural and discursive formation in *zespoły filmowe*, or state-sanctioned film units, which resulted in self-consciously oppositional groupings that constituted, in their collaborative approach to film art, a type of community that to some extent challenged conventional notions of film authorship; 2) the aesthetics and

⁴²⁴ This term was coined by one of its filmmakers, Janusz Kijowski, whose debut film *Indeks*, made within this movement, was banned in 1977. It is not necessarily a well-liked term, and has also gone by other names such as “Cinema of Moral Concern,” or “Cinema of Distrust” (*nieufności*), but to avoid historiographical confusion I use the original name here.

⁴²⁵ The Polish films were nevertheless beautifully and sensitively filmed—a point sometimes glossed over—by gifted and leading Polish cinematographers like Edward Klosinski, Sławomir Idziak, et al.

oppositional content of the film texts themselves. Taken together, these films mapped, and sometimes unfortunately reified, the shifting, inherently unstable politics of (oppositional) community in People's Poland, which had much to do with their own institutional formation as separate and yet immanent to the state, as I will show.

In the final section, I also (re)introduce the singular figure of director Andrzej Wajda, the Polish School stalwart and undisputed head of Polish filmmaking. Wajda was politically and artistically inspired by Kieślowski's documentary-driven cinema, but he brought, for better and worse, a very particular notion of the oppositional role of filmmaking vis-à-vis the state that was at loggerheads, though it may not have seemed so at the time, with the Krakow Group's call to reveal the undescribed world. Kieślowski, I ultimately argue, in the late 1970s, among this movement, found a way to push the open-endedness and sense of the viewer's emotional (but non-identificatory, cinematically speaking) participation found in the earlier documentaries to the absolute limit, sometimes blunting it in ways he considered failures but in so doing breaking narrative bonds and the connection between the filmic and pro-filmic more completely. His achievement was the representation of *negative community* in People's Poland, awaiting its dialectical reversal in Solidarity.

3.1. Non-fiction as research

To begin, it is necessary to look more closely at what I consider the connective tissue between the Krakow Group documentarists and the Cinema of Moral Anxiety, and that is the evolving non-fiction work of Kieślowski, which, along with his slightly older friend and colleague Krzysztof Zanussi, was the primary influence upon this later movement. This shorter first section is intended to build on what was discussed last

chapter: the fact that most film directors from the Polish School of the mid-1950s,⁴²⁶ through the 1970s began in documentary—a cinema that was on a par with fiction filmmaking in terms of popularity at that time. There was simply an overwhelming public feeling, for which, as we have seen, much ground had been laid in the '50s and '60s, in the hopes and disappointments that had followed the Thaw, that in a world in which everything was always already political, the “political” was in some sense thereby off-limits, since the Party spoke *in the name of the people*, for the people. As we saw in the first chapter, one response to this situation was an avant-garde that militated formally, not politically, as in the work of someone like Królikiewicz.

Observational documentary chose another path, as we saw last chapter. Only the art of simple description, it was felt, could render—almost alchemically so—popular everyday experience. This call for description of the “unrepresented,” vividly interpreted in the Krakow Group manifesto, was in fact part of a wider movement across many circles of art and culture in Poland, known as Young Culture (*Młoda Kultura*). It was best known and exemplified in the writing of poets Adam Zagajewski and Julian Kornhauser, in a book of collected essays from 1974, *The Unrepresented World* (*Świat nie przedstawiony*). While they took pains to point out that “diagnosing reality is not the only, nor even the main, task facing culture,” in film historian Tadeusz Lubelski’s words, it was seen as, ““degree zero”, the precondition of its effective functioning as a whole.”⁴²⁷ It is this *ontological* emphasis in their pronouncements that sticks in the mind: “to exist means to be described in culture.”

⁴²⁶ We can, for example, date this from the time of the war, in which leading filmmakers like Wanda Jakubowska and Aleksander Ford were pressed into service, or, more concretely, from the 1950s, with the star-crossed Andrzej Munk, contemporary and artistic foil to Andrzej Wajda. Munk’s series of increasingly adventurous documentaries led to his realist but *Rashomon*-like feature debut, *Man on the Tracks* (1952).

⁴²⁷ Tadeusz Lubelski, “From *Personnel* to *No End*: Kieślowski’s Political Feature Films,” in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski* (Townbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 56. See also Clare Cavanagh, “Lyrical Ethics: The Poetry of Adam Zagajewski,” *Slavic Review*, 59, 1 (Spring, 2000): 1-15.

These latter words, from Zagajewski's "Unrepresented Reality in Postwar Polish Literature (Rzeczywistość nie przedstawiona powojennej literaturze polskiej)," were written a year after The Krakow Group manifesto, and this sentiment, as we have seen, was shared by Kieślowski,⁴²⁸ who himself occasionally gave it more of an epistemological emphasis—the idea that description in some measure constituted *knowledge* ("...you feel completely cut off from other people. You cannot refer to anything, because nothing has been described and properly named."). Kieślowski's evolving 1970s fiction work fulfilled this diagnostic directive of Young Culture as well as the implicit suggestion of the Krakow Group manifesto to see documentary film as research; however, working in the more visceral, mechanically reproductive medium of cinema, he had to find increasingly creative ways of rendering a reality that, he felt, consisted of "...a course of thoughts and reflections, reaching far beyond the photographic picture and recorded sound."⁴²⁹

By 1976, Kieślowski's relationship to his filmmaking practice had shifted; while the once-passionate documentarist later conceded documentaries came to function in part as "charging the battery" for features,⁴³⁰ they began to enter into a kind of dialogue with the short fiction works—for example, *Pedestrian Subway* (*Przejście podziemne*, 1973)—and full features he would soon make. One of the more interesting ways in which this can be felt is Kieślowski's use of a recurring everyman character, Antoni Gralak, based upon a real person who was a party functionary. This Gralak travels as it were from short films to his features and back again. Significantly, different incarnations see "Gralak" as a disgraced

⁴²⁸ Moreover, the critic Tadeusz Sobolewski, Kieślowski's interlocutor (and interviewer) *par excellence* in Poland, sees Zagajewski's path as similar to the filmmaker's, in their "philosophical disenchantment" post-Martial Law, and intellectual withdrawal from overt politics. (We see it as slightly more complicated here). See Zagajewski's essay collection from the 1980s, *Solitude, Solidarity* (1990). Sobolewski, "Ultimate Concerns," in *Lucid Dreams*, 27.

⁴²⁹ *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 6.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

Party member, in the much-praised,⁴³¹ fascinating docu-fiction *Curriculum Vitae* (Życiorys, 1975); as an apolitical, ex-con itinerant labourer, of the type scapegoated as ‘hooligan’ by the Party during times of unrest, in *The Calm* (Spokoj, 1976; released 1980); and, in Kiesłowski’s curious TV film about the 1976 worker uprising in Radom, as a young insurrectionist worker, in *Short Working Day* (Krótki Dzień Pracy, 1981; unreleased).⁴³²

The first of these, *Curriculum Vitae*, bears discussing at more length in order to begin to unfold our ideas here about communication across varying institutions, platforms and in effect layers of reality; that is to say, the relation of filmic to pro-filmic reality, as well as the author’s relation not only to their material but to the wider community, of which even the Party, Kiesłowski always insisted,⁴³³ implicitly with other documentarist colleagues,⁴³⁴ were part. As to *community*, my ultimate aim, as previously stated, is to understand, with Kiesłowski, what exactly are or should be the delimitations of this word. To speak, then, of *Curriculum Vitae* I hazard the word *docu-fiction*, because “docudrama” is not quite right. In a film that surprisingly enough was screened in Party circles, but also the Krakow Film Festival,⁴³⁵ Kiesłowski allowed an actor with a similar background to the wholly fictional character he was portraying, “Gralak,” to go before a very real mid-level Party Control

⁴³¹ Ibid, 17.

⁴³² In these three examples, we have the plot of Kiesłowski’s *Blind Chance* (Przypadek, 1981; released 1987) in piecemeal, made the same year as *Short Working Day*. It contains three segments about how a young man’s life changes irrevocably based on whether or not/how close he gets to catching a train to Warsaw following the death of his father.

⁴³³ Kiesłowski on the Party: “There are two ways of treating such matters. One way is to say: I hate them and I’ll fight them until I die. And then you fight. But my attitude isn’t like that. My attitude is quite the opposite. My attitude is: even if something is happening which isn’t right, even if somebody is acting badly, in my opinion, then I have to try and understand that person. However good or bad they are, you have to try and understand why they’re like that. I believe it’s just as feasible an approach as the one of fighting.” *Kiesłowski on Kiesłowski*, ed. Danusia Stok (London: Faber, 1995), 59.

⁴³⁴ Kiesłowski’s gifted contemporary Marcel Łoziński, probably the most distinguished Polish documentarist from the latter half of the 1970s to the present, also argued along these lines, as late as 1981. The older Karabasz and Gryczelowska also conceded this point. Piotr Zwierzchowski, “Party in Krzysztof Kiesłowski’s Films,” *Images: the International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication*, 24, No 33 (2018): 137.

⁴³⁵ *Kiesłowski on Kiesłowski*, 58.

Committee, filming the latter taking Gralak to task about the kind of man he was and whether he was fit for Party membership (and by extension a decent future).⁴³⁶ The questions that these fallible, not wholly intimidating men—similar indeed, to plenty of others from his documentaries—pose and re-pose to him as they go over his personal history with a fine-tooth comb, seem to be a further elaboration of the unsettling ending of *Office*: “What have you done throughout your lifetime?”

Kieślowski began to fashion such characters, through the raw material of documentary (“instead of telling about reality, telling with reality”⁴³⁷), in a kind of cinematic witnessing to an emergent, non-monolithic political subject that was to take the stage in 1976 in a resumption of the struggle of 1970-1971. Importantly, this work was not done solitarily; that is, it would be incorrect to think of a character like Gralak (and his attributes) as traveling across the work of a single cinematic auteur. To take but one example, Kieślowski and the journalist and author Hannah Krall began a collaboration at this time that was to last well into the 1980s. At the time of Solidarity, looking to develop a character that was an ardent communist but one that would still be sympathetic to audiences, Kieślowski received the suggestion of a creation from one of Krall’s short stories. The character in the resultant film he made (*Blind Chance/Przypadek*, 1981) then fed back into Krall’s subsequent fiction.⁴³⁸ Again, this was not merely an exchange in authorship between friends, but part of something larger. It was initially inspired and enabled by a unique, creatively collective model for post-war filmmaking in Poland. As we will see, we cannot reduce the work that was subsequently produced to, i.e., “Kieślowski the auteur,” given the

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 59.

⁴³⁷ *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews*, 6.

⁴³⁸ Marcin Adamczak, “Film Units in the People’s Republic of Poland,” *Restart Zespołów Filmowych = Film Units: Restart*, ed. Adamczak, et al. (Kraków: Halart, 2012), 240.

director's constant participation with others in building collaborative authorship, as well as, we will see later, his sensitivity to threats—external and internal, as it were—to non-instrumentalized filmmaking practice. It is to these institutions we now must turn.

3.2. Polish Film Units and Production

The Polish system of film production became wholly decentralized by 1955, preceding even the Polish October. Following the successful war-time experience of mobile film units, nine state-financed but self-governing *zespoly filmowe*, or film production units, were set up at the Łódź Film School from between 1955-1957. While documentary filmmaking was based and produced in Warsaw,⁴³⁹ the primary loci for feature filmmaking were Wrocław, in Lower Silesia, and especially the setting of the film units, Łódź, where the world-renowned film school was located. While the case of Poland's structures of film production was perhaps not as singular within the region of Soviet-type societies as it has sometimes been made out to be,⁴⁴⁰ such rapid and drastic decentralization was uniquely possible due to the utter lack of filmmaking infrastructure, as the German Occupation, devastating for Poland's cities, had utterly decimated its studios.⁴⁴¹ Moreover, it was very much within the aims of the state itself, insofar as it was still represented by compatible components of the pre-war Polish Left. This combination of needing to rebuild from

⁴³⁹ The Warsaw Documentary Film Studio (Wytwornia Filmow Dokumentalnych), founded in 1949, would also begin, in 1961, to take on a small number of feature films, as well as television productions. Marek Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 154, note 1. Kieslowski would make his pathbreaking Decalogue TV series at the WDF in 1988.

⁴⁴⁰ Petr Szczepanik has shown that the Czechoslovak system of film units, while somewhat distinct from the Polish one, nonetheless developed along parallel lines, though it was more influenced by the German institution of dramaturgy. Szczepanik, "Between Units and Producers: Organization of Creative Work in Czechoslovak State Cinema 1945–1990," in *Film Units: Restart*, 270-309.

⁴⁴¹ Dorota Ostrowska, "An Alternative Model of Film Production: Film Units in Poland after World War Two," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Aniko Imre (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 453.

scratch and the political laxity of the Thaw was seized upon after the war by Poland's budding filmmakers.

The units were an attempt on the part of Polish filmmakers to benefit from this by regaining control of the creative process of filmmaking. Many of the individuals who were responsible for the establishment of Polish postwar cinematography, and the film units, Aleksander Ford, Jerzy Bossak, Wanda Jakubowska, and Jerzy Toeplitz, in particular, were associated with a prewar left-wing Warsaw-based discussion club called Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego "START" (Society of the Devotees of the Artistic Film, 1929-1935). This society had very broad social aims, not just artistic ones...START's credo in 1932 was 'fight for films for the public good'...It was the left-wing sympathies of the START members that made them into possible allies of the newly emerged Socialist state in Poland in advancing a new idea of culture and reorganizing film production.⁴⁴²

While the state and its filmmakers, who came to wield enormous cultural power, were thus united on a structural level from conception, their ideological relationship, in lockstep after the war, was broken for good by the events of 1968, a year which for many Poles sadly signifies something very different than the meaning we have given to it thus far.⁴⁴³ In March of that year, a rightist faction within the Party led by security chief Mieczysław Moczar began openly waging a notorious anti-Semitic propaganda campaign, seizing on the pro-Palestine position of the Soviet Union during the Six Days War in 1967. Moczar's "police faction" successfully scapegoated Polish Jews for a whole host of societal discontent, a craze that enveloped the entire nation and resulted in a great number of Jewish intellectuals purged from public life,⁴⁴⁴ including many one-time START members—Ford, Toeplitz and Bossak among them.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Ibid, 462-463.

⁴⁴³ "In Polish historiography the events of spring 1968 are often simply referred to as "March," and for many people the term is synonymous with an anti-Semitic witch-hunt." Dariusz Stola, "Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968," *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 189.

⁴⁴⁴ As previously mentioned, the most thorough account in English of this time is Michał Chęciński, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Antisemitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1982).

⁴⁴⁵ *Krzysztof Kiesłowski: Interviews*, xxii.

In terms of filmmaking, the resulting fallout from this, as well as from the student rebellion itself, meant that the film units were in serious disarray for several years; censorship and state interference were significant.⁴⁴⁶ It was in the early 1970s, in the Gierek era, that the insurgent spirit of START was slowly renewed within the film units—now at a greater remove from the Party. In this era, the true meaning of the word *zespół* comes into play—Dorota Ostrowska reminds us that the actual translation in English is not “film unit” but “team,” which “emphasizes the community element,” in spirit and in structure.⁴⁴⁷ As to the latter, each unit had a tripartite leadership, consisting of an artistic head—usually a film director—a production manager (vice-chief), and a literary chief—a crucial role filled by someone from the world of literature, with an outsider’s perspective.⁴⁴⁸ Each gradually took on a certain collective character, often based in part upon the tastes of its chief (artistic head), and provided a measure of autonomy artistically and politically, both within the time of filmmaking and without. At their best, what blossomed was a democratic, collaborative approach, and this too was a product of this newer iteration, which required cooperation and vigilance, not merely structure.⁴⁴⁹ In sum, these film units complicate the individualist Western conception of what it means to be an *auteur*. Certainly, auteurs emerged—perhaps even more quickly than *because of* the units—but they were *inscribed* differently than elsewhere, as in the common notion of the tyrannical, male-coded Hollywood director, or

⁴⁴⁶ Adamczak, 235.

⁴⁴⁷ Ostrowska, “An Alternative Model,” 454.

⁴⁴⁸ For example, Tadeusz Konwicki, an important novelist who later became an innovative filmmaker, was the literary chief on the film unit for Wajda first great film, *Kanal* (1956), about the doomed Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Konwicki was responsible for adding the literary effect of the key lines of the opening voiceover, about its characters: “Watch them closely, for these are the last hours of their lives.” Adamczak, 249, note 42.

⁴⁴⁹ Many accounts credit film unit TOR, headed by Stanisław Różewicz in the 1970s, for breaking with the authoritarian leadership of the pre-1968 film units, whose “feudalism” the democratic structure of the film units could not change on their own. This is the opinion of Antoni Krauze, quoted in Adamczak, 249. See also an interview with another 1970s director, ““TOR” Was Number One for Me: An Interview with Wojciech Marczewski,” *Film Units: Restart*, 343-347.

in the romantic image of the personal expression (again, male-coded) of the *Nouvelle Vague*. In both these archetypes, labour is effaced—that of the director, seen as having to do 100 things at once to be successful, and of all of the other film workers and artists who do much of these things, but received little credit (or pay).

Instead, within the *zespoly* artists emerged from the collective experience housed within the walls in which they operated, even if this itself was somewhat romanticized. Agnieszka Holland's sentiments are typical among her colleagues in this regard. She found in them a sense of belonging roundly denied to her elsewhere in Poland, in part because of her background,⁴⁵⁰ but also as a woman and a younger artist.

Now, after five years of knowing the solitude experienced by filmmakers in the West, I am much better placed to judge what a blessing, what an asylum, what a support, what a school, what a kindergarten, what a mother's womb, what a club, a film unit is, when it functions properly, and when it is headed by the people who have the authority, energy, enthusiasm for cinema, and a sense of responsibility.⁴⁵¹

Such was the freedom and support filmmakers felt was vouchsafed by these structures. These comments represent the Platonic ideal of the film units—their utopian aspect, for Marcin Adamczak.⁴⁵² If this was not evenly experienced/distributed across the spectrum of film units—Holland worked under the protection and outsized influence of Andrzej Wajda in the powerful film unit X—it was quite telling on not only an affective but practical level of artistic and political encouragement.⁴⁵³

Moreover, this sense of the importance of the units as a kind of structure of feeling apart from the state persists in literature and reminisces—a sense that they effectively

⁴⁵⁰ Holland's father was a pre-war Communist later arrested by the PZPR, who allegedly committed suicide by leaping from a building during an interrogation session. As such there was no chance, by virtue of this family connection, of her attending the Łódź Film School. She did her schooling in Prague, and was there in 1968.

⁴⁵¹ Quoted in Ostrowska, "An Alternative Model," 453.

⁴⁵² See the second part of his chapter, "Part Two, Film Units: Utopia," Adamczak, 253-267.

⁴⁵³ See similar sentiments from Holland's contemporaries expressed and cited in the first part of Adamczak, 231-252.

functioned as a counter-public sphere. The *zespóły* housed regular free-form discussion, prompting the comparison to a Parisian café. For some, this was the single most important aspect of the film units, as opposed to the films themselves.⁴⁵⁴ At the same time, this sense of a protective cocoon (“a womb”) and the freedom it bought could be overdone, in an overestimation of influence that threatened to lead these artists away as it were from the world they sought to represent, as with the opposition intellectuals discussed in chapter one. Andrzej Wajda argued that the film units had successfully wrested the role of producer away from the state. It then took the form, in his eyes, of a constant pitched battle between the two,⁴⁵⁵ a romanticization that belies the often rather humiliating “grunt work” done by the heads of the film unit behind the scenes, in order to placate Party officials.⁴⁵⁶

Kieślowski, for his part, emphasized the producer role of the Polish people insofar as the money lay with the taxpayers who were footing the bill, not the Party or filmmakers.⁴⁵⁷

While they might have left the state behind ideologically after the death of revisionism and the subsequent political interference that followed 1968, film units clearly remained connected to the state on a structural level. This immanence was in fact part of their power, a felicitous tethering to larger state apparatuses (including the National Film Board—*Film Polski*), that enabled their work. Ostrowska:

The history of the film units in Poland reflected a tension between, on the one hand, the drive of the Socialist state to control the creative community and to bring their aims in line with the ideological objectives of the state, and, on the other, the desire of the filmmaking community for creative and intellectual autonomy.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁴ For example, director Feliks Falk, quoted in Adamczak, 247.

⁴⁵⁵ Adamczak, 241-245.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 242-243.

⁴⁵⁷ Citing and commenting on Kieślowski’s point, Adamczak: “One has to remember that a great majority of funds earmarked for the cinema in fact came from profits generated through the distribution of foreign films in Poland,” *Film Units: Restart*, 243, note 28.

⁴⁵⁸ “An Alternative Model,” 453.

Again, we have to historicize here with respect to this tension, and where it first emerged: the film units after the war were not so different in this way to its precursors, supporting the war effort.

They were dependent on the Socialist state in the same way that war reporters were reliant on the army. During peace times the state was the filmmakers' enabler in very practical terms, providing them with the means of production. It also broadly defined the thematic focus of their films, which, like the work they were expected to produce in return for this provision, was to service the state and support the propaganda effort.⁴⁵⁹

In the 1970s this changed in the sense that dissent itself was occasionally rewarded, “especially if that resulted in international prestige and the influx of hard currency into the state coffers.”⁴⁶⁰ In sum, those within the *zespóły* were in a sense together in their apartness, but in an odd way positioned as such by the state, as oppositional—some of these units, like Tor and Wajda’s “Unit X,” were known as ‘left’ (as opposed to the government-loyal ‘right’ units). ‘Left’ filmmaking was popular both within the country and without, which brought prestige to Poland—and money to the Party.⁴⁶¹ Roles being somewhat prescribed, therefore, as “dissidents,” they were, dialectically speaking, somewhat limited in the broader impact they could have despite the artistic freedom.

Kieślowski, in his constant worrying and pessimism, seemed to grasp this need for vigilance better than most. The generous spirit of the film units’ operation was also reflected in his film production, which emphasized *process* over the finished product, and in his understanding that life was elsewhere. He often commented to his crew that getting the “make-up woman's child to school was more important than beginning shooting on time.

⁴⁵⁹ Adamczak, 463.

⁴⁶⁰ Ostrowska, 455.

⁴⁶¹ Adamczak, 243.

We were always made aware that film is less important than life."⁴⁶² These comments reflect a desire for change *out there*, as opposed to the need for positive visions *within* his art, which, though its generosity in characterization corresponded with the sentiment above, remained dark in its vision, as with other Polish films. As we begin to say more about the nature of these texts we first need to understand more of the political struggle occurring around them in the second half of the 1970s.

3.3. Struggle, Allegory, and the Politics of Interest: 1976 and Polish Cinema

In 1976, the strikes and repression of the working class at the beginning of the decade seemed to replay itself like a bad dream, yet this seeming return also held promise. On June 25th, the Party once again announced food price increases, kicking off the “June events.” These were far more (geographically) extensive than just the insurrection Baltic Coast (and Łódź) six years earlier. In June 1976 an estimated 130 factories—75% of Poland’s largest—went out on strike.⁴⁶³ In the face of this, the Party almost immediately retreated, and called off the price hike. At the same time, repression was pronounced, both direct—beatings in the streets, and longer term, in the form of fines or imprisonment (including for those uninvolved, but having police records, so the Party could claim it was the work of criminals), and especially mass purges of alleged radicals from industrial jobs.⁴⁶⁴ Retaliation was most severe in the places where direct violence against the state broke out, in Radom and Ursus (a suburb of Warsaw), and to a lesser extent Płock. In Radom, in

⁴⁶² Interview with cinematographer Jacek Petrycki, supplement to *The Scar* (Blizna, 1976, dir. Kieślowski), DVD, Kino Video (2004).

⁴⁶³ Michael H. Bernhard, Michael H. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976-1980*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 46-47.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

particular, an overzealous and violent response by security forces arguably accelerated the destruction wrought—Party headquarters was sacked and eventually burnt to the ground. The city resembled a “battlefield” by the afternoon, and all told, 17 people died in the pitched street-fighting.⁴⁶⁵ In the wake of the government repression and subsequent propaganda⁴⁶⁶ surrounding these events, Warsaw intellectuals and students, in their first coordinated national action since March 1968, formed the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (Workers’ Defense Committee),⁴⁶⁷ known as KOR, which first appeared during the trials in Ursus in July to offer financial support, acquired from Catholic lay sources.⁴⁶⁸



Fig. 16a,b: KOR in *Short Working Day* (1981)

In Kieślowski's unreleased Short Working Day (Krótki dzień pracy, 1981), a young KOR member (though not named as such), first glimpsed in an insert shot among those assembled attending workers' trials, later visits the family of an arrested Radom worker.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 52-59.

⁴⁶⁶ This aspect is dealt with in David Morgan, ““We Don't Make Heroes From the Lumpenproletariat:” Remembering the 1976 Protest in Radom,” *Polish Sociological Review*, No. 118 (1997): 133-147.

⁴⁶⁷ For a comprehensive (if somewhat triumphalist) history of this pivotal group, see (co-founder) Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985),

⁴⁶⁸ Michael H. Bernhard, 79.

3.3.1. The Cinema of Moral Anxiety

It was a small leap from these energies, these *goals* in poetry and documentary and the subsequent *actions* taken by their counterparts in support of political struggle, to the self-consciously oppositional Cinema of Moral Anxiety (*Kino moralnego niepokoju*), which effectively began that same year and ended with the imposition of Martial Law in 1981. A younger generation of Polish filmmakers, many of whom had been documentarists and/or felt strong ties to the Young Culture movement, stood ready to fulfill what they perceived as an exigency, a public demand for such cinema, or a “social request,” as director Agnieszka Holland put it. Much of the “undescribed reality” they were seeking simply could not be accessed by a documentary crew. Inspired not only by the Kieslowskian documentary cinema but by the dazzling early features of the slightly older Krzysztof Zanussi, which dissected intellectual life and one’s sense of belonging in People’s Poland,⁴⁶⁹ they stood ready to recognize a renewed spirit of struggle. These were films characterized by “contemporary themes, realism, and the social initiation of a young protagonist,”⁴⁷⁰ taking place in institutions at a secondary remove from politics, like a college summer camp (*Camouflage*, *Barwy Ochronne* 1977, dir. Zanussi), community theatre (*Provincial Actors*, 1980, dir. Holland), primary education (*Szansa*, *Chance*, 1979, dir. Feliks Falk), etc. Following the public’s established tendency towards “Aesopian reading”⁴⁷¹ in documentary film, these settings stood in for political microcosms of the country at large—for the everyday

⁴⁶⁹ See his breakthrough film *The Structure of Crystal* (1969) and especially the daring *Illumination*, a near essay-film, whose style Zanussi would not attempt to repeat, yet its main character, a “intellectual questioning the corrupt world,” was a Zanussi trademark; several prominent members of their intelligentsia expressed their identification with this character. Marek Haltof, *Historical Dictionary of Polish Cinema* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 210.

⁴⁷⁰ Tadeusz Lubelski, “A Difficult Return to Freedom Cinema,” *The New Polish Cinema*, eds. Janina Falkowska and Marek Haltof (London: Flicks Books, 2003), 27.

⁴⁷¹ Marek Haltof, “Screening the Unrepresented World: Kieslowski’s Early Film-Essays (*Personnel*, *The Scar*, and *The Calm*),” *The Polish Review* 48, no. 4 (2003): 464.

difficulties of People's Poland. At the same time, they were seen as providing viewers with a more direct representation of "what people spoke about at home," a cinematic version of Zagajewski's "syvlic prose," the name by which home journals or diaries in Poland had once been known.⁴⁷²

In terms of a blueprint, one could not likely find a better precursor than Kieślowski's first television feature, *Personnel* (1976), which like *Curriculum Vitae* mixed elements of fiction and non-fiction. Examining it in some detail will allow us to illuminate the components of this movement as a whole. While there certainly was plenty of the personal life of its director in his previous choices, in *Personnel* Kieślowski drew quite directly on his own experience. In it, a young man, Romek, played by future director of popular 1980s comedies Juliusz Machulski,⁴⁷³ takes his first proper job in a theater, just as the young Kieślowski had done.⁴⁷⁴ Over the course of the story, in which Romek is initiated into the hard work, intricacies, and in particular the utter dysfunction of a theater company, Romek has his idealism about the liberating power of art, including the labouring together to create it as a community, severely challenged. Stylistically, this is captured through careful documentarist attention to small revelations amid mundane activity and repetitive work, using a cast made up of real theater workers as well as many of Kieślowski's film school colleagues who imitated them in acting their parts.⁴⁷⁵ Another source of inspiration in the realist depiction of innocent youth, in the "daily routine and the vulnerability of his protagonists," approaches the work of two filmmakers the director admired, late directors Milos Forman and Ermanno Olmi.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² From the Latin *silva rerum*. Lubelski, "Freedom Cinema," 27.

⁴⁷³ His *Sexmission* (Seksmisja 1985), a science-fiction film that marries anti-Communism to misogyny, predictive of future directions in post-1989 Polish politics, is a perennial favorite in Poland and the Czech Republic.

⁴⁷⁴ *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 96-97.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 33.

The central conflict slowly steeping in *Personnel's* accretion of detail is between the performers, who receive adulation on the stage, and the artists and craftsmen who toil behind the scenes, who quite literally have a separate entrance to the theater. The tailor Sowa (Michał Tarkowski) is one of the latter, who as the hero's friend is a large influence on the young man. Sowa battles with the actors who scorn his labour and craft as well as those who run the company, who likewise turn a blind eye to the theater's woes. His ultimate stance is summed up in the film's key speech before an assembled, hostile company, with the unequivocal words: "This theater is rotten (*spróchniały*)."⁴⁷⁷ While Kiesłowski ends his film on a fascinatingly ambiguous note, in long shot, as the protagonist hesitates over where he should place his ultimate loyalty, it was the film's negative, allegorical diagnosis of seemingly irrevocable societal dysfunction that was to be the hallmark of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety.

At their best, the Moral Anxiety features that followed, portray, like the earlier '70s documentaries, the complexity of everyday experience and the negotiation of competing interests. But many, or perhaps most, of these features lack an evenness of approach—the documentarist's generosity of detail—as well an openness of narrative—plots tend to close decisively—of the earlier organization of the non-fiction material. At worst, they come off as schematic and dated—good and evil are very broadly painted. "We were delighted that we could code the message in a film that 'evil is linked with communism.' It seems that this is the basic weakness of these films."⁴⁷⁷ These artists genuinely felt they were responding to a need, as in Holland's prior quote above, and in so doing making a kind of intervention within a state socialist public sphere, as discussed last chapter. However, to put this in 21st-century media terms, providing *content* to salve discontent surely limits what cinema is

⁴⁷⁷ Holland from a 1993 interview, quoted in Haltof, "Screening the Unrepresented World," 465.

capable of in such situations. In Zanussi's lonely existentialist, "last honest man" portraits (such as *Constant Factor/Konstans* 1980), or Wajda's impressive collaborations with younger artists (*Without Anaesthesia/Bez znieczulenie*, 1979, screenplay by Holland) individuals come hard up against the immovable force of an apathetic or vindictive system, yet on a formal level, where is the space for the viewer? This is to say, they forego Kieślowski's "partnership," which would imply participation and an assembling of meaning not decided upon in advance. Viewer engagement and thought, and the careful documentary accretion of reality and situational truth that Kieślowski had gleaned from the Karabasz tradition, is foreclosed upon.

3.3.2. Kieślowski and the Politics of Interest: *The Scar*

As Kieślowski discovered, of course, this was a situation (political/aesthetic/ethical) not easily remedied in narrative by a cinematic realist in People's Poland. Whereas his favorite filmmaker Ken Loach could draw on a sharply defined British tradition of left-wing class politics against ruling class capitalist interests, Moral Anxiety features were made within a political situation in which the portrayal of working class militancy against the "workers' state" was, officially, effectively nonsensical, and therefore forbidden (indeed, Kieślowski's TV film made the same year, *The Calm/Spokoj*, was banned for its depiction of a strike).⁴⁷⁸ As such, the representation in complex narrative—that is, in a format larger than short documentary—of delineated competing interests, as opposed to mere hatred for the Party, proved difficult to ascertain in an allegedly classless society. Such waters had been

⁴⁷⁸ It is almost comical but perhaps important to note: the *official* reality of "classlessness" in People's Poland was, in a way, more akin to the situation of Hollywood, which had long given up portraits of class solidarity, in the wake of the post-war economic boom and the systematic purging of radicals from the labour movement in the second Red Scare.

further muddied by Gierek's surface-level attempt to equalize unequal interests through collective consumption, the optimism for which had largely evaporated by the middle of the decade amid a global economic downturn.

In recognizing the economic—not merely political—nature of the crises that buffeted Poland, both then and now, David Ost hones in on this category of *interest*, defining it not in absolute but in pragmatic terms.

People obviously do have wants, such as a better life, prosperity, happiness. But interest is used here in an economic sense, in its modern usage associated with the rise of market liberalism and the complex composition of industrial society. To say a group of people has an "interest" in a policy or political program is to say it believes this policy or program will enhance the socioeconomic position of its members. To say a group does not know what is in its interest means that its members do not know what program or policy can best advance its position.⁴⁷⁹

This argues against an understanding of *interest* as some kind of essential, transhistorical category, one that could be (self-) betrayed, i.e., given "false consciousness" among workers, etc. The explanation, rather, is structural:

(I)nterests do not simply exist "out there," waiting for the chance to articulate politically their own visions. Rather, interests are decisively shaped by the state, by the political and economic environments in which they take shape.⁴⁸⁰

In capitalist liberal democracy, class organizations—such as those portrayed in Loach's films, e.g., a railwaymen's union in *Navigators* (2001)—exist and hopefully flourish in negotiating their interest relative to a state that has ultimate power over them, but does not, Ost argues, guarantee their independent existence. However,

In state socialist society...all social groups owe their existence to the state and all flourish or decline depending on the state's commitment to maintaining them.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ David Ost, "The Politics of Interest in Post-Communist East Europe," *Theory and Society* 22, 4 (1993): 457.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

One need not go as far as Ost in arguing that for this reason People's Poland really was a classless society—I hope to have shown otherwise in the previous two chapters—to recognize this way in which *interest* in Soviet-type societies like People's Poland always defines itself in relation to a state that has nationalized all official organizations.

