

STALIN'S SWEET REVENGE,
or on Some Consequences of Close Encounters
Between Film Criticism and Politics. Around Recent
Discussions on Socialist Realist Cinema in Poland

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1.

Both historical experience and critical reflection on the essence of power, especially its acquisition and retention, practiced in social sciences, provide a body of fairly convincing evidence that all revolutions, notwithstanding their slogans, aim at substituting one order for another. This paradigm is reenacted regardless of spatial and temporal entanglements. The process of acquisition of power takes place in the social space and is generated first of all by the need for domination. This is where the fundamental source of social and political conflicts lies.

The development of the world invariably seems to re-affirm that it is indeed the desire for power that underpins each war, revolution or coup d'état. It is the only actual 'justification' of aggressive behaviors of social groups (or classes) that attempt to impose their order on others not only to validate political supremacy but also to appropriate goods. Each society is then a non-homogenous entity, organized vertically, in which leadership is reserved for the dominant class. The sequence of events initiated in Russia in 1917 neatly follows this pattern.

Each social class that seizes power endeavors to affirm its hegemonic position not only by redistribution of goods that are exchangeable values and are thus easily transferable, but also, as Pierre Bourdieu has been showing for the last 25 years, relocates its rule to the sphere of culture. While, however, such supremacy is unequivocal and somewhat measurable in politics and economy, it seems that it is 'no man's land' or that it is 'up for grabs' in culture, i.e. that it

is open, democratic and universal. By concealing their presence in this sphere, or at least camouflaging it as much as possible, authorities try to win favors of the classes and groups that they govern. As Bourdieu claims, this process consists in naturalization of culture, as, by staying in the shadow, those in power facilitate a development of cultural and artistic life as if in an independent and somewhat spontaneous way. The benefits of such a strategy are obvious. The stakes are always the same: to legitimize power and to give it a chance to appear in the role of the benefactor.¹

Lenin showed interest in art and culture, cinema in particular, as early as 1922.² This interest soon proved not to be disinterested. The doctrine of socialist realism, officially proclaimed by Andrei Zhdanov at the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, sought to channel the artistic practice, to organize it and to make it homogenous. With hindsight, it is clear that the new order was to hinder avant-garde trends that flourished in Soviet art in the 1920s and that were, by default, difficult to predict.³

¹ Cf. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception*, „International Social Sciences Journal”, 1968 no 4, pp. 589-612; P. Bourdieu, *The Aristocracy of Culture*, in: *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1984, pp. 11-96; P. Sulkunen, *Society Made Visible: On the Cultural Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, „Acta Sociologica” 1982, 25 (2), pp. 103-115; J. Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1993; B. Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*, London: Sage Publications 1997; J. Beasley-Murray, *Value and Capital in Bourdieu and Marx*, in: *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, eds. N. Brown and I. Szeman, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2000, pp. 100-119.

² As Tadeusz Miczka aptly noticed, '[the cinema] had been the center of attention of politicians, especially autocrats and dictators, from its early childhood. They greatly valued entertainment, artistic and communicative values of motion pictures but they had always been more interested in their particular abilities to create a sense of reality and to form the awareness and imagination of the mass audience. (...) During World War II, nearly all state leaders and generals showed a characteristic deep „film sensitivity”. When the military action was over and the battle for the political division of the world, spheres of influence and the appropriation of the memory of the recent events began, then they carefully nurtured their sensitivity. That is why cinema could not free itself from the apparatus of power easily and remained under a very strong pressure of politics.' T. Miczka, *1945-1955: Realizm – polityka – sztuka*, in: *Kino ma sto lat. Dekada po dekadzie*, eds. J. Rek and E. Ostrowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 1998, p. 102.

³ Cf. A. Zhdanov, *Speech to the First Congress of Soviet Writers*, in: *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi sjezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: Stenograficheskiy otchet*, Moscow:

At the same time, the doctrine set new objectives for art. It was to depict reality in its revolutionary development;⁴ its representation of reality had to comply with the principles of ideological correctness. Socialist realism appeared to sanction the new authorities, as political values, cleverly smuggled into the doctrine, highlighted their ability to form not only the social world but also the world of art.

A peculiar feature that is by no means an achievement of modern times has appeared regularly in political discourses conducted at times of acquisition of power by a specific group or class since time immemorial. A new group that comes to power tends to consider the commencement of its administration as a historical necessity: it attempts to justify itself in the historical process by finding distant predecessors. At the same time, however, it tries to time its appearance from a specific moment and to define its 'beginning' in no uncertain terms. Socialist realism was a new phenomenon for a reason: it delineated the turning point at which the rule of those who declared it began.

The category of realism to which socialist realism referred in more ways than merely in the sense of definition also draws upon a specific literary trend. The 19th century model seemed attractive on at least two counts. Firstly, it attempted to re-activate a convention known earlier and 'familiar' in social reception. Secondly, its classical mode of narration offered such sequences of events that they seemed to be a mimetic imitation of the real world. What is more, these events seemed to the audience obvious, logical and free from ambiguity, as if the process of their interpretation did not require excessive intellectual effort.⁵ While this remote patronage of the literary tradition was probably to contribute to a sense of continuity, it also had a different role to play: it alleviated and took the edge off the revolutionary and, naturally, radical and groundbreaking rhetoric.

Khudozhestvennaia Literatura; M. Gołaszewska, *Osobliwości estetyki socrealizmu. Szkic wprowadzający do dyskusji* delivered at the conference *Kultura artystyczna w Polsce lat 1949-1955* [Artistic Culture in Poland Between 1949-1955, Kraków 1983; *The Film Factory: Russian & Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, eds. R. Taylor and I. Christie, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988; *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian & Soviet Cinema*, eds. R. Taylor and I. Christie, London and New York: Routledge 1991.

⁴ Cf. A. Zhdanov, op. cit.

⁵ Cf. on this subject M. Głowiński, *Rytuał i demagogia. Trzydzieści szkiców o sztuce zdegradowanej*, Warszawa 1992, p. 9.

Socialist realism offered a vision of the world whose general model, tested earlier in the Soviet Union, was formulated by the new authorities placed in power in Eastern Europe after 1945 with the support – and not only with just ‘moral support’ – of the imperial neighbor in the East. This vision was made specific by individual artists/authors who translated it into different kinds of art. Obviously, those authors did not act at gunpoint nor were they forced to work under threat of death.

