

TRAUMA OF 'AESTHETIC CASTRATION'  
OR THE FORBIDDEN PLEASURES  
OF SOCIALIST REALISM?  
Psychoanalysis in/of Wajda's *Man of Marble*

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I'm stuck to the *Man of Marble*. I have watched it an endless number of times since I first saw it in Warsaw after its release in summer 1977. It was the first film in my video library and in my DVD collection. To be honest, I discovered my obsession with the film only after my arrival in Britain in 1990, when my identity, both national and professional, that of curator of Italian paintings at a major museum in Warsaw could not be taken for granted any more. Complicated by a new set of gender-roles prescribed for me in Britain, my identity had to be reinvented, constructed both in, and against, the gaze of the other. In the process of fixing my new identity, I abandoned the subject position of a museum curator, turning to another thing that I have lost, or rather that I have detached myself from, but which was defining me much more strongly. I began to look at Polish culture post-1945 and at the changing regimes of truth about an imagined Eastern European space and the Eastern European subject, at the conflicting visions of history and memory, and at the patterns of its representation, manufactured both West and East. And it was the film *Man of Marble* which stimulated and accompanied this metamorphosis, writing its scenario as it were, opening the road to the repressed desires and directing my search for another identity and another focus of my research.

My highly transferential reading of the film, and I refer here to the affinity between the psychotherapeutic displacement of the analysand's feelings onto the analyst and the analogical transference of ideas between the text and its

reader,<sup>1</sup> has been stimulated to a large measure by an opening scene, shot inside the National Museum in Warsaw, inside 'my' museum where I had worked for the whole duration of the Solidarity and martial law decade in Poland. The scene forms a background to the film credits and narrates a long walk of a film crew through the unending labyrinth of empty museum spaces (ill. 1). Having conquered the iron gate guarding the entrance, the crew bursts into the main hall, where they are met by an anxious female curator. She guides the invaders through, or rather surrenders to them, one by one, the museum rooms as they cross them with unyielding determination, rushing to force open and to penetrate the most secret museum interior, the storage, the space of the expelled, the Museum's Id, their destination (ill. 2). Their uncanny journey through the hauntingly familiar museum galleries opens the road to my own unconscious, providing a script of my own memories, now split between that of the anxious self and the invading other.

The film inspired my first essay focussed on the politics of museum display, and on the strategies of manipulating the collective memory and identities by alternating gestures of inclusion and exclusion, of investing with value and devaluing the same objects, by exhibiting them and hiding them away, as if in a constantly re-enacted 'fort' und 'da' game.<sup>2</sup> The *Man of Marble* is still with me, and I constantly rewrite my first essay, a permanent 'work in progress'.<sup>3</sup> This short text is another attempt of its reading, now from a psychoanalytical

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<sup>1</sup> On the mechanism of transference in the cinematic discourse, see E. A. Kaplan, *Introduction: From Plato's Cave to Freud's Screen*, in: *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. E. A. Kaplan, New York and London 1990, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Curator's Memory. The Case of the Missing "Man of Marble", or, the Rise and Fall and Rise of Socialist Realism in Polish Museums 1949-1995*, in: *Memory and Oblivion*, Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art, eds. W. Reinink, J. Stumpel, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 905-912.

<sup>3</sup> This is a revised text of a paper which, at various stages of its production, was given at several conferences, including the Sixth Joint Conference of Art Historians from Britain and Poland *Power and Persuasion: Sculpture in its Rhetorical Context* (Leeds 2002), Annual "Screen" Studies Conference (Glasgow 2003), *Culture Futures: Change and Diversity* Conference (Norwich 2004) and at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the British Association of Art Historians *Old/New* (Nottingham 2004, the panel *Art, History and Memory in post-war Eastern and Central Europe* organised by Deborah Schultz and David Crowley).



iii. 1 Man of Marble Credits



iii. 2 Entering the Museum Storage

angle. I want to focus, above all, on the transference role of the film, which in order to unmask the repressed history has to re-enact the trauma of the past. I will also be stopping at the numerous discernible psychoanalytical tropes within the film narrative, such as the Oedipus complex and the gender ambiguity of Agnieszka, the issue of trauma, the pleasures of melancholia, and the castration anxiety which manifest themselves on many levels of the film text.<sup>4</sup>

Made in 1976, and addressing the conflict between the regimes of historical truth and collective memory in post-Stalinist societies, while playing head-on with personal memories of the film-crew, *Man of Marble* is often claimed the most significant work in Wajda's career.<sup>5</sup> Hailed a milestone of the 'cinema of moral concern', and an 'Eastern European *Citizen Kane*',<sup>6</sup> it tells the story of Agnieszka in her final year at a Film Academy, who is making a diploma documentary about the Stalinist past, to be focused on the forgotten hero of the socialist labour competition, Mateusz Birkut, a bricklayer of the new workers town and the steelworks of Nowa Huta. Despite the discouragement and explicit warning from her supervisor against touching a subject classified as taboo in mid 1970s Poland, she is determined to pursue her inquiry into the repressed history of Birkut's triumph and his dramatic fall, motivating her persistence by the desire to learn about her father's youth. While combing through the film

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<sup>4</sup> On the use of psychoanalysis in film studies see, among others, C. Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, London 1982; *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. E. A. Kaplan, op. cit.; V. Lebeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: Play of Shadows*, London 2002.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive information about the origins of the film and its script by A. Ścibor-Rylski, see *Wajda Films*, Forward by A. Michnik, ed. B. Kosińska, Warsaw 1996, vol. 2, pp. 65-85. See also *Wajda mówi o sobie: wywiady i teksty*, ed. W. Wertenstein, Kraków 2000; M. Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, New York-Oxford 2002.