This volatility or fluidity of negative interests vis-à-vis the state later came together spectacularly, of course, in the 10-million strong radical community of Solidarity. As universal as such an organization and movement must have felt in late 1980, it was first born of something highly specific: the *public demand* for free and independent trade unions in Gdańsk. Despite the historical precedents of 1970 and 1976, this signal demand of labour activists and workers on the Baltic Coast had since those years been developed and transmitted locally, not nationally, and it was seen by oppositionists in Warsaw as a dead end,⁴⁸² including by members of KOR, and even the 1960s radical Jacek Kuroń.⁴⁸³ But this demand, and its realization, was a key pivot, as Michael Bernhard puts it: “Although the opposition of the 1970s had secured de facto toleration of an alternative public space and the organizations therein, and had improvised ways to pressure the party-state, it had not yet obtained de jure recognition of its right to exist or its institutional autonomy.”⁴⁸⁴ What

⁴⁸² Roman Laba: “To be specific, although the Polish intellectuals were aware of the bloody events of 1970, they were largely ignorant of the significant steps toward the organization of free trade unions that occurred there. In this respect the regime was quite successful in creating an image of a crowd that fought for bread but was incapable of more reflective self-organization and action. It should be said that this image corresponded to the Polish intellectuals’ expectations. The categories of thought determined perception more than it did false information or the lack of information.” Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 100.

⁴⁸³ Kuroń claims that while KOR understood the value in making a demand understood by all, he and others couldn't see past the idea that trade unions, at this particular moment, were more or less tantamount to bureaucracy. He recalls his reaction, from a prison cell, when he heard about the demand in 1980: “Because I'd been on to Gdańsk all the time saying this was horse-trading, I was afraid of trade unions. I was afraid of trade unions because I thought to myself, it's a bureaucratic machine that we won't be able to handle, it'll destroy us. Who will we use to run it? What resources do we have for this? I felt dizzy when I heard.” This was a rather typical New Left, even anarchist, reaction to the idea of controlling structures, and without the historical experience of the demand for trade unions by those on the Baltic Coast, they rejected the idea of out of hand. Jacek Kuroń, Video Interview, Web of Stories, “Independent Trade Unions,” 1987, filmed by Marcel Łoziński and Jacek Petrycki. <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/116>

⁴⁸⁴ Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland*, 151.

was developing in the Tri-City was thus an example of something more defined than “interest” and different than the “alternative public space” of civil society that treasured and closely-guarded its separation. It was instead closer to what Raymond Williams called a *militant particularism*, or the way in which “Ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get generalized and universalized as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity.”⁴⁸⁵ The free trade union demand, as well as its key enabling structure, the Interfactory Strike Committee (*Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy*, or MKS), and finally, its lead tactic, the sit-down strike, began in 1970 and hovered at the edges in 1976,⁴⁸⁶ but their time, and its recognition, was still to come.⁴⁸⁷

How, then, to portray such politics in visual narrative, in this moment of profound transition, when it all seemed such a jumble mid-decade? How to avoid the reification of the problem of *really existing power differentials*—for example men to women, or industrial workers or rural farmers to the nomenklatura (recall in the first chapter that “social mobility” was not a reality), etc.? Any attempt to deny this mitigating, fundamental category of the state, as opposition intellectuals increasingly tended to do when speaking of “(post-)totalitarianism,” or as Moral Anxiety did through the “communism is evil” coding, only further confused the issue—effectively fighting abstraction with more abstraction, however “cathartic” this may have felt to experience on screen. Kieślowski and Zygadlo had succeeded in portraying ostensible class differences or at least differing political interests, in the intercutting between workers and managers in films like *Factory* and *Workers '71*, as well

⁴⁸⁵ David Harvey, “Militant Particularism and Global Ambition,” in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publ., 2010), 83.

⁴⁸⁶ Laba, 173.

⁴⁸⁷ How could such demands obtain results under state socialism, in which the idea of independent unions was nonsense? The situation was perhaps akin to what Michel Foucault refers to, in his discussion of epistemic breaks, as being “dans le vrai” (in the true), but not yet accepted as truth, possessed as it of objects and methodology alien to the time period (or perhaps mode of production?). See his example of Mendel in Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 224.

as calling for and emphasizing organizational and institutional aspects in their manifesto, we recall. Yet how could subsequent, longer fiction relying presumably on characters with whom viewers are to identify, cinematically speaking, countenance this problem?

Kieślowski's first feature film, *The Scar* (Blizna, 1976), arguably the first feature of Moral Anxiety, does indeed, per the implications of the Krakow Group manifesto, restage many of the situations previously observed in Kieślowski's documentaries. It unfolds a typically tough-minded, or perhaps perverse, problematic that employs a setting and a professional-managerial class⁴⁸⁸ protagonist—e.g., like the sharp-tongued “star” of *Factory*—commonly associated in fiction with unpopular socialist realist television films.⁴⁸⁹ It follows the construction of a massive chemical factory works in a small town in northeastern Poland, whose citizens view the project with skepticism and outright resistance. This story is organized around the losing fight of sympathetic building director Stefan Bednarz (versatile veteran actor Franciszek Pieczka) to realize the chemical works, while constantly attending to the various interests in play among intransigent townsfolk, enthusiastic university researchers, implacable Party officials, a crusading journalist, and Bednarz's own family.

On the one hand, *The Scar* is a straightforward documentary-informed work, like those of Loach. It is an examination of a small community through the eyes of an outsider. But it is at once both dense and elusive as a film: full of outrage and specificities, but also

⁴⁸⁸ In Barbara and John Ehrenreich's influential formulation, it is an in-between “new class” that is neither proletarian nor bourgeois. While imperfect, the term seems to fit our imperfect understanding of what constitutes class under state socialism. Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” *Radical America* (March-April, 1977).

⁴⁸⁹ *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 38. In fact, Kieślowski would occasionally, especially beginning with this film, get into hot water with colleagues for a certain amount of sympathy for the devil, so to speak. His close friend and script editor, the director Agnieszka Holland, says he was deeply wounded by an insult going around at the time that he was “the balladeer of Communist tears.” Agnieszka Holland interview, *The Scar*, DVD, Kino Video.

aporias, underdeveloped characters, and mysterious yearnings. What it adds up to is a vivid and humane portrait of failure; what differentiates this emphasis on failure from other Moral Anxiety works is that the film depicts failure not merely of a political system, but failure in *representation*. This failure in representation is on the one hand political and concrete—the protagonist as a failed representative of “the people;” it is also artistic, as Kieślowski, through the clash of documentary form and fiction narrative, evidently concedes, that the photographic medium cannot represent community, in all its complexity. However, this pessimism, or negation, of community, in film narrative, need not foreclose on the possibility of positive developments in the real world. This is to say that our inability to point to extant examples of human community does not mean it is not becoming, if only in a negative sense. This idea is developed, or comes about formally, in Kieślowski, as we will see, existing as an interesting absence in the text. In this sense, it is very much like what Klaus Sherpe means, speaking of the work of Peter Weiss, as

a sign of this historical work of liberation that has not yet become history. The empty space in the frieze, at the spot where the lion's paw of Heracles would hang, designates precisely something absent, unrealized. Literature cannot and should not fill this space by way of compensation, but rather render its contours sharp and visible.⁴⁹⁰

Sherpe argues that literature should indicate, through *signs*, our capacity to alter the course of history and emancipate human potential; it cannot however show us the way (“fill this space”) through representation.⁴⁹¹ I argue in what follows, recalling elements of chapter one, that the documentary-influenced *The Scar* allows viewers, through their involvement in

⁴⁹⁰ Klaus R. Scherpe, "Reading the Aesthetics of Resistance: Ten Working Theses," trans. James Gussen. *New German Critique* 30 (Autumn, 1983), 104.

⁴⁹¹ The implications of this argument are brought to the fore next chapter, in the theoretical prescriptions of Negt/Kluge.

the film, to render the “contours” of reality “sharp and visible.” This is the gathering of negative community—the other side, as it were, of s/Solidarity.

In the first place, *The Scar* develops the examination of “negative phenomena,” as the 1971 manifesto had it, seeking through viewer involvement to transform this material. Kiesłowski’s critique of the crumbling, inefficient reality of life in People’s Poland, which stretches back beyond his documentaries like *Factory* to the more didactic Black Series films, as we have seen, is here stretched—more thinly yet occasionally more dazzlingly—across a broader canvas: nearly a decade in the life of a failing city. We come to see this failure through a fleshed out portrait of the protagonist, Stefan Bednarz, a professional project manager hired by the Party, and yet a “full-blooded humanist” as a citizen at a town-hall meeting says in praising him. Despite private brooding, Bednarz is, for a time, good-naturedly convinced about his (paternal) capacity to represent the townspeople and their conflicting concerns through his work. At this he is consistently thwarted, from all corners, and *The Scar* articulates an absence through Bednarz’s failure to *assemble* the militant particularist interests of the town—the local/personal within the national/collective—into human community.⁴⁹²

The various strands Bednarz attempts to pull together, to reconcile, register vividly for the spectator, in Kiesłowski’s patient, documentary long-takes and occasional non-eyeline matches, in a series of encounters with a myriad of townspeople, and a few supporting characters. These realistic scenes, reminiscent of the earlier documentaries, in which grievances are vented or decrepitude exposed, surely made the PZPR censor squirm and the average Pole perhaps cheer, and yet what is most interesting about the citizens’

⁴⁹² On a side note, there is also an implicit sense in which the Factory Works itself is supposed to guarantee community through design, i.e., in Modernist fashion.

heartfelt speeches and protests is that they ultimately fall on deaf or unyielding ears—not repressed, just passed over. As indicated in chapter one regarding the revisionists in the public sphere, we see how one need not necessarily bar free discourse—the concept of it may even be a boon to power—to keep a citizenry in thrall to, in this case, a parasitic bureaucratic stratum.

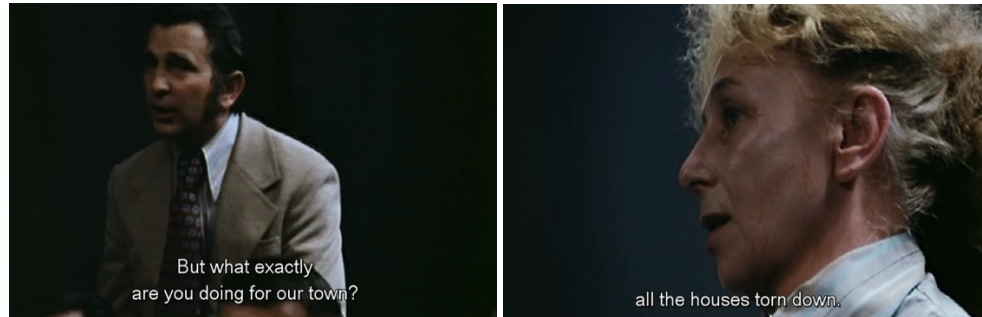


Fig. 17a,b: Town Hall I in *The Scar* (1976)

Moreover, just as Ost says, the waters of “interest” here are quite slippery. As townspeople vent their anger at the habitat being destroyed as well as many of their homes and existing infrastructure, the language used tells of shifting terrain and an utter inability to communicate. The town is told to think of the “big picture”—the Factory plan *could* actually work, it is true—but when the women and men move from a militant particularism (e.g., ‘the home we built for our old age has been destroyed’) to draw a universal conclusion (e.g., caring for the elderly requires a hospital, not a factory), Bednarz and his slick, ladder-climbing assistant (consummate Moral Anxiety actor Jerzy Stuhr) retreat to professional specialization and protest that this is outside their purview. When the assistant haughtily appeals to them to put aside petty personal concerns, to come speak as *citizens*, he then balks when they talk about *socialism*, accusing them of “bringing out the big guns.” Meanwhile, while Bednarz, well-intentioned “humanist,” meets personally with the citizens,

rather than speaking *at* them, like the lead Party official; however, in the end they use the same language, (*the Party official in the first two illustrations, Bednarz in the second*).



Fig. 18a-d.: Party vs. Humanism in *The Scar* (1976)

Bednarz, of course, is our natural point of identification, as Kieślowski capably uses him, as with any Hollywood protagonist, at the center of nearly every scene, including in the sense of *suture*—filmic reality subjectivity organized for the viewer through looks. The capacity to represent, after all, is also a spatial relation, which cinema that is filmed “on location” as it were is able to throw into sharp relief. The Director walks about the town, holding meetings and visiting residents. In this way we are asked as viewers to feel out the militant particularisms of the town’s residents—how place is connected to grievance—yet we rarely get such glimpses in whole; they remain incomplete. In an early, strangely beautiful scene in this manner that references Kieślowski’s documentaries but also evokes the vivid post-Neorealist cinema he loved—one thinks of Ermanno Olmi, at once

naturalistic and dream-like—we come to understand how deceptively Director Bednarz, though decades ago a resident of the town, is out of his element. As he strolls through the town, images of dilapidated housing and indigent residents are intercut with Bednarz gazing around, happy to see the town again and noticing the people, though only gradually noticing, as it were, the years of neglect.



Fig. 19a-d: Memory Lane I, *The Scar* (1976)

Then, in a long tracking shot in which Bednarz walks against the wind towards residences, the non-diegetic minimalist electronic music/noise accompanying him is gradually replaced by reverberating diegetic *chanson*, emanating, we presume, from an undisclosed block window (*Fig. 20b*). He approaches a residence as if by chance and is shocked to be seemingly recognized by a woman of his age scrubbing the outdoor stairs, who had already appeared for us in background behind him. In a deft bit of camera work, the tracking camera catches up with and swings around Bednarz, excluding him from the frame after he has noticed the woman, as she addresses him (and the viewer—*Fig. 20d*: "To

Pan?/Mr., it's you?"); he re-enters the frame and says "*Co?*/What?" She: "*Pan?*/You?"

There is confusion in our minds over the nature of his relationship to the residence—he lived here in the past?; is he going to live here now?



Fig. 20a-d: Memory Lane II, *The Scar* (1976)

Finally, one of the flunkies for the local authorities rushes down the stairs to meet him; apparently Bednarz was expected right there in the building that will be his new residence, as perhaps the flunky has guessed (“Old memories?”).

Though this way of shooting is not destabilizing in itself, in its strange temporal confusion vis-à-vis characterization it is an example of what Slavoj Žižek has noticed in Kieślowski’s later films—from *Blind Chance* (1981), for most critics a turning point, on—but already present here, that being his subtle ability to corrupt filmic suture, the standard

combination of objective and subjective shooting through which viewers ‘identify’ with the camera. If Hitchcock was a master of the subjectivization of a seemingly objective shot, says Žižek, with Kiesłowski it is the reverse, granting us access to a different feeling for reality through a sudden objectivization of what we thought was a character’s gaze.⁴⁹³

Further,

Kiesłowski was the great master in making the spectator perceive this dimension...in an ordinary scene—a part of drab reality all of a sudden starts to function as the ‘door to perception’, the screen through which another, purely fantasmatic dimension becomes perceptible. What distinguishes Kiesłowski is that, in his films, these magic moments of interface are not staged by means of standard Gothic elements (apparitions in the fog, magic mirrors), but as part of an ordinary, everyday reality.⁴⁹⁴

The toying with perception and reality in the scene mentioned above has the effect of dislodging Bednarz, who remains a sympathetic character throughout, as our point of identification, dislocating him spatially and temporally from the here and now of the diegesis, at the center of which he is expected to be a man of action. We, as viewers, are granted more than the sense of agency that accompanies psychology characterization, which was to remain the standard for Moral Anxiety films. This, instead, is Kiesłowski’s “partnership.” The relation we have as viewers to the decrepit infrastructure and modestly subsisting residents on display is effectively transformed. In one of the Black Series films they might have been captured—fixed, as it were, in their poverty. Here, we are effectively invited to look differently, an anti-consumptive impulse, so to speak,⁴⁹⁵ against Gierek’s prime directive.

⁴⁹³ In *Blind Chance* (1981), this is indeed a systematic technique. Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 38.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 39.

⁴⁹⁵ This also seems like what a more formally radical, daunting film like Chantal Akerman’s *Poland, Ukraine and Russia-set D’Est* (1993) is trying to accomplish in its hypnotic long takes.

3.4. Kieślowski vs. Wajda: Amateurs or Men of Iron?

If Kieślowski pushed the negative diagnoses of documentary realism to its breaking point of representation, it was more modestly its direct confrontation with everyday Polish reality in a work of fiction that convinced the old lion Andrzej Wajda, still best known for his historical work in the Polish School, as we recall from chapter one, but still a prolific filmmaker, that he could do the same.⁴⁹⁶ Wajda, as with the younger Moral Anxiety filmmakers like Holland, Feliks Falk, Janusz Kijowski, etc, thus had the similar aim of an intervention into current politics; importantly, Wajda, with his stature in the industry and clout, as well as continued popular and international appeal, was uniquely positioned as a dissident, tolerated also because, alluded to earlier, the popularity of his films and his prestige meant he was a reliable source of revenue for the Party.⁴⁹⁷ Kieślowski, by contrast, we should note, though intensely respected within Polish film circles, was virtually unknown at this stage outside of Poland; certainly he was not universally perceived, as I have already alluded to, as a fighter like Wajda.

The film that came of Wajda's epiphany that he could apply his particular filmmaking skills to present realities, *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z Marmaru*, 1976), is sometimes called the first film of the Moral Anxiety movement, but it is in some ways quite a different beast. *Man of Marble* injects a refreshingly *positive* heroism into the long-history of relentless negation of Party-critical Polish cinema. The film stages something of a collision between Wajda's classical historical sweep and a contemporary, representation of the *now*, though here it is hip and urban—aided by a funky jazz fusion soundtrack—where Kieślowski was increasingly dedicated to the drab and provincial in his documentarist

⁴⁹⁶ When Wajda saw *The Scar* it apparently convinced him it was possible to make films about the present situation. Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 1990), 137.

⁴⁹⁷ This was also true of Krzysztof Zanussi, to a lesser extent. Adamczak, 245-246.

approach (as well as a certain sympathy for the devil so to speak, as we have seen, of which Wajda's film will have no truck). This collision is thrown into productive sharp relief by a non-linear and self-reflexive formal structure, often compared to that of *Citizen Kane* in its flashback-told, mise-en-abyme portrait of a larger-than-life figure who remains mysterious or unknown to the *present* of the diegesis. In Wajda's film this is the titular man of marble—the 'exceptional worker' Mateusz Birkut, who comes to question the system that made use of his image as a worker-hero. Compared to one of its primary sources, Wojciech Wiszniewski's short documentary *A Story of a Man Who Filled 552% Of The Quota* (Opowieść o człowieku, który wykonał 552% normy, 1973), about "the people's miner" Bernard Bugdol, this aspect of Wajda's narrative is rather simplified. In the Wiszniewski film, one-time shock worker Bugdol is seen to have subsequently secured a comfortable living for himself. Interviewed by the director, he defends the Party against charges that worker competitions were mostly for show and detracted from a more concerted, across-the-board effort at rebuilding a devastated postwar Poland. Birkut, on the other hand, with single-minded if futile heroism—a classically Wajdan, Romantic theme—rebels against the state that exploited him, and is subsequently black-balled from public life, and forgotten.

However, the film's ace in the hole is raising the level of *the* journalist-investigator—in *Kane* an incidental audience surrogate—to the level of protagonist, and in his ultimate decision to cast a woman in a role he had intended for a man. In so doing Wajda pulls off something somewhat new—a forthright and powerful female hero, largely absent in male-oriented 1970s Polish features. Further, as a filmmaker, the characterization of the role takes on a self-reflexive dimension, for the headstrong and dynamic Agnieszka is positioned as *teaching* the old guard, i.e., Wajda himself, about the new times. In this respect one of the most fascinating scenes occurs when Agnieszka, played with tremendous force and

mischievous energy by the great actress Krystyna Janda, gains illegal access with her film crew to the backroom of a museum containing remnants of Stakhanovite statues, like those Wiszniewski vividly captured in his film about Bugdol (seen here in the match cut from the real man to his statue):



Fig. 21a-b: Bugdol, *A Story of a Man Who Filled 552% Of The Quota* (1973)

Seeing the forbidden Stalinist relics in the archive, Agnieszka picks the lock protecting them with her hair-pin and whisper-shouts for the camera; she hoists it and proceeds to surreptitiously capture, in one smooth and difficult take, all of the footage she needs of the marble detritus (*Fig. 22a*), as her aged cameraman voices his paternal enthusiasm at her abilities.



Fig. 22a-b: Krystyna Janda in *Man of Marble* (1979)

In this arduous and cunning maneuver, and in Wajda's broader characterization of her as somewhat unstoppable, with the occasional tendency to shoot and frame her idyllically (*Fig. 20b*), she is unmistakably of the new generation but also tacitly linked with the very state socialist labour heroes she is researching—including Birkut, her subject. This is perhaps its most transgressive aspect: she is in effect a better socialist than the *nomenklatura* or its labour heroes; the generational torch, in more ways than one, has been passed.

At the conclusion of *Man of Marble*, Agnieszka is unsurprisingly refused the means by which to complete her film by the mistrustful state apparatus, but before this happens she meets and joins forces with Birkut's son, Maciej, as more or less equals. Within the final two-shot (*Fig. 23*) there is a happy suggestion of a future relationship between the two, significantly implying also one of shared struggle—with roots in an historically specific past.

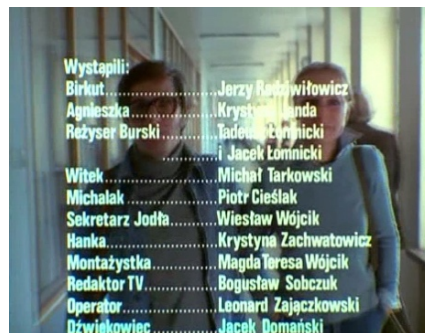


Fig. 23: Two-shot ending, Man of Marble (1976)

In this way, the film, ideologically-speaking, is arguably unopposed to certain of the revolutionary ideals espoused, though rarely rendered in reality, by state socialism with respect to gender equity.⁴⁹⁸ Moreover, Wajda's expressionistic art cinema has, for the moment, been successfully recast as realist and militant. It contains both the negative

⁴⁹⁸ This was a notable advance upon other 1970s Polish cinema we could name, except perhaps that of Agnieszka Holland's masterful *A Woman Alone* (*Kobieta samotna*, 1981), about a lack of solidarity with women in the Solidarity era.

critique of Kieślowski and Moral Anxiety films within the “historical” sections, including documentary films-within-the-film of shock worker Birkut as lionized by the Party, but it also reaches forward *positively* with Agnieszka and Maciej, at the dawn of a newly militant opposition to the PZPR state in the second half of the decade to come.

However, as I have already indicated, this sort of self-critical filmmaking was not the norm for Moral Anxiety on the level of text, which tended toward allegories of state oppression (the artistic height in this regard is probably Zanussi’s *Camouflage/ Barny Ochronne*, 1977, or, in Wajda’s brash subsequent film, written by Holland, the downfall of an intellectual orchestrated by the Party in *Without Anesthesia/Bez znieczulenie*, 1978). The collaborative spirit of the film units indeed yielded other impressive films, but rather than accompanying political struggle or suggesting it, they seemed closer to fulfilling the idyll of the initial artistic head of the post-war film units, Wanda Jakubowska, to effect the perfect marriage of screenwriter and director, while maintaining political commitment.⁴⁹⁹ It was this combination of what Truffaut and the Nouvelle Vague called the “tradition of quality” with what the Polish press called the “journalistic” (i.e., in cinema terms, the ‘Kieslowskian documentary’) that led the filmmaker Andrzej Żuławski to denounce the movement as evacuating the power of images from cinema’s repertoire in favor of mere reportage within a tidy narrative.⁵⁰⁰

Kieślowski’s 1979 film *Amator* (Camera Buff, 1979)⁵⁰¹ is his most heartbreaking depiction of this difficulty to find a visual language to represent politics, ultimately arguing that this impulse toward struggle must ultimately turn inward to find its honesty. In it he

⁴⁹⁹ Adamczak, 252.

⁵⁰⁰ We pick up this thread in the final chapter, on Żuławski’s filmmaking.

⁵⁰¹ I will use the Polish title in descriptions in this case, as the English one does not adequately convey what the film is about.

continued to grapple with the transformative process of (pro-filmic) reality, but did so in a highly personal and reflexive way. While *The Scar* did include a reflexive element in miniature, in the important character of a crusading journalist (played by the same actor, Michał Tarkowski, who played the rebellious Sowa in *Personnel*) and his cameraman, in *Amator* it is inscribed within the story of the film itself. In this it is something of a response to *Man of Marble*, as we will see. Filip Mosz, an average man, has his life changed by a film camera, and in the process he rallies the community around him to change their own. It will not surprise the reader at this point to say that this attempt ultimately fails. Cinema for Kieślowski cannot by itself effect change, as *Man of Marble*'s Agnieszka seems poised to do, it can only negotiate the complexities of reality it uncovers.

Amator takes for its title a word originally from Latin, that denotes one who loves (something). It retains this meaning in French, but the more common meaning of *amateur*, of course, is that which is defined *negatively* against the professional, as in “one who lacks professional finish,” and both connotations hold true in Polish. Here we can observe something of an antinomy at work, between emptiness/innocence and creativity/worldliness that is rallied not just in language but in the world of the film. Filip Mosz, a 30-year old factory sales worker in the small town of Wielice, and his wife are about to have their first child. In anticipation he saves up money and purchases an 8mm film camera to document this important moment, the culmination of their dreams of a *spokój* (peaceful/blissful) life. However, it is the camera, not the child, that is to transform his existence, revealing a “something more,” as he calls it, allowing him to experience the world in ways he previously could not, enabling his ability to radically communicate with others—through cinema. In other words, it is a dramatization of the purpose of the Krakow Group manifesto and his previous career as a documentarist. Kieślowski here represents *cinema* in

the diegesis as uniting the townspeople in their presumed interest—their well-being—though Filip does not entirely know what that entails, nor quite how to secure it.

Kieślowski makes the stakes, such as they are, clear in an early scene, in which the camera gains Filip access to his newborn thanks to an intrigued young doctor who asks to borrow his new camera (after he lets him pass). Receiving it, the doctor then makes an about-face, puts the camera to his eye, and tears back a blue curtain to reveal the hospital's tangle of floors, rooms and patients. The non-diegetic camera pushes slowly past the doctor filming and adopts the POV of the diegetic camera, reframing the hospital as apparently unmediated reality, newly uncovered.

Fig. 24a-d:
of
in *Amator*



The Affect
Revelation
(1979)

This long take, ultimately excluding the character *already seen to be looking* from the frame, as opposed to the more standard way of cutting to *reveal a look* (i.e., an eyeline match), is similar to the scene in the *blok* building courtyard described above in *The Scar*. Kieślowski seems less interested here in the POV perspective of the doctor character than in effecting an uncanny irruption of pro-filmic reality, no longer restrained, as it were, through mise-en-scene. The evidence of human failings on display here must somehow be reckoned with, Filip comes to feel. But in the somewhat humorous affect of this sudden “reveal,” we are

perhaps also to detect not only the revelatory power of the camera but also a kind of fake, foreshadowing the plot ahead.

We see how Filip, as a veritable activist with a camera, like Agnieszka, is only effective as insofar as he remains linked to the small community of which he is part, no easy task in the wider world. As the film's narrative catalyst, he and his new filmmaking crew initially go from triumph to triumph. Filip's films document the town's less-visible citizenry (portrays a veteran worker who happens to be a little person), the back-room dealings of Party politics, crumbling building facades, etc., as he becomes increasingly involved in larger sociopolitical and potentially national matters. Through photography and exhibition (on Warsaw Television) the films alter the relationship of the townspeople to their everyday experience, again dramatizing the fulfillment of the call of Young Culture and The Krakow Group.



Fig. 25: TV reality, *Amator* (1979)

Emphasized throughout is what we might call the *supportive visuality* of the community assembled around Filip, including his filmmaking unit,⁵⁰² office workers and other workers and families from Wielice, learning to “see” as he does. A typical shot in *Amator* is a two-shot close-up with Filip foregrounded and a supporting character (representing, literally, community support) only slightly out of focus behind him.

⁵⁰² In an autobiographical touch, Kieślowski has Filip receive a 16mm camera as a present from the factory for his efforts, of the same type that the director first used in his training at the Łódź film school. Comment by Kieślowski in *I'm So-So*, dir. Krzysztof Wierzbicki (Poland: 1995).



Fig. 26a-b: “Supportive Visuality” I, *Amator* (1979)

Filip’s power to critique, as we indicated, is lessened as he begins to move farther away, increasingly gaining professional knowledge and elevated connections. When he runs into trouble, the tenuousness of his position is exposed. We see his support undercut with visual literalness (*Fig. 27b*) as his portly boss maneuvers to curtail the filmmaking unit’s plans to air the town’s grievances on Warsaw state television.



Fig. 27a-b: “Supportive Visuality” II, *Amator* (1979)

Yet even this superior is not the philistine apparatchik he initially seems to be, it turns out—again, *interest* relative to the state remains murky territory. The money Filip’s film succeeds in getting allocated to repair housing had apparently been earmarked, he is told, by local officials for another project, which would have benefited the town elsewhere. In the process, Filip’s supervisor Osuch, something of a mentor, is fired to take the fall, and Filip

himself falls into despair. As with Agnieszka Holland's Solidarity-era masterpiece *A Woman Alone*, (Kobieta samotna, 1981), the atomization of the community depicted in *Amator* cannot easily be assigned blame. It refuses a reified separation between "the people" and the socialist state; its politics are deeper.

With these discussions of *The Scar* and *Amator* in mind, it is now worth re-posing a different question, about film production, relative to this discussion. While the Cinema of Moral Anxiety was a wonderful, passionate coming-together of like-minds in a community, seeking to fulfill a need, or gap, were they ultimately really linked to the rest of Poland merely by their desire to *represent* the community? I will continue to ask this question in subsequent chapters, as I discuss formally dissimilar filmmaking (including in terms of genre). Here, to help us expand the argument beyond the textual realm, let me return briefly to *Personnel*. Young Romek, the protagonist, influenced by his friend Sowa in his rejection of the official organ of art wherein he labors, proposes something concrete alongside Sowa's negative diagnosis—the formation of a new sort of community—a people's cabaret. This move makes him a perfect representative of the Young Culture movement, so invested in seeking out an honest way of "describing," as with, in different ways, the protagonists of *The Scar* and *Amator*. But it also mirrors some of the steps the young Kieślowski himself took in trying to build new structures that would bring this process into being.

After 1968 and its political failures there was an exigency, very much felt by Kieślowski, Zygadło and others, for something of their own, as politically-minded artists. They wished to build something that stood apart from the false sense of community cultivated at the Łódź Film School. Sławomir Izdiak, a cinematographer of renown who shot Kieślowski's first great Cannes's success *A Short Film About Killing* (Krótki film o

zabijaniu, 1988), explains what the school's legacy, as distinct from the city, meant to Kieślowski as he moved into fiction filmmaking on *The Scar*, which Izdiak also shot.

The School was a showpiece, something the regime liked to display. It was world-famous, foreigners came to study, a sort of oasis of freedom. Entering the School gate was like crossing the border. This atmosphere of artificial freedom was cultivated, and documentaries reflected it in some ways. Kieślowski was the one who objected (to the privileges afforded students and future film professionals).⁵⁰³

The political failures of 1968 had left a potential opportunity with respect to this situation, as the filmmaking units were in significant disarray thanks to government suspicion and interference; it would be several years before they would (re)develop into their now celebrated form.⁵⁰⁴ Kieślowski and Zygadlo, but also Grzegorz Królikiewicz and others, attempted to found their own film studio. It was to be similar to the pre-existing units in structure, yet it would be, much as the character of Romek proposes in *Personnel*, a haven for young filmmakers interested in new ways of doing things and new ways of saying them—a break with the old guard. This project, The Irzykowski Studio (named after the great pre-war Constructivist film theoretician mentioned in chapter one), was met with much interference and did not successfully get off the ground.⁵⁰⁵ Yet much like their film *Workers '71*, it would appear in a new guise 10 years later, when a new generation of filmmakers founded such a studio, of the same name,⁵⁰⁶ during the ten months of greater political and cultural freedom known as the Carnival of Solidarity.

Perhaps, including also the recent resurgence of interest in Poland in the zespoły filmowe,⁵⁰⁷ we might then say the method of Polish film production has outlasted the

⁵⁰³ Interview supplement with Sławomir Idziak on *The Scar*, DVD (2004).

⁵⁰⁴ Adamczak, 235.

⁵⁰⁵ Królikiewicz had the most energy, according to Kieślowski, while the group also including producer Andrzej Jurga, who portrays Filip's sympathetic contact at Warsaw Television in *Amator*. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 42-43.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 43.

⁵⁰⁷ See Jakub Majmurek, "The 'Restart' of Polish Cinema," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 2, Issue 2 (2011): 253-256.

content of the films themselves in significance. Film units waned in the politically desultory early 1980s, after Martial Law, and yet they were still strong enough to push through work as inventively bitter as the science-fiction of Piotr Szulkin, discussed in the final chapter, or The Irzyskowski Studio's attack on the prison system of People's Poland, *Custody* (Nadzor, 1983), nearly as potent as director Ryszard Bugajski's better-known, infamous denunciation of Stalinism, the banned *Interrogation* (Przesłuchanie, 1982/1990). This is all to say, Polish filmmakers like Kieślowski were at their best when attempting new things, collectively, not merely putting out fires, nor waging single-minded war against the PZPR, as was Wajda's conception of his role—that film units had usurped the role of producer from the state.

Indeed, Wajda's newer, Moral Anxiety-inspired approach, although it had been lightning in a bottle in 1976 at the dawn of renewed political struggle, resonated somewhat differently during the newly unfettered political critique made possible by The Carnival of Solidarity. For Solidarity was indeed an opening onto a different kind of world: new kinds of organizing that had begun on the shipyards of the Tri-City soon found its way outward along horizontal, decentralized paths (as we will explore in subsequent chapters). Here, men and women, however temporarily, became equals, as it were, and during this revolutionary time everyone was warmly addressed in the informal 'you' (*ty*). Like the documentarists arriving to capture the happenings in the Gdańsk shipyard who were inspired by Kieślowski and Zygadlo's *Workers '71*, Wajda also sought an update of a prior work—his own.

Recognized for its timely militancy with the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival, *Man of Iron* (Człowiek z zelaza, 1981) begins its story a few years after his *Man of Marble* (1976) ended, imagining its characters as now playing a definite part in the strikes of Solidarity—and as targets for state repression. It is this up-to-the-minute fictionalized presentation of unfolding political events that is the film's calling card—immediacy in a near-hybrid form.

More than the depiction of current events, *Man of Iron* takes Moral Anxiety's attempt at *political representation* a step farther by incorporating real-life persons: Solidarity chairman and longtime labour activist Lech Wałęsa, as well as the widely respected veteran crane operator and leader whose firing had prompted the Gdańsk shipyard strike, Anna Walentynowicz. Existing within the diegesis as they do—they attend the hero's wedding—the film benefits from the (silent) blessing of Solidarity's most prominent angels; thus, in its propaganda value, it would apparently justify a certain lack of depth in characterization and story in comparison to the intricate and polished prior film.⁵⁰⁸ In a way, it purports to be something that the Cinema of Moral Anxiety always toyed with: a kind of artistic witnessing that takes itself to be praxis of a sort.