Critical analyses of the degree of intentionality of socialist realist works seem to believe that a demarcation line can be drawn between what is the author’s ‘own’ part in a work and what is ‘alien’ and apparently introduced in it under pressure from other powers operative within the social sphere, powers usually identified only on the basis of circumstantial evidence. In other words, such analyses claim that it is possible to set apart the results of the author’s intentions from the effects of some external pressure. Such an analytical method, however, does not have to be the only true and efficient approach to the problem. It may be worthwhile to put it aside for the time being and to examine its potential interpretative disadvantages. Although the vision of the author whose soul is besieged by the armies of Mephistopheles wishing to ensnare them and to lead them astray still holds firm ground in the minds of critics and researchers of Polish socialist realism, let us imagine that it is only a critical assumption that facts may or may not bear out. Therefore, common sense gives us the right to consider this vision to be a figment of the imagination. This in turn allows us, as it were, to express a certain doubt as to whether the alleged loss of ‘innocence’ by artists in Stalin’s times may be considered a phenomenon frequent enough to constitute a feature characteristic of the entire period.

After all, from the point of view of the audience, texts and works eclipse the author and count more than he or she does. Freed from the protection of their creators, works of art live an independent life and speak to the audience. They give an impression, as the already mentioned Pierre Bourdieu noticed, that they were born ‘spontaneously’ without the causal interference of the social class or group that has gained domination and that makes them convince the audience, preferably in a ‘mute’ way, to accept such a situation as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’.

Because of the efficiency of cinematic tools, it was an exceptionally brilliant idea to make cinema, or the narrative film more specifically, a medium of persuasion. Due to the limited access to high culture, the mass audience, originating chiefly from the working and farming background, may have felt

disinherited under the previous regime. This audience, as Bourdieu writes, did not belong to 'the aristocracy of culture': without the wherewithal, suitable knowledge, education, taste, and finally qualifications, it necessarily remained outside the scope of classical music, painting or ballet.⁶ However, in the years to come, that is during Stalin's regime, it acquired (in return?) an easy access to cinema. It had the right to feel 'empowered' in the new situation.

Psychologically, this transparent decomposition and/or re-configuration of culture could be seen as a challenge taken up by the authorities in the name of the interests of the classes that had earlier been dispossessed. It seemed that it was because of the concern for them that traditional forms of art, representing higher values in a latent way, gained less support than new forms that, even though 'worse' as without a historical background, underwent a secondary consecration and became the object of attention or a favorite form of entertainment for millions of people.

The idea of legitimizing the new authorities with filmic instruments and using the cinematic apparatus that generated an illusory sense of dealing with the image of the real world⁷, apparently, free from any ideological pressure, will remain unparalleled in the history of techniques of persuasion for a long time. The world represented on the screen, being able to create a sense of reality, seduced and beguiled the audience with its 'authenticity'. It was all the easier to be taken in by this naïve genuineness because any telltale signs that it was a product of specific actions and structural wiles were eagerly smoothed over. The screen world retained referentiality to the reality that the audience knew from their direct experience only to the necessary degree and thus seemed 'true'. It distracted spectators' attention from the framework of the screen that surrounded it and that let them know that it was limited and that some higher instance delineated these limits.

⁶ Cf. P. Bourdieu, *The Aristocracy of Culture*, op. cit.

⁷ Cf. J.-L. Baudry, *Cinéma: effets idéologiques produit par l'appareil de base*, "Cinéthique" 1970, nos 7-8, trans. as *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus*, in: *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York: Columbia University Press 1986; J.-L. Baudry, *Le Dispositif*, "Communications" 1975, No. 23, trans. as *The Apparatus: Metaphysical Approaches to Ideology*, in: *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, op. cit.

All this released the ability of the world on the screen to veil, or at least to soften greatly, its persuasive nature and to cover up the ideology it conveyed. That is why cinema was the best medium for the doctrine of socialist realism.

2.

The first analyses of Polish socialist realist films appeared as late as the mid 1960s. Although some kind of a dividing line may have been justified for 'safety' reasons or was conditioned by a natural desire to isolate the subject of study and place it behind a certain barrier that would allow researchers to distance themselves from it and would make their diagnoses more credible and objective, the time that had elapsed in film criticism on socialist realism is interesting. The question should be asked why scholars failed to discuss the films made between 1950-1955 any earlier or why they did not call for their examination in a sufficiently forceful way.

It is quite possible that the success of the Polish film school, that is the movies made by Wajda, Munk, Kutz and others in the 1950s, did not encourage either the audience or film criticism to venture a keen and investigative look into the past. Quite the opposite, the success of these films eclipsed socialist realist films with particular efficiency and placed different kinds of problems that appeared more compelling and socially important at the center of public life. After all, an enthusiastic reception of the Polish audience on the one hand, and the lavish praise of film critics, also abroad, who foregrounded the dialogue with the tradition or with issues of national identity,⁸ bestowed an overpowering glory on the subject of study and made the reflection on it a priority.

These were the main reasons why it was only at the end of the 1960s that the Polish films of the 1950s came under the scrutiny of historians of Polish cinema. The studies were conducted as part of a long-term project whose aim was to devise a comprehensive history of Polish cinema. The narrative film between 1945 and 1949, as well as successively 1950-1954 and 1955-1956, was discussed by Barbara Mruklik,⁹ who surveyed the most important Polish films produced in these periods, including socialist realist films that epitomized

⁸ Some of them are recalled by individual authors in: *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*, ed. D.W. Paul, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan 1983.

⁹ Cf. *Historia filmu polskiego*, vol. 3, ed. J. Toeplitz, Warszawa: WAiF 1974.

the doctrine of socialist realism.¹⁰ Mruklik, however, did not really analyze the films she reviewed, or maybe she analyzed them, so to speak, in a simplified way. She followed the history of a film from script to individual production stages and concomitant circumstances, to the final release of the ready product. Next, she discussed the plotline, explaining its complexities or the role of individual characters, and the reception of the film, supported by critical voices, attendance or sometimes the director's commentary.

When she had to sum up the results as part of the final assessment at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, what Mruklik stressed was the persistent occurrence of established narrative conventions, a reiterative typological character construction that followed the Manichaeian division, and a repetitive use of thematic forms in the majority of socialist realist films. These were the attributes that made Polish socialist realist films, as well as almost the entire film production, secondary. Used over and over again, specific formulas and conventions were raised to the level of the standard in the film practice of the period. The construction of film worlds in keeping with such 'canonical' models had nothing to do with a search for new, original solutions. On the contrary, their successive application in newly released films certified and endorsed their position as the norm. On the other hand, however, a repetitive application of a limited repertory of expressive means in the same arrangement made filmmaking mostly re-creative. Films that were new at the moment of release turned out to be 'old' as they only used new props to recycle old 'stock' formulas. Consequently, they spoke to the audience with 'one voice'. Mruklik was right to recognize a communicative strategy of this type. As she wrote, 'spectators were treated like a passive audience of appropriately prepared prod-

¹⁰ The authors of *Historia filmu polskiego* do not have any doubts about how to determine the boundaries of the socialist realist cinema. They believe that institutional criteria as well as social and political external conditioning were crucial in defining individual stages of the historical process in cinema, and accept the year 1949, when the congress of Polish film-makers that officially proclaimed the doctrine of socialist realism by the cinematic authorities took place, as the border line. However, as the effects of the implementation of such a program could only become visible at least a few months later – film production is usually spread over time – only the time span between 1950 and 1955 was considered to be a new period. The dividing line set for the period seems justified as the beginning of socialist realism in cinema is connected with the implementation of the doctrine in films rather than with the date of its proclamation.

ucts.¹¹ The narrative structure or the construction of the protagonist, having been widely used as stereotypes, prevented a development of individual, unique film features as those could fail to meet the audience's expectations or, perhaps, its habits.

