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Of the Polish People's Republic and its Memory in Polish Film<sup>1</sup>

Memory seems to answer expectations and is already  
framed by the answers it seeks.  
— Weissberg 14

The Polish People's Republic expired in 1989. Since then, the newly democratised Polish state and its film industry have survived the initial chaos of collapsing communist structures and institutions, then a time of bitter disappointment with new social and economic realities, and a period of intense self-questioning before and also after joining the European Union. Finally, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the post-communist Third Republic of Poland and its film industry reached economic clarity that allowed for an unprecedented increase in government funding for film production in 2005. The Polish People's Republic, which is also fondly referred to in Poland as the "PRL," has become for more and more Polish people a mythical place, an inexhaustible source of stories told to amused children and grandchildren. At the same time, for the majority of Polish society that outlived the PRL, the communist past of Poland was not part of a mythical and, therefore, "higher" plane of life. It was an everyday life experience. Yet the normality of that experience is difficult to find in Polish films made after 1989. Most of these films emphasize the punishing qualities of the regime, and various aspects of its absurdity.<sup>2</sup>

In popular opinion the PRL, with the exception of the period between 1971 and 1980, is seen as a costly mistake and is portrayed as such in post-1989 films set in the PRL. The precise parameters of that experience, as perceived in the first 15 years after 1989, are bound not only by documents of the time, but also by individual and collective memories, which—as Liliane Weissberg states in the epigraph—are in servitude to our current expectations and desires, no less than any other type of history or collective remembering. Weissberg's view is especially significant in the context of Polish historiography, which traditionally—as were Polish films—was in servitude to the national project. More importantly, as Piotr S. Wandycz notes: "Poles more than other nations experienced history twice: when they occurred and when they became the object of debates and disputes" (Wandycz, 1992: 1011). So far, discussions around the PRL past have not been so much a debate as a revisionist search for less and more significant culprits of the old system.

Consequently, the aim of this article is to position some significant post-1989 films set in the PRL as textual resources for a collective memory of that time (affected by collective and individual traumas of all sorts), focusing on the "main stream" experiences of the "majority." The argument that underlies the structure of this article is that at least one function of collective memory realised through these films is their legitimisation of the current socio-cultural order by creating a disjunctive rupture from the communist/socialist/PRL-ist past, which may allow a coming-to-terms with that past in the near future. Furthermore, this article's underlying assumption is that this disjunctive rupture, as well as the dilemma of accepting collective and individual responsibility for the uncomfortable past, is a site of post-traumatic narratives relived in post-1989 Polish films about the PRL.

People born in Poland before, say, 1975 and who remained in the country, have been subjected to the trauma of dealing with an absurd, if not disturbing, reality, as well as to the trauma of having gone through the systemic quake that put an end to the PRL. Traditionally, trauma is conceived as being played out in the individual domain; however, a growing body of work recognises the effect of collective—as well as individual—trauma on societies as well as individuals. For instance, Kai Erikson, an authority on collective trauma, defines it as a state “resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a *persisting condition* as well as from an acute event” (185; emphasis in the original). Although Erikson focuses on singular traumatic events (for instance, natural or technological disasters), he also refers to the case of Romania’s experience of communism and to the lasting trauma that results from “sustained dread and dislocation” (190). The most significant outcomes of such prolonged traumatic experiences are helplessness, a general sense of fear, and lack of faith in the good will and good sense of those in charge (195).

Films made about the PRL after 1989 reflect various stages of dealing with the trauma of life under communism, an experience that is exasperated by its unexpected and rapid end. The initial outcry and the deep sense of injustice are usually followed by often interchanging states of denial and intrusiveness of images associated with the traumatic event or situations. The vicious circle of the perpetual internal or collective dialogue with past experience gets broken only if individuals or collectives are willing to work through the trauma of the past in order to put it to rest, a process that for some people may never be completed (Horowitz *et al.* 64). During the first 15 years of post-communist Poland, most films made about the PRL reflect either the “denial” or “intrusiveness” stages of post-traumatic coping. For instance, Wojciech Marczewski’s *Escape from Cinema “Freedom”* (*Ucieczka z kina “Wolność,”* 1990) relives the moral bankruptcy of that time, while Krzysztof Zanussi’s *In Full Gallop* (*Cwał*, 1996) denies the significant stresses of daily lives in the PRL. The other two films analysed here, Teresa Kotlarczyk’s *The Primate* (*Prymas — Trzy lata z tysiąca*, 2000) and Wojciech Wójcik’s *There and Back* (*Tam i z powrotem*, 2002) are examples of the commodification of the trauma of those times and, thus, possibly might be seen as part of a collective working through of that trauma to answer the needs of the new economic and political system.<sup>3</sup>