Yet despite its interesting (and rousing) form amid revolutionary times, it looks now like a revisionist film made *after* First Solidarity (1980-1981) and its Carnival-like atmosphere. The viewer sees the revolutionary milieu of the Lenin Shipyards in 1981 not through the eyes of a militant, but largely through that of a jaded journalist—a certain Winkiel who has been hired by the Party as a low-grade spy in its campaign to discredit the strike leaders—particularly Birkut's son Maciej (appearing at the end of *Man of Marble*), now a labour leader. This move, to have us attempt to identify with someone allied, however tenuously, with the Party is not unlike something Kieślowski, in his decidedly unheroic approach to the times, would have done.⁵⁰⁹ Winkiel is not eminently likable, but he is sad-sack and sympathetic, and perhaps an ex-radical. We follow his belated (and too late) moral

⁵⁰⁸ Apart from the Cannes win, this fact did not go unrecognized by Western critics, for example: Vincent Canby, "Man of Iron tells of Polish Union's Struggle," *New York Times*, October 12th, 1981.

⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, Kieślowski was to make two films in 1981 making use of a Party member protagonist, both banned: the tour-de-force *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*), and the less-successful but interesting *Short Working Day* (*Krótki dzień pracy*), a dramatization of the insurrection of Radom in 1976, in which the local Party Secretary is his protagonist.

awakening to what is really going on around him in the apparently exotic worker milieu of the Shipyards. This is to say that our following this outsider, through relatively standard cinematic identification techniques despite the hybrid form, is actually a something of a narrative switcheroo in order for Wajda to cope with and explain what effectively becomes the *real* outside: the militant trade union Solidarity, still something of a mystery to much of the Polish intelligentsia. Within the film, Solidarity is in this sense separated from the viewer more than the Party itself, as the former's living figures are effectively transformed into cardboard cutouts before our very eyes (i.e., Wałęsa and Walentynowicz mostly smile and wave).

Most egregiously, however, though it purports to be a revolutionary document, the door swings shut, quite literally, against the unnamed but palpable feminism and agency of Agnieszka of *Man of Marble*. In this later film she spends much of the running time imprisoned, the intelligent fire of revolt gone from her eyes and replaced by her concern for a child, while pining for her now-husband Maciej. Instead of Agnieszka, we have the now-familiar, individualist, father-vs-son, worker-vs-student account of political struggle in Poland since 1968 taking center stage. The horizontal pathways of collective political imaginary opened by Solidarity are denied, and its own significant number of female leaders and participants are erased.⁵¹⁰ Most significant in this regard is the key labour activist Alina Pieńkowska, a Shipyard nurse, without whom Solidarity's ability to continue the general

⁵¹⁰ See texts that seek to restore this important dimension to the Solidarity movement such as Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret the Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). Kristi S. Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland's Solidarity Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), as well as the recent, compelling documentary *Solidarity According to Women* (*Solidarność według kobiet*, 2014, dir. Marta Dzido).

strike in Gdańsk may have ended.⁵¹¹ In this case, Wajda apparently cannibalized the events of her life, such as her secret marriage to fellow Tri-City labour activist Bogdan Borusiewicz (i.e., Agnieszka and Maciej's wedding). This is to say nothing of the dismissive way the film depicts women generally—as typists and gophers for the men.

The only true moment at which female agency returns, interestingly at a para-textual level, is the very end of the film. As the credits roll, the film makes highly effective use of perhaps the most culturally recognizable and resonant text born in the wake of the 1970 Baltic Coast insurrection. During the massacre of the workers in Gdynia, a then-anonymous young man named Zbigniew Godlewski was cut down and killed along with dozens of others in machine-gun fire, then spontaneously hoisted onto the shoulders of his comrades-in-arms in their march into town. In the later poem of a young Tri-City architect, writing in a contest held by his workplace,⁵¹² Godlewski became immortalized in a name the author deemed typically Polish, in “The Ballad of Janek Wisniewski,” which was subsequently set to music. As sung by Krystyna Janda (Agnieszka), star power on full blast in ways best known to those who appreciate how actresses Katherine Hepburn and Barbara Stanwyck could rise above their tired sexist screenplays in the ‘30s and ‘40s,⁵¹³ it amplifies and also transcends the tale of male industrial worker struggle. Her voice rings out stridently but articulately, cracking with desperation and emotion (“Za chleb i wolność, i nową Polskę!”/For Bread and Freedom, and a new Poland). One feels in this performance there

⁵¹¹ After the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard workers had reached an agreement with management to settle the initial strike, Pieńkowska famously ran furiously around the shipyard, reminding workers they could not end their occupation of the factory, because all of the city, industry by industry, had come out in solidarity strikes with them; they would be crushed unless it continued. She was the biggest factor in saving the strike. See the wonderful description, from the memory of Anna Walentynowicz, of Pieńkowska's role, in Stanislaw Stanski, *Class Struggle in Classless Poland* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 238. See Long on the film's erasure of Pieńkowska and women generally. *We All Fought for Freedom*, 47-49.

⁵¹² Krzysztof Dowgiallo (1938 -). Personal conversation with author in Gdańsk, Summer, 2015.

⁵¹³ For the best writing on this subject, see Molly Haskell's classic *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

is more than triumphalism or cheerleading; there is urgency and terror, from wounds that have not yet healed. There is a desire, as Bataille says, to (again) lacerate oneself, in order to communicate this truth with others.

3.5. Kieślowski and Negative Community

In closing, I wish to elaborate on this sense of a wound not yet healed—what it meant for Kieślowski (as well as others, as we will see in the next two chapters). Within Polish critical circles, discussion of the later, more internationally lauded phase Kieślowski's career, throughout the 1980s into the 1990s, places much emphasis on his retreat from politics and public life in his storytelling. The films are said to take a “metaphysical turn,” or toward an obsession with chance and destiny,⁵¹⁴ especially his critically-adored European co-production television serial *Decalogue* (1988) and his final films produced in France: *Double Life of Veronique* (*La double vie de Véronique*, 1991), and *Blue, Red and White: The Three Colors Trilogy* (*Trois couleurs: Blue, Blanc, Rouge*, 1993-1994). Before touching on the beginning of this ‘turn’ I will briefly elaborate on a continued aspect of the extra-textual politics of production that persisted despite the increasingly politically reluctant Kieślowski in the 1980s.

Following the clampdown against Solidarity with the imposition of Martial Law (*Stan wojenny*-a ‘state of war’), by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, head of the Polish military, in December of 1981, Kieślowski and other Polish documentary filmmakers, fighting despair, sought to do as they had always done—insert their cameras where they did not belong.

⁵¹⁴ If I pass by the film many see as this turning point, *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*, 1981), made during the Carnival of Solidarity but unluckily released just after, and therefore censored and banned, it is because I find it such a rich and complex work—the perfect union of what it means when the personal meets the political—that it demands an entire chapter of its own. However, as it unites, not transcends, all of Kieślowski's strengths, I feel confident the films under discussion in this chapter represent the argument fully without its addition.

Kieślowski did so quite literally, placing it within the rooms where ongoing legal battles and trials were taking place all over the country, intending to make a documentary. He found, however, that his camera was far more powerful as a prop. Far from a ‘fly-on-the-wall,’ the camera influenced the events he sought to capture objectively. His presence in the courtrooms meant that Party judges who sought to pass harsh sentences were less likely to do so, terrified as they were of the camera’s power to record for posterity. He soon became a popular request at trials all over the country.⁵¹⁵

Somewhat nonplussed by this experience, which alternatively included a great deal of suspicion against him by labour activists thanks to counter-propaganda by the Party, he turned, as he had so often done, to fiction to tell the story. In *No End* (Bez Konca, 1984) Kieślowski was newly paired with two collaborators essential to the rest of his career—the gifted composer Zbigniew Preisner, and lawyer-turned-screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz. Piesiewicz, who had himself defended oppositionists, in court—this was where they met—was engaged to write the scenario of *No End*. The most important figure in the film, Antoni, appears only sparingly, which is perhaps a weakness in a film about political trials, for the character is a ghost. Until his death he was, like the screenwriter, a lawyer for Solidarity workers facing trials, and husband to the now grieving protagonist, Ula (Grazyna Szapolowska). As played by Wajda’s *Man of Marble/Man of Iron* star Jerzy Radziwiłowicz, who had always evoked an aura of beatific goodness, he is “...a man whose conscience is clear, yet who couldn't do anything in Poland in 1984,” as the director put it.⁵¹⁶ Further, in a (limited) way, Ula, in her despair, is a better, if bitter, counterpart to the dynamic Agnieszka of *Man of Marble* than the latter’s stasis in pre-Martial Law *Man of Iron*. While the film was

⁵¹⁵ For Kieślowski’s account of his strange, tortuous role in these affairs, see *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 125-130.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

vilified both by oppositionists for its alleged quietism and by the Party, who withheld it for a year and then distributed it erratically,⁵¹⁷ Kieślowski claimed he'd never before received so many letters, phone calls and personal conversations about one of his films, thanking him for testifying to the mood of the time.⁵¹⁸

The word that retrospectively surrounds this mood, “metaphysical”—perhaps the real word is religion—could hardly be avoided in a film about a ghost. Yet such moments are perhaps better characterized as the intrusion of the Utopian into a relentless negativity, an aspect of the transformation of “drab reality” that, as we have seen, was with Kieślowski throughout the 1970s. It is in *Personnel* that we first get a glimpse of what will become one of Kieślowski's favorite recurrent, affective images: horses. These, as he states in the portrait-of-the-artist documentary *I'm So-So* (1995), symbolize for him perfect freedom and serenity (in other words, *spokój*). Romek arrives at his new place of work on the first day and pauses to look outside. What he sees is a giant prop being hefted on a rope—a horse. He is somewhat charmed by this strange, nearly showstopping moment, which nonetheless almost goes badly as the prop swings down and nearly smashes into the workers below. If it is a reverie or dream it is threatening to become nightmare: death.

Horses appear next, and most significantly, in his second feature of 1976, made for television, *The Calm* (*Spokój*, 1976, released 1980). When Jerzy Stuhr's ex-con protagonist—a Gralak again—is paroled and arrives at his posted lodging, he finds the innkeeper fretting over a broken TV that, in between the color bars, intermittently shows a program about wild horses, emanating from an unknown source. The innkeeper has his face up against the

⁵¹⁷ “If a newspaper wrote that *No End* was being shown somewhere, then when you turned up at the cinema you could be sure that *No End* wasn't on. Some other film was showing. And when it was written that some other film was being shown, then it would be that *No End* was on. You couldn't find my film.” Ibid, 136.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. 136-137.

television and audibly thrills when he sees the horses, caressing the screen and asking in disbelief if Gralak has seen it too.

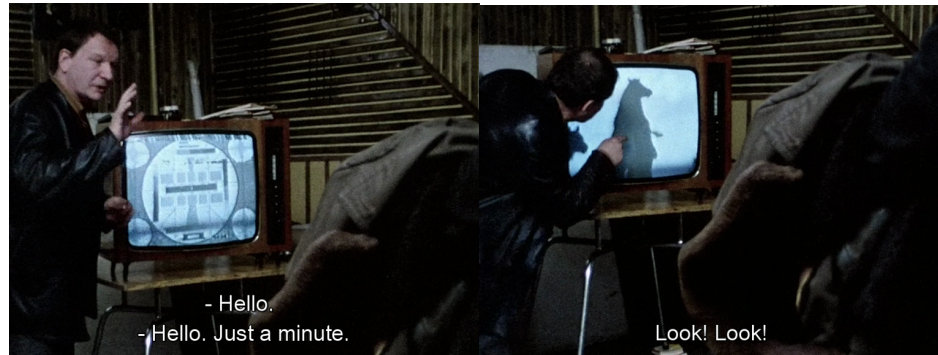


Fig. 28a-b: Utopian longing, *The Calm* (1976)

Gralak attempts to ignore the man—ignore the sort of too-real symbol of happiness that we understand is all the character really wants for himself (i.e, the titular, perfect *calm*). Later, however, we see how this image has stayed with him. At the film’s conclusion, our hero has fallen off the fine line he had been trying to walk in his vulnerable position as an ex-con between the labour agitating of his new workmates, on strike,⁵¹⁹ and a manipulative management trying to lean on and mine him for information about them. The workers, seeing the naïve protagonist as a scab and a snitch, as he unwittingly becomes, turn on him. In the film’s closing moments Gralak lies beaten and bloody in the grass without a friend in the world. Intercut with his muttering “spokój, spokój!” (calm, calm!) in an attempt to soothe himself, he sees horses in his mind’s eye, running under the cover of darkness.

⁵¹⁹ Though the word itself was unspoken, this was the main reason the film was banned. It was later released in 1980, when it was received as deeply contemporary, with one critic entitling his review, “*The Calm*, or a film about Solidarity” (Winiarczyk, “Spokój czyli o Solidarności,” 11). Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 157.



Fig. 29a-b: Bring On the Empty Horses, *The Calm* (1976)

The hooves of these galloping horses continue to resound even as the credits play. Given the origins of this image in the previous film, the world of the theater, and although it is a given that the setting was a microcosm of People's Poland, it is significant that it originates in the realm of art; the “something more” that Filip the amateur was trying to achieve through his fascination with cinema. This steadfast belief in the non-instrumental power of art to alter perception and reality is something I explore more in subsequent chapters. In Kieślowski's case it is difficult to say to what extent an art that was essentially documentary and realistic ultimately does become a retreat when politics are evacuated—when psychology, however externalized through beguiling form, fills the void for the purposes of viewer identification. Beginning with *Decalog*, documentary reality certainly *appears* to be there, but its specificity, its Polishness, is drained away and universalized. Even so, his determination to access the reality of the inner life, to bring it to light through his documentarist tools, remained a constant throughout his career.

This, finally, is also what *No End* is about—the nature of what one risks communicating that which is inside, and its necessary proximity to death. Perhaps this is the real meaning of what I am tentatively suggesting is the utopian in Kieślowski: “for in that sleep of death what dreams may come.” In the darkly visible first shot of *No End*, we hear

Preisner's choral-like music and gradually see, in a crane shot, a Polish graveyard, full of candles. We soon enter a small apartment, as the music continues. Then, we see the man, Antoni (not Gralak this time)—the ghost, we only gradually realize—sitting on the edge of a bed where his wife sleeps. He recounts, out of the darkness of this beginning, and looking directly at the camera, the circumstances that led to his death by heart attack (as Kieślowski himself was to prematurely succumb in 1995).

Very similar to this opening is *Amator's* well-known final scene, as Filip, having alienated colleagues, friends and family, and fighting self-pity and perhaps despair, turns the 16mm camera on himself for once. He is self-interrogated, as it were, on the circumstances that have brought him and his community to the present situation.⁵²⁰ He gulps as the camera clicks on as if weaponized, just as a shift to countershot assumes the POV of the diegetic camera. Much like Antoni, he recounts, matter-of-factly, the circumstances of a particular day, but in this case it is a story of life, not death—the day of the birth of his child, which began the film. “I got up at 6am. It was cold...” This is life risking death through determined communication, the community Blanchot sees when he reads Bataille—the notes written out of love but for no friends to read, “for that would mean personal reading by personal friends. Instead, “Through its relation to the unknown..(it) initiates ‘the negative community: the community of those who have no community.’”⁵²¹ This is the radical communication of Kieślowski's filmmaking that seeks to transform our divided interest, using cinema in partnership with the viewer. As we have seen, Kieślowski's

⁵²⁰ The image of Filip's decision—the camera turned on himself—is even better known than the film itself. It is often used as shorthand for the Cinema of Moral Anxiety, as book covers about Polish cinema, to riff on the ideas of the movement. Žižek, for his part, risibly misremembers what the sequence itself consists of—he claims Filip's wife has returned, though she has not—in his eagerness to grasp the ethics of Filip's act. In so doing he misses its point—rather than detachment, it represent a new type of engagement, at least as the director saw it. *Fright of Real Tears*, 138.

⁵²¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), 24.

negative community would become too painfully real after the dissolution of the positive, radical community of Solidarity, with the imposition of Martial Law. But his filmmaking practice nevertheless exists in its darkness as that which heralds the coming dawn.

In this chapter, I have attempted to push certain textual readings of Kieślowski's films into somewhat uncharted interpretive waters, in an attempt to do justice to work that may have grown increasingly subjective, but only because it remained dialectically open to the changing world around it. Kieślowski refused to content himself with reified representations of subjects who were engaged in an ongoing political process, not shying away from the implications of the negativity that was, for better or worse, at the heart of Polish cinema art. These films interpellated the viewer not as a receptacle for political content, but as a partner; his increasingly personal path seemed to him the only way possible in his historical moment, no longer content merely with documentary description, nor with "fighting" with the narratively closed artistic products of the *auteur*.

In these moments of darkness of what I have called negative community, we hear something of an echo of the embodied, affective protest of Janda's song and voice in *Man of Iron*—the "something more" that refuses to go gently into Kieślowski's long night. If the latter questioned political and artistic representation in narrative through alienating negativity, Janda's voice corresponds, at the level of feeling, and somewhat adjacent to the text itself, to the material level of labour of those organizing against the state—those individuated bodies in collective motion in strikes. This is something perceptible beyond discourse and the realist narratives that would hold their subjects in check, fixed. This is the radical communication of 1968. In the next chapter, we examine works that attempt to unite this level of bodily feeling with the abstraction of theory, in the short films of Piotr Szulkin.

Chapter 4

Solidarity and Theory, or Labour on Film: the Short Films of Piotr Szulkin

I was at the bottom, I am at the
bottom, I will be at the bottom.
- Lech Wałęsa⁵²²

The gap between mind and
sensation is a source of alienation,
but our absent-mindedness is also
the well-spring of the imagination
and its salvatory promise.
- Devin Fore⁵²³

In the previous two chapters we have seen how Kieślowski, building on past work and his collaborations with colleagues in the Polish system of film units, progressively called into question the very possibility of representing politics in *realist cinema*: that is, filmmaking which, whether documentary or narrative, could serve as a window onto the (officially denied) “unrepresented world.” In contrasting Kieślowski’s approach in the late 1970s with that of Andrzej Wajda, we saw the difficulty in trying to fix an ongoing, insurgent labour-driven politics in psychologically realist film narrative. In this chapter, we approach the formation of First Solidarity (1980-1981) by now more directly seeking an alternative to this approach, one with the capacity to correspond, in the radically communicative way we have discussed (i.e., locating politics in a deeper level of communication and feeling than that attainable by discourse alone), to the process of an unprecedented political struggle.

⁵²² Quoted in Maria Janion, “On the difference between being a worker and a representative of the working class,” in *The Book of Lech Wałęsa*, eds. Celina Wieniewska, Jacek Laskowski, Boleslaw Taborski (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 128.

⁵²³ Devin Fore, “Introduction” to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, translated by Richard Langston. (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 32.

The experimental documentaries of Piotr Szulkin (1950-2018) seemingly combined the innovations of both Kieślowski and Królikiewicz, showing that the camera was indeed capable of revealing unheralded, almost microscopic aspects of everyday reality and social relations in People's Poland, but doing so necessarily through a formally dissonant, embodied approach, redolent of theoretical energy, that pushed viewers to adopt a productively skewed perspective toward said reality. Above all, they challenge and expand our notions of what constitutes *labour*, and for this reason should be seen as an artistic accomplice⁵²⁴ to the praxis of workers, intellectuals and labour activists⁵²⁵ that led to Solidarity, a social movement best understood as fundamentally one of bodies *in and through their labour*. It was around this latter that organizing and direct actions against the state occurred, as well the affective, historically-rooted symbolic warfare by labour activists that accompanied it, as we will see.

4.1. Film and the Limits of Liberal Discourse

Before getting there, it is important at the beginning that we repose, summarize, further unpack the problem: what is the precise difficulty with the assumptions of liberal intelligentsia—including those of oppositional intellectuals in Poland in particular—about the type of communication and resistance against state power possible through (the discourse of) the public sphere? The latter corresponds to narrative cinema, as I have already tried to show, in terms of how this naturalized rational discourse is delivered, cinematically as it were, in terms of psychological realism and standard identification techniques. The

⁵²⁴ Note that I am not suggesting Szulkin's work reached the kind of audience it needed in order to do this, not least because many of these works were censored; in this sense the questions I attempt to answer here remain speculative, though historically and textually informed, and so rooted.

⁵²⁵ Though it may ring oddly in 2019, this third term is something of a bridge for the first two, at least insofar as it indicates someone *actively engaged in struggle*—in thought and action, and spurring it—on the Baltic Coast in 1980. See note 557.

limitation of this position, as well as our proposed alternative to it, will constitute the conceptual core of this chapter, as well as inform the rest of the dissertation.

As we have seen, Poland's intelligentsia, whose leading theorists—Leszek Kolakowski abroad and Adam Michnik at home—had renounced *socialism* (i.e., Marxist practice and thought) well before 1976,⁵²⁶ emphasizing in its place, if not quite yet the more Western liberal discourse of human rights, then certainly the need to liberate the alienated individual from forces of domination wielded by an increasingly abstract totalitarian or post-totalitarian state. In seeking to cordon off as it were the private individual from allegedly discrete realms of experience, they wished to articulate a certain space of freedom seemingly independent of productive forces—such is what Habermas conceived of as the “lifeworld.”⁵²⁷ Most significantly, opposition intellectuals cultivated forms of civil society, in which groups of individuals harnessed the means to act privately and semi-publicly free from the alienation of state socialist public life. A good example here is what was commonly known as the Flying University (*Uniwerytet latający*), which undertook higher education through non-traditional means, with home for classrooms, etc., independent of the state.⁵²⁸ In so doing, over time (i.e., into the 1980s), such efforts did weaken the state's monopolization of social power and social capital.⁵²⁹ There was a certain intentional lack of

⁵²⁶ See Leszek Kolakowski, three-volume (the first published in 1978), *Main Currents of Marxism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005). Though Adam Michnik still paid lip service to the word socialism in his “New Evolutionism” essay, going by the rest of its content and other evidence, he may have done so in order not to alienate some of his colleagues in the opposition. See his writing from the time period in Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2.: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

⁵²⁸ Beginning in late 1977, “informal lectures and courses that did not heed the official restraints on curricula were organized in private apartments.” Michael Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976-1980*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 147.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

structure in these cultural activities that found broad purchase in a country with an increasingly moribund official state apparatus (and official economy⁵³⁰) in the late 1970s.⁵³¹

Film and literature, meanwhile, contributed to these ideas, as we have seen, by showing the “unrepresented world,” with an emphasis on realism and the everyday; in other words, that which had been occluded—so it was thought—by the PZPR’s ideological stranglehold on what constituted reality in People’s Poland. However, as we have seen, this posited, other “reality” was rather selective; it largely did not include the complex and varied everyday experience of Poland’s women, nor did it reckon with their ability to contest state power within a “political sphere” that was effectively reserved for men. Moreover, this political sphere typically meant privileged men at that: while in some sense everyone was a “worker” in People’s Poland, a social fact that indeed had a certain power to later unify the opposition,⁵³² social divisions ran extremely deep in a nation like Poland, whose governing roots lay in the landed gentry (*szlachta*),⁵³³ as opposed to its neighbors.⁵³⁴ Lanes, as the phrase goes, were something to be kept to—certainly before the strikes of 1976, and even after,

⁵³⁰ See the collection *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism*, ed. Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

⁵³¹ Unfortunately, as historians and economists have increasingly admitted, the post-1989 triumphalism regarding the dual power of this civil society is in contradistinction to its presence, or absence, in central and eastern Europe in the 1990s, as the forces of neoliberalism and right-wing economics ran roughshod over public power and the working classes (including the erstwhile Solidarity movement). See these volumes, including one from a “native informant,” the political economist and one-time Solidarity advisor Tadeusz Kowalik, *From Solidarity to Sellout* (New York: Guilford Publication, 2015); Paul Kubicek, *Organized Labor in Postcommunist States: From Solidarity to Infirmary* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); and lastly, it’s the most influential book on the subject in any country, going by this author’s experiences, David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁵³² For an intriguing exploration of this see David Ost, who argues that while the working class became a *class-for-itself* when they stood up to the state in forming Solidarity, they were never a *class-in-itself*, which is to say that in a state in which everyone was supposedly a worker, the actual working class was not able to achieve “objective status” as workers, which would have been more or less clear cut (though I am not sure about this) outside of state socialism. “Workers were able to have great clout as citizens, but they exerted that clout only on behalf of all, not on behalf of themselves.” Ost, “Polish Labor before and after Solidarity,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 50 (Fall, 1996): 30.

⁵³³ See Jan Sowa’s polemic against the right-wing appropriation of postcolonialism in the Polish academy, “Forget Postcolonialism, There’s a Class War Ahead,” *nonsite.org*, Issue #12 (August 2014).

⁵³⁴ See Iwona Kurz, ““Our Folks”: Ordinary People in Czechoslovak and Polish Cinema around 1968,” in *Visegrad cinema: Points of Contact from the New Wave to the Present* (Prague 2010), 99-110.

despite the new worker-intellectual alliance. These divisions, and the barely su/repressed anxieties concerning them, were likewise reflected in the Polish features,⁵³⁵ as we have seen throughout this dissertation, and in particular in last chapter with Wajda's *Man of Iron*.

Of course, Polish documentary had, at its best, shown how the production of subject-hood was inextricable from, and in lockstep with, the productive forces of the state. One need only view in succession Kieślowski's shorts discussed in chapter two: *Office, Factory* and *Curriculum Vitae*, concerning experiences of ideological disciplining within, respectively, bureaucracy, the workplace and Party politics. Yet in Moral Anxiety filmmaking, the materialist analysis of these negative political diagnoses were largely absent. Instead, the vicissitudes of state domination—if it was so identified, for these were often allegories—was explored, often, through an existential quest of the protagonist “to be good.” Krzysztof Zanussi's *The Constant Factor* (Konstans, 1980) is symptomatic in this regard, as a “last honest man” sort of tale emphasizes that emphasizes its protagonist's individual existentialist anguish within the machinations of a mostly faceless, corrupt and authoritarian society. As in other realist narrative filmmaking, style here does not place pressure as it were on content or characterization. It is instead intended to be formally transparent, i.e., classically edited and shot,⁵³⁶ and in this respect its psychological realism should be understood as roughly correspondent to rationality in the spectator/subject who is to (cinematically) identify with its protagonists.

⁵³⁵ To refresh our memory, see also Wajda's adaptation in 1972 of Wyspiański's classic *fin-de-siecle* play *Wesele* (Wedding), about the wedding of a Krakow intellectual to a peasant. To a certain extent Zanussi's best, early work highlights this problem, but as we saw, in a way that feels more like apology, as opposed to the work of excavation (i.e., Królikiewicz's features).

⁵³⁶ This is so even if the editing itself may be occasionally documentary-informed or “post-classical” as in other realist 1970s cinema; that is to say there is no contradiction here.

What I have just described is of course a well-known, sturdy concept of Film Studies with respect to (Hollywood) narrative cinema,⁵³⁷ but its implications for a society actively engaged in political struggle, as was People's Poland, have perhaps still to be drawn out and thought through—at the very least we need to relearn them. In this respect it is germane to recall something that Herbert Marcuse wrote in 1937, of liberal individualism's ineffectual attempts to stave off fascism.

The person is no longer a springboard for attacking the world, but rather a protected line of retreat behind the front. In its inwardness, as an ethical person, it is the individual's only secure possession, the only one he can never lose. It is no longer the source of conquest, but of renunciation. Personality characterizes above all him who renounces, who ekes out fulfillment within given conditions, no matter how poor they might be... (I)his corresponds to a method of discipline still liberal in nature, for it exempts a concrete region of private life from domination. It lets the individual subsist as a person as long as he does not disturb the labour process, and lets the immanent laws of this labour process, i.e. economic forces, take care of men's social integration.⁵³⁸

Marcuse saw this defensive retreat into discursively-construed individual happiness as leading to what he called the “self-abolition of affirmative culture,” or the eventual obliteration of the individual under fascism. Soviet-type societies like People's Poland, as we have seen, knew a particular form of this culture of affirmation under Gierek's continued emphasis on (socialist) optimism and (collective) consumption, which in practice was individual in nature (Polański's *Knife in the Water* having provided a trenchant critique, far earlier). Related to this was, we recall, what Antonin Liehm called the “new social contract,” a certain, relative freedom from want and fear—arguably it was better guaranteed than in the West—in exchange for one's political freedom. In this we see the *permission* Marcuse mentions as

⁵³⁷ I refer to the writings of those who were part of the UK's *Screen* journal in the 1970s, especially Stephen Heath and Laura Mulvey, as well as *Screen*'s translations of French film theory. See Dana Polan, “The Critique of Cinematic Reason: Stephen Heath and the Theoretical Study of Film,” *boundary 2*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3 (Winter - Spring, 1985): 157-171.

⁵³⁸ Herbert Marcuse, “On the Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *Negations* 91.

granted to the individual by the state, “so long as he does not disturb the labour process.” The result was the same from Warsaw to Los Angeles—the reduction of personhood to mere economic subsistence and individual happiness. In *Moral Anxiety*’s existentialist communication of personal freedom amid unfreedom, we are supposed to see a kind of resistance to this state domination. However, as I have begun to argue and will further show, when such “resistance” is effectively—narratively and formally—detached, and subtracted, from the productive forces in which our bodies and minds are hopelessly entangled, domination is merely re-inscribed and perpetuated.

Against this, to question rationality in communication, as does the work discussed in these final two chapters, is to narratively disrupt and therefore challenge—rather than merely articulate and critique (e.g., Kieslowskian documentary)—the rationalized, Taylorist labour processes in which bodies are engaged and disciplined.⁵³⁹ To the tendency of such *Moral Anxiety* and post-Polish School historical films to reduce, fold and reify a complex, collective, ongoing process of struggle into the individual motives of protagonists (who are usually male, and representative of intelligentsia), I oppose here the non-fiction short films of Piotr Szulkin (1950-2018). Szulkin is commonly known in Poland as a science fiction allegorist, but his filmmaking, especially in these shorts, appeals first of all, however indirectly, to the viewer’s senses. Rather than excavating historical trauma through affect like Andrzej Żuławski (whose work, I argue, constitutes another alternative, as discussed in the next chapter), it uses the ironic play of its surfaces in order to awaken the viewer to the present, and specifically to that which perpetuates life—one’s *labour*. Textually, it is open in

⁵³⁹ Recall the increasing rationalization of Polish industry under Gomulka after 1968.

the best traditions of Polish documentary, in allowing the viewer to provide meaning to what are its heretical (i.e., from a Party perspective) and affective articulations of labour.

Further, in understanding Szulkin's mode of address I employ a theoretical lens that expands upon the idea of radical communication over and above the discursive delimitations of the public sphere by incorporating the "Marxist biopolitics" of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (commonly referred to in shorthand, as hereafter, as Negt/Kluge).⁵⁴⁰ With this nod to Foucault, I mean to emphasize, as opposed to the French thinker⁵⁴¹ as well as their colleague Jurgen Habermas, Negt/Kluge's "unwavering insistence that both power *and* resistance are always already material and microscopic."⁵⁴² Such work has distinct bearing on, as I will show, and can illuminate Solidarity's own aesthetic and creative aspects (i.e., weapons on the level of culture, which is to say its historically-rooted propaganda literature and grassroots communication strategies), which helped it secure victory in 1981. Ultimately, such films "speak" alongside the movement of labour's struggle "from below," or workplace to workplace and city to city, which inscribed revolutionary human relations across the nation, and perhaps beyond. Before we examine these films I see as providing an alternative to the notion of resistance as articulated through liberal individualism⁵⁴³ and the public sphere of civil society, i.e., that which was crucial to the way Polish liberal intellectuals envisioned political transformation, we must first examine the far more radical conception of praxis as

⁵⁴⁰ In this chapter I draw primarily from their magnum *History and Obstinacy* (Geschichte und Eigensinn), published in 1981, the height of Solidarity. Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, translated by Richard Langston (New York: Zone Books, 2014).

⁵⁴¹ As many have observed, Foucault indeed nearly conflates the two, "(in *History of Sexuality*) leav(ing) the notion of resistance underdeveloped so that, if anything, it seems to be a subsidiary of power." Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), 93.

⁵⁴² Richard Langston is their translator and one of their most astute commentators. Langston, "Palimpsests of '68: Theorizing Labor after Adorno," in *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives*, eds. Daniel J. Sherman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 63.

⁵⁴³ This is also the tendency among the US opposition today with respect to the proto-fascism of Trump, as in the empty slogan "We are the resistance!" It substitutes a belief in "civility" and the rule of law for popular pressure and action.

organically envisioned by the growing labour movement that had spiritual ties to the workers' council movement of the Polish October in 1956—and, more generally, 1968.

Solidarity's route to radical communication from below was, as we have already begun to see, not something separate, as in civil society, but *immanent to the state*. Enabled as it was by the institutional structure and rhetoric/symbols of state socialism, workers' self-activity and struggle was thereby largely obscured and discounted as a form of *political* engagement.⁵⁴⁴ This is to say that despite mounting evidence to the contrary—in particular the near-revolutionary atmosphere of 1970—workers were perceived as *of* the state. Any insurrection was thus viewed as flare-ups of “spontaneous” anger that could always be appropriately managed and manipulated, just as Gierek seemed to have done by visiting the Tri-city and radiating optimism and goodwill (“Will you help us?”), while later smearing the most militant of workplaces in the media and repressing radicals. To borrow a concept from the anarchist political scientist and anthropologist James Scott,⁵⁴⁵ the *nomenklatura* remained confident that the working classes had been made *legible* through its institutions and socialist-patriotic traditions. Scott discusses *legibility* as the modern “state’s attempt to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.”⁵⁴⁶ In order to possess knowledge of its subjects, the state needs to

⁵⁴⁴ Ost’s above-cited article is also relevant on this point: “In the realm of politics, workers could not appear simply as workers: Either they were suppressed, or “colonized” by intellectuals who had other goals in mind. Particularity could be defended only in the workplace...When these “hidden” conflicts moved outside the factory and into the public political realm, however, workers were unable to fight as workers alone, because the public sphere in communist societies is one in which no dissenting pro-worker institutions are allowed. There were no dissident trade unions to support protesting workers or a pro-labor press to take their views to the public. When these did emerge, beginning in the late 1970s, opposition intellectuals immediately dominated them.” Ost, “Polish Labor before and after Solidarity,” 31.

⁵⁴⁵ I was pointed to Scott’s work by his student, my comrade Alexander Kolokotronis, but I should also mention that Roman Laba’s writings on worker struggle in Poland also occasionally refer to Scott’s work (as do those of Ost).