Romantic aesthetics, the tradition that made a rebellion against the established models and conventions a fundamental criterion of merits and that also helps explain the aims of the negation of current 'sacred values' in art, is often invoked at the turning points in history when aesthetic and stylistic paradigms change. From its point of view, the model of cinema that Mruklik identifies could not gain the recognition either of critics or researchers. It was, however, the Romantic tradition that was the fundamental point of reference for the Polish film school. Socialist realist works must have seemed lame and unimaginative against this background.

Therefore, the lack of enthusiasm for Polish socialist realist cinema from Polish film critics and researchers at the first stage of critical reflection is not surprising. However, there is a certain open space, or possibly a small gap, between lack of enthusiasm and sense of aversion, often tinted with irony or even derision, where a researcher or a critic places his/her own views. The position in relation to one of the poles is inferential of the critic's attitude to the subject of study and communicates the degree of lack of sympathy to it.

The position on the scale of negation is not irrelevant as it indicates the critic's own system of values as well as of the times in which he or she has to live and practice critical reflection. It is a kind of medium in which different styles of thinking and speaking of the period are focused and stored. These styles, called discourses, become more conspicuous over longer periods of time: they are more distinct as their form becomes more advanced. It seems, however, that they can be identified throughout any period, even a short one. They make themselves felt in different ways: they overlap with or show through individual or collective opinions of critics and researchers, or interfere with them.

A critic or a researcher speaks even when not say anything or do they do not speak directly. They act like a ventriloquist whose voice should be listened to with particular attention. It does not matter that a critic may speak about

¹¹ Barbara Mruklik, *Film fabularny 1950-1954*, in: *Historia filmu polskiego*, op. cit., p. 259.

socialist realist films – works that are artistically flawed and certainly not of the first water. Of course, such voices always constitute private intellectual property as they reflect the opinions and beliefs of those who hold them. At the same time, however, they shed light on different subjects, such as the spirit of the period that generated them or contemporaneous discourses. This peculiar surplus is of special interest here.

3.

Polish socialist realist cinema attracted the definite attention of critics and researchers for the second time at the beginning of the 1990s.¹² Tadeusz Lubelski's book on the Polish narrative film between 1945 and 1961 proves it.¹³ The broad time scale allowed for an analysis of the history of the Polish cinema in the years between 1950 and 1955, often called the period of Stalinism on account of the presence of the themes and conventions typical of Soviet art during Stalin's government in Polish art and culture. These far-going affiliations were for many researchers the evidence of the transfer of foreign models and values that took place after the end of World War II when Poland found itself within the political influence of the Soviet Union.

Lubelski attaches particular importance to the period of Stalinism in the history of Polish film or even, more broadly, Polish culture. It was then that the unification of culture was achieved as a result of the directives issued to Polish artists associated with film, theatre, literature, music and the fine arts by the leading figures of political life.

Lubelski does not hide his negative attitude to the film works made during the period. He does not see any artistic value in them and emphasizes the limited popularity they enjoyed. To show the social disapproval of these films, he quotes unpropitious reviews on the one hand and a relatively low attendance on the other.

¹² In 1985, Kazimierz Sobotka's essay *Robotnik na ekranie, czyli o tak zwanym "filmie produkcyjnym"* was published in: *Szkice o filmie polskim*, ed. B. Stolarska, Łódź: Łódzki Dom Kultury 1985. The result of the author's individual reflection, Sobotka's position was not part of any integrated critical perspective. I have decided not to concentrate on it precisely because of its 'incidentalness': my aim is to examine those works that are indicative of an overall trend or that may exemplify it. Sobotka's essay does not belong to either.

¹³ T. Lubelski, *Strategie autorskie w polskim filmie fabularnym lat 1945-1961*, Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński 1992.

This line of argumentation reveals a certain classical model in keeping with which critical reflection is practiced in this case. The credibility of the critic's qualitative evaluation is verified with quantitative criteria. As such procedures have been used fairly commonly in film criticism for many years now, it should not be surprising. There is a certain element in Lubelski's analyses, however, that is more conspicuous after a while and that does not seem to be congruent with logical reasoning.

The process of the unification of cultural and artistic life in Poland in that period deprived the category of the author, as Lubelski writes, of its precision. Consequently, it became slurred and in a way 'annulled'.

If Lubelski claims that the works of the period slipped out of control of their authors to a great extent and somewhat refused to be obedient, because the authors themselves, as a result of institutional pressure, coming mostly from socio-political contexts¹⁴, as well as far-reaching conventional construction of their products, were in a way disinherited from the right to bear full authorial responsibility for them¹⁵, then it would be tempting to claim that, for instance, the Polish film-makers of the period were not true and full-fledged authors of their works as they acted on the orders of and partly in the name of other causal factors and forces. They performed, as one would say today, the role of 'foster parents'.

My aim is not to challenge Lubelski's perspective on the limited scope of qualification and evaluation of some decisions in the process of film production as fully authorial and others as imposed by some external forces that may not be clearly identifiable, particularly in the situation in which a critic or a researcher deals exclusively with a bare film work that 'speaks for itself'.¹⁶ It is important that, by removing

¹⁴ Cf. Alina Madej's numerous essays on the subject, for instance *On*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1994 No. 6, pp. 196-203; A. Madej, *Zjazd filmowy w Wiśle, czyli dla każdego coś przykrego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1997 No. 18, pp. 207-214; eadem, *Zawsze wszystko można zmienić, czyli o sztuce socrealistycznego scenariopisarstwa*, in: *Z problemów literatury i kultury XX wieku. Prace ofiarowane Tadeuszowi Kłakowi*, ed. S. Zabierowski, Katowice 2000, pp. 299-315.

¹⁵ Lubelski sums up the impact of external factors on artists of the period in a somewhat poetic way: 'Stalinist art does not know senders in its traditional meaning; the system is the sender.' T. Lubelski, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁶ To resolve the mounting methodological difficulties, it would be advisable to accept after David Bordwell that the analysis of the stories and forms of film works should take into account the fact that these films originate from a defined institutional order. That is why various external limitations are their natural environment. Social and economic contexts are necessary but not the only determinants. They define the horizon of what

from the authors the burden of moral responsibility for the works over which they had limited control, Lubelski made them 'half orphans' in a way. At the same time, he both absolved directors from mediocre films and disapproved of these films. To deprecate socialist realist films unquestionably, he even accentuated the highly conventional and derivative nature that robbed them of any individual features.