<sup>6</sup> On the 'cinema of moral concern', which is also translated in English as 'the cinema of moral anxiety', the phrase attributed to the critic and director Janusz Kijowski, see F. Bren, *World Cinema: Poland*, London 1986; B. Michałek and F. Turaj, *The Cinema of Moral Concern*, in: *idem, The Modern Cinema of Poland*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1988, pp. 64-65, 72-73. On the conscious reference of the makers of the *Man of Marble* to the flashback narrative of Wells' *Citizen Kane*, see M. Turim, *Remembering and Deconstructing: The Historical Flashback in Man of Marble and Man of Iron*, in: *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, eds. J. Orr and E. Ostrowska, London 2003, pp. 93-102.

archives, and interviewing people, she discovers the hidden drama of Birkut, who had been first elevated and then prosecuted by the Stalinist apparatus. She finds out that Birkut's Stakhanovite record had been 'sexed-up' by a young film director of this period Jerzy Burski, Agnieszka's Alter-Ego as it were, who needed this kind of propaganda documentary, entitled *Architects of Our Happiness*, extolling the rise of the New Man, to launch his own professional career.

The film has been extensively discussed within the context of Eastern European post-war politics, Eastern European cinema, propaganda and censorship, Eastern European housing estates, as well as gender politics.<sup>7</sup> A glance at the reading lists of courses on Eastern European culture and politics post-1945, taught at western universities, testifies that the *Man of Marble* has acquired a firm position in what one might call the 'canon of dissident culture' of the Other Europe, and, in terms of its referentiality, it is comparable to Kundera's novel *The Joke* (1967), or to the Sots-art ironies of Komar and Melamid.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See D. Roszkowska, *Człowiek z drugiej strony: Kobiety w filmach Wajdy*, in: *Głos mają kobiety: Teksty feministyczne*, ed. Sławomira Walczewska, Cracow 1992, pp. 78-94; J. Falkowska, *The Political Films of Andrzej Wajda: Dialogism in Man of Marble, Man of Iron, and Danton*, Providence and Oxford 1996, pp. 67-79, 144-49; A. Helman, *Żywoć człowieka uczciwego albo o wieloznaczności dyskursu Wajdy (Człowiek z marmuru Andrzeja Wajdy)*, in: *Widziane po latach: Analizy i interpretacje filmu polskiego*, ed. M. Hendrykowska, Poznań 2000, pp. 168-179; M. Haltof, *The Representation of Stalinism in Polish Cinema*, in: *idem*, op. cit., pp. 207-21; E. Mazierska, *Agnieszka and Other Solidarity Heroines of Polish Cinema*, "Kinema", No. 17, Spring 2002; <http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/FINE/juhde/mazi-021.htm>; A. Miljacki, *Closely Watched Films: On the Transformations of Eastern European Urbanism*, "Blok", No. 1, 2002, pp. 98-119; T. Lubelski, *'He Speaks To Us': The Author in Everything for Sale, Man of Marble and Pan Tadeusz*, in: *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, op. cit., pp. 38-43; M. Turim, op. cit.; B. Sørensen, *'Visual Eloquence' and Documentary Form: Meeting 'Man of Marble' in Nowa Huta*, in: *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda...*, op. cit., pp. 103-115; P. Coates, *Człowiek z marmuru / Man of Marble*, in: *The Cinema of Central Europe*, London 2004, ed. P. Hames, London 2004, pp. 180-189; P. Coates, *The Red and White: The Cinema of People's Poland*, London 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. courses: *The Turbulent Century: Eastern Europe 1914-1989* (Columbia University, <http://www.columbia.edu/~bfa4/TurbCent%202002.html>); *Economic Transformations in New Democracies* (Columbia University, <http://www.sociology.columbia.edu/graduate/academics/courses/U8150.pdf>).

Moreover, the film is often endowed with a prophetic power, as one of the works 'ahead of its time', which changed the course of history, by instigating the Solidarity Revolution in Poland, that in turn became the topic of the film's sequel *The Man of Iron*, shot by Wajda with record-breaking speed during early 1981. What appears to have evaded the mainstream discussions about the film is its ambiguous message about socialist realist culture, and indeed its contribution to the re-evaluation of socialist realism within the cultural and historiographical discourse in Poland of the late 1970s, re-enacting both the trauma and its forbidden pleasures.