⁵⁴⁶ James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 2.

streamline and map its terrain, doing violence both cultural and direct in the process. Like the Party, the intellectual opposition, within which Polish cinema itself was imbricated, as we have seen, saw little reason to believe otherwise.⁵⁴⁷

4.2. Bodies and State Power: “The Right to Appear” and Solidarity

We will discuss the implications of this idea for political aesthetics, and Szulkin’s films, later in the chapter; first, we must examine the still under-theorized ways in which bodies challenge state power. In so doing, these citizens and workers, as we will see, *communicate collectively* with their bodies in ways *illegible* to politicians, apparatchiks and liberal intellectuals, who, again, see—perhaps willfully—only “irrational anger,” rather than real organizing, and its impact. As we saw with the wildcat striking textile worker women of Łódź, fragile dichotomous constructions of the political/social and public/private, reinforced by the state on the political and economic level—i.e., Gierek’s consumption-based political model—are quickly exploded when the historical moment is seized. Judith Butler, in assessing our present-day resurgence of global protest against neoliberalism, as well as the violent repression and indirect “slow violence”⁵⁴⁸ that secures its place, has recently written about “the right to appear,” in a challenge to still-prevalent notions of the public sphere. The demand of this right to appear is conceived as countervailing received notions of citizenship and public speech as well as the gendered division, especially relative to labour,

⁵⁴⁷ Related to this, depoliticization in the West in the 1970s and the advent of post-industrialization (post-Fordism) saw a fair number of Leftist theorists begin to repudiate the proletariat as the revolutionary subject (e.g., Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau’s turn to populism, etc.). That is, however sympathetic or not they were to the cause, they doubted the working class’s ability to fight back, in part due to the complacency of the leadership in the “business unions” that remained, particularly in North America. Though it is outside of the scope of this dissertation to make the comparison, it seems a similar lack of faith in workers afflicted the Polish “New Left,” who saw the working class as too conservative to force change.

⁵⁴⁸ Rob Nixon’s term for systemic violence, including the environmental injustice absorbed by the racialized poor. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2013).

between the private and public sphere. It reopens the horizons of political possibility. Butler here continues to modify her concept of performativity as now quite literally *moving* beyond discursive speech acts.⁵⁴⁹ The “public sphere” in its classical form is thereby no longer linguistically constructed, but becomes one of bodily appearance—of turning up in person and physically disputing preconceived notions of what counts as political speech.⁵⁵⁰

In what is for us here a contemporary echo of the Łódź textile workers, those who as we saw subverted and overwhelmed the expectations of Party official and thus politically outflanked them—and won—Butler gives as an example the seemingly spontaneous protests and strikes by undocumented custodial and domestic workers in Los Angeles. These workers, not usually counted in the empty and bigoted rhetorical figure of the “US working class” (i.e., cis white male), laid claim to rights of assembly and citizenship without having any “legality” behind them.

(W)hen these laboring bodies emerge on the street, acting like citizens, they make a *mimetic* [my emphasis] claim to citizenship that alters not only how they appear, but how the sphere of appearance works. Indeed, the sphere of appearance is both mobilized and disabled when an exploited and laboring class emerges on the street to announce itself and express its opposition to being the unseen condition of what appears as political.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ For Butler’s earlier approach, in which she was occasionally criticized by other feminists for a lack of focus on corporeality, i.e., “real bodies,” see (in addition to her classic monograph *Gender Trouble*, 1990) Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, eds. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 401-418. However, not everyone is enamored with more her recent turn toward what Marie-Hélène Bourcier dubs a politics of “vulnerability. See her Queer Studies intervention, “I*** the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler,” *Paragraph* Vol. 35, No. 2 (July 2012): 233-253.

⁵⁵⁰ “(T)here can be no reproduction of gendered norms without the bodily enactment of those norms, and when that field of norms breaks open, even if provisionally, we see that the animating aims of a regulatory discourse, as it is enacted bodily, give rise to consequences that are not always foreseen, making room for ways of living gender that challenge prevailing forms of recognition.” Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 31-32.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

In the context of People's Poland, a workers' state with popular backing in name only, the working classes—especially women workers, as we have seen—existed very much as “the unseen condition of what appears as political,” guaranteeing the status quo even as they disappeared behind it. As we will see, films like those of Szulkin peeled back these ideological layers, through irony and by embodying what it actually meant to perform work, beyond facile social distinctions and accepted dichotomies.

Solidarity, as we will see, making use of workers' official status, we recall, as a class-in-itself, initiated a process that while illegible to most nascent civil society organizations, existed, on both a symbolic and structural level, as immanent to the state, with weapons stolen as it were from its veritable toolkit. Tactically and strategically, the Polish working class had over the course of the decade of the 1970s developed the structural tools, discussed in more detail next chapter, to fight back. However, this also extended to appropriating, and indeed embodying, through art and protest, the very symbols used against them to justify the existence of an alleged workers' state.⁵⁵² To reiterate, uniting this aspect of Solidarity with Butler's point: articulating only what *seems* possible (to some) names that which is legible solely at the level of (state) power as well as discourse. Discourse, particularly, is rarely prepared or able to envision the positive, but complex politics of collectivity and solidarity.⁵⁵³ As Butler points out, as with the domestic workers, to speak of

⁵⁵² Jan Kubik calls it, per the title of this book, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁵⁵³ David Featherstone argues this has much to do with the predominance of “accounts which (incorrectly) position solidarity as bearing on linking given, already-formed identities.” David Featherstone, *Solidarity Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 37.

“the excluded,” as part of a different paradigm, forecloses on political possibility and indeed the “impossible” aspects *positively* realized at the decade’s end by Solidarity.⁵⁵⁴

Indeed, this history of bodily suffering and struggle against the PZPR State for “the right to appear,” to represent *themselves* as workers, and as women, and not just the universalized and honorific “working class,” became, throughout the 1970s, a powerful weapon of counter-propaganda. As the time of Solidarity dawned, struggle on the level of culture developed rapidly, as praxis in conjunction with direct actions. The two came together in the spatial-relational organization⁵⁵⁵ of protest around key sites of working class struggle within cultural memory—in the desire for monuments to commemorate the dead.⁵⁵⁶ Authorities failed to effectively combat such protests, to say the least, since denying workers their monuments was bad press, so to speak, in a so-called workers’ state. Such is part of what Roman Laba calls “sacred politics”; in his chapter on the subject, he delves into and

⁵⁵⁴ I briefly remind us here how we ended chapter two, introducing Blanchot/Bataille’s idea *negative community* by also mentioning Partha Chatterjee’s concept of *political society*, which explains how subaltern, excluded, and yet part of the conditions of the state and the unity of the ruling class, is thereby able to resist it by weaponizing aspects of the state through they are subjugated. These seem a better framework as I have indicated than “civil society” toward understanding the nature of the growing *dual power* challenge to Party rule in late 1970s Poland—the movement that became Solidarity. Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁵⁵⁵ I refer here to David Harvey’s conception of space as fluid—that is, endowed with meaning relative to the human practice that goes on within it. On specifically *relational space* (and memory), see David Harvey’s essay “Space as a Keyword” in Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006) as well as his much earlier essay on the Sacre Coeur in Paris, “Monument and Myth,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, No. 3 (Sep., 1979), 362-381.

⁵⁵⁶ “Immediately after the bloody conclusion of the (1970) December strikes, the demand for a monument to the victims surfaced among Gdańsk workers. In the May Day parade of 1971, workers carried a banner demanding such a monument as they marched past the tribunal of party dignitaries. In 1977, groups that later founded the Free Trade Unions of the Baltic and the Young Poland Movement (RMP) took up the demand. Each succeeding year the crowd grew, from some 800 in 1977 to 5,000 in 1979. In that year Lech Wałęsa told the assembly that the following year on this day, December 16, at this place in front of the Gate no. 2 of the shipyard, they would dedicate a monument to the dead of 1970. When the strike started in the Lenin Shipyard on August 14, 1980, one of the six demands was the erection of a monument to the dead of 1970. On December 16, 1980, almost 500,000 people came to dedicate their monument—more than the population of the city of Gdańsk.” Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland’s Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 135-136.

interprets two archives assembled in 1980 by Polish labour activists⁵⁵⁷ (“1970” and “1980”). Laba locates this term as one with deep roots in Polish history, as we shall see next chapter, and as connective of these two dates named by their archives. Along with the monument protests, rituals at the strike gates, and the propaganda literature, as we see below, these “symbolic actions contain(ed) a historically grounded aspiration...that uniquely combined the European socialist tradition with nationalism. This it accomplished through its eschatology of a martyred proletariat and his imminent resurrection and triumph.”⁵⁵⁸

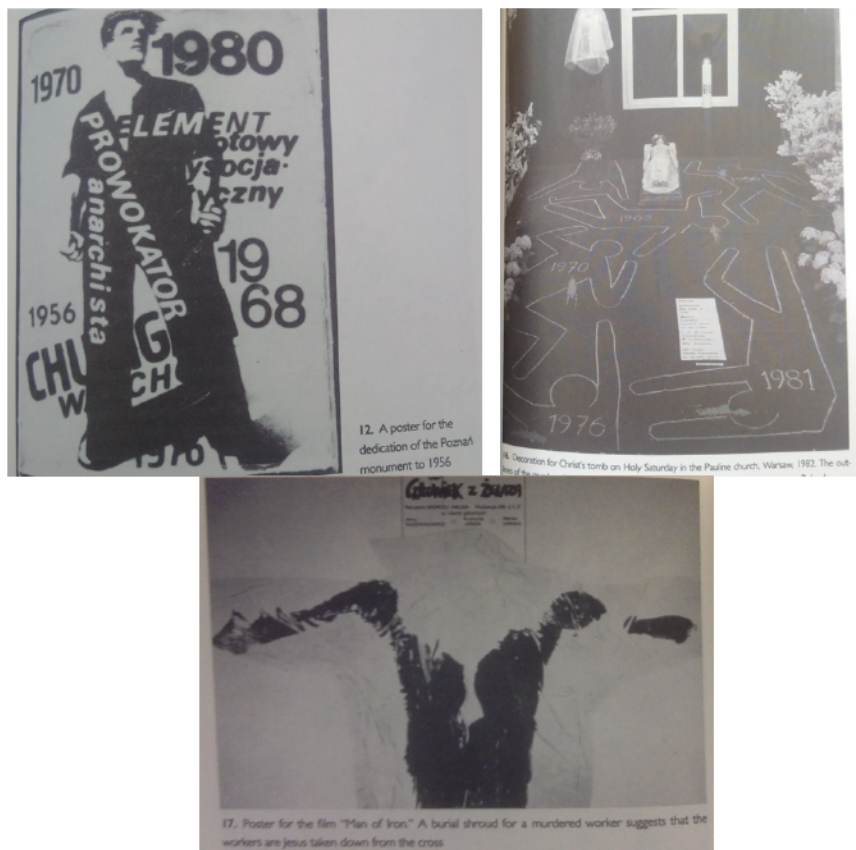


Fig. 30a-c: Solidarity propaganda taken from Laba's *Roots of Solidarity*

⁵⁵⁷ Jan Kubik has an insightful comment to help us define this elusive term. “(What) I describe is the behavior of those small groups of Poles who were the most active, who organized and participated in “illegal” demonstrations and ceremonies. They can hardly be described as “masses”; however, their cultural productions were for the masses, certainly more so than Kundera's novels or Michnik's essays were.” Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power*, 7.

⁵⁵⁸ Laba, *Roots of Solidarity*, 126.

From the secular, Stakhnovite image (top left), graffiti'd with slanderous names used by the Party to divide workers, to the chalked outlines of workers' bodies within Christ's tomb (top right) and a related, highly Christian image of a burial shroud (bottom), one gets a sense of how popular piety was instrumentalized by these labour activists along politically messianic⁵⁵⁹ lines, and quite literally mapped onto the body politic. The link thus made to a national struggle that had long predated the PZPR and People's Poland was deeply felt; these embodied cultural objects, which combined this fight for self-determination with that of class struggle against a supposedly classless society, had the potentially to resonate more powerfully than any composed speeches. These images were often conveyed on the bodies of workers themselves—as badges. Beyond mere discourse, such badges were a “means of communication that transmit(ed) the most important facts about the movement to its adherents and opponents.”⁵⁶⁰

4.3. Negt and Kluge: Obstinance and Destabilizing Perception

The cinema, as we know, was also a powerful currency of transmission in People's Poland—films like those of Piotr Szulkin are of an alternate type, perhaps, that may allow us to reopen a window to the singular organizing of this moment in history. And just as importantly, they also productively complicate the limitations of these images of a martyred, specifically male, proletariat. Like Królikiewicz, Szulkin, a painter by training, was dissatisfied with the capacity of Karbaszian/Kieslowskian documentary to say something meaningful about reality in People's Poland, gravitating instead towards the marginal and the un-serious. But whereas Królikiewicz's watchword was formal innovation through framing and mise-en-

⁵⁵⁹ This is a concept associated in Poland with national bard Adam Mickiewicz, who we discuss next chapter.

⁵⁶⁰ Laba, *Roots of Solidarity*, 126.

scene, to help the viewer overcome the tyranny of the cinema apparatus's naturalized role in narrative, Szulkin from the beginning zeroed in on human activity in something like perversions of the Kieslowskian documentary form. In a definite thread among his varied short films, he was particularly fascinated by *labour*, its alienation, and ultimately the way in which it underpinned human lives at a deep level. He would find a way to portray human bodies in motion in articulating their alienation without *reinforcing it* through rational observational/narrative means.

Before attempting a close reading of these films, and with this understanding of the propaganda of Solidarity in our minds, I need to draw out what is to come in these texts by using two theorists who likewise, unlike the post-revisionist intellectuals, refuse to abstract mental and emotional alienation from the human body—who see within its subjugation also the capacity for resistance. German sociologist Oskar Negt and filmmaker/theorist Alexander Kluge were, along with Jurgen Habermas, part of the next wave of the Frankfurt School—the so-called ‘58ers—as students of Adorno, their mentor. In chapter two we briefly discussed their influential early 1970s critique, and modification, of Habermas with their idea of a counter-public (*gegenöffentlichkeit*) or proletarian sphere, in which the negativizing category of *proletarian* designated a much broader terrain of experience. This “context of living” was largely “blocked” by the bourgeois public sphere, but its incipient forms within the labour movement and elsewhere promised development that could not be predicted,⁵⁶¹ just as was seen in Poland in the strikes and insurrection of 1970 on the Baltic Coast and a year later by the women textile workers of Łódź who picked up the ball they had dropped.

⁵⁶¹ Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 32.

A decade later, Negt/Kluge had more to say about where these potentially revolutionary forms of expression were specifically located. In their magnum opus of theoretical montage *History and Obstinacy* (*Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 1981, trans. 2015), they turned their attention to production processes centered in the body and the senses, or “the capitalism within us,” as they put it. Unlike the problematics of contemporaneous Continental theorists of (socio-)politics which likewise see it as operating on a micro-level,⁵⁶² Negt/Kluge retain the key Marxian category of labour, which they define as “the human ability to change matter purposefully...It not only consists of commodity production, but also engenders social relations and develops community.”⁵⁶³ As *community*, a word that immediately calls forth structures of feeling, suggests, *labour*, as well as labour power, now encompasses a much broader array of human experience. Intimately intertwined with formative processes of feeling as we adjust to the world at birth, labour possesses *obstinacy* (*eigensinn*), the element hidden within us that is never quite used up by capital: “Without the consciousness ever in the know, living bodies hold some of their capacities in reserve.”⁵⁶⁴

This capacity, present but inaccessible, cannot liberate us as it were by itself, and is in need of something of an intervention. With the constant bodily maintenance required of self-regulation,⁵⁶⁵ combined with an eviscerated body politic, which is to say a lack of community, emancipation is certainly not inevitable despite the march of history (i.e., the product of labour, as they emphasize). It is therefore to be sought through the body—we

⁵⁶² Emily Apter’s recent book provides a compelling overview of such theorists, like Foucault, Deleuze/Guattari, Pierre Bourdieu, et al. Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018).

⁵⁶³ Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, trans. Richard Langston (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 73.

⁵⁶⁴ *History and Obstinacy*, 108.

⁵⁶⁵ This is a difficult concept we do not have the space to develop here, but Negt/Kluge call it the “locus of obstinacy” and see it as the evolutionary trait that allowed us to dominate as a species. For a good explanation of the lineage of “self-regulation” as a term, see Devin Fore’s “Introduction,” in *History and Obstinacy*, 23-24.

must find the anchor within ourselves, they put it—and with it human emotion. As Richard Langston puts it, “Counter to Habermas’s appeal to communicative reason, Negt and Kluge maintain that the necessary reorganization of human characteristics can only transpire corporeally, through living feeling: “The raw material of feeling is rooted in pain. It is an aggressive means toward a peaceful goal.”⁵⁶⁶ *Cinema*, Negt/Kluge feel, has the critical ability to disrupt and alter our ways of seeing, but operating on the extremely visceral level as it does, should not attempt to wield its full force in approaching this pain.

This difficulty is articulated well by the opening of Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), in the argument the director conducts—effectively between himself and the viewer—through the French(woman) and Japanese (man) lovers concerning the bombing of Hiroshima (Him: “You saw nothing.”). Using their voices as a poetic and distancing lull as much as to give information to the viewer, Resnais ponders the meaning of how to understand suffering through metonymic and metaphoric glimpses of bodily destruction at a museum.⁵⁶⁷ Kluge, like Resnais and the French Left Bank, theorized from the perspective of a militant avant-gardist and filmmaker trying to reckon with the problem of representation. His answer, with Negt, was to advocate for a theoretical and cinematic—these are effectively rendered as one and the same⁵⁶⁸—intervention that corresponds to the movements and rhythms of the body. It is framed in terms of patterns of specialized labour: cinema will disrupt our naturalized ways of seeing through what they called a “precision grip” or

⁵⁶⁶ The Negt/Kluge quote within the quote was translated by Langston prior to his official translation of *History and Obstinacy* (from which it is drawn). Langston, “Palimpsests of ’68: Theorizing Labor after Adorno,” 61.

⁵⁶⁷ Note that Resnais’s pathbreaking film is an extremely complex text, especially as concerns memory and its institutionalization; it cannot be pinned down to a single level of meaning.

⁵⁶⁸ The entirety of *Geschichte und Eigensinn*—this is also true of the shorter 2015 English-language adaptation and translation, but to a lesser extent—is laid out like a great cinematic montage. Its digressions, intellectual excursions and illustrations, conveyed in part through its interrupting and irruptive footnotes, are intended to distract and rebound the reader’s attention from image to image, as it were, altering our perception like one of Kluge’s films.

“precision maneuvering.” This is very much like the grip, they say in analogy, that a midwife uses in helping a new mother give birth.

Sometimes a fetus lies twisted in the so-called breech presentation in the mother's womb. If the midwife does not turn it in time, the child will be strangled at birth. She does this "by applying violence [*Gewalt*]." Using a power grip is not an option she would ever consider. Instead, she uses a precision grip in the middle of the procedure, one that corresponds to the delicate limbs and agility of "the object." It is entirely impossible for the midwife to use her hands in a violent fashion and move the infant's arms so that they lie crossed atop its chest. In order to allow it to pass through the birth canal, *her grip must provoke the child's own movement* (my emphasis). Such violence as applied by the midwife is distinct from the violence of hammers, sickles, hoes, or saws.⁵⁶⁹

Kluge's own filmmaking practice, while made up of stimulating, gentle cinematic shocks and meta-visual ideas about mass art, is not what one would call an embodied cinema or cinema of bodies. This seems an important point, given that the excerpt quoted above, about the beginning of a new life, was intended by its authors for more than just comparison but to get at the heart, and actual substance, of the matter. Furthermore, arguments about Eisensteinian montage and essay films aside, his films were (and possibly are still) made with the benefit of the *counterpublic sphere* he himself helped to forge—part of his life's work—within the politically freer environment of (previously West) German public television. Such a realm scarcely existed in People's Poland, and even less so in the advertising revenue-driven USA. However, as we have discussed, Polish filmmakers in the 1970s had something enviable of their own—a public hungry for documentaries and glimpses of that “unrepresented world.” Piotr Szulkin was able to subvert expectations of “documentaries” such as his by adopting a deceptively political aesthetic that corresponds, I argue, with this “precision grip” of Negt/Kluge. He attempted, with a dose of rhetorical irony that his

⁵⁶⁹ *History and Obstinacy*, 96.

filmmaking hero Andrzej Munk would have appreciated, to tap into human actions, human feeling and human labour in People's Poland.

4.4. Szulkin's shorts: toward a non-objectified labour on film

Although it was Wiszniewski who had worked with the Krakow Group on *Workers '71*, it was Szulkin who was to explore labour most “creatively” in his 1970s documentaries. While Wiszniewski's theme became historical representations of labour and the uses of these representations, he was not very interested in getting under the hood, so to speak, of work and portraying labour in detail, nor in investigating its relation to other social forces. As we shall see, Szulkin's films grasped the fact that, as Negt/Kluge have it, human characteristics, however “immaterial” they may eventually become,⁵⁷⁰ are extracted from processes in the body (hence the choice of the midwife analogy). *Everything* (Wszystko, 1972), Szulkin's fascinating first short, made for Polish television, begins this often-visited theme—the repetitions and rhythms of human labour, and from this to human experience as a whole. His camera documents the process of urban waste removal—of the workers' steady rotation, almost like a camera roll, of a trash can filled to the brim with hard-to-identify refuse. This is taken to near abstract lengths, as the spectator's nose is rubbed, as it were, in the activity, in a way that emphasizes the image's visual tactility, a virtual olfactory capacity.

⁵⁷⁰ Langston, 60.



Fig. 31: Garbage Revolution, *Everything* (1972)

One might on first glance dismiss it as merely the formal exercise of a clever student filmmaker, but something a bit deeper seems to be going on. *Everything* gradually attains something hypnotic in its physicality and repetitions as this unenviable job takes place. We can almost feel the waste material, in close-up. The workers themselves are scarcely seen in whole—their faces not at all—thwarting both identification and the spectator's objectifying gaze. Throughout, an estranging earworm snippet of an American folk song, whose lyrics are displayed at the beginning, in Polish translation, is looped on the soundtrack—Almeda Riddle's "I love my little rooster." This song was employed notoriously many years later, with equal ironic incongruity, in Harmony Korine's bleak *Gummo* (1997), about post-natural disaster childhood in benighted Xenia, Ohio. Korine's usage was at least more direct in that *Gummo* is a film about (aborted) childhood that used a children's song, whereas in Szulkin its meaning is somewhat disturbingly harder to parse, and yet very much felt.

It is here we should also remember James Scott's concept of the legible, for the fact is that state power indeed has an aesthetic dimension, as Benjamin long ago showed,⁵⁷¹ if this

⁵⁷¹ This is Benjamin's conclusion in his "Artwork essay," Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2008).

is so, it follows that it is also terrain on which to fight back, as with the body. Consider these two images from Scott's book⁵⁷²—one an untended natural forest (*Fig. 32a*), and the other planned, or *made legible* by the state (*Fig. 32b*).

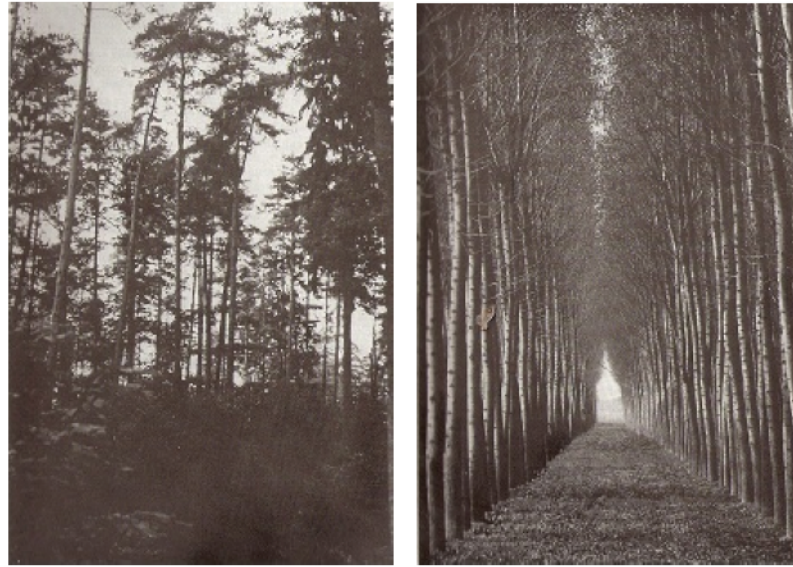


Fig. 32a,b: *Translations of Nature*, from James Scott

With these images in mind, it is fair to say that what may seem to some an obtuse and “irrational” film, which was deemed “offensive to the working class” by the censor,⁵⁷³ is indeed quite comprehensible, as I have shown⁵⁷⁴; moreover, garbage collection is a part of daily life and labour, however much we would like to wish its sight away under late capitalism (or “state socialism”).

Further, when we consider the particular way in which this labour is depicted, and in conjunction with the song, we have a sense of what Negt/Kluge call the “haptic sensorium.”

⁵⁷² Scott's description of the two images, respectively 32a): “Mixed temperate forest, part managed, part natural regeneration” 32b): “One aisle of a managed poplar forest in Tuscany”. *Seeing Like a State*, 16-17.

⁵⁷³ Szulkin quoted in Ela Bittencourt, “Interview: Piotr Szulkin,” Film Comment, June 29th, 2015 <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-piotr-szulkin/>

⁵⁷⁴ I would also add that this illegibility seems to correspond to Królikiewicz's denial of aesthetic beauty in his films, and his overall attempt to use a “democratic” as opposed to “authoritarian,” *mise-en-scène*.

The stirrings of sensation and feeling, produced here at the affective collision of sound and image, is for them intimately connected with human labour—that is, including birth. “(T)he proximity of the mother - this is the first thing that motivates the development of the hand and, with it, of labour. All further characteristics will then be developed out of this motivation.” This use of a novelty-like folk song, conveyed in balladeer Riddle’s backwoods vocal delivery (“cock-a-doodle-DOOOO!”) more than in the denotative meaning of the lyrics, has the potential to form oddly productive connections in the viewer’s mind in the contrast between the carefree daydreaming of childhood and the desultory reality of alienated adult labour. We are suggesting, finally, that what Szulkin is up to is very much like what Negt/Kluge articulate in their aptly chosen image of the midwife. Cinema here provides a certain affective loosening for the perception of the viewer, in order to make conscious that which lies deep within our mind—in particular in what these relationships have to do with (subjugated) human labour.

In a longer, award-winning film made four years later, *Daily Life* (*Życie codziennie*, 1976), Szulkin sought to expand upon several of these ideas, in something slightly less abstract. In this film he implies that our labour on the job, in the workplace, is not dissimilar to that in other aspects of life, in and out of the home. Organized as “a day in the life,” complete with a running clock that allows us to monitor the story time, much as Kieślowski was to do in his celebrated *Hospital* (1977), Szulkin begins the fifteen-minute film with a couple getting themselves ready for the day—showering, shaving, breakfasting. In the classically negative diagnosis that Polish cinema excels at, the couple gradually, as the details accumulate, become reduced to the tools they use, the food they consume and the items they shop for in order to replenish the first two. Yet unlike with Kieślowski’s fragmented humanism, Szulkin, as in his earlier film, makes this point by refusing to show his subjects in

their entirety. We are thus unable to engage in cinematic identification, even in a free-floating, observational documentary sense, so relentless and all-embracing is this tactic *and* strategy of steady close-ups that nonetheless refuse to look upon the human face. It persists as the characters move throughout the workplace, the grocery, and finally back home again in the evening.



Fig. 33a-f: everyday, invisible labour: Daily Life

It is here, when the couple returns home in the evening, that the film unfolds a further, subtly feminist point, for She (let us call her) does significantly more work (putting away groceries, making dinner, folding laundry, and taking the responsibility to avoid accidental additions to their family, so to say), than He (propping his legs up, his face disappeared behind a newspaper). In Szulkin's subsequent short film, *Working Women* (Kobiety pracujące, 1978), Szulkin now focuses with singular intent on women's labour, making no distinctions between the 'public' or 'private' forms of it he depicts. Here, however, he destabilizes our spectatorship, and desire to look, differently. In a way, Szulkin, like Wiszniewski, somewhat ironizes the mythic depiction of labour under socialist realism, but the lack of a discursive-historical element in this film prevents rational comprehension, which is to say also discursive reflection/critical comment, of its hypnotic repetitions. Beginning with a overcranked, slow-motion shot of women exiting their workplace in a way that surely references *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory in Lyon* (La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon, 1895), the subsequent shots consist of five long takes. Each woman's body is entirely visible in long shot, as each performs the same work motions, over and over again—ironing a shirt, driving a train, gutting a fish for dinner, and so on—until we fade to black, onto the next subject and next shot. The camera itself is distorted, the grain of the film murky, as if these repetitive movements were animated with an optical printer (through they were achieved through frame manipulation).⁵⁷⁵ The film ends with the most interesting of these very Muybridgian living labour tableaux, corresponding, with Szulkin's typical quizzical irony, to one of the final shots in the previous film of 'She' taking birth control

⁵⁷⁵ "As I recall, I filmed it using 16 frames, and then doubled each frame. When I sold the film in Germany, the Germans complained that the copy had technical errors. In my jokes, I always point this out as typically German. The distortion of reality is key to the film, but they still took it as a mistake." Szulkin, quoted in Bittencourt, "Interview: Piotr Szulkin."

(Fig. 33f). A woman tends to her child while watching the spectacle of a pornographic film on the television—unlike in Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), made the previous year, in Szulkin this labour is mediated.

To conclude, in all of these films we get a sense—however oblique, and skewed—of the everyday, constant labour that makes up these lives, giving the lie to optimistic consumption (i.e., the surface appearance of these actions), that was a cornerstone of the Gierek regime’s ideological and economically untenable approach to the 1970s. Linking official work to the labour to the home, to the “intimate sphere,” the film destabilizes our relationship as viewers to ideologically-riven everyday experience and the social reproduction in which we take part. We are unable to consume them, in effect, as the subjects of a documentary film.⁵⁷⁶ Of course, the Karabasian and Kieslowskian documentary tendencies were humanistic and circumspect—that is, rarely heart-tugging—in their depictions, as we saw in chapter two. Yet Kieślowski, in his attempt to be open to viewer “partnership,” i.e., the intermingling of our own experience in the determination of meaning, could occasionally be said to fail to provide something like subjective agency to his female “characters.” In his early short film *From the City of Łódź* (*Z miasta Łodzi*, 1969), the women are filmed, however tenderly, almost exclusively at the workplace.⁵⁷⁷ Again, we have the problem of merely mirror-ing, and therefore reproducing, pre-existing narratives and ideological divisions that separate off the private and the public, the latter of which women are only permitted to belong as *workers*.

⁵⁷⁶ Here I am gesturing towards what is sometimes called the “pornography of the real,” or documentary film’s tendency to emphasize human suffering—usually that of poverty or alterity—and serve it up to the spectator, as though to be consumed. Jill Godmilow explores this (as well as theorizing her own *counter-practice*) in “What’s Wrong With the Liberal Documentary?” *Peace Review* 11 Issue 1 (March 1999): 91-98.

⁵⁷⁷ Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Vanishing Women. Łódź Women Textile Workers in Polish Documentary Cinema,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 11, no. 2 (2017): 129.

Elżbieta Ostrowska argues that Kieślowski's then more experienced colleague Krystyna Gryczelowska, in *Our Friends From Łódź* (*Nasze znajome z Łodzi*, 1971), overcomes this problem of (re)producing visual reifications of what are in actuality complex negotiations of life and labour processes—particularly for women—by showing a fuller experience for its female subjects. Gryczelowska, allowing for the shifting display of feelings across home, work and leisure to emerge, therefore grants agency not limited to the (state socialist) workplace.⁵⁷⁸ This would be a full humanistic answer to the problem; but Szulkin's proposition, by contrast, across this series of films, is a kind of anti-humanism, refusing cinematic agency through negativity in an attempt to, somewhat like Królikiewicz, rescue agency itself *out in the world*. Aesthetically, moreover, we have a feel for the collective experience of working Poles and women, over and above its emotional reduction to representative individuals. Szulkin attempts to grasp an abstracted totality of experience through further (embodied) abstraction—this is cinema after Negt/Kluge's heart, doing the work of theory.

Finally, and crucially, this work is done not through staging an encounter with images of broad historical representations and their distanciation, as in the cinema of Wiszniewski, but by showing us distorted aspects of the everyday that underlie representations, such as only a particular sort of camera eye can bring us. It is a strategy at once both apperceptive and affective that also thwarts our desire as viewers to look more *deeply*—that is, with the Perspectival depth of a bullet's eye view that is typical of narrative film, as Paul Virilio had it.⁵⁷⁹ Instead, like the Solidarity propaganda, Szulkin's films correspond to what Negt/Kluge speak of in how workers have the need to “*sit* on their

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ See Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).

eyes” in accomplishing an immediate, difficult manual task that does not call for a visualization of “the big picture” nor any interpretation.⁵⁸⁰ This, then, in its embodied “precision maneuvering” is a *different* kind of seeing—perception around the edges.

The problem of the very nature of perception, as well as, in particular, its mediation in the world, is one that began to increasingly occupy Szulkin, to the point of its thematization and allegorization in his later work. Szulkin’s short films began to take on longer, more otherworldly forms, and later evolved into in his more narratively complicated science fiction features after 1980. In the next chapter, I explore how this *violence of seeing* is further transformed when placed within not just more complex narratives or historical frameworks, but, other, unknown worlds. Szulkin shares this development with another, better-known filmmaker who is at the center of the next chapter, Andrzej Żuławski. Żuławski is someone usually celebrated, *extra*-nationally, as an auteur-provocateur, but his films were deeply marked by and engaged with Polish historical, artistic and indeed genre traditions in ways that have been insufficiently unpacked. In his bracingly dark cinematic encounters with Polish Romanticism, he provides us with something of a subversive bookend to the Polish School features mentioned at the beginning of chapter one, but in ways that also allow us to further unpack the embodied propaganda of Solidarity, mentioned in this chapter, in its larger historical and cultural dimensions. We then explore, in the second half of the chapter, what changes when Żuławski’s cinema acquires, like the later features of Szulkin, the futurist lens of science fiction, utilizing what Darko Suvin called *cognitive estrangement*. This, we will see, much like the Solidarity movement itself, is the realm

⁵⁸⁰ *History and Obstinacy*, 110.

of *utopianism*—the necessarily negative (cinematographic) desiring that clears a different path—this time, temporally, as it were—for the citizen/viewer as they leave the cinema.