These features, however, bring to mind the Western, which has for years used conventionalized means of expression. The repetition of, for example, the same plot structures and patterns, seems to be one of the charms of the genre. Does the baffling resistance with which the films of the classics of the American Western have survived various innovations make them subordinate, and does it provide sufficient grounds to push them into oblivion?

It may therefore be suspected that if the claims concerning the alleged insignificance of Polish socialist realist films are based on such uncertain premises, then the negative opinion which Lubelski expresses so vociferously may have roots in factors other than the facts he quotes. An analysis of his line of thinking, as well as of the way in which the assessment of the films of the early 1950s is formulated and the criteria that are applied, shows that he himself could not defend the right to independent judgment. In other words, when Lubelski examined the Polish cinema of socialist realism and different types of pressure, institutionalized or not, exerted upon film production or even on the form of the films made in the period, he did not say it all exclusively on his own behalf.

4.

Lubelski was not alone in proffering such a vision of the cultural life of the 1950s. Anita Skwara also disapproves of socialist realist cinema in a similarly ostentatious way.¹⁷ The simplicity and determination of the thesis she put forward in her essay published concomitantly with *Strategie autorskie...* are still

is permitted or what is possible. Limitations should not be understood as orders or prohibitions. Such contexts are not unique or exceptional: they are simply factors that actively and creatively contribute to the decisions made, regardless of the place and time. Cf. D. B o r d w e l l, *Historical Poetics of Cinema*, in: *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*, ed. R. Barton Palmer, New York: AMS 1989, pp. 369-398, especially p. 382.

¹⁷ Cf. A. S k w a r a, *Film stars do not shine in the sky over Poland: the absence of popular cinema in Poland*, in: *Popular European Cinema*, eds. R. Dyer and G. Vincendeau, London and New York: Routledge 1992, pp. 220-231.

noteworthy. As she claims, there was no popular cinema in post-war Poland. Even though cinema conquered the world as early as at the beginning of the 20th century when it took hold of the imagination of millions of viewers who passively let the magic of the screen lull them into deception and indulged in the illusory world created by it, the story of Polish cinema was different. To be precise, as Skwara states, it was to be different.

Such a point of view, formulated at the end of the 20th century, may be surprising because it sets aside, or even questions, the evolutionary vision of the development of the phenomenon the social success of which is quite automatically believed to have its roots in its ability to construct the screen world as an illusive representation of the real world. It is also believed that it greatly contributed to the development of mass culture or that it partly gave rise to different forms of popular culture. Changes in cinema have come to be seen as an upward trajectory that symbolizes the film's gradual acquisition of ever-greater efficiency and fluency in implementing the functions it has devised through contacts with millions of spectators. The co-existence of the different roles cinema plays had never before sparked heated discussions because it seemed that, while the degree of their activity might vary, they were not mutually exclusive. A periodical dominance of one of those roles was always accounted for in relatively rational terms. Furthermore, primary and secondary functions were believed to be related dialectically and were additionally seen to fall within a certain interval; they had the right to occur with varying power and intensity depending on the circumstances.

Skwara turned out to subscribe to more radical views. She would be inclined to claim that the Polish cinema of the 1950s could not keep viewers amused; it could not entertain the audience as it had come to participate in the activities of the 'ideological state apparatus', to borrow Louis Althusser's expression.¹⁸ It is immaterial whether it was conditioned by the institutional influence exerted on film production and distribution or whether it happened because of haphazard coincidence that activated and updated certain meanings potentially present in a film in the process of its social circulation.

¹⁸ Cf. L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)*, in: idem, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster, London: NLB 1971, pp. 123-173, especially 128, 146 and 148.

As Skwara claims, the absence of popular cinema in Poland was brought about by the ideological pressure on cultural life, including the film community, exercised by the authorities.¹⁹ It meant that political contexts, and Marxist-Leninist doctrine as the ruling ideology, contributed to the formation of the thematic style and conventions of the Polish cinema of the period. As the doctrine ascribed the most useful values to the sphere of labor and gave it primary importance, popular cinema, traditionally associated with entertainment and pleasure, could not develop in a country run by communist powers for doctrinal reasons. Therefore, from the perspective of the objectives of the ruling ideology, popular cinema as well as the values represented by it, were considered to be a superfluous luxury and unnecessary surplus. It was thus a breach of ideological principles to treat culture as a potential source of pleasure and to view the reading of its products as a successful tool that could cheer up a wide audience.²⁰

As Skwara argues, the hegemonic position of the doctrine of socialist realism successfully prevented the appearance of a truly popular cinema in Poland in the 1950s and contributed to the birth of socialist realist cinema that played a purely servile role in the totalitarian regime. She both notices that the doctrine additionally stripped this cinema of any merit and makes ironic comments on the tasks that politicians set for literature and art, film in particular.²¹

¹⁹ The ultimate evidence was provided by the decisions taken at the congress of filmmakers in Wisła in November 1949 as they 'made Polish cinema entirely subordinate to the aesthetics of socialist realism as well as subject and formal preferences resulting from it', A. Skwara, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

²⁰ As she writes: 'No such luxury could be afforded by Marxist ideology, deprived of a sense of security and a sense of humour in the areas it conquered.' Further on: 'It is thus inconceivable that socialist realist art could be reconciled with entertainment, with mass culture containing elements of spontaneity and ritual, of revolt, a culture often fascinated by designs of worlds turn upside-down. (...) an obvious aspect of these forms of cultural activity is subordination to an official system of values and preferences as well as a strategy aimed at consolidating an existing state of affairs.' *Ibidem*, p. 226.

²¹ To prove her point, Skwara quotes official speeches which focused on the needs that works of art had to satisfy: 'What would be the worth of artistic creativity, or art, knowledge or literature, which would overlook, which would fail to comprehend, fail to draw inspiration from the profoundly revolutionary transformations and phenomena which live in the minds of millions of simple people, which subconsciously jolt their psyches?' *Ibidem*, p. 224.

Skwara enters a particularly dangerous ground as she begins to use questionable arguments to support her thesis. Declarations, especially those given as part of political discourses, reveal the expectations, hopes and desires of those in power, regardless of how this power was gained or the degree of the social acceptance for it. If a researcher makes such declarations the point of departure in their examination of what cinema was at a given historical moment and what role it played in the life of a nation, that is of an attempt to itemize and describe the models according to which cinema in Poland functioned at the time, it may easily be assumed that what was only intended was actually implemented. Unfortunately I am afraid this is the case here.