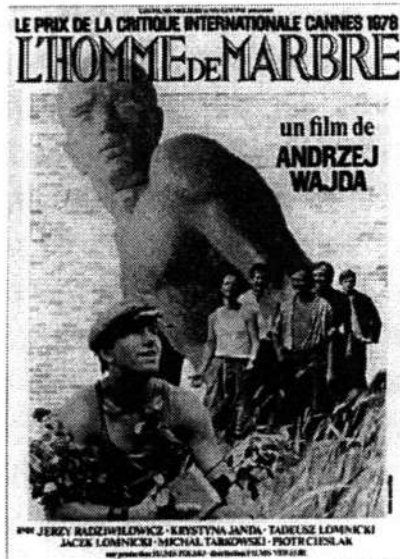
It is the disgraced socialist realist plaster cast of the Man of Marble, which provides the key image and the master metaphor of the film, anchoring, both visually and verbally, its floating messages. Its function of the film's dominant signifier has been taken up by the media and merchandise surrounding its release, the mock socialist realist statue. It featured in a number of posters, such as the one designed by Waldemar Świerzy in Poland, or by Alain Lynch and Dominique Guillotine in France, which accompanied the film's distribution in the aftermath of its extramural screening during the Film Festival in Cannes in 1978 (ill. 3). The centrality of the sculpture, however, has been marked most conspicuously in a series of remarkable photographs taken by Julien Qui-deau and reproduced in a special issue of the French periodical "Cinema", in which Wajda himself poses as the 'father', the maker, or, perhaps, even as the referent, of the Man of Marble (ill. 4).<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the sculpture of the Man of Marble was made especially for the film, cast in plaster by the professional sculptor Adam Roman, a professor of the Academy of Fine Art in Warsaw. As stressed by John Walker, feature films on art and artists rarely use the original artworks, turning either to photographic reproductions, or to copies and casts.<sup>10</sup> Although those 'representations of representations' are often crudely made, they are much cheaper and safer to handle. Most importantly, they make possible a great deal of mediation, transforming the original into a prop which suits the plot. The decision to make

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<sup>9</sup> *Special Wajda: L'Homme de Marbre, Varsovie, l'oeuvre de Andrzej Wajda*, special issue of "Cinema", Nos 239/240, 1er/15 janvier 1980. This issue reproduces the poster by Lynch and Guillotine and contains an article by Jerzy Borkowski, *L'épopée inachevée d'un stakhanoviste: le romantisme en question*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Walker, *Art and Artists on Screen*, Manchester 1993, pp. 5-6.



iii. 3 Alain Lynch and Dominique Guillotine, poster 1978



iii. 4 Julien Quideau, Andrzej Wajda and the mock statue of the Man of Marble at the Documentary Film Studios, Warsaw, 1980

the Man of Marble anew (and significantly, as well as ironically, in plaster) rather than using one of the many available socialist realist statues, must have been due to both of those reasons. On the one hand, the statue could have been given the crude portrait features of the actor playing the role of the fallen hero; on the other hand, this also made it possible to represent the imagined 'essence' of socialist realism, the essence shaped by not so distant memories, and projected seamlessly upon the viewers and witnesses, by the participant observers, once implicated in the production of the 'real' Man of Marble.<sup>11</sup> And it appears that the Man of Marble was, indeed, much more than just a prop, turning into a cathartic figure of the repressed Other for the director, his censors, and for the viewing public of the later 1970s in Poland, amongst which I can count myself.

Given the significance of the plaster cast in the *Man of Marble* text I want to argue that the film can be seen, on the one hand, as a standard critique of socialist realism as regression, or as 'aesthetic castration', while, on the other hand, somewhat unexpectedly and paradoxically, as a subversion of the modernist criteria of an absolute value and the ensuing policy of exclusion, and as such as an endorsement of the return of socialist realism (and its forbidden pleasures) from the deepest strata of the unconscious into the daylight of museum display and to an open discourse. By the term 'aesthetic castration', however, I do not mean solely the act of punishment for the identification with modernism, performed at the time by Stalinist apparatchiks. On the contrary, given the ultimate hegemony of modernism, in my analysis, the fear of 'aesthetic castration' implies rather a stage in the complex aesthetic re-construction of the subject in the post-1945 society, seen from the hindsight of the modernist triumph of the 1970s, when the subject punishes himself and herself retrospectively, in the name of the phallic power of modernism, for the forbidden love of the 'maternal' body of realism.

To explain this concept further, I owe the concept of the 'aesthetic castration' to Griselda Pollock's analysis of what she termed as 'social castration' in her autobiographical text, linking her interest in contemporary African art to her

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<sup>11</sup> The cast of the Man of Marble, for a long time homeless and moved from one site to another, has been recently museified at the Museum of Cinematography in Łódź.



experience as a child of white parents growing up in South Africa.<sup>12</sup> She has employed Freud's scheme of the Oedipal formation of the subject through the discovery of sexual difference between man and woman and the ensuing fear of disempowerment by castration, to the analysis of her own social formation as a white child who, brought up by her black nanny in South Africa, discovers the racial difference between the black and white skin. If in Freud's scheme, the discovery of sexual difference by the male child, fearful of the lack of phallus as signifier of power and authority, leads him to abandon his identification with his mother for the identification with his father, in Pollock's account, it is the realisation of the 'phallic power' of the white skin, which has led her to abandon her primary emotional attachment to her 'black mother' and to build up the identification with her white mother, completing thus the racial variant of the process of Oedipalization. In her analysis of what she named 'social castration' anxiety, the white skin can be thus seen as a substitute of phallus.

Playing this 'dangerously loose game of analogies' even further, and moving now from the domain of race to that of aesthetics (both ultimately referring to bodily imposed hierarchies), we might attempt to draw another analogy between phallus/ white skin and modernist aesthetics. It is the latter which, in the 1970s Poland, endowed autonomous and self-referential art with power and authority, while declaring the demonstratively propagandistic art in the socialist realist idiom as aesthetic deficiency and failure. In this perspective, the toppled Man of Marble in the storage bears the memory not only of the problematic socio-aesthetic circumstance of its production, but also of its exclusion, thus signifying the 'castrating moment' brought about by the modernist hierarchies.