Chapter 5

Political Affect and Solidarity: Andrzej Żuławski from Romanticism to Utopia

Piercing the eyes of a bird so
that it may sing better.
- Valéry⁵⁸¹

For to organize pessimism means
nothing other than to expel moral
metaphor from politics and to
discover in political action a sphere
reserved one hundred percent for
images.
- Benjamin⁵⁸²

Last chapter we saw how Piotr Szulkin developed an approach in his short films that harnessed a certain theoretical energy, eschewing documentary realism through an embodied, haptic approach to the depiction of labour. In this chapter, we examine the combative work of Andrzej Żuławski (1940-2016), features that raise the stakes on certain latent, affective aspects of Szulkin's shorts by applying their micro-communication in far broader strokes to acting and non-psychological characterization. Just as the creative documentarists had opposed their work to Kieslowskian documentary, Żuławski's visceral, post-New Wave filmmaking in Poland, beginning in the early 1970s, came to be viewed, not least by the director, as diametrically opposed to the filmmaking that became the Cinema of Moral Anxiety. This latter was derided, uncharitably or no, by Żuławski as "radiophony"⁵⁸³—that is, mere reportage that effectively renounced the power of images, cinema's greatest asset. But a better way to put this might be: the renunciation of the

⁵⁸¹ Paul Valéry quoted in Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision* (NYC: Harcourt Brace & World, 1966), 129.

⁵⁸² Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 217.

⁵⁸³ "Skolimowski, Królikiewicz, Żuławski, Uklański: Excerpts from the History of Polish New Wave," in *Polish New Wave: The History of a Phenomenon That Never Existed = Polska Nowa Fala*, eds., Ronduda, Barbara Piwowarska, (Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 2008), 40.

interrogation of the power of images, and of seeing, which the documentary-derived realist impulse, with its tendency towards positivism, does not necessarily consider. At the same time, Żuławski, in placing his tortured characters and formal deviance within recognizable (Polish) historical and genre paradigms, manages something even more subversive in articulating our desire to find and communicate with others.

Using his cinema in this final chapter, I trace two forms or modes of modern literary thought that found new life in 1968, but also, less visibly and more surprisingly, given the reactionary turn in politics globally, with the dawn of Solidarity in 1980. Namely, I undertake an examination of Romanticism and utopia relative to Polish cinema and politics. In the first part of this chapter on the former I track what I see as a certain *political affect* mobilized in Żuławski's work that is rooted in what I am calling *base Romanticism*, with deep roots in Polish cultural and literary traditions. In the second part, I examine what happens to such work—heavy, affective, *supra*-rational—when it acquires a different, futurist framing, in the filmmaker's encounter with the Eastern European tradition of utopianism in SF (science/speculative fiction). Where appropriate, I bring Piotr Szulkin back into the conversation, for doing so will help us understand the relationship between his shorter work that tends toward the avant-garde and theoretical, and that of Żuławski, which, despite its reputation as *outré*,⁵⁸⁴ had deceptively popular aspirations in its mobilization of genre pleasures. Szulkin's work for its part took on an increasingly affective turn as he dabbled in fantasy and folklore, then found himself cast in the mold of a science fiction (SF) filmmaker as he began to make feature films. At the same time, I discuss the relevance of this radical

⁵⁸⁴ One need only use Google search to see this word in many accounts of his films, almost as frequently as “hysterical,” a word he loathed. In this (wide-ranging) interview, they have a laugh because Żuławski says it—the word the interviewer was avoiding. Donato Totaro, “Interview with Andrzej Żuławski and Daniel Bird,” *Offscreen* 18, Issue 5 (May 2014).

Romantic tradition and Eastern European SF for the collective political struggle that resulted in First Solidarity (1980-1981, i.e., before Martial Law). This latter I frame in more concrete terms in this chapter in terms of its structures, tactics and overall organizing strategy while viewing its own deceptive utopianism, which realistically “demand(ed) the impossible,” to borrow a popular graffiti of May ’68 in Paris, as a necessary break with the idea of progress; that is, as having the potential to unlock as it were a different future.

5.1. Żuławski’s Cinematic Revolt: Base Romanticism

Deciding to make use of fictions, I
dramatize being, I lacerate its solitude,
and in this laceration I communicate.
- Bataille⁵⁸⁵

When romances do really teach
anything, or produce any effective
operation, it is usually through a far
more subtle process than the ostensible
one.

– Hawthorne⁵⁸⁶

The political aesthetics of Andrzej Żuławski, while stemming from a place of deep personal experience and announcing something of a break with contemporary Polish cinema⁵⁸⁷ (i.e., the Young Culture and documentary-influenced cinema), also grew out of two very particular, deep traditions within Polish culture and letters normally placed in opposition to one another, as we shall see. Born in occupied Lwów (present day Lviv,

⁵⁸⁵ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 110.

⁵⁸⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Preface by the author (1851),” *The House of Seven Gables* (New York: Book Essentials, 1994), 5.

⁵⁸⁷ There is a tendency to group him with other sometime expatriate Polish filmmakers, despite generational and stylistic divergence. See for example, Michael Goddard’s “The Impossible Polish New Wave and its accursed émigré auteurs: Borowczyk, Polański, Skolimowski and Żuławski,” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Aniko Imre (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 291-310. To be fair, Goddard has written more on Żuławski than most (there is a dearth of English-language scholarship). See Goddard, “Beyond Moral Realism: The Subversive Cinema of Andrzej Żuławski,” in *Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, eds. Ewa Mazierska and Michael Goddard (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 2014), 236-257.

Ukraine), in 1940, and later educated in France, Żuławski drew, on the one hand, upon Polish Romanticism, from which he took a certain approach to the Polish experience as well as a fearlessness about discarding one's rational bearings and plunging headlong into passion, and with it spectacle. At the same time, enhancing this but also creating a subversive internal tension within the idealist elements of the Romantic mode, an ineluctable corporeality permeates his work—bodies as mere bodies, not as ideas or objects. While the embodiment of politics is itself a significant strain within Romanticism and Polish history, as last chapter already alluded to, the finitude with which corporeal bodies in Żuławski are separated from a spiritual/mythical level of meaning is much more in keeping with a 20th-century sensibility accustomed to the horror of industrialized war-making. This I theorize in terms of what Georges Bataille called *base materialism*, or a mobilization “from below,” of not only the popular—that is, *of and from the people*—but of all things transgressive in human behavior. Ultimately, for Żuławski the mediator between these dialectically positioned levels of meaning—the spiritual and the corporeal—is cinema, in its vast, negativizing power to reshape our conception of reality.

To begin, we will say something about his filmmaking as a whole as well its relations to his contemporaries and his own personal history, before diving deeper into and historicizing these aforementioned modes of literary thought. Though it may be to give the devil of patriotic suffering its due, the films of Andrzej Żuławski, like much meaningful art from Poland, are born of national trauma, and indeed, of the tradition of depicting such trauma. As we saw in chapter one, this locates his work, or at least his early features, which concern humanity *in extremis* during wartime, within the thematic realm of the Polish School of the older generation. In the late 1960s, as Żuławski began his filmmaking career, this

trope of excavating wartime suffering remained present, if dormant,⁵⁸⁸ in the form of director and Film Unit X head, Andrzej Wajda, for whom Żulawski briefly worked as an assistant. While both directors could be said evince a certain expressionism or baroque sensibility, the level at which these play out for the viewer is significantly different, as I indicate below. If Wajda was an influence on him, Żulawski has said, it was not necessarily on an aesthetic level, but through example—the idea that one must interrogate one’s “moral attitude” toward making a particular film to possess integrity as an artist.⁵⁸⁹

Wajda’s Polish School work, particularly as discussed in chapter one, is usually taken to be exemplary of the Polish Romantic tradition,⁵⁹⁰ hinging as it does on the critical image of a “spectacular (male) dying body (that) conditions the emergence of a national subject.”⁵⁹¹ Suffice it to briefly consider the ending of *Ashes and Diamonds* (1957), perhaps Wajda’s best-known work and the key text of the Polish School. Its torn hero Maciek (Zbigniew Cybulski), who, we recall, cannot find a “right” choice in how to be a patriot in postwar Poland, dies after a pursuit with pathos, his red blood staining white sheets on a laundry line. It is as though Maciek’s death calls forth the red and white Polish flag, and thus the nation itself into being—emerging as it were from beneath its representation.

⁵⁸⁸ This period of Wajda’s lengthy career was marked by a certain stock-taking, self-critical turn, arguably beginning in 1969 with *Everything For Sale* (*Wszystko na sprzedaż*), a film dedicated to his tragically late star Zbigniew Cybulski.

⁵⁸⁹ “I was really young, about 19, when I first worked with him. Then I was his first assistant on two films some years later. What was important as a life lesson; why the hell do we do films or why do we want to make films. What kind of moral attitude can you have? What kind of will to remain honest to something; to what in fact..or not? And that was much more important, to make it short..lessons of cinema? Lessons of citizenship and morality? Yes.” Żulawski quoted in “Interview with Andrzej Żulawski and Daniel Bird.”

⁵⁹⁰ See this strong edited collection, whose essays take the connection as a given but develop it in interesting ways. John Orr, Elżbieta Ostrowska, eds. *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

⁵⁹¹ Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Invisible Deaths: Polish Cinema’s Representation of Women in World War II,” in *Embracing Arms: Cultural Representation of Slavic and Balkan Women in War*, eds. Helena Gosciło and Yana Hashamova (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 56.



Fig. 34a,b: Maciek's death, *Ashes and Diamonds* (1957)

This death, while affecting for the viewer in that we have come to care about and identify with Maciek through Wajda's classical storytelling and Cybulski's nimble performance, registers principally on this symbolic level of representation (i.e., for Polish viewers). We are moved yet not rattled, so to speak; this is to say we perceive this death for what it *represents*—we are not encouraged to feel it viscerally.

Death and bodily pain in Żuławski operate quite differently—a counter to national symbolism through the bluntness of cinematic corporeality. Instead of abstracted feelings (e.g., patriotism) or represented feelings (psychology), we get *literal feeling*, so to say. Through his frenzied stylization, Żuławski seems to wish to push beyond naturalized representation, in which images point to fixed psychological states. His approach bears comparison to what literary scholar Geoffrey Hartman called “imageless vision” or “pure representation,” in describing the Romantic poets' attempts to circumvent the Enlightenment injunction to use art as a mirror unto the world despite the overwhelming amount of sense data available to the eye. Instead, they sought to develop, Hartman puts it,

the urge to construct that ideal system of symbols which relieves consciousness of the eyes' oppression but assures it of the eyes' luminosity.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹² Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, 128-129.

And further, as a result of this,

The eye and the senses are made to supply not merely the ornaments but the very plot of truth. The body itself becomes, in its contact with the physical world, the source and often the end of cognition.⁵⁹³

As we will see, experience in Żuławski's films is grasped or translated not through narrative or national paradigms, despite his engagement with them, but in a secular *danse macabre* between camera and bodies that seeks to meet the hell of living in the world head-on. In a filmmaking practice as suspicious of the mediation of experience and the instrumentalization of art as Hartman's Romantics, cinema itself become the mediator.⁵⁹⁴

Żuławski feature debut, *The Third Part of the Night* (*Trzecia część nocy*, 1971), concerns the war-time experience of Żuławski's own father, Mirosław, who co-wrote the script. However, the younger man's "period film" is, on the surface and arguably also on a deeper level, something of a broadside against Polish School filmmaking. While the latter carefully maintained classical narrative unity beneath the expressionistic visual flourishes that Wajda in particular was known for, in Żuławski's film (and films), the intense interaction of its full-tilt acting, editing and plot—the protagonist joins the underground and meets a woman who looks exactly like his SS-murdered wife—results in the temporary or complete breakdown of the narrative's temporal structure. We as viewers experience the protagonist's psyche cracking under the duress of war and fascist occupation. As Żuławski put it, to make it was to fulfill an exigency.

These are such memories that until sixteen I couldn't sleep without the light on. My sister died on our hands from hunger and cold. Half the family were killed at Auschwitz, the other half in Siberia. Three of us made it: my parents and I. My first

⁵⁹³ Ibid, 156.

⁵⁹⁴ This is the dialectical conclusion Hartman ultimately draws about the "unmediated vision" of Romantic poetry.

film, “The Third Part of the Night”, was a tribute to them.⁵⁹⁵

Moreover, the film’s grotesque bodily trauma is intimately and unmistakably connected with the trauma of particular historical realities. It depicts the experiences of Mirosław Żuławski in wartime Lwów (Lviv) as he, along with other vulnerable intellectuals, including many Polish and Ukrainian Jews, was able to evade Nazi capture by using his body in the service of a vaccine for typhus—as an incubator for laboratory lice—in exchange for secure employ and papers.⁵⁹⁶

The Third Part of the Night exceeded, formally speaking, the depiction of war-time suffering and deprivation in Italian Neo-realism (arguably itself a body genre⁵⁹⁷)—the latter a strong influence upon the Polish School. It did likewise to the New Wave innovations of so-called “Third Polish Cinema,”⁵⁹⁸ consisting of portrayals of alienated young men grappling with their identity and sense of belonging,⁵⁹⁹ as seen in the work of 1960s Polish directors such as the filmmaker/novelist Tadeusz Konwicki, Jerzy Skolimowski in his “Angry Young Man” trilogy, as well as the work of the young Krzysztof Zanussi.⁶⁰⁰ Żuławski’s work, rather, as with the more formally obsessed Królikiewicz, feels distinctly post-1968 and post-

⁵⁹⁵ Monika Maszewska-Lupiniak, ““War beading up into a red dot”: Autobiographical Discourse in Andrzej Żuławski’s *The Third Part of the Night*,” Trans. Zofia Ziemann, *Kwartalnik Filmowy* (Film Quarterly), Special Issue - Polish Film Scholars on Polish Cinema (2013): 96.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. Maszewska-Lupiniak’s article examines his father’s novella and Żuławski’s approach to this “autobiographical event”—the search for a cure for Typhus by biologist Rudolf Weigl, whose “workers” were saved from death camps.

⁵⁹⁷ This is one aspect of Karl Schoonover’s compelling intervention into our conception of the purpose/approach of Neorealism. *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁵⁹⁸ Michael Goddard claims that the title of Żuławski’s debut, while taken from the Bible, is also a jab at this “Third” cinema (which would fit his personality). “Beyond Moral Realism,” 239.

⁵⁹⁹ As indicated in the first chapter, Ewa Mazierska’s newer coinage of this grouping as the “soft avant-garde,” taken with this earlier historicizing label, is perhaps a more useful shorthand for understanding its aesthetics. The widely influential novelist/filmmaker Tadeusz Konwicki’s artful two-hander *The Last Days of Summer* (1958)—like a more spartan Antonioni—is usually seen as the harbinger of this trend, a kind of “New Wave” that never got off the ground.

⁶⁰⁰ Marek Haltof includes Zanussi within this group in his *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 125.

revisionist; that is, it is less about the innate need for rebellion and generational understanding⁶⁰¹ than indicative of a complete breakdown in communication, and of the loss of the traditional societal relationship between the individuated person and patriarchal authority. *The Third Part's* protagonist is not rebelling against his father—it is simply the case that his father has no answers for him to the madness that surrounds them other than to impotently urge the son to “adapt yourself to the new laws that govern this decay!” Żuławski's younger generation careens about quite literally in an apocalyptic world that has had called into question the very possibility of knowledge about this world—to say nothing of *how* to know it. It comports, as a text, with Bataille's sentiment “(L)ess do I question to know. That's something that pretty much leaves me indifferent. And I live. And I question in order to live.”⁶⁰²

5.1.1. Interlude on Cinema and Mimesis

This question of epistemology and embodied communication still needs a slightly oblique route, rather than a frontal assault, critically speaking, lest we suppose this apocalyptic energy present on a narrative, imagistic, and indeed bodily level in Żuławski implies not a mediation of the world but the drive for some sort of cinematic catharsis or nihilism, as perhaps suggested by some of the labels attached to his work (e.g., “hysterical excess”⁶⁰³). While Żuławski relentlessly centers the human *body* (as opposed to merely the

⁶⁰¹ Polish cinema of the 1960s did not remotely approach the politics of nearby cinemas like Czechoslovak New Wave or Yugoslav Black Wave in their sense of anarchic invention (e.g., the work of Vera Chytilová or Dušan Makavejev) nor allegorical nose-thumbing at state power (e.g., Miloš Forman's *Fireman's Ball*). Arguably no European cinema west of Poland matched these two, either (excepting Left Bank French cinema, perhaps).

⁶⁰² Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 110.

⁶⁰³ Kristin Thompson reminds us, pace Barthes and Shklovski, that the word ‘excess’ is often used somewhat haphazardly when critics are faced with hermeneutical frustration. See her classic essay “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” *Cine-Tracts: A Journal of Film, Communication, Culture and Politics* 1, No. 2 (Summer 1977), 54-63.

human subject/individual), let us consider a more avant-garde, even structural approach to the question, in a close reading of another short film by Piotr Szulkin, related to yet distinct from those of the previous chapter. In its charged affect of aesthetic violence and historical embodiment, we will see an inoculation, so to speak, for that in which Żuławski is engaged.

Copyright Film Polski MCMLXXVI (1976) takes for its subject (or object), appropriately enough, an apple—the ultimate symbol of the dangers of knowledge. Symbolism, however, is not necessarily what this film is up to—not precisely. As it begins we see a close-up image of a delicious-looking green apple, surrounded by darkness. Our eyes, as Laura Marks puts it in defining visual tactility, or the haptic, want to touch this object. To quote Marks, on the strange power of such images, which has tended to elude, until perhaps recently, a field like film studies long-haunted by the earlier theorization of cinema as a language,

our experience of cinema is mimetic, or an experience of bodily similarity to the audiovisual images we take in. Cinema is not merely a transmitter of signs; it bears witness to an object and translates the presence of that object to viewers.⁶⁰⁴

If we accept this description of the affective, mimetic power of the cinematic image, we have some insight into what may occur for viewers in what comes next. To our somewhat comical horror, the luscious apple slowly buckles, as the commercial press in which, we realize, it has been placed, gradually comes down, until the fruit has been reduced to mere pulp (*Fig. 35b*).

⁶⁰⁴ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), xvii.



Fig. 35a,b: *Copyright Film Polski MCMLXXVI* (1976)

What are we to make of this violence against foodstuff? The footage of the mutilated apple is excessive, in the sense that it makes critical language challenging. In its somewhat grotesque destruction in close-up, it recalls some of the more transgressive aspects of the 1960s avant-garde—for example, Kurt Kren’s collaborations with the Viennese Actionists (without however Kren’s indispensably rapid, slice-and-dice cutting).



Fig. 36a,b: *O Tannenbaum* (1964)

Or, together with *Copyright’s* comic element—reinforced by two bizarre intrusions of Handel’s *Messiah*, as music continues its ironic, contrapuntal role in Szulkin’s work—it is not unlike some of more sensuous, dadaistic impulses within the European New Waves. Green apples themselves are a recurring motif (Fig. 37b) within Czechoslovak filmmaker Vera Chytilová’s formally free-wheeling, food-crazy, feminist masterpiece *Daisies* (1966).



Fig. 37a,b Food in Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966)

These two examples merit mention because with Szulkin's films there is always a sense in which a certain triangulation is at work between (avant-garde) imagery/sound, (art cinema) storytelling, and the engagement of viewers—the latter something of a fulcrum. In both of the films mentioned above, bodies surround the food objects, which, at least in *Daisies*, indeed help mimetically “translate the presence of (the) object to viewers.”⁶⁰⁵ In *Copyright*, bodies are noticeably absent; the apple by itself seems to exceed any real symbolism or representational element. However, following Marks, the haptic-tactile, affective power of such images should not exclude other readings, whether intellectual or symbolic (indeed, I would argue that seeking to prevent them, as a thinking and feeling human viewer, is ultimately impossible).

If we introspect, then, about what our thoughts as a viewer might be, watching Szulkin's film, we might consider the status of apples as staples in a nation without ready access to other, warmer-climate fruit. In thinking more broadly of food, we might recall the slow violence being done to Polish citizens in the titular year the film was made, 1976—a sudden food price hike for a poor population. Finally, this would lead us to something more

⁶⁰⁵ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, xvii.

direct, which, especially for the intended Polish viewer of the time, would seem to immediately supersede, or at least precede, the first two—that is, the experience of a healthy, ripe piece of fruit utterly pulverized as a substitute for the insurrections violently put down in Radom and Ursus (and to a lesser extent, every major city) that same year.

Yet finally, Szulkin, his cards close to his chest, withholds something of an allegory in miniature until in the last moments, when the pulverized apple we have watched in long take is suddenly replaced via the cut with an ugly, unpulverized, rotten one. For the critic and curator Michał Oleszczyk, this series signals the key to an overall existentialist attitude on the part of a filmmaker who was fond of Albert Camus: “the only grace to be found in this world is that borne of heavy pressure.”⁶⁰⁶ While that may be, it nevertheless corresponds as well to very real repression taking place in 1976—in this sense it “says” whatever it is has to say, *alongside them*. With this in mind, any sense of comic horror viewers initially feel when faced with the affect of an embodied—we now understand how it corresponds to bodies—excessive apple-image being crushed into oblivion is less likely to inspire either existential fortitude or defeatism than a certain feeling of indignation, a mobilizing emotion.

To be sure, it is not the instrumentalized sensation present in an agit-prop film. Even in this more affective, near-structural mode of *Copyright Film Polskiej*, Szulkin is far too oblique for that. What is more, he is devoted to the radically communicative—the *supra*-rational. As in Żuławski’s features, as we will see, cinema feels more like a literal canvas, one upon which our radical imagination—the “lamp” within, for the Romantics⁶⁰⁷—can be projected, against

⁶⁰⁶ Michał Oleszczyk, “Things to Come: Piotr Szulkin’s Homespun Apocalypse,” *Roger Ebert.com*, March 16th, 2015. Accessed 4/12/18 <https://www.rogerebert.com/far-flung-correspondents/piotr-szulkins-homespun-apocalypse>

⁶⁰⁷ This well-known conception comes from M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (OUP, 1976).

desultory reality. Szulkin often compared cinema to a scream with the power “to confront the situation (we are in),”⁶⁰⁸ while for Żuławski cinema was “like a gate in a dark wall.”⁶⁰⁹ In short, it is the practice of radical freedom through affective negation, even as the content of the films interrogate the very possibility of freedom and knowledge in the world. Above all, perhaps, these filmmakers want to live (positively) outside of the negativity of the text—the “very interesting nothing of cinema,” as Żuławski put it.⁶¹⁰ In this he was surprisingly like Kiesłowski, whose characters dreamed of horses, as though they were positive, utopian intrusions onto this negative cinematic canvas. Even so, Kiesłowski’s work ultimately grounds its authority in the stuff of material reality (“Telling *with* reality”), which Szulkin’s structural short slyly subverts. It reorients our (complex) relationship to an everyday object and its embodiment, even as his other films, as we saw last chapter, found novel ways to portray human bodies engaged in labour that refused their reification as individual “characters.” Similarly, Żuławski’s dark imagination reorients or mediates our relationship to reality through radically communicative bodies; here, acting and a moving camera aesthetic play a far larger role in subverting cinematic identification. What is more, these affectively-charged bodies are themselves rooted, for the Polish viewer especially, through certain historical-artistic continuities.⁶¹¹ This continuity begins, firstly, through his link to Polish Romanticism.

⁶⁰⁸ Ela Bittencourt, “Interview: Piotr Szulkin,” *Film Comment*, June 29th, 2015.

⁶⁰⁹ Żuławski quoted in the documentary *Żuławski par Żuławski*, dir. Jakub Skoczen (TV, 2000, Poland).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ This is again perhaps a surprising for someone occasionally labeled an “outsider artist.” See this interview with his later collaborator, the curator Daniel Bird. “Outsiders, Shamans, and Devils, Part 1: A Discussion of Central European New Wave Cinema with Daniel Bird,” *Slant magazine*, March 2, 2009 <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/outsiders-shamans-and-devils-part-1-a-discussion-of-central-european-new-wave-cinema-with-film-writer-daniel-bird/>

5.1.2. Romanticism and Political Affect

Beginning in the second decade of the 19th-century, Polish Romanticism, like Polish art after WWII, was a response to a profound national trauma; in so responding it developed a particular poetics, which took the form of a *political affect*, as described and shown below—a well from which Żuławski drew deeply. However, in terms of cinema, Andrzej Wajda was and is the inarguable torch-bearer in the public mind for Polish Romantic patriotism. In cinema as in public life,⁶¹² Wajda extolled the politically liberal virtues of tolerance and individual rights within an artistic framework that could not be entirely contained by mere rationalism (read: classical narrative realism).⁶¹³ Romantic literature in Poland, however, as we will see, contained elements that were perhaps darker and woolier—these Żuławski was eager to tease out—than Wajda’s cosmopolitan inheritance and careful balance of the baroque and the classical. This is likewise true, politically speaking, as compared to Western culture’s more conservative sense of Romanticism as heralding the bourgeois, individualist turn in Europe following the quelling of the most radical aspects of the French Revolution.⁶¹⁴

Contrary to this formulation, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayles have argued that Romanticism in general is a profound, popular reaction to the depredations and deprivation of capitalist modernity,⁶¹⁵ which is to say it challenges a rationality in thrall to the economic and politically oppressive aspects of life. If this is so, the Polish legacy emphasizes this aspect

⁶¹² In opposition politics, his counterpart would probably be the dissident turned (still active) newspaper editor Adam Michnik, who once wrote a lengthy piece on Wajda, in part recognizing their similarities. Michnik, “The Wajda Question.” *Salmagundi*, No. 128/129 (Fall-Winter 2000 - Winter 2001), 137-179.

⁶¹³ He also adapted Stanislaw Wyspianski’s fin-de-siecle play *Wedding* (Wesele, 1973, dir. Wajda), his best known work and certainly in the Romantic tradition of the intersection of the political and the mystical.

⁶¹⁴ It is too great and divisive a topic to breach here, but I am thinking of the time of the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815)

⁶¹⁵ Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

in rather historically unique ways. In captive Poland the Romantic revolt took on a less internal “withdrawal of the individual”⁶¹⁶ (however transgressive in of itself), and a more external, overt call to collective action. The poet and academic Czesław Miłosz, arguably the most recognizable Polish literary figure of the 20th century internationally, situated the works of Polish Romanticism within its time period thusly:

...a jungle of criss-crossing currents, of madly daring ideas, of self-pity and national arrogance, and of unsurpassed brilliancy in poetic technique asks for constantly renewed explorations...The struggle against the classical rules of good taste, which began in Poland (as in France) around 1820, concealed, from its inception, political undertones ...Romanticism in Poland acquired an extremely activist character and was clearly a consequence of the many ideas of the Enlightenment.⁶¹⁷

This “activist character” was correlated with the dire circumstances facing the nation following the three-sided Partition of Poland (*Rozbiory Polski*), which began in 1772, as well as the especially repressive character of life in areas controlled by Tsarist Russia.⁶¹⁸ It thus inspired a “nationalism,” yet on the whole this had a politically pluralist character, rather than solely cultural/ethnic.⁶¹⁹ Its deceptive progressivism is aptly summed up in Michael Löwy’s description of the pan-European Romantic attitude of “...protest against exploitative society in the name of the values of the past.”⁶²⁰ In this, it was perhaps perfectly in keeping with the spirit of 1968 in Eastern Europe, in which the State, and the Party, were hated, while the nation and socialism joined together against it in something of an uneasy embrace. A filmmaker like Żuławski, drawing on historical themes as he did in his early work, clearly

⁶¹⁶ Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 201.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ The Partitions of Poland (1772-1793), Poland’s loss of nationhood through war and subsequent divisions by Prussia, Austria and Russia, constituted “the most radical change in the map of Europe since the Ottoman conquests of the fourteenth century.” Robert E. Jones, “Review: *The Partitions of Poland, 1772, 1793, 1795* by Jerzy Lukowski,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Jun., 2000): 401.

⁶¹⁹ Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 4.

⁶²⁰ Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, trans. Donald LaCoss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 100.

identified with the Polish Romantic need to make art in times of political strife; indeed, the extent to which his films are radical protests against modernity is an underappreciated facet—see especially *Szamanka* (She-Shaman, 1996), about which more later, in which an ancient preternatural force embodied by the titular woman threatens the post-1989, rapacious free market philistinism of the present.

The Polish approach to Romantic literature at the height of its influence and power (i.e., after 1820), had a particular, lyrical, non-realist character, drawing on the culturally and religiously diverse history of the region, including pagan folklore, in its appeals to openly revolutionary and politically Messianic ideals. The inarguable key figure of Polish Romanticism, and the Pushkin of Poland in terms of national legacy, was Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855). His poetry combined the precision of Enlightenment-era verse with a newfound, defiantly mystical character in a political-patriotic key.⁶²¹ Regardless of his late-life choices, in which he largely eschewed writing for direct action—he died in 1855 in Turkey while organizing an all-Jewish brigade against Austrian imperialism—the success of his earliest successful writing efforts were political on a different register. In a well-known, early poem, “Romanticism,” Mickiewicz presents a kind of statement of purpose, which uses words from Hamlet as an epigraph (“Methinks, I see... Where? -In my mind's eye.”), to jab at the positivistic rationalism of Enlightenment philosophers. Here is an excerpt, from its conclusion:

So the girl embraces her lover,
Runs after him, shouts, falls;
Seeing her fall, hearing the voice of her grief,
A crowd of people gathers.

⁶²¹ In this latter he and like-minded contemporaries were also heavily inspired by the Napoleonic myth as well as French Utopian socialism. Milosz, *History of Polish Literature*, 231.

"Say your prayers!" shout the simple folk,
"His soul must be here.
Jasio must be near his Karusia,
He loved her in life!"

I also hear this, I also believe this,
I cry and say my prayers.
"Listen, maiden!" shouts amid the uproar
An old man, and exclaims to the people:
"Trust my sight and my lenses,
I see nothing here.

"The ghosts are the creation of this tavern crowd,
Forged in the smithy of foolishness.
The girl is raving utter nonsense,
And the peasants blaspheme against reason."

"The girl feels," I modestly answer,
"And the crowd believes profoundly;
Feeling and faith speak more clearly to me
Than the lenses and eye of the sage.

"You know dead truths, unknown to the people.
You see the world in details, in each spark of the stars;
You don't know living truth, you'll never see a miracle!
Have a heart and look into your heart!"⁶²²

The most commonly cited element of this early poem is Mickiewicz's speaker's entreaty to suspend the faculties of thought directed by the "sage" (i.e., the academic), in order to *feel*, to "have a heart and look into your heart (*Miej serce i patrzaj w serce!*)" Formulating the problem in such comparatively serene terms may have left Mickiewicz, as opposed to the German Romantics, "disarmingly, even childishly, helpless to intellectually challenge the capitalist modernity and the Enlightenment."⁶²³ Yet it was a triumph, as Miłosz puts it, if not over Rationalism (philosophical and economic), then certainly over language.⁶²⁴ In adapting a *popular* poem of the day, he re-centers its Romantic tale of a tragic, deathly

⁶²² Mickiewicz, "A New Translation of Adam Mickiewicz's "Romanticism"" trans. Angela Britlinger, *Sarmatian Review* XII, 3.

⁶²³ Jakub Majmurek, "The Polish Lucifer, or Towards a Progressive National Art." *Place Called Space*, accessed 2/22/17. <http://placecalledspace.org/content/the-polish-lucifer-or-towards-progressive-national-art/>

⁶²⁴ Miłosz, 213.

couple to highlight the “solidarity of the girl, the rural community and the poet”⁶²⁵ with the possibility of something beyond the rational. Here Mickiewicz presents a concerted manifesto of dialogism, in the Bakhtinian sense of “the verbal is always the property of one’s social group,”⁶²⁶ which feels worlds away from the introspection of the British Romantics. In this solidarity with the peasants—the faith in the popular over the elite or academic—there was also something inherently political and democratic over and above any specific calls to national action.⁶²⁷ The revolt was to be a collective one (however charismatic/Messianic in Mickiewicz⁶²⁸), and it is in this sense that we should try to understand his pose and subsequent historical stature as the incarnation of the poet as hero of the people.⁶²⁹ Indeed, this dialogism of heroism, well-understood by Poles, was adapted in more grounded terms in the 20th-century, coloring their fascinating relation to a particular worker-hero in 1980, Lech Wałęsa, the strike leader and later Chairman of Solidarity. Solidarity had grown into a radical workers’ movement not from vanguardist rhetoric but from its modest beginnings—behind which was a decade of organizing—as a call for, we recall, the militant particularist local concerns of working people to be recognized and upheld. Wałęsa had a canny understanding

⁶²⁵ The translator’s commentary. The poem is “Lenore” by G.A. Burger. Britlinger, “Adam Mickiewicz’s “Romanticism””.

⁶²⁶ Michael Holquist, “The Politics of Representation,” in *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 177.

⁶²⁷ It is also important to re-emphasize, the almost uniquely troubled and fraught history of alliances and betrayals between the Polish intelligentsia and the Polish peasantry in the 19th-century, as portrayed in Stanislaw Wyspianski’s best-known, highly Mickiewiczian play, *Wesele* (Wedding), about a big city intellectual marrying a peasant girl.

⁶²⁸ In an elaboration of this point—the ‘internationalist’ formulation of the Messianic in Mickiewicz, including the profound influence upon him of the mystic Andrzej Towianski—see Andrzej Walicki’s chapter on him, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, 247-276.

⁶²⁹ Milosz, 203.

of the dynamic in which he was imbricated, as articulated in his (early 1980s) comment “I was at the bottom, I am at the bottom, I will be at the bottom.”⁶³⁰

This spirit of revolt as manifest in Mickiewicz’s fusion of vernacular language and folklore with classical form reached its apex, textually,⁶³¹ in what is nowadays considered Poland’s national epic, *Pan Tadeusz*; however, it is the Messianic verse of the Everest of Polish theater, the fiercely political *Dziady* (usually translated as “Forefathers’ Eve”), that is perhaps most deeply imprinted upon the Polish national consciousness.⁶³² Written over the course of many decades and acts, and charting the political fortunes of a mercurial Polish nation, its allegorical content arises through “the revitalization of drama in a return to the sacred spectacles of the past, still preserved in folklore.”⁶³³ Its power, explains Miłosz, “resides in what has been called an “objective lyricism”; the ability, so typical of Mickiewicz, to embody outbursts of passion in tangible images.”⁶³⁴ In this sense, the play is itself deeply engaged in a dialogue with historical and cultural memory, and while language is the medium, the communication is wilder—a mode irreducible to rational thought: in a word, poetry.

This poetic interpenetration of historical forms, storytelling and embodied sensations was what, for Mickiewicz, constituted drama, as set forth in his famous lectures at the

⁶³⁰ Quoted in Maria Janion, “On the difference between being a worker and a representative of the working class,” in *The Book of Lech Wałęsa*, eds. Celina Wieniewska, Jacek Laskowski, Bolesław Taborski (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 128.

⁶³¹ It was not a popular success, unlike previous work.

⁶³² Notoriously, a staging of it in Warsaw in late 1967 and its subsequent censorship in January, 1968, helped push the country toward the events of March, despite this not at all being the intent of those involved. For an overview of the politically contentious staging of the play across Polish history, see the theater director Kazimierz Braun, “*The Forefathers’ Eve*: The Burning Bush of Polish Theater: Some Personal Encounters,” *The Polish Review*, 43, No. 4 (1998): 397-409.