Skwara's thesis that popular cinema could only exist in a market economy seems both open to dispute and questionable. Classical Marxist-Leninist works do indeed leave no room for doubt: labor ranks higher than entertainment in the hierarchy of values. It should be noticed, however, that those works offered a prescriptive model rather than a descriptive representation of the social practice. The contemporaneous authorities used them to define 'ideal' social relations, that is, in other words, the ones they expected to be realized in social practice. Such models, however, are hardly ever followed and complied with in everyday life. A gulf yawns between the ideal and its practical implementation; regardless of the reasons for it, an empty space between them is generated.

Scholars such as Maya Turovskaya, Maria Enzensberger or Richard Taylor attempted to prove a contrary thesis in their analyses of the Soviet cinema of the 1930s and the 1940s.²² As they showed, film musicals by Ivan Pyriev and

²² Cf. M. Turovskaya, *I.A. Pyriev i ego muzykalnye komedii. K problemie žanra*, "Kinovedcheskie zapiski" 1, 1988, pp. 111-146; M. Turovskaya, *Volga-Volga i jego vremia*, "Isskustvo Kino" 1998 no 3, pp. 59-64; M. Enzensberger, *We Were Born to Turn a Fairy-Tale into Reality. Svetlyi put' and the Soviet musical of the 1930s and 1940s*, in: *Popular European Cinema*, op. cit., pp. 87-100; *The Film Factory: Russian & Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, op. cit.; R. Taylor, *Ideology as Mass Entertainment: Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s*, in: *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian & Soviet Cinema*, op. cit., pp. 193-216. Later the following were published, for instance, *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, eds. R. Taylor and D. Spring, London & New York: Routledge, 1993; R. Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, second edition, London and New York: I. B. Tauris 1998; R. Taylor, *But eastward, look, the land is brighter: towards a topography of utopia in the Stalinist musical*, in: *100 Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?* eds. D. Holmes and A. Smith, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2000, p. 11-26.

Gregorij Aleksandrov, examples of screen utopias that were part of popular Soviet cinema, offered entertainment that lured with 'the image of "something better" to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives do not provide'.²³

Needless to say, these analyses concentrated on the functioning of cinema in the country that embodied the doctrine of Marxist-Leninism to the highest degree and whose economy was for ideological reasons more unfriendly towards the market system than the Polish economy.

Logically, films such as *Skarb* [Treasure] (1949) or *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* [Adventure in Mariensztat] (1954), both directed by Leonard Buczkowski, had to play a parallel role in Polish cinema. Skwara, however, would like to deprive the entire Polish cinema of the time of any entertainment value²⁴, even though there exists evidence to prove that those films were successful and warmly received by the Polish audience.²⁵

Skwara fails to notice it. I suspect she does not see a certain success of Polish socialist realist cinema because she presupposed that there had not been any. Is it some idiosyncratic feature that cannot be accounted for and that can hardly be explained rationally?

5.

Grażyna Stachówna does not attempt to conceal her attitude towards socialist realist cinema in her essay published a few years later.²⁶ She expresses her disapproval of it as early as in the introduction, as if she wanted to pre-empt any accusations of a sympathetic approach. It must have been argumentative

²³ R. Dyer, *Entertainment and Utopia*, „Movie”, 1977, No. 24, p. 3; later reprinted in: R. Altman, *Genre: The Musical. A Reader*, London: BFI 1981.

²⁴ As Skwara writes: '(...) in the Poland of the 1950s entertainment, including popular cinema as the most potent form of entertainment, could not be attractive to any of the parties involved. Marxist-Leninist culture rejected those cultural forms as too reactionary, incapable of severing ties with the bourgeois mentality.' A. Skwara, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

²⁵ Cf. B. Mruklik, op. cit., p. 240, also E. Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Kinematografia polska 1918-1991*, Warszawa: FilMOTEKA Narodowa – WAI F 1992, p. 150.

²⁶ G. Stachówna, *Równanie szeregów. Bohaterowie filmów socrealistycznych 1949-1955*, in: *Człowiek z ekranu. Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, eds. M. Jankun-Dopartowa and M. Przyłipiak, Kraków: Arcana 1996, pp. 7-25.

clarity that made her explain right at the beginning that she was interested in the problem only out of scholarly duty.²⁷

It therefore seems that Stachówna exhumes a dead body, which is not a pleasant task, but at least she has a good alibi: she does so only for research purposes. She has a sense of obligation to make it clear for her readers as she works on the material the value of which has been degraded. It used to enjoy popularity but, as she proves in the successive parts of her article, it was popular among the leaders of public life rather than wide audiences. It was doomed to die because it represented artificial and unauthentic values. Fortunately, history did it justice: it was removed from the altars and buried deep down.

Stachówna quotes figures to make her arguments more specific.²⁸ A consistent presence of different conventions and stereotypes in socialist realist cinema, not only Polish, but also Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian, Eastern German, North Korean and Albanian, seemed to prove that, as Miron Chernienko, a Soviet critic, self-ironically noticed after many years, 'there is one socialism, the same one everywhere, it is enough for it to be born and it will immediately fill up all the recesses of social, political, ideological, economic and moral life; it will become something natural, as one says, for ever and ever,'²⁹ and was enough for Stachówna to disqualify it.

²⁷ 'Apart from researchers of the period, no one voluntarily reads the novels, watches the films, meditates on the paintings or listens to the music of the period of so-called socialist realism, also dubbed the period of the cult of one person or the period of errors and mistakes, and that falls between 1949 and 1955. Occasional reviews or exhibitions of the art of the period function now as a shocking proof of the domination of ideology over artists' common sense and propaganda over the audience's decency. They are recalled with sadness and unease by older participants in culture, and treated jokingly by the young generation. Young people ask poignantly: how was it possible at all; old people remain silent, explain something vaguely or fulminate on foreign influences, pressure and coercion. The entire output of socialist realism: novels about leaders of labor, poems about Stalin and the splendor of the six-year plan, films about factory workers and saboteurs, paintings of women tractor drivers and sinewy men workers, finally enthusiastic, marching songs about victory were unanimously deposited at the rubbish bin of art history where one looks seldom and with embarrassment.' *Ibidem*, p. 7

²⁸ Stachówna writes: 'Thirty-four films were made between 1949 and 1955, and 31 of them followed the socialist realist model more or less consistently. A preliminary interpretation of these films provides one fundamental observation: they are all similar to one another. They tell similar stories, have similar heroes, convey identical messages and share film craftsmanship.' *Ibidem*, p. 15

²⁹ M. C z e r n i e n k o, *Polska – nie zagranica*, trans. M. Chyb, "Kino" 1993 No. 2-3.