There are two major scenes of the film in which the plaster cast plays the dominant part: the making of the marble statue in a studio and filming it as a discarded object in the museum storage. They appear in the film in reverse order, according to flashback poetics, in which death precedes birth,

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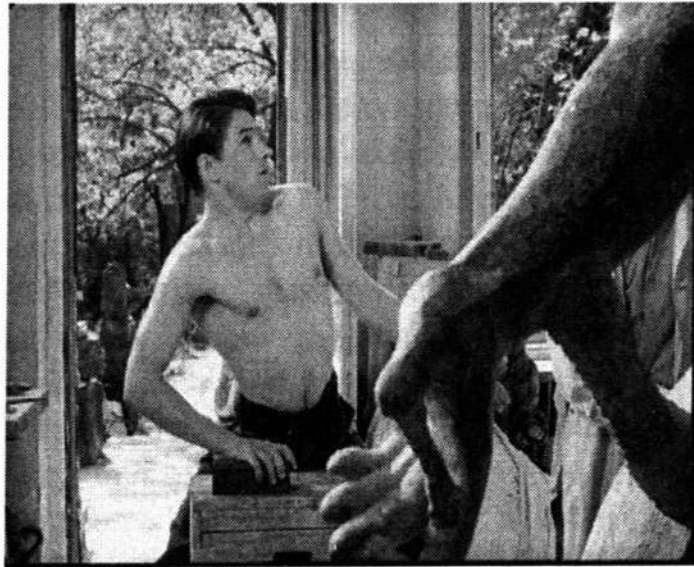
<sup>12</sup> G. Pollock, *Another time, another place: An African childhood reconsidered*, in: *idem, Looking Back to the Future: Essays on Art, Life and Death*, Introduction by Penny Florence, London 2001, pp. 352-369. Pollock, in turn, has based her analysis of Carolyn Steedman's concept of the 'castrating moment' in which the black or working-class child is traumatized on the discovery of a social lack in the parent, who, up to that point, has been imagined as a figure of authority and power (C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London 1987).

and resurrection comes before petrification. The sequence of making and then exhibiting the statue constitutes a climax of a mock documentary on the elevation of the hero of the socialist labour competition (ill. 5) This episode, kept in parody mode, which allows for establishing a safe distance for the spectator, taps directly onto the mainstream critique of socialist realism as regression, as neither art, nor realist representation, as nothing more than a farce imported from abroad, moreover a farce which provided a smokescreen for communist castration rituals, the latter uncovered by Agnieszka through her interviews and her search for the rejected documentaries buried in the archives. The cinematic production of the Stakanovite hero forms the antithetical core of the film, since on the meta-cinematic level the *Man of Marble* is a film about the codes and conventions of making documentaries, on blurring the boundaries between the reality and its assumed copy. The regimes of truth governing *Architects of Our Happiness* which, in Foucauldian terms, literally fabricate Birkut as the Man of Marble, are laid bare by the film text: they are both framed and subverted by the opening sequence of the discovery of the fallen statue in the museum storage. Making and disgracing the statue, analogous to fabricating and shelving the documentary, act as textual counterparts to making and destroying the human subject of both. Originally, the opening scene of the metaphorical death of the hero in the museum storage, staged as a place of *damnatio memoriae*, was to correlate with the closing shot at the cemetery gate in Gdansk, where no body, no tomb of the real Birkut could be found.<sup>13</sup>

A more ambiguous message, however, is sent by the first episode of the film-text, which is focused on the plaster cast. It is in fact the first scene, in which the statue appears in the film, moreover, it constitutes the first episode of the film narrative shown just after credits, the scene in which Agnieszka discovers it in the museum storage, in the darkness of the museum unconscious (ill. 6). It is this encounter with the over turned socialist realist sculpture

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<sup>13</sup> This very scene at the cemetery will, in turn, be symbolically re-employed by Wajda as the opening scene of his *Man of Iron*, the Solidarity sequence to the *Man of Marble*, shot at record speed in the Solidarity year of 1981. Although the title of the *Man of Iron* reproduces further the sculptural metaphor, thus establishing the continuity of the cinematic epic and alludes to a mythological and literary topos categorising the human nature by metaphorical comparisons with characteristics of various materials, sculpture plays a dominant role only in the *Man of Marble*.



iii. 5 Birkut is posing for his marble statue,  
a scene from the mock documentary *They Are Building Our Happiness*



iii. 6 Agnieszka is filming the fallen statue

which marks the beginning of her journey down the repressed memory lane, to uncover the 'truth' about Birkut, to see through the false marble skin thrown over him, and to dig out the 'real' man, imprisoned within it.<sup>14</sup> The narrative of the film suggests that the gaze of her camera will now have the capacity and force to take away the evil gaze of the Stalinist film-maker, which had earlier turned the real man into an image, and petrified him into the statue (ill. 7). Objectified and subsumed by the dominant regimes of representation, despite all the might invested into his image, Birkut has been in fact disempowered, castrated and feminised, and, accordingly, reduced to an image, to a sign, which could be put on display (ill. 8), toppled over, or taken down, according to the wishes of the image-makers. This explicit charge against the statue, which can be extracted from the film narrative, reproduces in fact the ocularcentric and iconoclastic phobias of the modernity, which identify both the camera gaze and an image with a threat, with subjection and patriarchal power. And yet, in spite of that, the very scene at the museum storage seems to make us believe that now Agnieszka's gaze, sympathetic to the sitter but subversive towards the mechanisms of representation, will be able to reverse the bad spell of Stalinism. Her camera, far from casting an evil gaze, will be able to turn the object back into the subject, to find the forgotten 'truth' about the fallen hero, bringing him back to life.