⁶³³ Miłosz, *History of Polish Literature*, 215.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid*, 217.

eminent *Collège de France* in Paris in the early 1840s. Here, Mickiewicz describes a particular Slavic folk tale of the search for a phoenix.

This bird, having flown over a Slavic land, lets fall a single feather, which the hero picks up; when he brings it home, it gives off such a bright glow that it fills the entire thatched hut with light. At just this very moment, the storyteller has the habit of lighting a few wood shavings, and the glow that they give off makes the audience shudder. In another tale, when he mentions the crystal mountain occupied by fairies who are as much alike as stars, and among whom it was so difficult to choose the one that the hero must find, the peasant suddenly opens a door, and shows his audience the winter sky shining with stars, and the clouds whose fantastic form represents the crystal mountain better than any theatrical setting.⁶³⁵

Mickiewicz's far-sighted prescriptions for Polish theater to ignore the feasibility of performance—it was politically impossible to stage plays—and embrace the “fantastic,”⁶³⁶ guided by historical forms, found their fulfillment in the 20th-century *fin-de-siècle* work of the Krakow painter/playwright Stanislaw Wyspiański, and later under visionary postwar theater directors Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski.⁶³⁷

However, his descriptions may also appear to us now as not only a rapturous Wordsworthian embrace of the natural world with a bodily eye, but deeply cinematic—“*the clouds whose fantastic form represents the crystal mountain better than any theatrical setting*” as that which is only possible through the magic of camera, editing and *mise-en-scène*.⁶³⁸ Further, his

⁶³⁵ Adam Mickiewicz, Daniel Gerould, "From Adam Mickiewicz's "Lectures on Slavic Literature" Given at the College de France," trans. L. Ploszewski, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 96.

⁶³⁶ For a fascinating look at 19th-century debates surrounding this term in Western Europe, and the transnational reception of the literature that made use of it (e.g., ETA Hoffman), see Matthew Gibson, *The Fantastic and European Gothic: History, Literature and the French Revolution* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

⁶³⁷ Kathleen Cioffi, "From the Great Reform to the Post-dramatic: Adaptation in the Polish Postwar Theatre," *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 52, No. 1/2 (March-June 2010): 1-18.

⁶³⁸ Further: "Mickiewicz forecast a theatre that would encompass the various arts...emulate the medieval mysteries in cosmic dimensions and draw on primeval rites, while still utilizing the modern scenic techniques...and heroes capable of appealing to the popular imagination. Believing that the drama must awaken the masses to social action, the poet recognized that all means must be used-popular entertainments, panoramas, projections-so that the theatre could reach beyond its own moribund official institutions and its bourgeois audience." Daniel Gerould, Introduction to "From Adam Mickiewicz's *Lectures on Slavic Literature* Given at the College de France," 92.

appeal to make the audience “shudder” through spectacle may even speak to a particular kind of Romantic-inspired but very modern conception of cinema—one that emphasizes the “shocks” of bodily, mimetic experience, such as that of Żuławski and Szulkin (and of course theorized by Negt/Kluge among others, as we saw last chapter). When taken together with Mickiewicz’s emphasis on collective feeling towards emancipatory projects it seems clear that he is advocating what in our parlance today could be called a kind of political affect in art. We should now be very clear at this point what we mean by *affect*. It is here taken to be “a term defining the physical processes whereby the body is affected by an external prompting.”⁶³⁹ It becomes *political* in the sense in which it is dialogically re-centered—a kind of virtual organizing—within the collective, through drama, and, as I will show, through cinema like that of Żuławski.⁶⁴⁰

This political, embodied affect—the need for a theatrical, collective communication—is inseparable from a certain negation or darkness, for it is communion not only with the living, but with the dead, as we saw above in Mickiewicz’s poem “Romanticism.” This was a point well understood by the labour activists of Solidarity in crafting their propaganda, as we saw last chapter. This literature not only highlighted and embodied moments of struggle against the PZPR state—mapping dates and language onto the chalk outlines of the bodies of fallen workers—but appealed to and called forth an entire

⁶³⁹ Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 5.

⁶⁴⁰ The long history of the repudiation of affect on the Left, of course, including Western Marxism’s influential attack on the affect-producing Culture Industry, has not been easy to shake. But attitudes toward the embrace of spectacle, overt emotionalism and transgressive behavior are slowly changing through art practice, through the accepted supremacy of various haptic media platforms, through the promulgation of ‘Affect Theory,’ and perhaps most interestingly, through recent, popular—that is, not mass, but viral—cultural trends across the internet such as the circulation of “dank memes” or even in the radical détournement of the “Tide Pod Challenge,” a viral anti-consumerist craze which makes its participants violently ill when they intentionally consume a detergent product seemingly designed to look like candy.

complex tradition of struggle for freedom within Polish history⁶⁴¹ and cultural memory, one very much tied up not merely in relational sites of struggle but within art and cultural expression. Indeed, this practice is what Mickiewicz's fiercely political *Dziady* is all about. The title denotes a day of pagan folkloric rituals wherein villagers call forth spirits of the past, and such is the form taken on by Mickiewicz's drama. Across the many pages and years in which the play was written, the character Gustaw, who begins as a lovelorn, silently-suffering Romantic individual spirit, becomes transformed into the wrathful, avenging angel Konrad, who is willing to blaspheme against God and threaten utter (self-)destruction if it means emancipation for the Polish people.⁶⁴² Jakub Majmurek has recently argued that Mickiewicz does not go far enough in tapping into the richly ironic Romantic portrayals of fallen angels, which he sees as stemming from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and evolving with Goethe's *Faust*. Unlike Faust, Konrad, though blaspheming by unfavorably comparing God to the Tsar, does not ultimately make a pact with a worldly Satan, i.e., in order to save Poland. This is in effect, Majmurek argues,⁶⁴³ an unfortunate blind spot in the national political imaginary. However, Konrad, as alluded to above, is representative of a less noted (i.e., within in the Anglosphere, regarding Eastern Europe), though potentially as subversive, tradition in Polish folklore—that of the *upiór*, or *wampir*: a vampire. Indeed, for Mickiewicz this is the key figure in Slavic mythology.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴¹ See the historical collection, on the legacy of the struggle of Polish nationals not only within their own (erased/compromised) borders but in particular without, in internationalist solidarity, *For Your Freedom and Ours: Polish Progressive Spirit from the 14th century to the Present*, ed. Krystyna M. Olszer (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1981).

⁶⁴² This latter moment occurs in Part Three of *Dziady*, its most famous section, written in 1832, and often seen as the apotheosis of Mickiewicz's political feelings—perhaps even a premonition of his later turn to direct action. See Milosz, 214-218.

⁶⁴³ Majmurek, "The Polish Lucifer."

⁶⁴⁴ "The Slavic people have, above all, believed in the existence of what are called vampires, and they have even developed a philosophical theory of vampirism. We have already spoken of this earlier. But, from a philosophical standpoint, this belief is nothing other than faith in the individuality of the human spirit, in the individuality of spirits in general, and nowhere is this belief as strong as it is among the Slavic people. That is

It is this Polish iteration of the undead vampire, with all of the rich cultural embodiment it carries as a figure, that Żuławski holds up as a sort of funhouse mirror to patriotic feeling in his grimly mordant, deeply unsettling second feature. As the only film banned in People's Poland on alleged moral grounds (it abounds with the High Gothic content of violence and incest⁶⁴⁵), *The Devil* (Diabel, 1972), probably, was more likely censored due to its stated allegorical intent as "a transposition of the events of 1968, about which no film could be made."⁶⁴⁶ The central, though not only, relationship in the film is that between the seemingly virtuous young Polish rebel Jakub, the protagonist, played ingenuously by Leszek Teleszyński, lead of Żuławski's previous film, and a mysterious, unnamed "agent provocateur,"⁶⁴⁷ often seen as a stand-in for the unscrupulous, power hungry Minister of the Interior, Mieczysław Moczar, who sought to incite student discontent and rebellion to sow chaos in a bid to seize power for himself.⁶⁴⁸ Further, Żuławski sets this "transposition" in an older, still contentious period in national history—The Polish Partition, a time of hardship that Mickiewicz was born into much as Żuławski had been with WWII.

why no pantheistic theory will ever manage to take root there; the national instinct rebuffs it. We know from history and mythology that the cult of spirits was an important part of Slavic religion: to this very day there is the custom of invoking the dead in Lithuania and elsewhere; and of all the Slavic sacred rites the most important and solemn is the ceremony of calling forth the spirits of the dead." Mickiewicz, "From Adam Mickiewicz's *Lectures on Slavic Literature* Given at the College de France," 94.

⁶⁴⁵ Żuławski collaborator Daniel Bird compares its structure to Witold Gombrowicz's play *Marriage* (Ślub, 1948), but in content it more resembles scandalous gothic novels, full of incest, rape and murder, such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). See "Another Moon in the Gutter Q+A with Writer and Director Daniel Bird," Another Moon in the Gutter, Wednesday, July 18, 2012, <http://mooninthegutter.blogspot.com/2012/07/another-moon-in-gutter-qa-with-writer.html>

⁶⁴⁶ Interview, *Żuławski on Żuławski* (2000).

⁶⁴⁷ This was, perhaps surprisingly, exactly how Żuławski refers to him in the screenplay. *Paul Coates, The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2005), 102.

⁶⁴⁸ On Moczar's power grabs in the 1960s and his dirty work in 1968, see Dariusz Stola, "Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968," *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 178-194.

The eminent Polish humanities scholar Maria Janion,⁶⁴⁹ who also took a great interest in Slavic legends, especially as relating to this time of the Partition, asked in 1989 a series of provocative questions about what Poles make of their legacy—how do they relate to historical evil *within* Poland (i.e., not just from without)?⁶⁵⁰ On the cover of her book, she took up one of the sacred cows of Polish history, the martyr Tadeusz Rejtan, an MP during the time of Partition whose desperate act of flinging his body onto the floor of the Polish *Sejm* (Parliament), to block its final departure before it was given over to puppets of Tsarist control, was immortalized in a famous and controversial painting by Jan Matejko.



Fig. 38: “Rejtan - Downfall of Poland,” Jan Matejko, 1866.

On the cover of Janion’s book, Matejko’s image of Rejtan, who committed suicide a few short years after his infamous act, has been given vampire fangs, and drips with blood.

⁶⁴⁹ Janion is best known abroad for her Mickiewiczian, oft-quoted quip about Poland’s ascension to the EU “To Europe, yes—but together with our dead.” (It was also the title of her book: *Do Europy - Tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (2000)).

⁶⁵⁰ *Wobec zła* (In the Face of Evil, 1989).



Fig. 39: MP Rejtan as vampire (Maria Janion)

Here is an historical image, she seems to suggest, that necessitates interrogation—*how* do Poles understand the *uses* of evil, including martyrdom, within their own history?⁶⁵¹ Like Janion—and Negt/Kluge also, for that matter—but most importantly like the labour activists of Solidarity, Żuławski seeks the answer to this question *through bodies*.

In so doing Żuławski bends Polish Romanticism and historical memory toward modern horror, utilizing genre film and its bodily thrills and sensations to mold his implacable, politically sensitive content. In the process he somewhat subverts the allegorical mode this second “historical film” appeared to propose, as well as, on the other hand, that of a horror thriller, albeit a resolutely de-eroticized one. To some Polish film professionals

⁶⁵¹ As Żuławski’s film urged Poles to find the evil *within*, so a new generation of sociologists and historians has done the same, including exposure of Poland’s own ugly colonial history, pre-Partitions: “The so called Union of Lublin that created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569 cut a huge chunk of land – what is a present day Ukraine – from the Great Princehood of Lithuania and put it, within the union, under a direct administrative control of the Kingdom of Poland. . .Ukraine is blessed with one of the richest soils in Europe...Polish nobility needed it in order to further and extend its material base – the manorial economy...The so called *Kresy* (the Ends – a Polish term referring to the Eastern ends of the empire, i.e. contemporary Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) just like the British Raj gave birth to formidable fortunes. There is no anachronism in calling *Kresy* “Polish colonies” as the term itself was literally used by the Polish political writers in 16th and 17th century... We’ll find all major elements of a colonial discourse in the Polish political thought of the time: a myth of terra nullius, of mission civilisatrice, of natural longing of the savages for progress, of racial and religious superiority of the colonizers and inferiority of the colonized (called...Czern which means „Blacks”) etc. It comes as no surprise that today’s relations between Poland and Ukraine bear strong postcolonial traits.” Jan Sowa, “Forget Postcolonialism, There’s a Class War Ahead,” *nonsite.org*, Issue #12 (August 2014).

who listened to the script assessment of *The Devil*, the specter, if you'll forgive the pun, of genre film conjured images—perhaps lucrative ones—of Hollywood horror.⁶⁵² However, the Dracula tradition so beloved by Hollywood cinema, of dulcet and tremulous “Transylvanian” accented tones, spoken through eroticized fangs, had little to do with Polish *upiór*, nor with the later finished film. In contrast to “Count Dracula,” the *upiór* was not an unknown, and perhaps racialized, Other.⁶⁵³ It existed, rather, as a kind of dark side of the soul—a *second* soul—that could be found in anyone, and perhaps even just under the surface.⁶⁵⁴ The *upiór* sought the blood of innocents, but its victims were often thought to be those closest to it, especially family members.⁶⁵⁵ The horror, in this sense, is that of the uncanny—the deformation of that which is most familiar.⁶⁵⁶ As with the *upiór*, Jakub, “possessed” by the antagonist, strikes down those he loves—those closest to him—in the name of G(o)od.

⁶⁵² The director was not alone in his interest in utilizing the horror genre. During the content vetting sessions prior to its making (The Script and Film Assessment Commission), fascinatingly analyzed by Polish film scholar Paul Coates, *The Devil* was directly discussed, with enthusiasm, as a horror genre entry. Despite the intelligence/experience of those present, connections are not made, within their discussion, as to what it might mean to combine a genre film with something more historically trenchant and specific. “The time is ripe for our own Dracula!” says Ryszard Frelek, who goes on to “mouth-wateringly” enumerate the varied, transgressive, embodied spectatorial thrills inherent in violent horror—and in Żuławski's gruesome script. These comments betray a desire for that unique mixture of utter disreputability and popular appeal (read: able to be monetized) that Robin Wood long ago identified as particular to the genre of horror. See Coates, *The Red and The White*, 100-103.

⁶⁵³ Hollywood aside, this tradition extended across much of the Slavic region. Among Żuławski's contemporaries, Alexey Tolstoy's 1839 novella *The Family of the Vourdalak* seems to have inspired, among others, a Russian-set segment of Italian horror auteur Mario Bava's triptych *Black Sabbath* (1963), which chimes with *The Devil*. As the grandfather of a large family, Karloff's character, off-screen, is bitten by a “vourdalak.” His family is told, but seeing his apparent helplessness outside in the cold night, they invite him in, whereupon the old patriarch proceeds to, quite upsettingly, murder them all.

⁶⁵⁴ Maria Janion. In English, the best we can do is to link this useful website that explores Polish culture, which breaks down her thinking on *upiór*, “Uncanny Slavdom: Maria Janion,” accessed 6/14/18 <https://culture.pl/en/work/uncanny-slavdom-maria-janion>

⁶⁵⁵ For a recent exploration of *upiór* by a popular novelist, see Jodi Picoult's aptly named, timeline juggling, engagement with Polish folklore as well as the Holocaust, *The Storyteller* (New York: Atria, 2013).

⁶⁵⁶ See Freud's classic 1919 essay “The Uncanny (*Heimlich*).” Freud, *The Uncanny* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2011).

Vis-à-vis what we have seen of the upiór tradition, a regional genre as it were, *The Devil* despite its specificity actually fits well within post-1960 international horror cinema. As with three path-breaking films from 1960, *Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock), *Peeping Tom* (dir. Michael Powell) and especially *Black Sunday* (dir. Mario Bava), itself set in the distant past, *The Devil* will concern the horror *within* (i.e., human relations). While the film locates its horror as it were in a specific historical setting well-known to Poles, with ready-made Monsters, or at least potential historical villains, in Russia and Prussia,⁶⁵⁷ Żuławski makes his closer-to-home intent clear, or perhaps hides it right under our noses, in the opening scenes. Rather than the young rebel it is the black-clad *agent*, known in the script as *nieznajomy* (literally “not known person,” but referred to in English-language accounts of the film, as The Stranger), played with mad glee and occasional sympathy by sterling character actor Wojciech Pszoniak, who is our initial point of identification and entry into Żuławski’s Hell on Earth during Partition. We enter, as it were, this historical world through hand-held, swooping camera, plunging into a painterly mise-en-scène with a cavernous depth-of-field (*Fig. 40a*) with bodies likewise in motion and halted only briefly by confrontation (*Fig. 40b*). It announces Żuławski’s mature style.

⁶⁵⁷ Fearing the implications of criticism toward Russia, it was deemed necessary for German to be inserted into the dialogue to make clear events took place within the Prussian Partition. Coates, *The Red and the White*, 103.



Fig. 40a,b: Mise-en-scene in *The Devil* (1972)

Just prior to this sequence we get a glimpse of the hand Żuławski is holding, as it were. As The Stranger rides out in search of the young protagonist (as we eventually learn), a cut is made to an insert shot of his quarry, prior to our introduction to this character. The title card brands *him*, rather than The Stranger (who looks forward earnestly), as the true, human monster.



Fig. 40c,d: Protagonist/Antagonist in *The Devil* (1972)

Importantly, then, this relationship and these relations are immediately established within the image and linked through editing, a more deeply, or at least more immediately, felt method than mere narrative relations. Thus established, when allegory does seem to explicitly rear its head, it makes itself *felt*, as opposed to being *made legible*, through violence

(including formal violence) and obscenity, which is also to say genre violence.⁶⁵⁸ Again, this is evil not from without but local, as it were—within the body and thereby, in keeping with Polish Romanticism, the body politic. It is felt most painfully in the way *The Devil* keeps circling back, as in modern horror, to the kin of the protagonist (as well as that of the supporting characters), entering the Freudian realm of the family romance. Jakub’s mother, previously unknown to him, is revealed (to him) belatedly as a prostitute, with whom he then abortively has intercourse. However, instead of an Oedipal revelation after the fact, he learns who she is beforehand, and only chooses to reveal his identity to her immediately after penetrating her sexually. Here we have a pitch-black satirical moment and effective middle finger to revisionist historical memory, in which “Mother Poland” is violated, knowingly, by the supposedly noble young hero she is supposed to suffer for (and mourn for upon his dying, etc).⁶⁵⁹

In this negative vision, Mickiewicz’s Konrad has not stopped short and swooned⁶⁶⁰—he has gone fully, diabolically over to the darkness. Żuławski’s work in *The Devil*, then, issues a polemical challenge to the progressive nationalism that is Wajda’s Mickiewiczian inheritance, wrenches the Messianic away from the dangers of a transcendental belief in salvation and the martyrdom of individuals. At the same time, he does indeed follow Mickiewicz’s political affect in tapping into Polish folklore and the

⁶⁵⁸ Though it is beyond our scope here, the film also provides evidence that genre cinema, and perhaps horror in particular, is perfectly capable of providing the requisite affective pleasures and chills (including with formal daring), while simultaneously possessing interpretative historical content, coming up with something that would be called polemic were it writing. Polish cinema has rediscovered this with the popular success of Władysław Pasikowski’s *Pokłosie* (Aftermath, 2012), inspired by Jan T. Gross’s description of the Jedwabne pogrom in his controversial *Neighbors* (2001).

⁶⁵⁹ Again, see Ostrowska, “Invisible Deaths,” and also Joanna Szwejowska, “The Myth of the Polish Mother,” in *Women in Polish Cinema*, eds. Mazierska and Ostrowska (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 15-36.

⁶⁶⁰ Elżbieta Ostrowska compares the fainting Konrad to Wajda heroes who suffer bodily and fail to act, calling it the “hysterical body” in Polish cinema. Ostrowska, “What Does Poland Want From Me?” Male Hysteria in Andrzej Wajda’s War Trilogy,” in *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia: Between Pain and Pleasure*, eds. Ewa Mazierska, Matilda Mroz, and Elżbieta Ostrowska (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2018), 31-52.

“sacred spectacles” of the past while pushing them to the absolute limit or beyond on his radically negative cinematic canvas. As with Królikiewicz, the route to anything like collectivism may first have to pass through extreme alienation. At the same time, in its genre trappings it skews closer to the affective intensity of horror,⁶⁶¹ allowing it to potentially avoid the entrapment of the historical film that would reify unfolding socio-historical processes and thereby entrench a patriarchal and conservative historical memory.⁶⁶² More than simply an “accented cinema,” Hamid Naficy’s term which has been used to describe Żuławski as a transnational filmmaker,⁶⁶³ his is a cinema of the nation, as in its people, as we have seen, but without the framework of patriotism, whether liberal or conservative.

Ultimately, it is how this past meets the present, whether that be the time the film was made or when it is viewed, that shapes how these film bodies, about which more below, are grounded, i.e., gain dialectical depth, for viewers, beyond our mimetic, spectacular experience of them as viewers. What articulates and amplifies their radical communication is indeed not simply memories of the war, or a more abstracted sense of past suffering, but also the violence of the *now* of which viewers are more or less aware (i.e., they do not need to be informed), and which Żuławski’s style works to draw out and press beyond genre pleasures. These characters are, in that sense, dialogic, and self-identical to Mickiewicz’s common folk who “feel”—from, perhaps, the past dead. The purging/mass exodus of much of what remained of Polish Jewry in 1968 was a human outrage less than 25 years after the horror of WWII and the Holocaust, and in addition constituted a massive blow to the

⁶⁶¹ For accounts of horror film theorized along these lines, see Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect*, and Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London: Continuum, 2005).

⁶⁶² In some sense, the secular Romanticism it mobilizes was precisely the project, Michael Löwy argues, of Andre Breton and the Surrealists, along with such revolutionary pessimists inspired by Romanticism like Walter Benjamin and Rosa Luxemburg. See his *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (2009).

⁶⁶³ This is Goddard’s framework in “Beyond Moral Realism,” *Polish Cinema in a Transnational Key*.

diversity and ingenuity of Polish cultural and intellectual life. In addition, the memory of fallen, violently twisted bodies was also very much on the minds of the Polish nation. Żuławski's film was made one year after the repression on the Baltic Coast, from the massacre in Gdynia to its aftermath throughout the Tri-City, in which strike leaders—the very image of the working class as lionized by Soviet-type societies like People's Poland—were driven out of the country by the secret police, or even, as with Black Panther leaders in the US,⁶⁶⁴ murdered in their sleep.⁶⁶⁵

5.1.3. Base Materialism: History + Genre

We saw last chapter how the memory of this struggle was very much on the minds of the First Solidarity labour activists when creating their propaganda, as they tapped into in a collective affect that one might call the “Left Sacred.” Although the phrase seems as though it could felicitously describe the politics of a Mickiewicz, the Left Sacred is a more recent, and somewhat ambiguous, conception tied to industrialization, crowds, and (bodily) transgressions against the social order.⁶⁶⁶ In this it also seems to comport with a particularly Polish, 20th-century understanding of bodies that influenced Żuławski, as we will see. French renegade surrealist Georges Bataille had sought to appropriate this term in his attempt to theorize a militant dialectics of affect in the late 1920s and early 1930s that could outflank the increasing appeal of fascism across Europe. As mentioned briefly in chapter one, Bataille

⁶⁶⁴ I refer to the notorious FBI/Chicago police assassination in 1969 of the young organizer Fred Hampton—a potential “black Messiah” in the words of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011), 239.

⁶⁶⁵ See Jack M. Bloom, *Seeing through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 95.

⁶⁶⁶ Gavin Grindon argues, in his excellent and sympathetic overview of Bataille's affective Marxism, that Emile Durkheim (Bataille's source) appropriated this term from more reactionary writings on the mass psychology of the crowd (Gustave Le Bon), and that therefore even in Bataille the concept is tainted with the moralism he sought to eschew. See Grindon, "Alchemist of the Revolution: The Affective Materialism of Georges Bataille," *Third Text* 24, no. 3 (2010): 314-316.

opposed what he saw as the “Icarian” tendencies of Andre Breton and the Surrealists, who wanted art to liberate drives and thereby rise above capitalist oppression. Despite his polemics, Bataille was sympathetic to their aims, but to his thinking revolution would come, on the contrary, quite literally from below. He called it: “base materialism.” Quoting Marx in epigraph, “in history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life,”⁶⁶⁷ Bataille sought a “determinism of desire”—a mobilization of all that was considered low and untreatable by both idealism and materialism. As he saw it the latter had unwittingly reproduced the hierarchies of the former. Bataille would instead examine, much to the chagrin of many comrades and contemporaries, “luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality).”⁶⁶⁸ This would include those with whom some of this behavior was stereotypically associated: Marx’s *lumpenproletariat*, the cast off underclass. Thus mobilized, this force could not wander off into idealistic abstraction, but would instead be restored to the “world of facts,” and to the working class proper, in revolutionary fashion. Whatever it may have lacked in clearer definition, this affective Marxism was an important theoretical step towards something that has resounded throughout the later 20th century, from Bataille’s adjacent conception of the revolution as festival that inspired in 1968 to the resurgent recognition of the political importance of affect, including its study within the academy for the past two decades.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁷ Georges Bataille, “The “Old Mole” and the Prefix Sur in the Words *Surhomme* and *Surrealist*,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927 – 1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 32.

⁶⁶⁸ “The Notion of Expenditure,” in *Visions of Excess*, 118.

⁶⁶⁹ For a useful overview, see Erika Doss, *American Art* 23, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 9-11. For one of the key essays in the field, see Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 31, Part II (Autumn, 1995): 83-109.

This “base” method certainly resonates with the contemporary work of renowned Polish novelist Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969), one of Żuławski’s masters,⁶⁷⁰ and arguably the most influential post-war Polish writer. In Gombrowicz, alongside the then-unpublished, sadly short-lived Bruno Schulz,⁶⁷¹ Polish artists and writers found something of a corrective to the more transcendental tendencies of the Romantics, which had found a revival in Stanisław Wyspiański’s circle in the fin-de-siècle. Gombrowicz’s relentlessly Carnavalesque constructions “aim(ed) at the de-mythization of spiritualized humanity as it was developed in the works of the great Romantic writers.”⁶⁷² A central image in Gombrowicz is that of the *pupa* (ass), his image par excellence for unassimilable immaturity that resists any and all attempts at control or systematization.



Fig. 41: The Pupa. Gombrowicz’s *Ferdynand* (137)

While the comic element of the *base* is downplayed, though certainly not absent, in Żuławski, it is embodied and strikingly communicated in the frenetic performances he elicits from actors’ theatrically wrought and explosively transgressive bodies. This is playfully

⁶⁷⁰ Indeed, Żuławski’s final film *Cosmos*, 2016, an adaptation of Gombrowicz’s novel, and arguably there is more of the novelist than the filmmaker in the work—a sign of reverence on Żuławski’s part.

⁶⁷¹ Schulz was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. See especially his extraordinary drawings, compiled in Bruno Schulz, *Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz: With Selected Prose* (New York: Fromm International, 1990).

⁶⁷² Klara Lutsky, ““I Know What I Am Not” The Problem of the Marginal Self in Gombrowicz’s Novels,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (2015): 28. Lutsky also mentions this as emphasized in Janion’s work on Gombrowicz, see Maria Janion, “Ciemna młodość Gombrowicza,” *Twórczość* 34, no. 4 (April 1980).

voiced, as a kind of principle against straightforward rationality, by The Stranger of *The Devil* in his response to a metaphysical question: “I’m not able to tell you...I have to dance it.”

This aspect was increasingly developed in Żuławski’s later films: bodies that, in the non-naturalistic literalness of their corporeality, constantly in motion and constantly verbalizing, incarnate and communicate bodily revolt against hegemonic reality, and in this revolt (our) proximity to death. Stylistically, they range across genres; conceptually, they lie within the realm of the *abject*. As influentially, ambivalently theorized by Julia Kristeva, the *abject* links a psychoanalytic conception with an affect-oriented approach. Per horror scholar Xavier Aldana Reyes, for Kristeva “the body can be a source of affect at a representational level when it dares to transgress the neatly delineated boundaries of inside and outside.”⁶⁷³ Żuławski’s characters can hardly do otherwise, as they scream, transmit various bodily fluids in close-up, are literally crucified, violently miscarry, etc.



⁶⁷³ Aldana Reyes’s work, besides Kristeva, is indebted to phenomenological accounts of affect and horror. See *Horror Film and Affect*, 55.



Fig. 42a-f: Bodily transgression in Żulawski. *Possession* (1981, d), *L'Amour Braque* (1984, a,b,e,f) and *On the Silver Globe*, 1976/1988, c).

The abject is, says Kristeva, “something rejected from which one does not part.”⁶⁷⁴ If so, it is most terrifying in Żulawski when this process of *parting* is unaccountably, seemingly complete, taking on the phantasmic form of the Double. Beginning with Żulawski’s debut, this Gothic trope reaches its height in his deeply disturbing horror masterpiece of marital breakdown, *Possession* (1981), in which both lead characters are eventually transformed, and doubled, as their *upiory* second souls, and within the home where they struggle to raise their son.

⁶⁷⁴ The abject, Julia Kristeva tells us, in speaking relative to the maternal body, is “something rejected from which one does not part.” *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press), 4. Żulawski’s early films, particularly his debut *The Third Part of the Night*, concern—and instrumentalize—this (pregnant) maternal body at key moments, to signify creation or destruction. For Elżbieta Ostrowska this is a sign that, despite their destabilization of narrative, they cannot escape the limitations of the Polish School’s approach to Romanticism, “following their efforts to de-substantiate the female body” while the male body is granted a heroic death. “Invisible Deaths,” 54. Happily, this motif largely disappears in his later work, as we will see.



Fig. 43a,b: The Double in *Possession* (1981)

In sum, if Bataille, like Benjamin, had worked against the clock of creeping fascism in 1930s Europe in an attempt to find a way out politically—something the organized Left was failing at—Żuławski’s art was born in 1940 as he was, from the paroxysmal wartime violence of, in a word, *no way out*. This is to say that his cinema was a testament to the failures of modernity, and, like Romanticism, a response to this failure. In its corporeality, abjection and lack of stasis there is a palpable desire to smash and relegate the psychologized, bourgeois (and yes, state socialist) subject to the dustbin of history, but these films are likewise a weapon against the contemporaneous “waning of affect” in postmodern cinema, in Fredric Jameson’s phrase.⁶⁷⁵ As with Munch’s “The Scream” (Jameson’s example, which fits well with Żuławski), the mediation of artistic expression—the within and without—is

⁶⁷⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-92

alive and well; his characters yearn for love and meaning, however futile it seems. Moreover, Żuławski's radically non-naturalistic approach to acting, while it bears similarity to other contemporary approaches in Poland,⁶⁷⁶ was theorized (though rarely set down in words or interviews) from the painful standpoint of his own historical experience. Remembering again the source for *Third Part of the Night*, the Rudolf Weigl Institute in Lviv, the institute's workers, says Żuławski, who fed the lice, were prone to experience fluctuating body temperatures and fevers, inducing "maniacal states." "As my father said, these people lived partially in fever and double vision. They went through the occupation and war in bizarre states of depression and euphoria." In a way, he suggested, it was quite literally from this "infected blood" that he was born.⁶⁷⁷ This is also how they are intended to impact us as spectators—as bodies of horror that "speak" affectively, beyond allegory, yet always already situated in history.

In Żuławski's later films, this *political* aspect of affect is, increasingly, no longer explicitly thematized or historically located, and yet their power in this regard is arguably all the stronger. In Żuławski's insistent obliteration of the illusory separation of private and public⁶⁷⁸ using the "nothing of cinema,"⁶⁷⁹ politics itself becomes a kind of absence, or aporia—a darkness or despair threatening and immanent to localizable events (for example,

⁶⁷⁶ It especially resembles the acting taught by renowned theater director/theorist Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999); however, Grotowski's quasi-religious emphasis on *deliverance through art*, as opposed to Żuławski's absolute refusal of anything resembling transcendence, arguably places them at odds. We do not have the space to explore it here. See Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶⁷⁷ Interview, *Żuławski on Żuławski*

⁶⁷⁸ "There's no such thing as a public and private life, it's not separated. It's not like in a theatre--here is the scene. And there's the place behind the curtains. I wouldn't like to live like that. To sum it up, I actually think that things that we struggle with in life, our goal is to achieve (knowledge of) how to live, not how to make films." Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ "Cinema is nothing and this nothing is very interesting. A great, mysterious nothing. It's a wonderful experience." Ibid. We might also connect this with Bataille's *Informe* (Formless), an adjacent concept to base materialism that has proven influential for the artworld in redefining the meaning of modernism, i.e., no longer just "high." See Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A Users Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

Possession, 1981, is set in divided Berlin, and Sam Neill's protagonist may or may not be a spy). Close interpersonal conflict, unbridled yet resolutely de-erotized sexual energy, and the characters' experience of pain without explicit referents, set the parameters for examinations of radical freedom. The dialogic confusion of inner and outer is taken on with abandon, in worlds very much out of joint, as though Mickiewicz's Konrad were locked into a nightmare. In these films that embrace genre, like *Possession* (1981, horror), or *L'Amour Braque* (1984, gangster), but also *On the Silver Globe* (1976/1988, SF), which I discuss in detail in part two, the connection between Żuławski's camera and mise-en-scène and the hyper-charged, ecstatic bodies engaged in struggle assume monstrous proportions (quite literally in the infamous scene of Isabelle Adjani's copulation with a Lovecraftian beast in *Possession*).

Here, the ostensible absence of political context is filled not merely by genre and absence conveyed by the camera, but by the absolute bodily force of female performance— itself a trope of horror, of course, if an ambivalent one.⁶⁸⁰ While Kieślowski, also notable for the absence of politics or current events in his late work, also tended to center female performance in his final films (especially the co-productions in France starring Juliette Binoche or Irene Jacob), the effect is rather different. Female characters in Kieślowski are also sexually and economically independent, coming to recognize their power apart from men, yet the space they carve out in an increasingly isolated, post-state socialist world is a freedom somewhat apart from others (not just men), one that arguably registers as positive, ultimately. Narratively speaking this is an evolution, from one perspective, from the lonely

⁶⁸⁰ Part of the story here is, again, a certain adoption of the horror genre by Żuławski. Early theorists of film horror, in terms of the academy (especially Carol Clover, Barbara Creed and Robin Wood), showed how as a genre it illuminated a darkening, reactionary turn in global politics as the 1980s began, and in so doing forced a (re)consideration of spectatorial agency in cinema, especially with respect to women's bodies (however politically ambivalent the texts themselves). See Carol Clover, "Introduction: Carrie and the Boys," in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-20.

protagonist of *No End* (1985), who ultimately commits suicide from despair. The characters and actresses in Żuławski's post-*The Devil* are equally alienated and isolated, but they confront it not obliquely but head-on, as is Żuławski's way. In addition to sparring verbally with their male counterparts—"I find pathetic these stories of women contaminating the universe!" (Isabelle Adjani in *Possession*)—their most prominent form of "speech" is with their bodies. The performative body of woman is here capable of overwhelming both the naked brutality of patriarchal violence as well as male neuroticism or hysteria (e.g., the intellectual protagonists of Zanussi, or the post-Brando, tortured heroes of Wajda). In this way these films give notice to the entire Polish School/Romantic tradition that would subjugate women historically and render their deaths invisible, in Elżbieta Ostrowska's phrase, as opposed to the nobly suffering/dying male of the Romantic tradition mentioned earlier in the chapter.