Stachówna's approach to socialist realism and the effects of its rule follows the kind of criticism practiced earlier by Lubelski. She also brings up a set of reviews, this time in connection with Maria Kaniewska's *Niedaleko Warszawy* [*Near Warsaw*] (1954), placing particular emphasis on straightforwardly negative opinions. Stachówna seems to equate critics' views with the audience's beliefs. They were to constitute the 'palpable' evidence of the inferiority of the film that '(...) one cannot bear to watch (...) from the contemporary point of view.'³⁰

Stachówna reveals a further defect of Polish socialist realist films: character construction relies on foreign models derived from Soviet cinema. Following the evolutionary changes they experienced throughout the time of the action, the protagonists 'became ideologically mature'. This construction principle was used in such Soviet films as *Mother* (1926) by Pudovkin, *Old and New* (1929) by Sergei Eisenstein, *Homeless* (1931) by Nicolai Ekk, *Maxim Trylogy* (1934, 1937, 1939) by Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, *Chapayev* (1934) by Sergei and Georgi Vasiliev and *Far from Moscow* (1950) by Alexandr Stolper. It provides an additional proof that Polish socialist realism was a Soviet legacy and that it had its roots there.³¹

It does not seem important that the German novel had devised such a model of character construction much earlier, which makes the issue of borrowings even more problematic.³² It also encourages a reflection on the operation of various cultural mechanisms that ascribe positive or negative valences to the category of 'the Other' depending on the circumstances. The problem in itself is not surprising. What is surprising is the application of the reception strategy that Stachówna adopted and that is a product of her times, to the situation of the audience that watched the same film much earlier. It is interesting that Stachówna decided that both situations were parallel or that they should be treated as if they were parallel.

Even if a review mentions gales of laughter in the audience at moments that may appear tragic for the heroes on the screen³³, it is difficult to determine

³⁰ G. Stachówna, op. cit., p. 24.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 24.

³² German literary criticism uses the term *Bildungs-* or *Entwicklungsroman* to define it. Bakhtin also wrote on such a model, cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)*, in: *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press 1981.

³³ Stachówna quotes a passage from a review by I. Merz, *Daleko od sztuki*, „Trybuna Ludu”, 1954 No. 294.

on the basis of this observation only what the actual reasons for such behaviors were and what meanings the audience watching the film construed.³⁴

Stachówna still eagerly produces this specific passage from a review because such reactions of the audience symbolized the film's failure in her eyes: being defectively organized, the film implied ambiguities that encouraged the audience to behave 'inappropriately' or 'improperly'. She appears to believe that seemingly 'incongruous' responses enhance her argument against socialist realist cinema as they expose the doubtful quality of the films of the period and prove their repetitiveness. In other words, their role is to blur the image efficiently so that these films would not be seen as works that can sometimes be grand and impressive.

6.

It is more than fifty years ago that the doctrine of socialist realism was enforced in Polish art and culture. It coincided with the times of political subordination to Poland's Eastern neighbor, which had put socialist realism into practice much earlier.³⁵ The doctrine contributed to the formation of artistic life in Poland for more than a decade. This chapter is closed now and, together with the films of Polish socialist realism, belongs to the past.

Any event in the history of each society is recorded and then stored in the collective memory as something more than just a bare fact. Nearly every generation assesses earlier history and, so to speak, covers a map of history with the events that it considers important or worthwhile. Remembered only in this way, these events are continuously verified and qualified. Such a map, or a view from a window on history, is not a constant value. It evolves and changes depending

³⁴ According to Barthes, it is important that a sense of pleasure is not a feature of the text itself but a kind of relationship into which the text enters with the audience or the reader. A sense of pleasure induced by a text may be experienced by some, while others do not have to experience it. Cf. R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller, New York: Hill and Wang 1975. The experience of a sense of unpleasantness may be similar.

³⁵ Cf. I. Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, New York: Harper Collins 1990, pp. XII-XIV; M. Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man*, New York: Knopf 1988; V. Strada, *Le réalisme socialiste*, in: *Histoire de la littérature russe: Le XXe siècle – Gels et degels*, eds. E. Etkind, G. Nivat, I. Serman and V. Strada, Paris: Fayard, 1990 III, p. 11; G. Struve, *Russian Literature Under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1971.

on the standpoint and preferences of a given generation.³⁶ This mechanism explains the variations in the attitude towards socialist realist cinema.

The events that took place in Poland in 1989 and the victory of political groups affiliated with the Solidarity movement fundamentally changed the perspective from which Polish socialist realist films had been viewed. A researcher or a critic who dealt with the phenomena of socialist realism in the 1990s had the benefit of hindsight and experience. Aware of the historical process, they could see the period not only 'from above', as a completed structure, because they could do it as soon as it came to an end. It is of equal importance, however, that they investigated this structure through the filter of their times: the order of the Third Republic of Poland with all its ideological and moral preferences. The period of Stalinism, as well as all artistic facts genealogically connected with it, had to be scrutinized, as one may assume, through a magnifying glass equipped with a fairly contemporary lens, made in the 1990s. Such a lens offered a very different image.

After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of communism in Poland in 1990³⁷, the Polish political scene was radically transformed. Representatives of the new generation, often activists of the democratic opposition, came to take part in public life. Despite pluralism and the emergence of politically divergent factions within the post-Solidarity group, discussion on the process of political vetting³⁸ continued to rekindle enmity towards leftist traditions. Public debates and conflicts frequently spurred discussions on national identity as well.

Literary criticism was the first to react to this political discourse. It expressed such firm and judgmental opinions as 'socialist realism is an anti-value'

³⁶ Cf. on the subject A. Helman, *Synchronia i diachronia w badaniach nad filmem*, in: eadem, *Przedmiot i metody filmoznawstwa*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie: Łódź 1985, pp. 70-75.

³⁷ Lech Wałęsa's victory in presidential elections in December 1990 and the signing of the agreement on the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Poland over the following two years were clear signs of transformations. A detailed register of events is provided by Jakub Karpiński in his book *Trzecia niepodległość. Najnowsza historia Polski*, Warszawa: Świat Książki 2001.

³⁸ After December 1995, the discussions were intensified as a result of a political crisis connected with the charges against Prime Minister Józef Oleksy, who was accused of cooperation with the Soviet and Russian intelligence.

or that the output of the period should be considered a 'degraded art that (...) radically clashes with everything that has deserved any merit in the European tradition.' Still more: 'Socialist realism was a specific outgrowth of communism, such an embodiment of totalitarian art to which only the Nazi style of art can be compared. It was thought of as a movement whose principles were to create eternal canons of morally right and progressive art.'³⁹

Such statements appear to have been brought about by a peculiar psychological mechanism. An open depreciation of the ideology whose underlying values had been prescribed by Lenin and Stalin and which, at the same time, legitimized power-holding structures in the so-called Eastern bloc for more than 50 years could bring a profound sense of retaliatory satisfaction. It fed on the conviction that history, which had earlier contributed to the loss of independence and breach of civil liberties, had performed an act of grace for the wronged nations, settled the score and offered a deserved compensation. It restored the belief in historical justice and made history look like a self-regulating mechanism.