The episode contains a memorable scene, in which the masculinist signifying regimes of the film are called into question. It is when Agnieszka, sitting astride the top of the fallen figure of Birkut, takes a quasi-sexual possession of him, while shooting a close up of his face with a hand-held camera, in the presence of the astonished elderly camera-man (ill. 6). The scene appears to constitute an as yet unrecognised case of the domineering female gaze in the masculinised cinematic discourse.<sup>15</sup> By possessing the silenced monument Agnieszka repositioned socialist realism within the sphere of public visibility, initiating the process of its return from the depths of oblivion onto the approachable level of academic evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On this issue, see an insightful text by T. Sobolewski, *Cierpiący posąg*, "Kino", 1989, No. 8, pp. 14-27.

<sup>15</sup> L. Mulvey, *Visual pleasure and the Narrative Cinema*, "Screen", Vol. 16, 1975, No. 3.

<sup>16</sup> I referred to this scene in my article *How the West corroborated Socialist Realism in the East: Fougeron, Taslitzky and Picasso in Warsaw*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki",



iii. 7 Birkut is turned into a hero of the socialist labour by Burski who is shooting his falsified documentary *Architects of Our Happiness*



iii. 8 Birkut's gigantic image is taken down from the streets of Nowa Huta after his downfall

Importantly, Wajda's film, narrating Agnieszka's struggle against the 1970s discursive formations, political and aesthetic, talks about the director's own struggle against censorship (which held back the production of this film for more than ten years), and, above all, about his own past as a young film director beginning his own professional career in the Stalinist Poland. In interviews, both Wajda and the script-writer Ścibor-Rylski identified themselves with the Stalinist film director Burski, the author of the *Architects of Our Happiness*, as well as, to some extent, with Birkut himself. In an interview conducted by Lesław Bajer in 1977, Ścibor-Rylski admitted plainly:

In my younger years, I was also like Burski ... I had to embellish this and that, here and there puffing up the facts, widening the production curve a bit – taking part in this way in the construction of a myth, which was composed partly of waste paper. ... *Man of Marble* is also my attempt at settling my own, honest and sincere, accounts with this young contender – with what moves me in the figure of this belligerent boy in a red tie, with what irritates and angers me about him, as well as provokes my dismay.<sup>17</sup>

As if seconding his words, Wajda boldly asserted: 'The film is not about "them" it speaks about a piece of our own lives; the piece that we are not ashamed of'.<sup>18</sup> In another interview, he draws the immediate equation between himself and Agnieszka, saying:

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vol. LXV, 2003, No. 2, pp. 303-329. See also P. Coates, *Człowiek z marmuru...*, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>17</sup> 'Otóż ja – w owych szczenięcych latach, byłem też takim młodym Burskim; [musiałem dostarczyć redaktorowi "Biblioteki" [Przodownika Pracy] fascynujących sylwetek, a znaleźć ich nie mogłem ... ]. W związku z tym musiałem się uciekać do podkoloryzowania tego i owego faktu, tu trochę sprawę rozdałem, tam jakby poszerzyłem skalę wyników – i tak brałem udział w tworzeniu legendy, która częściowo składała się z makulatury. ... *Człowiek z marmuru* jest także próbą mojego, w miarę chyba szczerego i uczciwego rozliczenia z tamtym młodym zawodnikiem – z tym, co mnie wzrusza w owej sylwetce zaczepnego chłopca w czerwonym krawacie, i z tym, co mnie w niej irytuje, gniewa, a chwilami także i oburza.' *O tę ludzką dzielność nam szło: Rozmowa Lesława Bajera, 1977*, in: *Wajda mówi o sobie...*, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem. On Wajda's unrealised socialist realist documentary made during his student years in Łódź, see T. Lubelski, *Niedoszła Zemsta w tkalni*, "Kino", 2002, No. 10, pp. 121-23 (<http://kino.onet.pl/http://kino.onet.pl/>)

this girl is clearly the girl of the 1970s, but in some measure, she is also myself, the man who wants something. Through her I would like to tell the young: try to be like her! Wake up!<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the film on the whole can be seen as an exercise in an auto-analysis performed not only by the director and script-writer, but involving a remarkable part of the film-crew, including the cameraman Leonard Zajązkowski and the production-manager Barbara Pec-Ślesicka, as well as Wajda's wife Krystyna Zachwatowicz playing the role of Birkut's wife. All of them are using the film text as an opportunity to recover and re-enact the repressed memories of their youthful contribution to the ideological apparatus of Stalinism in order to discharge the tension and to remove the neurotic symptoms, to appease the trauma of what has now to be denounced as political and aesthetic castration. In Wajda's remark about the script-writer:

he realised that he got the chance to write something against what he had written before, rehabilitating himself. And indeed, he wrote the darkest piece imaginable. I suggested that this film should be made by a young woman.<sup>20</sup>