The 44 years of the PRL are not a uniform period. For ease of reference, this article follows a systematisation of that period based on the changes in the leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party, a division also employed in surveys on public opinion about the communist past by the Center for Public Opinion Research, the main polling organization in Poland. Accordingly, the first period after World War II—from 1945 to 1956—is most commonly referred to as the Stalinist period and is a favoured focus of Polish films about pre-1989 Poland, possibly because it accentuates a rupture between the improved and “free” present, on the one hand, and the particularly oppressive Stalinist past, on the other. A few films of the Cinema of Moral Concern (1976-1981) period focused on the Stalinist period’s dubious ethics—or the period’s lack of ethics altogether—even though they mainly told stories of contemporary systemic excesses. The second period in the life of the PRL starts with the thaw of 1956, which marks the arrival of the Polish School (1956-1961) and continues until 1970. The post-thaw years are a less popular destination for filmmakers after 1989 despite the fact that those times are the site of one of the most significant post-Stalinist communist government’s excesses: the purges of 1968 that resulted in the forced emigration of prominent Poles of Jewish heritage, including, for instance, Zygmunt Bauman.

The period between 1971 and 1980 was the time of Edward Gierek's Party leadership, also popularly known as the "Gierek era."<sup>4</sup> It gave rise to the Cinema of Moral Concern, which to some extent increased the visibility of Polish cinema at European film festivals. In his 1985 publication, Adam Michnik, a leading opposition figure, defined the Gierek era as "a strange and roguish epoch. It was an epoch of hurried materialism, of explosion of long-forbidden material aspirations, whose realisation was paid for in the currency of moral conformism and complete de-politicisation" (9). Or, in the words of Jacek Bromski, a film director, producer, and script writer, who often ventures into the field of popular cinema in Poland: "in Gierek's time everything was half-hearted. Everybody was winking at everybody. Nobody, not even the government, treated the official propaganda seriously. Everybody suspected that in the evening news even the weather forecast was subject to manipulation" (qtd. Dondziło 4-5).

If these accounts can be considered relatively indicative of the time, it is not surprising that the Gierek era remains the least visited site of the PRL in the films of the first 15 years after the end of the old regime. However, it also remains the most definite site of nostalgia for the lived past for post-1989 Poles. In 2000, 56 percent of Poles surveyed by the Center for Public Opinion Research identified it as "the time in which, generally speaking, life was best in Poland" (Pietrasik 6). By comparison, only 20 percent identified the decade of 1989 to 1999 as superior (Pietrasik 6), which adds significance to the absence of films about that period made after 1989. While materialism was part of life under Gierek, the people of Poland did not rebel against the then-current system. Consequently, that period serves no purpose in re-legitimising the break from it and, therefore, it is not a site of any significant trauma.

By contrast, the last decade of the PRL under General Wojciech Jaruzelski, which lasted from the beginning of the imposition of Martial Law in December 1981 until 1989, enjoys neither popularity (3 percent of the above-mentioned respondents identified it as the time "when life was best in Poland," exactly the same percentage as identified Gomułka's period, 1956-1970), nor has it received much filmic treatment between 1989 and 2004. One explanation of this may be that the old system was irrevocably falling apart then, without any significant conflicts arising from the disintegration. Party bureaucrats, instead of being monumentally oppressive, hurried to secure their place in the new system. The Party dissolved in 1990, just like the communist system itself—without any protest.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason for the lack of films focusing on the socio-political or cultural problems of that period is given by Tadeusz Sobolewski, one of the most prominent and respected Polish film critics, in his discussion of post-1989 cinema:

Even the fact that Wajda thought all throughout the 1990s about making the third *Man of...*, and never made it, is also symptomatic. Maybe it wasn't possible to make it. ... If he were to make another *Man of...* he would have to say some negative things about Solidarity, and he would be the last man to do so. He would have to bare the myth of Solidarity, because the lives of Solidarity's people have been complicated and often very dramatic, if not tragic. Many of them emigrated. Others got disappointed with politics after 1989. Others assumed some fanatical stands, they dug their own trenches, they even turned to left politics. That protective umbrella of Solidarity's myth, which kept people alive until the mid 1980s, was not replaced by

anything that would give people [the same] sense of unity. (Sobolewski, 2003)

Sobolewski's approach establishes the difference between the most recent memories—with direct connections to the present time—and those slightly more remote memories, which already fall under the realm of history.