In such circumstances, it appeared right and 'morally justified' to deny socialist realist art and culture any value. Since literature finally came to be interpreted by critics and researchers of degradation – and thus could not be deemed a neutral object of study that is 'value-free' as far as its moral status is concerned – cinema had to be 'punished' in the same way.

This type of thinking about the doctrine of socialist realism on the one hand and its products on the other became binding at the beginning of the 1990s. The marking scale that had initially been applied to the world of politics soon expanded to include cultural and artistic phenomena. It could be operative on one condition: only the mimetic nature of literature was noticed while films were perceived exclusively as representations of reality. Consequently, both the characters that appeared in the story and the events in which they participated were given a referential value. The world of the narrative, in literature as well as in film, was believed to be so 'transparent' that it not only spoke about real life but should also be referred to, as it was a direct system of reference to it. Such an assumption was not only to 'guide' the process of interpretation but also to define the manner and the direction of analyses.

³⁹ M. Głowiński, op. cit., p. 5 and 6. Cf. also *idem*, *Peereliada. Komentarze do słów 1976-1981*, Warszawa 1993.

Depreciation of socialist realist cinema in the first half of the 1990s followed the same model or paradigm. The attitude adopted by Lubelski, Skwara or Stachówna relied not on the strategy of a distant witness but on the strategy of the witness-victor, or at least the witness-judge. Those witnesses do not identify themselves with a neutral observer who is aware of the wavelike meanders of the historical process in which opposite systems of value alternate periodically. They resemble a researcher who attempts to evaluate rather than to describe bygone events that are completed, closed and, importantly, conquered, and makes use of those standards that are employed to assess the system of values that they believe in and respect. They do not hide their satisfaction that the times of the socialist realist doctrine, of which Stalin was an avid supporter⁴⁰ and whose essence was explained in "Pravda" published in Moscow in 1934 to celebrate the upcoming congress of the Soviet Union of Writers⁴¹, belong to the past and that history has firmly closed the door on it.

It may seem that to make such an announcement after so many years is to take part in a second funeral and to deliver a speech over a dead body. Of course, the body was not thought of well when alive. The evaluation is severe, but one has the right to be strict.

I would like to digress at this point and to offer a personal confession. The aim of my summary of the discussion on socialist realist cinema in Poland and the commentary of the manner in which the contributors justified their line of argumentation is not to rehabilitate films unjustly doomed to oblivion or to prove that the critics' views on these films are erroneous. I am not driven by the desire to right the wrongs inflicted on Polish socialist realist cinema. What I am intrigued by is a puzzling affective surplus in the negative assessment in the mid-1990s, also discernible on the metacritical level. I find a clearly exposed aversion to the object of study that I myself experienced particularly conspicu-

⁴⁰ Cf. A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-39*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1991.

⁴¹ "Pravda" of 6th May 1934 commented on socialist realism in the following way: 'Socialist realism, the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands truthfulness (pravdivost') from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Under these conditions, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of laboring people in the spirit of socialism.'

ously. As it must have been affected by the axiology accepted, it is interesting to see why its radical version was in operation exactly at this precise time.

I would be inclined to believe that this aversion is rooted to a great extent in the social space, which surrounds a critic or a researcher endeavoring to sum up the life of socialist realist art, and cinema in particular. Different systems of values negotiate and carry our dialog with one another in this social space. Their ideological features find their way into researchers' views. I would claim that scholars of Polish socialist realist cinema were not able to escape these interdependencies, even though their beliefs and opinions were meant to tell 'the truth and nothing but the truth'.

When in 1960 Daniel Bell formulated his thesis that great ideologies had used up their persuasive capacity in the face of the numerous cruelties of World War II, especially concentration camps, brought about by the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact,⁴² he meant both Nazi ideology and communist ideology. They could no longer hold power over the minds of millions of the ideological faithful, let alone acquire new ones. Stalin's demise initiated the collapse of the communist regime, while the wave of events that took place in Europe between 1956 and 1989, with the disappointment and resistance it entailed, subverted it from the inside in a way. The ideas of the communist system irrevocably lost their capacity to acquire a wide social acceptance as they turned out to be only empty declarations.⁴³ In an obvious way, a common recognition of the collapse of this ideology inspired hopes that culture and art, including film criticism, would not be subject to ideological pressure in the new chapter of life that was opening in this part of Europe. It could be believed that film research discourse would liberate itself from external obligations or that it would no longer succumb to them. Consequently, things would return to normal and the views of a critic or a researcher would be a reflection of their personal opinions.

The problem is that Bell interprets ideology as a common sense category: as a certain relatively homogenous set of beliefs that neither is our own way of thinking nor flows directly from experience. Such a definition was most probably con-

⁴² D. Bell, *The End of Ideology*, New York: Collier Books 1960, p. 373.

⁴³ On the relationship between cinema and politics in the countries of the so-called Eastern bloc cf. M. Liehm and A. J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art. Soviet and Eastern European Film After 1945*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press 1977; *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*, op. cit.

structured to explain political aspects of social transformations. As it emphasized the 'external' or even 'foreign' origin of such beliefs, it usually entailed negative associations. Such an understanding of ideology reinstated the subjectivity of its followers and its opponents. Exposed to its effects, they would become united and share a sense of unanimity. When everyone has similar views and the consensus tones down discussions and conflicts, ideology comes to an end and is exhausted.

Ideology, however, can be interpreted as a more comprehensive category. It is clear then that it constructs not only a person's beliefs but also a person as a subject who holds such beliefs. An escape from ideology is only an illusion. Human preferences are a sign of its influence. When one identifies with it, it becomes 'transparent' and naturalized, and seems to have disappeared. The reverse is possible too: its presence is burdensome and, if the values it propounds differ from ours, we are inclined to accuse it of acting against 'human rights'.⁴⁴

The doctrine of socialist realism was Stalin's legacy. It lost its power of influence at the moment of his death. If it still arouses interest, it is only for research purposes. Socialist realist conventions clash with contemporary taste and are outmoded. It is difficult, however, to ignore the fact that the films that implemented its principles had their audiences. As nothing happens without a reason in the world of signs and meanings, it has to be accepted that some mechanisms apparently made this cinema socially useful, whether we like it or not.