The apotheosis of these portrayals is a film we have already mentioned in introducing the method of this dissertation, namely the post-1989 *Szamanka* (She-Shaman, 1996). It bears discussing again, using a slightly different angle, before we move to part two. As one of the most vilified films in Polish history, it perhaps shares something in this regard with *No End*, despite their otherwise profound aesthetic difference. Just as Kieślowski's film was painfully recognizable as post-Martial Law, Żuławski's film articulated the chaos of post-state socialism; this is to say the seeming embrace of despair by both films led to their directors being somewhat unfairly charged by critics with nihilism or fatalism. Żuławski, returning for his first Polish film production in over 20 years, may have given himself an uphill battle, in terms of public acceptance, as *Szamanka*'s titular character, a woman known only as "The Italian" (Iwona Petry), begins and ends the film with the eating of brains. At the end of the film these brains, we recall, are not from a Warsaw *bar mleczny* ("milk bar")

cafeteria), but literally from a human—that of her lover, an anthropology professor who initially rapes, then tries to “civilize” her. Significantly, in this role, of a seemingly independent-minded researcher revealed to be a thuggish boor, Żulawski propitiously cast Bogusław Linda, who after 1989 had come to be well-known to the Polish public for his Dirty Harry-type persona in the violent, wickedly cynical and box office smashes of Władysław Pasikowski.⁶⁸¹ In the sex scenes between these characters, together, including the rape, subjective camera and cutting, i.e., cinematic identification, are refused.⁶⁸² In addition and importantly, Żulawski’s style is not in the service of the spiritual or mythic,⁶⁸³ despite the film’s subject matter (i.e., about a woman who may be the reincarnation of an ancient supernatural being). Instead, there is a matter-of-fact approach to the corporeal, including The Italian’s consumption of her lover’s brains,⁶⁸⁴ which, against the recognizable, quotidian backdrop of a changing Warsaw (*Fig.44a*)—this is particularly important and resonant for the viewer—prevents her from becoming either a horror villain/femme fatale,⁶⁸⁵ or entering the mythical historical realm to which female characters in Polish cinema (and literature) are, as we have seen, too often relegated.

⁶⁸¹ This began with *Kroll* (1991), in which he played a soldier, but see especially in his role as a renegade ex-milicja (a cop in People’s Poland) officer in *Psy* (Dogs, 1992) and its sequel (1994).

⁶⁸² Elżbieta Ostrowska, “Women Who Eat Too Much: Consuming Female Bodies in Polish Cinema,” in *Transgressive Women in Modern Russian and East European Cultures: From the Bad to the Blasphemous*. eds. Yana Hashamova, Beth Holmgren, and M. N. Lipovetsky (New York: Routledge, 2017), 133.

⁶⁸³ As in, alternatively, the work of a filmmaker like the mystically-inclined Alejandro Jodorowsky.

⁶⁸⁴ Ostrowska sees the film as mobilizing viewer *disgust*, an “aesthetic emotion” that stands apart from moral judgment, as opposed to psychologically, narratively) reconcilable emotions like pity or guilt. “Women Who Eat Too Much,” 134.

⁶⁸⁵ In contradistinction to Ostrowska, this is the charge of Ewa Mazierska, in agreement with the film’s critics. “Witches, Shamans, Pandoras - Representation of Women in the Polish Postcommunist Cinema,” *Scope*, 2 (2002).



Fig. 44a-d: Bodies in *Szamanka* (1996)

While Żulawski's films could not reasonably be called feminist, source material aside,⁶⁸⁶ there is thus a certain politically productive unknowability in their portrayals of women. In their dalliance with genre—in *Szamanka* it is primarily in casting Linda—and especially due to the formal violence they do to narrative coherence vis-à-vis female performance, they inscribe in these women what Teresa de Lauretis has called, in speaking of the work of Nic Roeg, “radical and irreducible difference.”⁶⁸⁷ Dominating the space within the film frame, and resisting male attempts—characters and viewers—to psychologize them or possess them through knowledge, these women refuse to be the “unseen conditions of what counts as political” recalling Judith Butler's words from last chapter. In other words, it

⁶⁸⁶ The screenplay was adapted by controversial feminist writer Manuela Gretkowska from her novel.

⁶⁸⁷ Discussing *Bad Timing* (1980), she quotes Kristeva: “What I mean by 'woman' is that which is not represented, that which is unspoken, that which is left out of namings and ideologies...[she continues] (*Bad Timing*) inscribes the cinematic figures of non-coherence: non sequiturs in the dialogue, visual and aural split ends, a running over of the sound beyond "its" image, a bleeding of one image into another, the cuts which articulate narrative and shot, and mismatch them.” Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), 95.

is, in keeping with how Żuławski applies pressure to the legacy of Mickiewicz, film made politically rather than political film as such.

5.2. Apocalyptic Wonder: Science-Fiction, Negation and Solidarity

How to fix this intolerable present
of history with the naked eye?

- Jameson⁶⁸⁸

We have till now discussed how Żuławski employs elements of Polish Romanticism while subverting certain received expectations of it, as well as that of art cinema generally, through his emphasis on bodies and the corporeal, as well as combining a certain flair for genre cinema with something that is more outré not only in its content but form. In this second part I elaborate upon the further implications of this latter—genre and form—relative to an element embedded within the performances of women in his films—namely, temporality. The desire for political change requires concrete institutional structures, such as we saw in the post-1968 organization of film units in the PRL, and as we will further see below with respect to how the Polish working classes the Solidarity trade union movement. As incongruous as it may seem, in what follows I hope to (re)construct a certain textual scaffolding sympathetic to such structures for Żuławski's already established cinematic affective negation. I do so vis-à-vis the non-linear temporality that is always latent, and sometimes overt, in his narratives. Żuławski's debut, *The Third Part of the Night*, we remember, gave the viewer the experience of a human psyche breaking down under the extreme conditions of war—the viewer's difficulty and labour in parsing together the narrative parallels the protagonist's own inability to “see” linear progress. The primary

⁶⁸⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia, Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” in *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 287.

formal relation here vis-à-vis the character's mental state is thus a *temporal* relation. There is a sense of an opening onto an apocalyptic futurity, something immediately invoked in the film title's quote from Revelations (and the words pronounced in voiceover in the first scene). Yet despite the darkness of this vision, there is, in Leonard Cohen's phrase, a crack in everything. If so, "the light gets in,"⁶⁸⁹ for the viewer—here we should recall the image from the introduction of *Szamanka*'s protagonist in front of the (blue) train windows—in the potential for emancipation within this different temporality. To quote de Lauretis again, "It effectively breaks the narrative complicity of look and identification with the wedge of a question: what about *now*? what about my time and place in the apparatus, in the nexus of image, sound, and narrative temporality?" This immediacy of the *now* refuses, and seeks to shatter, the complacency of hegemonic narrative progression (i.e., human progress), instead hurtling darkly towards a future that would Messianically risk the apocalypse for a glimpse of liberation.

With this in mind, let us buttress and direct the point further by mentioning a small but important scene in *The Third Part of the Night*—made amid the turmoil of the year 1970, we recall—that of a heated argument. As the anxious, and indeed feverish, worker-intellectuals sit down at their desks and prepare to feed the lab lice once more with their blood, the conversation turns to books. To the statement of a minor character that, "it is a time for intensive reading," the protagonist's friend, a poet and resistance fighter, bitterly retorts that, at such a time, a time of concentration camps and summary executions in the streets,⁶⁹⁰ "books are read out of derision. One should not be reading but taking care of

⁶⁸⁹ "Anthem," by Leonard Cohen, from the album *The Future*, 1992.

⁶⁹⁰ This was his earliest childhood memory—glimpsing these killings from their apartment window. *Żuławski on Żuławski*.

children.” The protagonist, who had not been involved in the discussion, then counters in earnest that “The fate of non-existent people has never been more important.” His comment suggests a need, in times of political despair, to believe in something particular and realized that lies outside of the desultory reality in which one is trapped. It also implies a *place*, even if only immediately within the cinema frame, for these non-existent people. As Chris Marker put it in his short film *La Jetée* (1962), “If they were able to conceive or dream another time, perhaps they would be able to live in it.”⁶⁹¹

5.2.1. Utopia: Desire and the “Technology of Resistance”

These questions, then, of another time, and another place, are brought to the forefront and made explicit, as with Marker, in the genre of science/speculative fiction, or SF. It is to here that Żuławski turned in another critical year, 1976 (and Szulkin soon after). SF gives—and can give—a certain sort of structuring, *technological lens* that is able to focus collective political (and cinematic) desire. I intend the word “technology” not to suggest the sort of impressive futurist gadgetry we might see on *Star Trek*, but in the broad, Heideggerian sense of the word—as a way of getting things done.⁶⁹² It is something like Negt/Kluge’s similarly technical conception of cinema as a “precision grip” towards political emancipation. If we then accept this word as relating to form, the particular form or organization of story content that SF takes in Żuławski, and later in Szulkin, is that of *utopia*, itself long an SF literary tradition within the Slavic Eastern European region. I discuss these traditions and forms and bring them to bear on a close readings of Żuławski’s utopian SF

⁶⁹¹ My thanks to my supervisor Masha Salazkina for reminding me of this wonderful quote.

⁶⁹² Heidegger also connects this sense of technology to *poiesis*, a bringing forth of truth (i.e., through art). Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013).

film *On the Silver Globe* (Na Srebrnym Globie, 1976/1988), as well as Piotr Szulkin's first SF feature, *Golem* (1980).

In so doing, we also wish to explore their relevance for revolutionary political organizing, as in that done by Solidarity. Indeed, the Polonist Michael Bernhard also uses this word to discuss the *form* the fight took, as opposed to its substance, describing the political networks, tactics and structures made by the Polish opposition in the 1970s leading up to Solidarity as the “technology of resistance.”⁶⁹³ After the repression of 1976 the labour movement that eventually realized Solidarity developed rapidly, from the signal demand of independent and free trade unions of 1980—originally developed much earlier, as we will see—and the weapon of the general strike that realized it, to its transformation into a majoritarian social movement whose existence and tendency towards workplace self-management threatened to upend the very mode of production in Poland (and perhaps beyond). However modest in its original aspiration—for indeed, such is the dialectical movement of true revolution, from the particular to the universal⁶⁹⁴—it too imagined an “impossible” new world, a socialism for *all* people and a society actually run by the working class (about which more below). This series of leaps made by Solidarity was and is a profound challenge—indeed a briefly realized Utopia—to a belief in steady, reformist “progress,” which is to say the emphasis on economic development that merely affirms and shores up the status quo.

⁶⁹³ See Michael Bernhard “The Polish Opposition and the Technology of Resistance,” Conference -- Solidarity: 25 Years Later. Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, Canada (January 2006): 3.

⁶⁹⁴ One can have modest local organizing goals—e.g., a worker co-op—and in the same impulse seek to transform society utterly. Such is the meaning of the syndicalist motto of the Industrial Workers of the World: “One Big Union.”

SF films in People's Poland refused this status quo, corresponding instead—negatively as ever—to Solidarity's well-prepared positive leap into the not-yet. In the SF imaginary, this "not-yet" is rendered thinkable by shedding light on our alienated experience of the *now*, in a kind of aesthetic sleight of hand. Through SF, we as readers/viewers are better able to punch a hole through ideology and grasp the totality behind reified everyday "reality." In Fredric Jameson's words, SF "enacts and enables a structurally unique "method" for apprehending the present as history, and this is so irrespective of the "pessimism" or "optimism" of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization."⁶⁹⁵ This is to say that in envisioning an alternate future, and suggesting its connection to our present, SF implants the seed of a belief that the "intolerable present" will not last forever—that it may yet yield or give way to something new.

In a word, this style of futurist negative thinking so indicative of the modern,⁶⁹⁶ and the belief in something new, is that of *utopia*, or utopianism. Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopianism as "social dreaming—the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live."⁶⁹⁷ In other words, it is a realm of desire in search of a form—just as intended by its coiner, Thomas More. His "place that does not exist/no place" (*utopia*) may have linguistically lost its pun counterpart of *eutopia*, or "place to be desired/good place" but the latter remains an occluded dialectical force in the affect seemingly activated whenever the term *utopia* is invoked. This is particularly so when it is

⁶⁹⁵ Jameson, "Progress vs. Utopia," 288.

⁶⁹⁶ Ruth Levitas argues that More's project signals the beginning of modernity, including the formal aspects we associate with modernism: "As social structures were understood as human constructs, and human beings as social constructs, it became possible to imagine alternative societies in which a happy life was possible—societies that were just, ordered, stable and secure." Levitas, "The Elusive Idea of Utopia," *History of the Human Sciences* 16, issue 1 (2003): 1-10.

⁶⁹⁷ Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994): 3.

directed at those who are seen to be to be prioritizing their heart over their head, so to speak.⁶⁹⁸ In other words, a skeptic, unwittingly tapping into More's dialectic, may accuse their political interlocutor (i.e., "you're being utopian.") of *desiring a place that does not exist*, and, it is implied, never will. In this way, utopia is eminently compatible with the "nothing of cinema" that so delighted Żulawski—a huge canvas on which to dream, and dream socially, as cinema must.

I take utopia, then, to be at its most potent when utilized as originally intended by More—as a *literary form*, however philosophical this shape becomes.⁶⁹⁹ By the 20th century this form, and the function of utopia's literary fiction in its strangeness and spatio-temporal dislocation that *points elsewhere*, had shifted significantly. In the European More's day, maps, tools of imperialism, had not yet been filled in; that is, "no-place" really could be *some place* i.e., in parts of the world as yet unseen by Europeans. By the 20th century, utopias, for the West, had undergone a sea change, becoming, as with those of the Frenchman Jules Verne (1828-1905) and Englishman HG Wells (1866-1946), either temporal in nature, or extra-planetary, or both. This tradition was already well established by the time Georges Melies

⁶⁹⁸ In a way, of course, its attack from the Right and (politically) left-of-center liberalism is also the reverse—an accusation of head without heart. That is, they saw *utopia* as a dream actually reflected in reality: the top-down, failed social engineering of the Soviet Union was all the evidence political reactionaries needed to confirm that the dream of a perfect society leads inexorably to totalitarianism. Its attack from the Left is arguably older, by no less than Marx and Engels, who saw this "social dreaming"—here they speak about utopia as a political blueprint, not a literary form—as betraying a lack of political critique and comprehension of the class character of life. Despite professed admiration for those grouped as "utopian socialists"—especially Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen—they deplored that it was "cast in terms of an ideal," and that it was "possible to be a Utopian without developing a *complete* description of an ideal society, a *rigorous* argument demonstrating that the proposed ideal is actually achievable, or a *fully-developed* moral justification." Roger Paden, "Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists," *Utopian Studies* 13, No. 2 (2002): 70.

⁶⁹⁹ One of the key philosophical texts of utopianism, and a foundational one for utopian studies, is Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* (published in three parts: 1954/1955/1959). It is described nicely by David M. Bell as articulating "utopia as a temporal force immanent in a number of "everyday" activities, expressing an immanent collective desire for a state of abundance and fulfillment that has not yet arrived." Bell, "Paying "Utopia" a Subversive Fidelity; or, An Affective Trip to Anarres," *Utopian Studies* 27, No. 2 (2016): 132.

made cinema's first SF masterpiece, at the height of European imperialism, the delirious and satirical *A Trip to the Moon* (*La Voyage dans la lune*, 1902).

In cinema, of course, the world of the diegesis is always *another place*, and also possessed of an inevitable temporal drag,⁷⁰⁰ even as it suggests otherwise through the insistence of photographic immediacy and (invisibly edited) narrative flow. This dialectic further helps to give utopian cinema its power, and since we tend to accept the world—the place—that it pictures, the utopian film is necessarily 20th-century, temporal utopia: that is, Scientific or Speculative Fiction. Darko Suvin, in his classic, if hardline, definition, of SF as always already political, refers to it as “cognitive estrangement”:

SF takes off from a fictional ("literary") hypothesis and develops it with extrapolating and totalizing ("scientific") rigor...The effect of such factual reporting of fictions is one of confronting a set normative system—a Ptolemaic-type closed world picture—with a point of view or glance implying a new set of norms.⁷⁰¹

Though Suvin is somewhat at pains to retain the “*science*” in his definition of SF,⁷⁰² it is the rigor of thought combined with fiction's sense of wonder that encapsulates the genre for him.

Significantly, for Suvin this was to be found more prominently in the Eastern European tradition of utopian SF than that of the West, corresponding as the former did in the early 20th century to the revolutionary time and place in which such works were

⁷⁰⁰ I am thinking here of Dudley Andrew's concept of cinematic *decalage*. See his “The Core and Flow of Film Studies,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, No. 42 (2009): 879-915.

⁷⁰¹ Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” *College English* 34, No. 3 (Dec. 1972): 374.

⁷⁰² Suvin's exclusion of fantasy from his paradigm as un-technical and concerning wish-fulfillment and therefore irredeemably reactionary is no longer broadly accepted in the field (including among those otherwise politically sympathetic to Suvin). See Mark Bould and China Mieville, eds., *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (London: Pluto, 2009).

composed.⁷⁰³ Stanislaw Lem (1921-2006), post-war inheritor of this tradition and arguably the greatest Eastern European writer of SF of his time,⁷⁰⁴ appeared to agree with Suvin, feeling that its authority had weakened by the 1970s (though this was soon to change, as we will see).⁷⁰⁵ Criticizing his genre's reliance on technological gadgetry and instrumental action, Lem wrote,

(R)esigning from the study of super- or extra-instrumental phenomena has a wide range of evil consequences. For instance, all robots and all the hosts of supposedly brilliant electronic brains that populate SF are in fact not brilliant at all. Nor do they possess any psychological aspects of existential functioning: to have become "personalities" would have required the creation of a certain "metaphysics." SF, however, became blind to such problematics since it was always looking for the motive force behind phenomena in machines rather than in human beings, in the technological rather than in the social or psychological, or in what marks the course of history.⁷⁰⁶

As elsewhere in this essay, Lem dances around his point a bit, and some of his pronouncements seem to contain a trace amount of snobbery towards “pulp” fiction, but what he is getting at is an interesting prescription for SF, and by extension, perhaps, narrative art full stop. Lem argues for a SF genre/mode that explores future changes in humans and human thinking (“metaphysics”) immanent to technological and material changes rather than simply lazily indulging our societal belief that technology will either destroy us or—very widespread today—save us from eventual but utter destruction.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰³ We do not have the space to discuss such works as Aleksander Bogdanov's fascinating *Red Star* (1908) or Zamyatin's well-known *We* (1921), but see Darko Suvin's introduction to the tradition in his edited collection of Eastern European SF stories, *Other Worlds, Other Seas: Science Fiction Stories From Socialist Countries* (New York: Random House, 1970), xi-xxxiii.

⁷⁰⁴ It would be churlish not to mention in the same breath the Strugatsky Brothers (1925-1991; 1933-2012), of Russia/The Caucasus, adapted in films by both Tarkovsky (*Stalker*, 1979) and German (*Hard to be a God*, 2013).

⁷⁰⁵ In fact, with the political changes of 1968, utopian SF was soon to flourish anew, this time in North America, with the visionary 1970s novels of Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel L. Delany, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler and others. Unfortunately, Lem, whom Le Guin in particular much admired, did not take notice.

⁷⁰⁶ Stanislaw Lem, "Remarks Occasioned by Antoni Slonimski's "The Torpedo of Time'," trans. Elizabeth Kwasniewski, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Nov., 1984), 241.

⁷⁰⁷ See Evgeny Morozov's polemic against Silicon Valley “technological solutionism” in his *To Save Everything Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (London Public Affairs, 2013). It is also a major point of debate in AI circles, and much contemporary SF, but that is beyond our scope here.

Implicit too is a criticism of grand social engineering, such as Bolshevism and state socialism, that employs modernist planning on a mass scale⁷⁰⁸ without attending how change will occur on the human, microscopic level (a concern investigated, we have seen, by the filmmakers treated in each of these chapters). In other words, utopian SF's task was not to dream up blueprints of a future society or warn against these plans, as SF at the time of the Russian Revolution (i.e., especially between 1905-1917) had done. Instead, it was always at its best, and most modern, when illuminating, in scholar of utopia Ruth Levitas's words, a "shift of emphasis from exteriority to interiority, from structures to experience."⁷⁰⁹

If we take Lem's polemics alongside Suvin's "factual reporting of fictions," we have a decent way of describing how cinema operates *tout court*—perhaps it is always already SF. Narrative films use the stuff of reality to spin their tales, moving from the pro-filmic external world to the *mise-en-scène* to the internal state of the characters being developed, and perhaps then projecting those internal states back onto the external world, and through the viewer, beyond. Piotr Szulkin's best known work within Poland very much reflects this notion, as he himself claimed to see little distinction between making SF films or any other kind of cinema.⁷¹⁰ His SF "tetralogy," as his first four features are sometimes known (*Golem*, 1980; *Wojna światów-Następne stulecie/The War of the Worlds: Next Century*, 1981; *O-Bi, O-Ba. Koniec cywilizacji/The End of Civilization*, 1984; *Ga-Ga. Chwała bohaterom/Glory To the Heroes*, 1985) is usually taken, somewhat reductively, to be an allegory for life in People's Poland.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁸ On Lenin as a preeminent modernist, see James Scott, "The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis," in *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 147-180.

⁷⁰⁹ Levitas, "The Elusive Idea of Utopia," 7.

⁷¹⁰ Piotr Szulkin and Ela Bittencourt, "Interview: Piotr Szulkin," *Film Comment*, June 29th, 2015.

⁷¹¹ This interpretation has gradually shifted, in terms of reception and scholarship in Poland, with increasing distance from the 1980s. See Ludmila Gruszevska Blaim, who also points out that anyone now reading Szulkin's previously unpublished novellas, upon which his four films were based, will have no doubt that they are not allegories/satires of state socialism first and foremost. "Dystopianising the Dystopian: Piotr Szulkin's

We have established how the Polish public was said to practice “Aesopian reading” on any and all texts; we have also seen, however, that this common wisdom is not necessarily how a filmgoer experiences a film. Nor is it, I argue below, how these films are primarily put together in their narrative and mise-en-scène.

In Szulkin’s first feature *Golem* (1980), Polish streets and recognizable social interactions are poetically transformed for the viewer, in the dazzling sepia tones used by the cinematographer, Zygmunt Samosiuk.⁷¹² The film uses as its jumping off point⁷¹³ the classic Jewish folk tale of the Golem, “the mute clay servant brought to life by Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and who ran amok one Sabbath.”⁷¹⁴ Its golem-like protagonist, Pernat, played intelligently by Marek Walczewski, is only monstrous in a reverse sense: as a government laboratory creation who is part of a project to newly engineer a threatened human race, he seems, rather, to be more of a flesh and blood human than those he encounters. Pernat is too gentle and sensitive to acclimate to the hardened and selfish way, we come to understand, that one is forced to behave within in the difficult reality of the film’s diegesis, which contemporary viewers of the film recognized as something like their own. *Golem*

Film Tetralogy,” in *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, ed. Fatima Vieira (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 212.

⁷¹² Szulkin: “Samosiuk (the DP) came up with the idea. He was older and more experienced, but he acted like a friend.”

Bittencourt, “Interview: Piotr Szulkin.”

⁷¹³ Szulkin claims he couldn’t get through the 1920 novel of this legend, but had his co-writer, the critic Tadeusz Sobolewski, narrate a few scenes to him, sparking his imagination. Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ Edan Dekel and David Gantt Gurley, “How the Golem Came to Prague,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, No. 2 (Spring 2013): 241.

proceeds, however, not necessarily allegorically, but through a labyrinth of misdirection and sensations, of colors and charged objects, almost as in a melodrama.



Fig. 45a,f: Talismanic objects in *Golem* (1980)

These objects within the mise-en-scène seem like talismans—both within the diegetic narrative (i.e., Pernat searches for information about himself) and without (i.e., beyond the film). What if reified reality, seemingly unalterable, can become magical, through cinema—is this the utopian? Szulkin has taken up the very Lem-like investigation of what makes us

recognizably human vis-à-vis our social reality, poignantly rendered in his tale, on the eve of the transformations of Solidarity in 1980.

The question of *how* SF is able to embody these human “metaphysical” changes still needs a bit more unpacking. How does it work to cognitively or “scientifically” estrange the reader/viewer, thereby potentially allowing her to arrive as it were in a different place. Carl Freedman, a disciple of Darko Suvin, explains this process well in a close reading of Philip K. Dick, Lem’s contemporary and counterpart in the United States. I will need to quote at some length.

(W)e may begin by analyzing the language of the following passage, which opens a major science-fiction novel, Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968):

A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised - it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice - he rose from the bed, stood up in his multicolored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again.

In some of its particulars, the passage could be the straightforward opening of a mundane novel...The stylistic register of the paragraph, however, marks it as unmistakably science fiction. The key factor here is the reference to the mood *organ* - evidently a technical device somehow connected to emotional states and one that, though unknown in our own empirical environment, is an ordinary accoutrement of everyday life in the world of the text...the whole topic of human feelings, sexual and otherwise, is estranged, and the question of a technology of emotion is posed.⁷¹⁵

The clever innuendo of *mood organ*, a dirty joke that Gombrowicz would have appreciated, instantly poses the question of the links between emotion, technology and human sexuality.

⁷¹⁵ Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 30-31.

Freedman proceeds to argue, further, that the paragraph is evidence of SF's profoundly dialectical, *critical* character, which gives it an inherent theoretical energy.

Because the paragraph shows an emotional dynamic of a future age operating quite differently from what we ourselves empirically experience, the question of the historicity of feelings is raised, and the possibility of a historical periodization of emotion in coordination with other aspects of social development (such as technology) is at least implied. The technical emphasis of the paragraph also tends to remove emotion from idealist notions of spirituality or the unproblematically individual, and to suggest that psychic states may be reducible to concrete and transindividual material realities.⁷¹⁶

Here we have a sense of how SF contains and also liberates political affect, rooting technology to a particular historical development, rather than brandishing it like a magic wand of wish-fulfillment. Text-based media like novels, as they point to images and things in the world through language, operate at a remove from visual media like cinema in its immediacy and (perhaps undeserved) sense of photographic truth 24 times a second, as Godard wryly observed. How is one cognitively estranged through something as visceral as cinema? One should, it seems, necessarily go beyond mere “factual reporting,”⁷¹⁷ but how to do this within narrative without recourse to avant-gardism (such as that explored by Królikiewicz)? Szulkin's answer, as we have seen, is a combination of affective intensity and distancing imagery, with a certain frustration in narrative trajectory for his protagonists, who are unable to attain their goals and appear to go round and round as it were. In *Golem* he locates the *technical* in certain objects, which seem to possess the talismanic power of fantasy: a special book possessed by an inventor is missing a cover, which falls into the hands of Pernat and suggests that he—an altered and internally changed human, Lem-like—is a sort of key (he possesses the cover). Yet the ‘magic wand’ fails; these objects cannot

⁷¹⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁷¹⁷ Suvin's phrase here, when isolated, recalls Żulawski deploring the Cinema of Moral Anxiety as “radiophony.”

liberate the diegetic protagonist, Pernat. Nevertheless, the utopic sensations they give off seem to resonate beyond their representation in narrative; this, once again, radically communicates, supra-rationally, with the viewer.

With respect to these almost haptic qualities in Szulkin, we have seen how this takes place in Żuławski's films instead in the bodies of his characters, which absorb and rebound such sensations; how his emphasis on darkly enunciated affect, on the limits of bodily experience, attempts to connect with audiences in ways that cut beyond narrative and indeed (national) allegory, i.e., what we have called *base Romanticism*. Yet this approach may still appear to unsympathetic eyes as though it wants to “shoot the moon,” a phrase from the card game Hearts that signals the player's attempt to collect every last negative-value card, in order to win. In this estimation, rather than mediating experience, his is a nihilistic cinema that desires nothing positive beyond (negative) desire itself and its accompanying cold cinephilic thrills. It is not such a stretch to see this sort of attack on art also apply to creative impulses in politics—those that wish to break from consensus. In other words, disapproving eyes may see in the revolutionary not trenchant critique and far-sighted political goals, but what is called the unrealistically “utopian,” or its flipside: the death drive of destruction.

Moreover, these were indeed words and charges made against First Solidarity, both during and after the fact;⁷¹⁸ as we have seen it has often been likened without qualification to a time of Carnival or festival, even by those ostensibly sympathetic to its aims.⁷¹⁹ This we

⁷¹⁸ A symptomatic case, the Polish sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis did both, quitting the “team of experts” (intellectual advisers to Solidarity) in the middle of the August negotiations in Gdansk due to the “utopian and anarchic thinking of the workers” and because she opposed the (again “utopian”) idea of independent trade unions. Later, she wrote one of the first books about it, which also complained, conversely, and without evidence, of “worker authoritarianism” (cited by Laba, *Roots of Solidarity*, 170). Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-limiting Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 59.

⁷¹⁹ As the best known example of the “elite thesis,” Timothy Garton Ash's eyewitness account is breathless and journalistic, including in its florid description of participants, especially, and peculiarly, toward women strikers. Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, 1980-1982* (London: Cape, 1983).

should consider the other side of the coin to the debunked “elite thesis,” as Roman Laba calls it, that Solidarity was built solely by intellectuals; in this case the thinking would go, Yes, the working class made Solidarity but they did so through mere primitivism—a spark was suddenly ignited, etc. Such a mistaken conception is erasive of both the historical moments that enabled it as well as the very concrete steps taken by the working class that allowed its seeming “spontaneity” to occur. In reality, it had formed—a decade in the making—grassroots political structures (and concomitant symbolic weaponry, discussed last chapter) immanent as we have said to the State. It is to these we now turn.

5.2.2. Solidarność and solidarity: radical community

Earlier we alluded to one of the best-known graffiti/slogans in May 1968 in Paris: “Be realistic—demand the impossible.” In the year 1980, a moment that seemed to be a nadir for the global Left, as the economy in People’s Poland worsened and concern grew across the country, the Solidarity movement was to take this slogan of 1968 and make it flesh, to choose a metaphor appropriate to Solidarity’s “sacred politics.” This of course lay with Polish workers’ determined, eminently concrete yet seemingly impossible demand—one greeted by onlookers, whether hostile or friendly, with confusion and scorn—of the right to organize, to have free and independent trade unions,⁷²⁰ in an alleged workers’ state. Indeed, the movement itself could not have existed without the historical reality specific to People’s Poland. Just as in 1956—that is, prior to any Marxist Revisionism—and in Kuroń and Modzlewski’s revolutionary document of 1965, the State’s bluff was called on its promise of

⁷²⁰ By 1980, it had been ten years in the making. “On December 16, 1970, workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk demanded that “trade unions on all levels should be made up of non-party members,” while workers from the Gdańsk Repair Shipyard wrote on the same day, “eliminate the interference of the party in the work of the trade unions.” Gdańsk port workers demanded that “trade unions should be non-party and must support the working class.” Roman Laba, “Worker Roots of Solidarity,” *Problems of Communism* 35, No. 4, (1986): 54.

full communism—a case of “over-orthodoxy” to official ideology, perhaps.⁷²¹ An analysis of the program of Solidarity confirms this; the most common words to be found within the document are “social” and “self-government.”⁷²²

We have seen last chapter something of the creativity of the Solidarity movement in fighting back on a cultural level, so to speak, but it is important at this stage to point out the extent to which the struggle on this front was, in a sense that will be unpacked below, inseparable from the actual oppositional political structures built by Solidarity. We recall how the experience gained in struggle by Polish workers, from 1956 in Poznań to the insurrections of 1970, 1971 and 1976, constituted an archive of cultural memory, an “invisible store of knowledge locked in the minds of workers themselves,” in the words of Lawrence Goodwyn.⁷²³ This formulation seems compelling for how it directs our attention to the relation that constitutes revolutionary change—how this “consciousness” is inscribed within members of a collective. In sum, the “technology of resistance” was part and parcel of the cultural resistance, and together they advanced changes within individuated Poles. As Negt/Kluge argued, the change itself is something that cannot simply be thought, which is to say directed by theory—it must be (collectively) experienced. Below we indicate how this was accomplished.

⁷²¹ This point, supportive of the idea of Solidarity’s immanence to state socialism, as maintained by this dissertation, is from a compelling, unpublished conference paper by three young Polish intellectuals (each of whom have been referenced separately elsewhere in the dissertation). They argue, along Lacanian-Badiouian lines, for Solidarity as the only communism that Poland has ever experienced, unwitting called into being retroactively by the State. Jakub Majmurek, Kuba Mikurda, Jan Sowa, “Event in the Icebox. The Carnival of Solidarity (1980-1981) as an Outburst of Political Imagination,” Paper presented at “On the idea of Communism” Conference, London (2009): 4.

⁷²² Ibid, 7.

⁷²³ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 153

After 1970, this “knowledge” containing the signal demand of free trade unions, was institutionally (i.e., “technologically”) codified in the Interfactory Strike Committee (*Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy*, or MKS). The MKS structure, uniting workplaces in a way somewhat similar to the abortive workers’ councils in Poland and Hungary in 1956, allowed workers to radically reorient themselves along decentralized lines. Roman Laba describes it in a way that gets at the heart of its function and efficacy, as “an antimodel of the state, spreading horizontal structures where the Leninist state erected hierarchical forms of mobilization and control.”⁷²⁴ Here, I also want to suggest and emphasize that direct actions generally, such as those carried out by Solidarity, carry with them a powerful collective affect in excess of what is needed for the success of the action. Again, it is hard to measure the changes that follow this affect, because it occurs in individuals within the collective, but that makes it no less significant or important for future organizing—nor perhaps as a target for the “precision grip” of cinema.

The primary, radically communicative weapon for direct action by the MKS was the sit-down, or occupation strike. It naturally had the desired, and quite essential, effect of worker control of space and the means of production. It also influenced what became wider, revolutionary changes, through its status as ritual—one with attendant, historically-derived symbols, poetry and songs. As Roman Laba puts it, “(T)he Poles did not simply unite, they divided—drew boundaries in which a political space for democratic participation could exist.”⁷²⁵ This literal and figurative drawing of boundaries also had the effect of separating strikers, and in some sense families as well, from the state socialist mode of production—a degraded mode of capitalism, recall—creating a utopian space and

⁷²⁴ Laba, *Roots of Solidarity*, 112.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

inscribing the aforementioned ineffable revolutionary change within participants. This, then, is what lay behind the body politic of “Polish Carnival.” Like modern utopia, it comes to exist far beyond the specifically delineated *space* of the strike gate—even if only, at first, in the “mind’s eye.”