The demonstrative identity of the names appearing in the credits of the mock documentary (ill. 9), with those who took part in the production of the *Man of Marble*, strikes one as an acute expression of the self-loathing associated with the condition of melancholia, as defined by Freud, or as an act of collective lying-down on the psychoanalyst's couch performed en masse by the film-crew. The problem, of course, is the identity of the analyst, as the contemporary spectator of the 1970s was obviously invited to take part in the collective psychotherapy as well.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'A ta dziewczyna jest oczywiście dziewczyną lat siedemdziesiątych, ale trochę i mną samym, człowiekiem, który czegoś chce, czegoś potrzebuje. A chciałbym przez tę postać powiedzieć młodym: starajcie się być tacy, jak ona! Zbudźcie się!' – *Film kręcony przez życie: Rozmowa Krystyny Nastulanki, 1977*, in: *Wajda mówi o sobie...*, op. cit., p. 112. On the identification of Wajda with Burski and Agnieszka, see T. Lubelski, 'He Speaks to Us'..., op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> *O tę ludzką dzielność nam szło...*, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> The act of the collective psychotherapy involved at the time even the Culture Minister Józef Tejchma because of his own memories of the erection of Nowa Huta, who



iii. 9 Credits of the mock documentary *Architects of Our Happiness*

The film offers an astonishing number of other situations calling for a psychoanalytical apparatus. The opening scenes which form the background to the film credits show Agnieszka asleep in the van which carries her crew to the Museum's 'unconscious', as if implying that the whole film-text that follows resembles a dream, revealing the repressed desires of both the protagonists and the makers of the film. There is also a very strong manifestation of the much discussed gender ambiguity of Agnieszka, who, in Wajda's own words, dresses and behaves like a 'boy with a camera', acting thus as the director's Alter Ego.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as announced from the start, Agnieszka's subversive project is driven by her Oedipal desire of learning more about her father who, accordingly, is positioned in the film text as Birkut's double. The aforementioned scene in the darkness of the museum storage, in which Agnieszka /Wajda possesses Birkut's Doppelganger/ her Father by penetrating his disgraced body with her phallic camera, speaks strongly of the fear of castration

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released the ban put on the film by the censorship, which would cost him his job (J. Tejchma, *Kulisy dymisji: Z dzienników ministra kultury 1974-1977*, Kraków 1991). See also P. Coates, *Człowiek z marmuru...*, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> See D. Roszkowska, *Człowiek z drugiej strony...*, op. cit.; E. Mazierska, *Agnieszka and Other Solidarity Heroines...*, op. cit.



(affecting both her and her Alter Ego in reference to various social domains) and as such calls for further deployment of psychoanalytical apparatus.

Furthermore, the process of exorcising the Stalinist past blurs, dangerously, traumatic events and memories of political and aesthetic castration with the forbidden pleasures of socialist realism, which, having been imposed by the Stalinist Super-Ego, are, in turn, censored and repressed in turn by the post-Stalinist Super-Ego. The mock documentary *Architects of Our Happiness*, made in the uncannily familiar style of the 1950s newsreels, and mixing original and fabricated documents,<sup>23</sup> offers a whole sequence of frames seducing the spectator by the false splendour of the socialist realist dream, a coercive fairy-tale of an Utopian society, which unites and elevates the underprivileged, identifies and guards them against the enemy (ill. 10), distributes social amenities, including the newly built flats (ill. 11), as well as providing pleasures and splendid balls for those in the vanguard of social progress (ill. 12). The 'fairy-tale reality' effect is amplified by the voiceover read by the same actor as in the 1950s, adding the nostalgic pleasures of auditory memory to those derived by the spectator from his and her visual remembrance of domestic interiors, as well as of his or her enjoyment derived secretly from participating in public spectacles, including the 1 May parades.<sup>24</sup> But should we be entitled to the memory of this enjoyment, forgetting about horror? Could the resignifying practices be applied to the products of Stalinism? The Post-Stalinist Super-Ego says 'no'.

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<sup>23</sup> On the issue of 'nested narratives' in the *Man of Marble* and their 'expository' function adding to the sense of authenticity, see B. Sørensen, 'Visual Eloquence'..., op. cit., pp. 110-112.

<sup>24</sup> According to the classification of mock documentaries proposed by Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, by openly moving between the 'real' and the 'fictitious', the documentary reaches the degree of deconstruction, engaging in 'a sustained critique of the set of assumptions and expectations which support the classic modes of documentary', and thus foreclosing the 'notion that filmed images have a direct unmediated relationship with reality' (J. Roscoe and C. Hight, *Faking It: Mock Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*, Manchester and New York 2001, pp. 72-75). The same modes of thinking, both blurring and re-establishing the boundary between fact and fiction are addressed to the statue of the Man of Marble – we can see the likeness, knowing at the same time that it is no more than a prop, and moreover, that the presumed real statue would not have any unmediated relationship with reality either.



iii. 10 'Trumanillo Circus' during the May Parade in Warsaw, a frame from an original newsreel of 1951 inserted into *Architects of Our Happiness*



iii. 11 The New Year's Eve Ball, a scene from an original newsreels of the 1950s, inserted into *Architects of Our Happiness*



iii. 12 Interior of the workers' flat, a scene from an original newsreel from the 1950s, inserted into *Architects of Our Happiness*