As much as it is possible to differentiate between the popularity of different periods of the PRL in their post-1989 filmic treatments, it is also useful to point to the differences in the way they depict the communist past. The most balanced, if not ambiguous, reading of the communist past is offered by the films made in the early to mid-1990s—that is, soon after the Polish Left came back to power. They are more likely to focus on the absurdity of the system, the ambiguity of people's alliances when caught in that system, but also on the relative helplessness of its apparent victims, who are not averse to pursuing utilitarian ethics. By resisting the duality of good and evil, these films offered, comparatively speaking, a more complex reading of the recent realities, while at the same time either representing the trauma of those times or denying it. One example of a film depicting the traumatic helplessness is Jacek Bromski's *Polish Cuisine (Kuchnia Polska)*, (1991). In it, Margaret (Krystyna Janda), an English wife of a Polish lieutenant, Stanisław Szymanko (Marek Kondrat), consents to a continuous sexual relationship with Colonel Bergman in order to get her husband, who is arrested on the day of Stalin's death, released from prison. The "necessary compromises" of communism are also portrayed in Zanussi's *In Full Gallop*, in which aunt Idalia (Maja Komorowska) appears to co-operate with the communist state, yet does so mainly in order to realise her aristocratic passion for horseback riding. (**Fig. 1**) Her aristocratic anti-communist heritage is part of her private identity, while her public one appears to be in agreement with the dominant regime. This type of duality between public and private identification is not limited only to these examples, and will be discussed later in this article.

Films made at the end of the 1990s and around 2000 are more likely to recolor communist history/memories to accentuate the heroic struggles of everyday lives and unwavering Kantian ethics, which, for example, power the narrative of Wójcik's *There and Back*. In the film, Andrzej Hoffman (Janusz Gajos) refuses his chance to escape from Poland to join his English wife in Australia because that chance is steeped in the blood of a security guard who has been shot by Hoffman's partner. Together with Marczewski's *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* and Kotlarczyk's *The Primate*, Wójcik's *There and Back* constitutes the three-pronged focus of this article. The three films differ subtly in their relationship and use of the past that they claim to represent for post-1989 viewers. *There and Back* is a piece of the consumable past in line with the film's contemporary socio-political reality and the dominant (Western) modes of commercialisation. It is set in 1965, an under-represented time of the PRL in contemporary Polish cinema, a fact that in itself is worthy of attention. *Escape* is cited by the majority of critics and scholars surveyed for this article as the most significant post-1989 portrayal of the PRL. It is set in the period between 1985 and 1989, again an under-represented time in post-1989 Polish cinema, and is also one of the most contested and ambiguous filmic resources of collective remembering, where even its possible ambiguity is a site of contest.<sup>6</sup> The third film, *The Primate*, is also third on the list of box-office successes of 2000. It constitutes a particularly powerful example of the use of the communist past to legitimise the current social, cultural, and political status quo. It is set in the last four years of the Stalinist period (1953-1956) and centers on the imprisonment of Cardinal Wyszyński (Andrzej Seweryn), one of the most vocal figures in the Catholic Church's struggle against the oppressions of the communist regime.

Discussions of the communist past, including those contained in the films analysed here, shift between different evaluations of the positions taken by the so-called “us” in the communist times and the oppressive “them.” So, before engaging the three main film examples in more detail, this article will first outline fundamental types of post-1989 evaluations of the PRL and “our” role in it.

#### The PRL: Compromise and Duality

In films about the PRL made after 1989, there is a clear distinction between the communist oppressors, otherwise known as “them,” and the victims of oppressions, commonly identified as “us.” “Us” in this instance usually encompasses almost everyone in the Third Republic (that is, the Polish post-communist state), with the exception of a few public figures who are useful as a physical manifestation of “them.” The insistence on this division in Polish films goes counter to other media trends in post-1989 Poland. For instance, in a commemorative article on the PRL, which describes the nostalgia for the PRL’s aesthetics inspired by a popular exhibition in 2000 of PRL artefacts, also includes the following statement by Zdzisław Pietrasik, a renowned post-1989 journalist, social commentator, and film critic, who also lived through the PRL:

... it was a system ideal for average citizens. It absolved *them* [my italics; note that Pietrasik places himself outside of “average citizens”] of responsibility for the state, assigning them the role of extras participating in the fictitious ritual of democracy. The majority took part in this mystification without any resistance just so they could be left in peace and retain the right to a realisation of their dreams of a (very) small stability. (9)<sup>7</sup>

In a more explanatory vein, Czesław Robotycki differentiates between at least two types of writing about the communist past of Poland in his essay on the anthropology of the communist past and its tools:

Black and white schemata do not suffice to understand the fate of Poland and the motives of her inhabitants. That is why a sociologist would point to two types of writing histories of the People’s Republic: a political one that describes the system and its functioning, and a social one that shows how the society was reacting to evolving forms of oppression and how people realised their smaller or bigger daily goals. At the same time, the intersection of these two dimensions was unavoidable in the practice of everyday life, and it is only in this context that the many forms of social conformism of people living in that regime may be understood. (66)

Robotycki’s explanation carries some validity, but does not explain the mechanism by which the line between “them” and “us” becomes mythologised.