First Solidarity became the radical community this dissertation sees as the *positive* model responded to by the *negative community* of aesthetics, in part thanks to several critical, decisive moments, described below. While the Polish August and the agreements signed in Gdańsk that month in 1980 gave official birth to Solidarity’s dream of free and independent trade unions, many of which sprouted all around the country, forming their own MKS (interfactory strike committees) in the interim, on paper it was still only achieved regionally, and the Party very much wanted to keep it that way. On September 17th, delegates from all over the country met in Gdańsk to decide what shape Solidarity would take as a national organization. Battle lines were drawn between the Gdańsk Presidium, made up of Wałęsa and other local workers and labour activists, and the Warsaw-based activists of KOR. Gdańsk argued passionately for a decentralized structure; they did so from hard experience of organizing and its repression, fearing that a strong central executive could face instant decapitation by the Party, destroying the workers’ movement. On the other hand, KOR wanted a united front that could stand up to divide-and-conquer Party manipulation all over the country. In the end, the decentralizers won out.⁷²⁶ Each local Solidarity union, all over the country, without a strong executive telling them what to do, was forced to fight the Party where they were. As with the cities on the Baltic, these locals of the union would face direct experience of struggle and find eventual victory

⁷²⁶ There is a succinct and stirring account and analysis of this meeting in Laba, *Roots of Solidarity*, 105-112.

themselves, inscribing the revolutionary relation of change in the grassroots, and thereby nationally as well. As a result, Solidarity was arguably able to actualize a proletariat in Marx's—and Negt/Kluge's—broad sense of the word, as those who may conceivably unite in common struggle as a class against those who possess the means of production. Beyond avoiding the threat of “decapitation of the head” by the PZPR, “(b)y this smart move it did not allow the state to manipulate one branch against another and to destroy the Union's unity (by, for instance, giving a pay rise to miners in order to alienate them from university teachers).”⁷²⁷

In the final incarnation of First Solidarity, a further, fascinating development began to sweep the nation, known as Worker Self-Management (*samorząd*, also meaning self-governing), a growing movement within Solidarity demanding that, in effect, workers' councils control industry and in effect run the country. It began to catch fire in Fall of 1981, to the point where, at Solidarity's first national congress, in Gdańsk, “self-management had emerged as the union's foremost demand, the centerpiece of its program for a self-governing republic.”⁷²⁸ Workers councils, of course, had been tried before, failing in 1956, we recall, when they were gutted by Gomulka. This fact was not lost on many involved in the movement. In the words of one of their organizers, and Łódź delegate, Zbigniew Kowalewski,

You do not have worker self-management just because you elect a workers' council. The workers' council is not instantly an organ of self-management. It is only an organ of the struggle for worker self-management. So we fought the idea that if you have a workers' council you have worker self-management. No, you have a body to

⁷²⁷ Majmurek, Mikurda, Sowa, “Event in the Ice Box,” 5.

⁷²⁸ Henry Norr, “Self-Management and the Politics of Solidarity,” in *Worker Participation and the Politics of Reform*, ed. Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Pr., 1987), 269.

lead the struggle for self-management.⁷²⁹

It was understood, as with Lem, that technology and form—in a word, modernism—was not enough; in both cases above, inscribing revolutionary change within individuals took active, human struggle. Though Solidarity was crushed in its relative infancy by the declaration of Martial Law in December of 1981, the far-sighted lessons learned and acquired, and the change it sought to inscribe, continue to be transmitted—not merely in written documents like this one, but every time a group of people take direct action against the violence of the state, in whatever forms it takes globally.

5.2.3. Żuławski and SF: the solidarity of cinema

Such is how utopian desire, the dream of another future, meets action, and where cinema’s “precision grip” might very well be applied in SF cinema that engages us in other futures. Żuławski’s cinema of radical negativity and abject bodies, his understanding of our relational experience of history and cultural memory, his itinerancy while being in demand as a filmmaker, and his disdain for art as product—all of these are given a final push by SF and its sense of facticity within Żuławski’s distorted yet strangely detailed *mise-en-scène*. What SF does for Żuławski is to further foreground the hidden political force of the desperate desire of his characters, and its relationship to trauma.⁷³⁰ In SF, viewers are cut free from the burdensome weight of the past and initiated into a temporally and “scientifically” estranged realm. Dialectically speaking, this returns us to the present as it were with fresh eyes. To quote Jameson again, SF films exist as a “meditation, which,

⁷²⁹ Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski and Christopher Phelps, “Solidarność in Łódź: An Interview with Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 73 (Spring, 2008): 118.

⁷³⁰ One thinks of the childhood abuse of the title character of Hitchcock’s *Marnie*. Żuławski’s painful mobilization of desire and obsession, and their connection to past trauma, has much in common with Hitchcock.

setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits.⁷³¹ Żulawski's cinema, as we have seen, wants to mediate our engagement with this totality; rather than revel in it, he wants to examine the strife that occurs when we, like Mickiewicz's Konrad, rage against these limits.⁷³²

To unpack this affect of rebellion a bit more, we turn again to Negt/Kluge, for whom it is the realm of *fantasy*, an "anti-realist" feeling that is one of the by-products of the self-regulatory struggle that arises in our organism. Much like consciousness in Freud, which they indeed reference, fantasy is a way to "shield the ego from the shock effects of an alienated reality" during the "unbearable real situation"⁷³³ of the labour process. As such it is an important site of (bodily) protest, which they consider an "unconscious practical critique of alienation," but not something that could or should be directly accessed, given that "(i)n its unsublated form, as a mere libidinal counterweight to unbearable, alienated relations, fantasy is itself merely an expression of this alienation."⁷³⁴ In other words, it is doomed to fail as politics—this is the caricatured position of Solidarity as Carnival—and as culture (i.e.,

⁷³¹ Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia," 289.

⁷³² In Part Three of *Dziady*, Konrad, delirious with fury at God and tempted by Satan, unleashes a vow of vengeance, a cautionary torrent of spleen, shortly before "swooning" (and thus ultimately failing to make a demonic pact).

*Feelings circulate through the soul, they kindle, they blaze
Like blood through its deep hidden channels;
And men will find in my songs as my feeling
As they will see blood in my face
My song, you are a star beyond the confines of the world!*

Adam Mickiewicz, *The Great Improvisation* [from *Dziady*, part three], trans. Louise Varèse (NYC: Voyages, 1956).

⁷³³ Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 33.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*

films); it is merely a way to cathartically satiate and/or harmlessly diffuse our deeper collective longings as a society.⁷³⁵

We repose the question, then: how can we most productively channel the very real bodily feelings of rebellion we experience? As Negt/Kluge commentator Richard Langston puts it, “Instead of aspiring to reconstruct an original totality of labour power,” (and here, though he is thinking of painting,⁷³⁶ he means an attempt at a kind of full narrative representation of the problem, as *Man of Iron* attempted)

...fantasy translated must inhabit the fissures and discrepancies left in the wake of dominant historical processes and the obstinacy it occasions. A process, not a product, it must wrestle with fragmentary forms and foster a sensibility attuned to the otherwise abandoned, unacknowledged yet real feelings of *Eigensinn* (obstinacy).⁷³⁷

In this final section, I show how Żulawski was able to mobilize specific temporal and spatial elements of utopian SF that indeed “inhabit the fissures and discrepancies” of history through aesthetic misdirection, particularly in how he uses the dialogic power of the then-contemporaneous *critical utopia* (Tom Moylan’s word) of the 1970s.

In fact, the second part of Langston’s description could almost be a poignant eulogy for Żulawski’s *On the Silver Globe* (Na Srebrnym Globie, 1976/1988), which remains fragmentary as a text to this day. Filming began in 1976, following Żulawski’s invitation to

⁷³⁵ See Jack Zipes’s book, which discusses with admirable specificity how the culture industry tends to blunt our collective longings. He makes it clear that any discussion of utopian energies present in cinema must also take into consideration, beyond close readings, the socio-historical context in which they are told. For example, *realism* was a mode audiences became used to in the 1970s, and thus *Rocky* (1976), a fantasy that posits a working class hero can beat the odds through belief in himself, etc., was accepted as “realistic.” Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 120-121.

⁷³⁶ Richard Langston compares Negt/Kluge in this regard to novelist and playwright Peter Weiss, particular in his *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. For Weiss, a work of art successful in attending to yet subverting dominant historical processes, “wrestl(ing) with fragmentary forms” and bodily obstinacy would be Picasso’s *Guernica*. Langston, “The Work of Art as Theory of Work: Relationality in the Works of Weiss and Negt & Kluge,” *Germanic Review* 83, issue 3 (2008): 209-210.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid*, 204.

return to Poland to make a film, as he had had something of a hit in France with the moving Nouvelle Vague deconstruction,⁷³⁸ *The Important Thing is To Love* (L'Important c'est d'aimer, 1974). Political winds, however, quickly shifted against such work; *On the Silver Globe* fell under the censor's knife, and wrath, with the sets taken from the director and largely destroyed.⁷³⁹ The film was only to be completed more than ten years later. Perhaps for that reason it inherently retains the power of feelings in/for history better than most. It straddles the ferment of the late 1970s in People's Poland as well as the end that was also a beginning (of an end?): that is, the hope-filled death of state socialism and the subsequent vicissitudes of "capitalism with the gloves out" of 1989 that ravaged Central and Eastern Europe.

Given its checkered history, as well as its recent critical resuscitation following a restoration of the film,⁷⁴⁰ it is tempting to see the work as high modernist SF in the mold of Tarkovksy—a text which de-emphasizes or transforms the "hard" aspects of its SF source material, as the great Russian filmmaker did with the Strugatsky Brothers' novel *Roadside Picnic* in his *Stalker* (1978), as well as Lem's own *Solaris* (1972). A case could be made for this, as many of the scenes are as dark and impenetrable, and as formally experimental, as Żuławski ever shot. But it is also important to note its element of fidelity to what was definite SF genre fiction,⁷⁴¹ for herein lies much of its power as a film. It was adapted from the filmmaker's great uncle Jerzy Żuławski's once widely read, early twentieth century "Lunar Trilogy" novels, which tell the story of a dying Earth attempting to colonize the

⁷³⁸ As evidence of Żuławski's distance from "New Wave(s)", the impish character played by Jacques Dutronc is ultimately revealed to be emotionally broken, a pointed send-up perhaps of the characters played by Jean-Pierre Léaud.

⁷³⁹ Daniel Bird, Interview, "Outsiders, Shamans, and Devils, Part 1."

⁷⁴⁰ For example, in the US, Żuławski's film played NYC triumphantly (and posthumously) at the Lincoln Film Center. A piece was commissioned from Daniel Bird for the occasion. Bird, "Film Comment Selects: Andrzej Żuławski," February 17, 2016 <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-comment-selects-andrzej-żuławski/>

⁷⁴¹ Łukasz Wodzyński, "Modernism Romanced: Imaginary Geography in Jerzy Żuławski's *The Lunar Trilogy*," *Slavic Review* 77, Issue 3 (Fall 2018): 685-703.

moon. The younger Żulawski called the Lunar Trilogy the saddest books he had ever read, while Stanisław Lem, who much admired their prose, saw them as seeking to create a philosophy of history in science fiction form.⁷⁴²

The film approaches the problematic of the novels in a way contemporaneous with a newly resurgent utopian SF in 1970s literature, a grouping of novels organized as “Critical Utopia,” in Tom Moylan’s influential phrase. The term is a historically specific one, and applies indirectly to the aforementioned culture industry’s neutralization of popular feelings of protest, or collective longing, But as we know this began to change in the 1960s.

(A) critique of the present was developed in literary form that proved especially capable of resisting the affirmative culture of contemporary capitalism even as much of science fiction was absorbed into that consumer culture in print and, especially, in film... Aware of the historical tendency of the utopian genre to limit the imagination to one particular ideal and also aware of the restrictions of the utopian impulse to marketing mechanisms, the authors of the critical utopias assumed the risky task of reviving the emancipatory utopian imagination while simultaneously destroying the traditional utopia and yet preserving it in a transformed and liberal form that was critical both of utopian writing itself and of the prevailing social formation.⁷⁴³

A critical utopia designates a SF narrative torn as it were between two worlds: “one dying, and the other yet to be born,” as Gramsci once put it. But unlike in the traditional utopia, the dream is not as simple; indeed, it is not always clear which world we are to desire.⁷⁴⁴ In Moylan’s words again,

the text is not important for its practical blueprints of an actual alternative society, but rather as it provides *pre-conceptual images that are generated out of opposition to what is*. [my emphasis] The unresolved problems in the text, the tensions and absences in the text, become an important part of the oppositional ideology. ...the negative thinking

⁷⁴² Stanisław Lem, “Żulawski’s Silver Globe,” trans. Elizabeth Kwasniewski, *Science Fiction Studies* 12, 1 (Mar 1985): 1-5.

⁷⁴³ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London; New York: Methuen, 1986), 42.

⁷⁴⁴ See especially the Taoist anarchism of *The Dispossessed* (1974), arguably the stand-out entry of this subgenre, and about which a great deal has been written. Le Guin sub-titled it “an ambiguous utopia.”

of utopia stands opposed to the affirmative culture of the present dominant system.⁷⁴⁵

Critical utopias, dialogic in their back-and-forth narrative thrust, thus possess inherently revolutionary energy in how they are forced to envision a *second world*, however morally and teleologically “ambiguous,” in Ursula K. Le Guin’s phrase, or outright apocalyptic in presentation. Żulawski’s *On the Silver Globe* begins with group of astrophysicists on a post-apocalyptic Earth who live isolated among those they see as a primitive tribe. When they discover a video sent from a lost expedition to the Moon, the action shifts to the ill-fated party on the Moon, and later, their descendants, as a new life is made, full of new social codes that struggle to tear themselves away from the twin dominions of science and religion.

Żulawski, using this form of the critical utopia, is able to in effect make upiór doubles of not only his characters, but of Earth itself, for which these “pre-conceptual images,” are paramount in a tale of humanity marooned. As with Szulkin, Żulawski does not eschew allegory, it is simply not the overarching element; it is obfuscated, as ever, by his overheated dialogue and monologues, philosophically overdetermined, and punctuated with rapid camera movement and rather trenchant jump-cut editing. This plays out amid a vast, wind-swept *mise-en-scène* as the desperate characters flail about, struggling with aliens, each other and themselves in trying to make sense of their situation on a harsh new planet.

As a text, the film fulfills, in two ways I wish to highlight, Negt/Kluge’s injunction to translate *fantasy* by “inhabit(ing) the fissures and discrepancies...(to) foster a sensibility attuned to the...unacknowledged yet real feelings of *Eigensinn* (obstinacy).”⁷⁴⁶ First, Żulawski brings out the abstraction and sense of discovery of his great uncle’s prose by inserting

⁷⁴⁵ Tom Moylan, “The Locus of Hope: Utopia versus Ideology,” *Science Fiction Studies*, 9, No. 2 (July 1982): 163.

⁷⁴⁶ Langston, “The Work of Art as Theory of Work,” 204.

cinema itself into the diegesis, as a *scientific* tool of documentation, cognitively estranging the viewer as it technologically frames—and influences—the struggle with sanity of the post-apocalyptic characters. Thanks to the camera he wields, one astronaut, Jerzy (Jerzy Trela, cast against type) emerges as different from the other survivors (two other men and a woman) in the apparent ease with which he adjusts to being inter-galactically shipwrecked (for they have ended up on the wrong side of the moon).

With true joy, a bit like Filip in Kieślowski's *Amator* on a new planet, for whom the camera is also a blessing as well as a curse, Jerzy records and documents their excitement and terror on this new world. Much of the first half of the film contains footage—that which was recovered by Earth scientists at the film's beginning—taken from his (second person) point of view with a rough handheld camera, a self-reflexive device strikingly ahead of its time.⁷⁴⁷ At many such moments, Jerzy provides a philosophical commentary, as the sound is chopped with Godardian jump cuts of the image; he tries to understand not just the new world, but his own use of the camera to capture it.

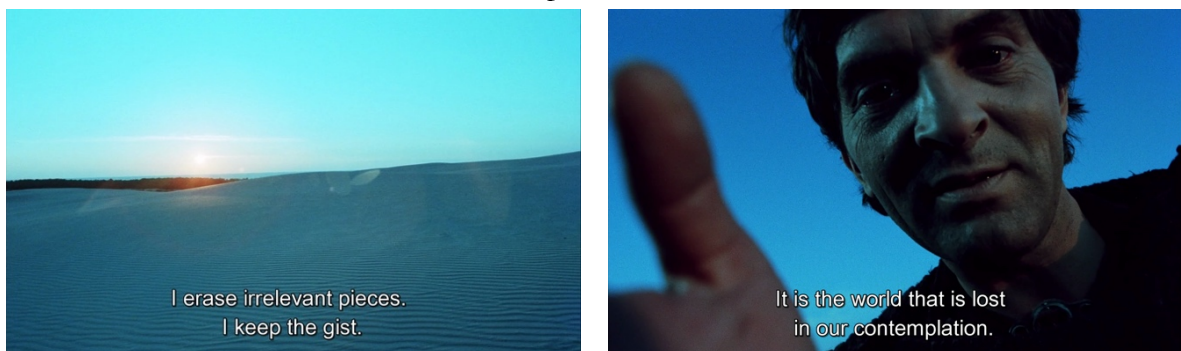


Fig. 46a,b: Jerzy's footage, *On the Silver Globe* (1976/1988)

⁷⁴⁷ It predates, for example, Ruggero Deodato's notorious *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), about a documentary film crew who disappeared in the Brazilian Amazon and whose footage is recovered. This blueprint would later prove something of a horror subgenre evergreen, beginning with the success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).

Despite what it brings him (“I must be careful. It costs them so much; it costs me so little. Why?”) a breaking point is reached when he is confronted by one of his steadily deteriorating compatriots, Piotr, in the middle of the latter’s ruminating monologue. Captured by Jerzy’s camera, Piotr laments that they have found nothing on this new planet but the same meaninglessness and pain. In a jump cut, Piotr then turns to Jerzy, who is seemingly immune to the pain and madness of this radical and unsustainable freedom that has been foisted upon them. Incredulous, he asks, “How can you be so happy here? You who have nothing!” “I have you,” is Jerzy’s reply. Thus triggered, Piotr proceeds to beat Jerzy unconscious and bloody, as though to make him understand. Jerzy’s camera now records his own suffering—first from his point-of-view (*Fig. 47a*) and then from a nearby spot (*Fig. 47b*) where it has fallen.



Fig. 47a-d: Jerzy beaten, *On the Silver Globe* (1976/1988)

Here is a criticism of rationalism overextended, a very Lem-like observation of the development of technology beyond the capacity of humanity—as yet unchanged, as it were—to cope with it. We grasp the ontological poverty not only of violent transgression in itself, but we understand the “raw feeling of living pain,” in the world, which science/technology cannot remove by itself, nor can it forge the solidarity they are lacking (“you have us...which means nothing!”). As Szulkin was also to do,⁷⁴⁸ Żuławski portrays *vision* as difficult or impossible on this new planet within the diegesis. It is exactly the sort of “lens” that Wordsworth cursed and Mickiewicz warned about in his “Romanticism” poem—one that would dominate and mediate imperially through rationality in discourse. We might even see this as a self-criticism by the director, allied like Jerzy to the “nothing of cinema.” However, Jerzy is also much like the peasant girl in Mickiewicz’s “Romanticism” poem, with her simple faith and belief. Indeed, in seeking to fill the void on this barren world, Jerzy becomes, though against his will, a quasi-religious icon among his descendants and that of his fellow astronaut Marta. This situation only deepens upon the arrival of a new astronaut, investigating what has become of those who took the footage. The arrival of this man, from a dying world, completes the circle, as he is viewed by Jerzy’s “children” as the Second Coming, disturbingly wedding faith in technology—independent of real human communication—to faith in religion.

The time of the second astronaut is complicated by a third temporality, which

⁷⁴⁸ After the short films discussed last chapter but prior to the science fiction features that made his name, Piotr Szulkin also tapped into the rich folklore of the Polish and Slavic nations in two striking short films from about pre-Christian peasant legends. In particular, *Bewitching Eyes* (*Oczy Uroczone*, 1976), is a convoluted tale full of haunting imagery, and can be seen as a strange parable of the failure of an all-encompassing, seductive, imperial vision, culminating in the self-blinding by a sorcerer. It is the “sorcerer’s creation,” that then becomes the subject in *Golem*.

concerns the second reason the film fulfills the translation of fantasy, and in effect grants responsibility in so doing to the viewer. Namely, it is the beautifully unfinished finish Żuławski lent to the piece in 1988, over a decade after government censors destroyed his sets and costumes, preventing the film's completion. Żuławski, making a decision to embrace untimeliness in what is after all a SF film, transforms *On the Silver Globe* into a genuinely moving contemporary document. The director reads his own screenplay, describing sections, throughout the film, of that which was never shot. We as viewers are thus asked to fill in the blanks quite literally, with our minds, as the vast emptiness of a barren planet races toward us with terrific speed while Żuławski speaks.



Fig. 48: Filling in the blanks, *On the Silver Globe*

This feeling is confirmed and augmented with the decision by Żuławski and cinematographer Andrzej Jaroszewicz to present footage from contemporary Poland in 1987, the positive to the negative of the blank vistas of the beach. We glimpse faces on an escalator, tired yet somehow hopeful—perhaps eager to take the stage, as it were, as political subjects.

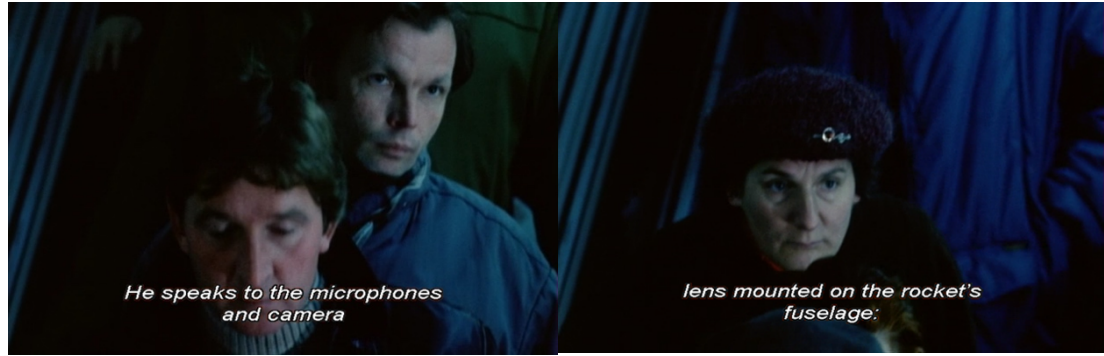


Fig. 49a,b: Faces from the Present, *On the Silver Globe* (1976/1988)

The SF language overlaid on the soundtrack with images of these Polish citizens seems to be what Freedman means by the “historicity of feelings,” albeit with a Brechtian twist. We hear the futurist words, but the images bring us back to the present; we consider the hopes and prayers of a Polish citizenry not simply in general but on the eve, in retrospect, of political transformation. This distancing produced by contrasting word and image also has the effect of orienting us, in Negt and Kluge’s sense, to our part as “spectator”—our labour in the production of this dream, i.e., *breaking* with our sleepwalking within a nightmare—and toward a different future. We are indeed assembling the film in our mind, filling in the “seams,” as Negt and Kluge call for, to reclaim our human characteristics.⁷⁴⁹ At the same time we are shaken loose, through the affective cacophony of Żulawski’s filming of this apocalyptic tale, from resigning ourselves to fate—no “cosy catastrophe,” here.⁷⁵⁰

Though we can understand much of the new footage as contemporary, and of course, in 2018, as past, the effect is not mere documentary, not merely a hybrid form, as in *Man of Iron*. We experience it, I think, this delay, these faces, these empty spaces, as the *now*

⁷⁴⁹ Another name for this in Negt/Kluge is *counterproduction*. *History and Obstinacy*, 195-196.

⁷⁵⁰ This term was coined by the SF novelist/theorist Brian Aldiss to pejoratively describe a subgenre of SF, represented by writers like John Wyndham (*The Day of the Triffids*), in which the bourgeoisie begins to enjoy post-apocalyptic life, now free of the poor and subaltern, etc. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Corgi, 1975), 292-294.

that is also beyond the darkness of the present. As something perhaps Utopian, of which we're collaborative; this too is what recent work like Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights*, thick with the Romantic imaginary, is aiming at, it would seem, combining fantastical storytelling forms with authentic *testimonio* of recent victims of austerity in Portugal, as well as highlighting the process of putting it together. Can we yet locate something utopian, beyond its reification in mass culture, to paraphrase Jameson⁷⁵¹—nowadays, superhero films, which profit off marginalized cultures and identities—in what is common to us all and at the same not un-instrumentalized by capital? It may be worth allying the concept of cinema as radical communication—that which constitutes an engaged form of transmission between humans that cannot be reduced to rational discourse in narrative—with Hito Steryl's influential concept of “poor images.” She calls them,

...the debris of audiovisual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies shores...Poor images show the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable—that is, if we can still manage to decipher it.⁷⁵²

With this in mind, consider what poor Jerzy with his camera that charts his experience in *On the Silver Globe*, or Filip in *Amator* who likewise harbors the best of intentions that he cannot realize by himself, may have to do with the world of technology today. There are a great many across the globe who record and transmit their experience, full of joy or perhaps great hardship, in poor images, in ways that are not always meaningful or legible outside of a local context. But when added up and accumulated—across vastly dispersed networks, across various timelines and temporalities, housed in online archives and waiting to be revisited—these do have the capacity to, as Steryl suggests, “create an alternative economy of images,

⁷⁵¹ Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” *Social Text* No. 1 (Winter, 1979): 130-148.

⁷⁵² Hito Steryl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux journal* 10 (November 2009): 1.

an imperfect cinema existing inside as well as beyond and under commercial media streams.” Such is the dream of a decentralized technology of resistance—the empty seams waiting to be filled in by human communication, which perhaps very much desires—militantly, as we put it above—to live *positively* outside of the negativity of the text. It would be nice to think that Żulawski, in his approach to cinema as wrestling with experience, would appreciate Steryl’s Benjaminian thoughts, that an image

is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality.⁷⁵³

5.3. Concluding remarks: Cinema and Imperfect Refusal

In this dissertation, we have discussed some of the varied approaches within Polish cinema art after 1968 and argued for their correspondence with the struggle, *za chleb i wolność* (for bread and freedom), that sought to liberate working people in Poland, the Solidarity movement. These films were made with rigor, passion, and intellectual seriousness, and yet their makers also never deluded themselves into a belief in the overweening importance of their art as a contained and finished product, whether as the supposedly autonomous realizations of art as personal achievement, or as political broadsides with the power to reshape reality and mode of production all on their own. Instead, they delighted in filmmaking as an aspect of comprehending life; in the idea of that which is unfinished, or *imperfect*, in the memorable phrase, alluded to by Steryl, of revolutionary filmmaker and theorist Julio García Espinosa. Such cinema retains a questing openness—a spirit of research

⁷⁵³ Steryl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” 8.

and discovery. It is, as Espinosa put it, “an answer, but it is also a question which will discover its own answers in the course of its development.”⁷⁵⁴ What is *open* about this cinema is thus not merely to be found in eschewing narrative closure in favor of dazzling postmodern uncertainty, but on a deeper level that evinces a fundamental participatory principle as to what the viewer has to do with this situation. Part of this, as we have seen, is connected to an understanding of the importance of material life,⁷⁵⁵ not merely the “spiritual values” of art and intellectual discourse—and how it is inscribed upon (cinematic) bodies—this indeed is a large part of what radical communication seeks to convey.

In this way, these films give us an idea of how participatory cinema may function and stimulate politically, even today. As far as we may have come, in terms of consciousness, from the political despair of the decades in which this writer grew up, much is yet to be done in terms of uniting ourselves, and indeed our bodies, in a great *refusal*, in Maurice Blanchot’s word of 1968.

Those who refuse and who are bound by the force of refusal know that they are not yet together. The time of common affirmation is precisely what has been taken away from them. What they are left with is the irreducible refusal, the friendship of this sure, unshakable, rigorous No that unites them and determines their solidarity.⁷⁵⁶

This refusal is not nihilistic, or apathetic, but active; it is the “irreducible” negative without which the positive of political organizing cannot exist. The indignation of refusal takes the form of a collective affect—the lesson of 1968. It is, finally, very important that we are able to grasp this collective affect at the roots—our roots, as it were—and make it our own, because of course in 2019 it is as relentlessly coopted as ever by Late Capitalism, sold in the

⁷⁵⁴ Julio García Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema,” trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979): 24-26.

⁷⁵⁵ This is another important point made by Espinosa is his defense and desire for “popular art” to *become* mass art; that is, for and by everyone. Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Maurice Blanchot, “Refusal,” in *Political Writings, 1953-1993*, trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 7.

form of faux-radical Hollywood representations, for one.⁷⁵⁷ For this reason cinema can, and should, not only “democratize” art by bringing artist and viewer closer together—the 1968-era tendency noticed and encouraged by Espinosa a year later—but in so doing it can also behave as a powerful *mediator of experience*, one that indeed through our participation—here, our collective participation in refusal—allows us to perceive mediation at all. This is to say, it is not merely as a presenter of experience (narrative) or a packager of experiences (affect), but a go-between. It is not unlike what Marx had in mind when writing *Capital*, conceiving of it as a “journey,” as Beverly Best puts it,

Marx takes his readers on a very particular kind of narrative journey, the categorial reconstruction of the capitalist formation that he refers to as the movement from the abstract to the concrete. The course, or the event, of the reading itself is meant to produce an affective response in the reader. This affective response is a kind of “dialectical shock.” It is the shock of recognizing oneself in relation to the other, in relation to the social totality that at first seems to stand “over and against” (an objective difference) and which one discovers is essentially an extension of one’s own subjectivity.

For Marx, the journey of reconstructing the “meaning” of capital and one’s relation to it is an epistemological operation that nonetheless produces a kind of ontological shift in the reader. The exercise changes the reader: a shift in the way one sees and perceives produces a shift in the way one experiences and lives in the world. This process also works the other way: a shift in the way one experiences the world produces a new way of seeing and understanding it.⁷⁵⁸

What we are up against in this world seems insurmountable; the violence of capitalism is both direct and indirect; as a result there is isolation, precarity, loneliness—difficult grounds on which to struggle. If the point is to change it, we may also have to change our ability to perceive this totality—suprarily, arrhythmically, *collectively*. Placing our faith in cinema’s

⁷⁵⁷ I am thinking of superhero films that (increasingly) aim to turn a profit through representing marginalized cultures and identities.

⁷⁵⁸ Beverly Best, ““Fredric Jameson Notwithstanding”: The Dialectic of Affect,” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 23, Issue 1 (2011): 81.

embodied “dialectical shocks” in organizing perceptions can also help us place our faith in each other in this fight. And when we fight? We win.

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Alphabetical by director. Made in the People's Republic of Poland unless otherwise stated.

Agnieszka Holland

Kobieta samotna / A Woman Alone, 1981

Kazimierz Karabasz:

Muzykanci / Sunday Musicians, 1960

Krzysztof Kieślowski:

Shorts:

Urząd / The Office, 1966

Z miasta Łodzi / From the City of Łódź, 1969

Fabryka / Factory, 1970

Robotnicy '71: Nic o nas bez nas / Workers '71: Nothing About Us Without Us, 1972.

Przejście podziemne / Pedestrian Subway, 1973

Pierwsza Miłości / First Love, 1974

Szpital / Hospital, 1975

Życiorys / Curriculum Vitae, 1975

Features:

Personnel, TV, 1975

Blizna / The Scar, 1976

Spokoj / The Calm, TV, 1976/1980

Amator / Camera Buff, 1979

Przypadek / Blind Chance, 1981/1987

Krótki Dzień Pracy / Short Working Day, 1981 (unreleased)

Bez Konca / No End, 1985

Dekalog, TV, 1988/1989.

Krótki film o zabijaniu / A Short Film About Killing, 1988

La double vie de Véronique / Double Life of Veronique (1991), and

Trois couleurs: Blue, Blanc, Rouge / Blue, Red and White: The Three Colors Trilogy, 1993-1994.

Grzegorz Królikiewicz

Shorts:

Wyjście / Exit, 1965.

Każdemu to czego mu wcale nie trzeba / Everyone Gets What He Doesn't Need, 1966.

Nie Placz / Don't Cry, 1972

Features:

Na Wylot / Through and Through, 1972

Wieczne Pretensje / Endless Grievances, 1976

Tanczący jastrząb / The Dancing Hawk, 1977

Marek Piwowski

Short:

Muchotłuk / The Fly-Killer, 1967

Feature:

Rejs / The Cruise, 1970

Roman Polański

Nóż w wodzie / Knife in the Water, 1962.

Jozef Robakowski

Rynek / Market Square, 1970 (short)

Piotr Szulkin

Shorts:

Wszystko / Everything, 1972

Copyright Film Polski MCMLXXXVI, 1976

Życie codzienne / Daily Life, 1976

Oczy uroczone / Bewitching Eyes (TV, 1976)

Kobiety pracujące / Working Women, 1978

Features:

Golem, 1980

Wojna światów - następne stulecie / The War of the Worlds: Next Century, 1981

O-bi, o-ba: Koniec cywilizacji / O-bi, o-ba, The End of Civilization, 1984

Ga, ga: Chwała bohaterom / Ga, ga, Glory to the Heroes, 1985

Andrzej Wajda

Kanał, 1957

Popioły i diament / Ashes and Diamonds, 1958

Wesele / Wedding, 1972

Człowiek z marmuru / Man of Marble, 1976

Człowiek z żelaza / Man of Iron, 1981

Wojciech Wiszniewski

Shorts:

Opowieść o człowieku, który wykonał 552% normy / A Story of a Man Who Filled 552% Of The Quota, 1973

Wanda Gościmińska, A Weaver / Wanda Gościmińska, Włókiarka, 1975

Krzysztof Zanussi

Struktura kryształu / Structure of Crystal, 1969

Barwy Ochronne / Camouflage, 1977

Andrzej Zulawski

The Third Part of the Night / Trzecia część nocy, 1971.

Diabel / The Devil, 1971.

L'Important c'est d'aimer / The Important Thing is To Love, France, 1974.

Na Srebrnym Globie / On the Silver Globe, 1976/1988.

Possession, UK, 1981

L'Amour Braque, France, 1984

Szymanka / She-Shaman, Republic of Poland, 1996