This brings me back to the issue of socialist realist art and its return to museums as well as to academic discourse, in the aftermath of the film. Seven years ago I read the film as a powerful stimulus to a debate on the obliterated pages of Poland's Stalinist history.<sup>25</sup> The opening episode of the discovery of the fallen statue, clear of any detectable parody and therefore not allowing for the establishment of a safe distance between the represented, the representant

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<sup>25</sup> See note 2.

and the viewer, seems to have been structured in such a way as to provoke a preferred reading from the viewer, referring not only to the condemnable Stalinist regimes of production of socialist realist sculptures, but to the post-Stalinist regimes of their repression, of embarrassed oblivion, and of policing the museum displays. I argued that Agnieszka's camera reversed not only the evil spell of Stalinism, but also the hegemonic verdict of Modernism, and that the film provoked a major shift in re-thinking the rules and exclusions of post-Stalinist art history-writing and museum display, and as corollary, a reassessment of the now 'degenerate' socialist realist works, imprisoned in museum storages, re-legitimizing Socialist realism as an object of museum display. Moreover, it generated also new kinds of subject positions for curators of post-1945 art, which would define themselves precisely against the lady-curator, caricatured in the opening scene of the film, conforming to and guarding the old-fashioned aesthetic values. The film made possible a conception of the New Museum, subverting the hegemony of the aesthetic, and of a new curatorship, which would not exclude socialist realism. And it did literally produce it.

The scene in the 'storage of the National Museum in Warsaw' was in fact shot by Wajda at a central repository of Stalinist art production, kept by the Ministry of Art and Culture in the remote village of Kozłówka. The nationalised palace of an aristocratic family had been designated as the place of evacuation for a vast amount of socialist realist paraphernalia of the early 1950s. Although those works had been earlier commissioned and acquired by the Ministry, after the political Thaw of 1956 they had to be removed from sight and, like Birkut, had to vanish without a trace, as if they had never existed. In my student days in the mid-1970s, that is at the time when Wajda was making *Man of Marble*, a specially arranged visit to Kozłówka was a highlight of the usual kind of field trips round the renaissance and baroque churches and residences of south-east Poland. It was offering then a totally new kind of cultural encounter with forbidden visuality, unveiling to our eager eyes what had been covered up by dominant art history since the post-Stalinist era. Almost twenty years after Wajda had shot there the opening of his film, and, subsequently, after the ensuing wave of iconoclasm targeted against all the testimonies of the Stalinist past following the collapse of Communism in 1989, Kozłówka, once the tightly guarded place where only the initiated could confront the repressed discourses of the past, was elevated to the rank of the public Gallery of Socialist Realist Art, the first of its kind in Poland, or anywhere else (except for Budapest's

Szoborpark). It was opened in 1994, not without controversies, that were reported widely in the media and in the professional art historical press.<sup>26</sup> Since then, the gallery has produced a number of exhibitions, as well as publications.<sup>27</sup> In 1994, a modest leaflet produced by the Museum, still framed by the rules of the Cold War modernist discourse and entitled 'Stalin's breath', cautiously compared Stalinist art in Poland to an 'epidemic brought in from the Soviet Union'. Today, despite its peripheral location, Kozłówka attracts large numbers of visitors. When confronted with the idea of setting up another Museum of Communism in Warsaw, its director has asserted publicly that he is not prepared to part with any object from the collection.

A growing number of similar museums, including virtual ones, are being established in the former Eastern Europe, including the Museum of Communism in Prague, the House of Horror in Budapest, or the Ukrainian website on socialist realist painting.<sup>28</sup> The regimes of writing about socialist realism, too, have been revised, in the process of new publications and exhibitions,<sup>29</sup> absorbing the new freedoms given by the postmodern shift from, what Linda Nochlin once called a positive *art history* which has been preoccupied with aesthetic values and the canon, to a *critical art history*, more concerned with re-thinking the strategies and exclusions, class, race or gender-related, producing and guarding the canon against the expelled.<sup>30</sup>

Are we then entitled to experience pleasure from looking at socialist realism? Or should we castigate ourselves for any sensation of enjoyment derived

<sup>26</sup> See L. Lameński, *Galeria Sztuki Socrealizmu w Kozłowie*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki", vol. LVII, 1996, pp. 177-9.

<sup>27</sup> See J. Szczepaniak, *Kozłówka: Galeria Sztuki Socrealizmu*, Kozłówka 1998; *idem*, *Socrealizm: Muzeum Zamoyskich w Kozłowie*, Kozłówka 2003.

<sup>28</sup> The topic of museums of communism was tackled in an unpublished paper by Arnold Bartetzky, *Horrorkabinett oder Disneyland. Die Musealisierung des Kommunismus*, at the conference *Neue Staaten – neue Bilder? Visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral- und Osteuropa seit 1918*, Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas (GWZO) Leipzig, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> See, among others, the recent exhibition *Dream Factory Communism: the Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, curated by Boris Groys and Max Hollein in Shirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2004, reviewed in "Blok" by R. Fowkes ("Blok", No. 3, 2004, pp. 187-93).