In his article on the 50th anniversary of Stalin's death, Robert Conquest, a British historian of modern times, notices ironically that the world is quite lucky that one of the most brutal leaders of modern times did not live as long as Mao. Conquest adds quickly, however, that raging terror and ruthless reign were not Stalin's only trademarks. The Generalissimo was also a master of illusion and hypnosis. He could deceive and somehow stupefy everyone, and he even invented a factually non-existent society.⁴⁵ This tendency to invent an

⁴⁴ Cf. S. Hayward, *Key concepts in cinema studies*, London and New York: Routledge 1996, pp. 181-183; R. Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1995, pp. 390-395; M. Miyoshi, *A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State*, „Critical Inquiry”, vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer 1993), p. 751; C. Belsey, *Critical Practice*, London: Methuen 1980, p. 5; L. Althusser, op. cit., pp. 123-173; L. Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, London: Verso 1984, *passim*.

⁴⁵ Cf. R. Conquest, *Stalin's reputation as a ruthless master of deception remains intact*, „The Guardian”, 5 March 2003.

'unreal' and/or 'alternative' world in culture and art in Stalin's times was also noticed by Lev Manovich, who has been doing research on the new media of the electronic era for more than a decade. He has quite unexpectedly stated that the aesthetics of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) somewhat continues the tradition of Soviet socialist realism as the representations of reality are constructed along similar lines in both cases.⁴⁶

If socialist realism was a doctrine whose primary aim was slyly to conceal the real world, or maybe the world that was perceived as real at the time, and to offer an alternative, 'improved' version of it, then cinema, with its illusive-ness and hypnotic qualities, perfectly suited the purpose. Those who contributed to Polish discussions on socialist realism in cinema in the first part of the 1990s did not deny that it had such abilities. They simply did not agree with the representation of the world constructed by this cinema, the representation to which Stalin contributed. They were more determined and ostentatious than their colleagues in the West or even in Russia.⁴⁷ Even though it is difficult to be sure, it may be suspected that the raised voice and the loud protest against the screen world let them participate in the political discourse on the Third Republic of Poland, its place in the new Europe and its potential allies.

⁴⁶ As Manovich notices, just as much socialist realism transposed the vision of a future, ideal world of communist ideology on everyday life, Spielberg attempts to reconcile the vision of a future world that is a product of digital design whose capacity for detail is unlimited with the familiar vision of film images. While the vision of the world in socialist realist art had to respect fundamental standards of reality in order not to appear excessively 'futuristic', computer-generated images, perfect from the point of view of technology, with an immaculate focus and unblemished by the inadequate grain, have to expose openly their 'defectiveness' to resemble a 'normal' film. Hence a limited depth of focus and diffused lines in Spielberg's film. Cf. L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: MIT Press 2001, pp. 203-204.

⁴⁷ Cf. fn. 22. It is noteworthy that Piotr Zwierzchowski's book published only a few years later is free from such bias as its author describes and analyzes socialist realist films using a more objective set of criteria. Cf. P. Zwierzchowski, *Zapomniani bohaterowie. O bohaterach filmowych polskiego socrealizmu*, Warszawa: Trio 2000. Małgorzata Hendrykowska and Marek Hendrykowski commented on a cognitively limited usage of established patterns in their studies on the heritage of socialist realist cinema, cf. M. Hendrykowska and M. Hendrykowski, *Film w Poznaniu i Wielkopolsce 1896-1996*, Poznań 1996, pp. 198-199.

Although it has been deposited in the rubbish bin of history for a number of years, the heritage bequeathed by Stalin has paradoxically proved helpful and useful. By taking part in a discussion on some cultural phenomena that belong to this legacy because they are part of it, it is sometimes possible to contribute to a discussion on contemporary problems and issues. Does it not look like the Generalissimo's... sweet revenge from the grave? Is it possible that banners 'Stalin lives for ever' placed in Red Square in Moscow in the 1950s were prophetic after all? History would turn out to be greatly ironic.

**Słodka zemsta Stalina, albo o pewnych konsekwencjach bliskich
związków krytyki filmowej i polityki.**

Wokół ostatnich dyskusji o polskim kinie socrealistycznym

Każda gwałtowna i radykalna zmiana porządku politycznego oznacza redystrybucję władzy, która często idzie w parze z redystrybucją kultury. Skoro wcześniej kultura występowała w funkcji dobra nierównomiernie obdzielającego swym bogactwem wszystkie klasy społeczne (Pierre Bourdieu) – co jest regularną strategią sprawowania władzy – w okresie porewolucyjnym jednym ze sposobów legitymizowania nowej władzy było uczynienie kultury, przede wszystkim w sferze psychologii społecznej, sferą powszechnie dostępną. Z tej perspektywy doktryna realizmu socjalistycznego mogła doskonale realizować takie cele, gdyż odwoływała się do tradycji dziewiętnastowiecznego realizmu powieściowego. Ponieważ konwencje powieściowego realizmu zostały społecznie przyswojone dużo wcześniej, w nowej sytuacji wystarczyło je tylko tak zaktualizować, aby odbiorcom we wcześniejszych okresach kulturowo „wydziedziczonym” dawały złudzenie partycypowania w kulturze na „równych prawach”.

Czas narodzin i upadku kina realizmu socjalistycznego w krajach Europy Wschodniej i Centralnej zamyka się w latach 1949-1955. Krytyka filmowa w Polsce dwa razy w wyraźny sposób czyniła ten okres przedmiotem swych zainteresowań. Pierwsza fala krytycznych opracowań przypadła na I połowę lat 70.: mieściły się w paradygmacie oficjalnych komentarzy politycznych upowszechnianych przez polskie media po roku 1956, tzn. posługując się ogólnikami, mówiły raczej enigmatycznie o błędach i potknięciach, o uporczywym realizowaniu jednego wzorca. Fala druga przypadła na lata 90. Tenor dyskusji o socrealizmie ustaliła wówczas krytyka literacka: w sztuce i literaturze odsądziła socrealizm od czci i wiary, zaś sztukę tamtego okresu nazwała „zdegradowaną” i „totalitarną”. Podobne kwalifikacje wobec filmów socrealistycznych,

opatrzone prześmiewczym i ironicznym komentarzem, zaczęła stosować krytyka filmowa. Artykuł stawia tezę, że te ostatnie dyskusje nad filmowym socrealizmem wpisywały się w dyskurs polityczny, jaki się w Polsce odbywał po roku 1989, a który dotyczył konieczności określenia politycznej przyszłości kraju po oddaniu władzy przez komunistów w wyniku zwycięstwa sił związanych z obozem solidarnościowym.

Uczestnicy dyskusji poświęconych polskim filmom socrealistycznym, odmawiając im wszelkich wartości, zabierali jednocześnie „bezglównie” głos w narodowych sporach i deklarowali swoje polityczne sympatie. Dziedzictwo Stalina – choć historycznie i politycznie przezwyżnione – dało w ten sposób jeszcze raz znać o sobie.