<sup>30</sup> L. Nochlin, *The Imaginary Orient*, in: *idem*, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, London 1991, pp. 56-7.

from socialist realist kitsch, denounced as such by Greenberg in 1939?<sup>31</sup> Or perhaps, our curiosity and desire to watch closely the images of the mighty bodies of the New Man and Woman, of happy collective farmers and of genderless youth marching towards future is acceptable, but only on condition that this is preceded by a disqualifying aesthetic judgement, and accompanied by moral outrage? The latter has been recently, and somewhat paradoxically, suggested by Wajda himself, who, having fathered the psychotherapeutic return of socialist realism to public visibility, must have had second thoughts on this issue. A few years ago, he established a Foundation to set up another Museum of Communism in Poland, called 'Socland', which opened in Warsaw in summer 2003.<sup>32</sup> Set in the cellars of the Palace of Culture, deep in the Id of the edifice of tyranny and subjugation, The Museum bears uncanny similarities to the *Man of Marble* scenario. It does not show art, now safely isolated in Kozłówka; even further, it bans strictly any pleasures, and it aims, plainly and unequivocally, to recreate the full horror of Communism by means of photographs, newsreels, documents, as well as new media interactive tricks. According to its statutes, on the basis of which the Foundation received grants from the European Union, the museum wants to evoke the 'real image', the 'historical truth' about the times of contempt, bureaucracy, poverty, terror and captivity.<sup>33</sup> Interpellating the visitor, in the absolute Althusserian sense of interpellation of the subject, the museum invites its visitors to experience nothing but the vicarious trauma of living in Communism. Are we in need of yet another Agnieszka to re-enter once again repressed anxieties and libido in the Id in order to re-assess the new regimes of truth dictated by the prohibiting post-Stalinist Super-Ego, and produced by the 'consciousness industry' of today?

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<sup>31</sup> C. Greenberg, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* [1939], in: ed. F. Francina, *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, London 1985, pp. 21-44, esp. pp. 26-8.

<sup>32</sup> *Socland: Muzeum Komunizmu (w budowie)/ Museum of Communism (under construction)*, Exhibition and book scenario by C. Bielecki, ed. A. Borowski, Warsaw 2003.

<sup>33</sup> See *Statut Fundacji Socland* (1999) <http://www.socland.pl/textstat.html>.

## Lęk przed „estetyczną kastracją” czy zakazane przyjemności socrealizmu?

### Psychoanalityczne wątki w *Człowieku z marmuru* Andrzeja Wajdy

*Człowiek z marmuru*, jeden z najintensywniej dyskutowanych filmów Andrzeja Wajdy, analizowany był w kontekście historii politycznej Europy oraz demokracji ludowych, historii Solidarnościowego przewrotu, kina „moralnego niepokoju”, powojennej architektury osiedli robotniczych, nierówności płci, propagandy i cenzury, jak też estetyki języka filmowego. Tropem, który nie znalazł się do tej pory w centrum debaty, jest dwuznaczne przesłanie *Człowieka z marmuru* dotyczące stosunku do realizmu socjalistycznego, a w istocie kwestia dalekosiężnego wpływu, jaki wywarł ten film na przewartościowanie oceny socrealizmu oraz stalinizmu w kulturowym oraz historiograficznym dyskursie, trwającym od lat 70. po dziś dzień, dyskursie obejmującym także kwestię muzealnej reprezentacji.

Artykuł koncentruje się na analizie roli, jaką gra w filmie gipsowy odlew *Człowieka z marmuru*, odnaleziony przez młodą reporterkę Agnieszkę w fikcyjnym magazynie Muzeum Narodowego. Tekst przypisuje porzuconemu posagowi kluczową funkcję w filmowej narracji, paralelną do pełnionej przez sfigowany film dokumentalny, oba fabrykujące stalinowskiego Nowego Człowieka. Odczytując film według klucza psychoanalitycznej metody, artykuł stawia tezę, że *Człowiek z marmuru* stanowi akt zbiorowej psychoterapii, umożliwiającej zarówno twórcom filmu, jak i jego widzom, osobisty rozrachunek z przeszłością poprzez przywołanie z zakamarków nieświadomości traumatycznych przeżyć z okresu ich stalinowskiej młodości oraz ich zneutralizowanie w języku parodii.

Film zawiera szereg innych wątków poddających się psychoanalizie, jak dwuznaczność charakterystyki płciowej głównej bohaterki (*alter ego* reżysera), jej nierozwiązany kompleks Edypa oraz identyfikacja całego tekstu filmowego ze snem. Choć *Człowiek z marmuru* przynosi standardową krytykę socrealizmu jako „estetycznej kastracji”, jednocześnie jednak może być odczytany jako wezwanie do obalenia hegemonii modernistycznych wartości, a nawet jako rekomendacja nowej interpretacji „zakazanych przyjemności” socrealizmu, które, zepchnięte w głąb nieświadomości, wracają na powierzchnię otwartej dyskusji. Jeśli założenie Galerii Sztuki Socrealistycznej w Kozłówce (1994), w miejscu, w którym Wajda kręcił sceny w magazynie Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie, stało się kontynuacją debaty zainicjowanej przez film, to nowe Muzeum Komunizmu „Socland”, umieszczone w podziemiach Pałacu Kultury (2003) oraz zorientowane wyłącznie na artykulację „historycznej prawdy” o komunistycznym terrorze, uświadamia istnienie poststalinowskiego *superego* lub przypomina o althusserowskiej diagnozie interpelacji podmiotu przez ideologiczne aparaty władzy.