One fascinating account that highlights the mobility of the line separating the communist oppressing “them” and the active anti-systemic “us” comes from the set of interviews with prominent Polish actors and directors collected by Roman and Sabat concerning their “boycott” of television during Martial Law in 1981. On the one hand, there exists a story of the spontaneous solidarity of actors and directors, refusing to co-operate with a television industry that is seen as a mouthpiece of the abusive government. On the other hand, many actors were abroad during Martial Law (for example, Bogusław Linda, Krystyna

Janda) and for others it was a boycott by proxy, caused by the decline in production activity in television at the time of and immediately after Martial Law. Still others, such as Andrzej Wajda, pursued a temporary compromise that made it possible to finish the fifteen films that were close to completion— including Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation* (*Przesłuchanie*, 1982; released 1989),<sup>8</sup> Janusz Zaorski's *The Mother of Kings* (*Matka Królów*, 1982; released 1987), Jerzy Domaradzki's *The Big Run* (*Wielki bieg*, 1981; released 1987), and other films that ended up being “shelved” for a few years before they were allowed to be shown in public. In other words, the narrative of actors' and directors' solidarity against the oppressive state is incomplete because for many of them that solidarity was not entirely an outcome of conscious political or ideological protest, but was a part of their individual professional trajectories and opportunities that presented themselves (or not) at a convenient time. This is not to pass a fundamental ethical judgement, but rather to emphasize the tendency of narratives to homogenise a set of events to be remembered by contemporaries and generations to come.

Following from that argument and adapting it to life in the PRL Jerzy Płazewski, an “old-guard” film critic, is more accurate than Robotycki in labelling the compromises of every-day life as a “philosophy of survival” in his review of Zanussi's *In Full Gallop* (18). Zanussi's film is semi-autobiographical and offers a telling metaphor of the duality of private and public life as experienced under communism. James V. Wertsch describes this duality in his study of Russian recollections of the communist past as “internal immigration,” a process in which the true opinions and views of individuals are hidden from the public sphere and only expressed, if at all, in the security of the private (138-148). The Protagonist in *In Full Gallop*, aunt Idalia, creates for herself a double identity amidst post-war administrative chaos. She is at once her Catholic and aristocratic self, and her own fictitious communist twin sister, who makes living in communist Poland more bearable because of her affiliation with the system. Idalia has two identification cards, and she works two shifts at the local post office—one as herself and one as her twin-sister—to support her passion for horses, which in itself belongs to the bygone capitalist era of pre-war Poland. This duality of existence is interpreted by Bożena Janicka and Kamil Rudziński as permissible because of Idalia's aristocratic upbringing, which places her in a zone untouchable by the new system, regardless of how much she presses against it (2002). From Janicka's argument it follows that compromises like Idalia's are excusable if they are executed by those on the “good” side of the “us” and “them” divide. The reversal of the strict valorisation that comes from this divide never occurs in the Polish cinema of the first 15 post-communist years. To be anti-communist and preferably an aristocrat is “good” and to be a communist is irrevocably “bad.”

Co-existing with the nostalgia for communist aesthetics and cultural artefacts is an underlying reluctance in films of this period to evaluate the communist era in terms other than heroic acts of opposition, the absurdity and injustices of the system, and unavoidable utilitarian compromises by characters inhabiting “our” side. Writing about Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), Mateusz Werner, a younger generation film critic, gives one explanation of that reluctance when he says:

Nostalgic cinema [of the *Good Bye Lenin!* type] is not possible in Poland, because no one is concerned with the character who is central to that genre: a “noble commie” believing in the “ideals of socialism”.... Second, the Germans can play sentimental pieces with a clear conscience because they made a clear cut with the past. They got rid of the people of the old order

from all institutions. They opened Stasi archives. They established new laws. [In Poland] such far-reaching changes have not occurred. (2004: 32)

Similarly, Leszek Koczanowicz, a Polish philosopher, outlines some paradoxes of Polish transitions in the post-1989 period. To him, drawing the line between the communists of the old regime and the non-communists of the new regime is impossible for a multitude of reasons. First, the new Poland eventuated from the talks of the Round Table in 1989, which brought together the communist government and the anti-communist Solidarity movement. The presence of each side at the talks legitimised the other side, and recognised the input of each side into the political, economic, and social transitions to come. Second, the incomplete and ambiguous state of security police archives made it much more difficult than in, for instance, the GDR (East Germany) to determine who might have been the old state's collaborator. Furthermore, again according to Koczanowicz, while many names in the security police's books are those of opposition members, old Party members are the only people beyond suspicion of being agents of the security police because it was against its rules to recruit them (265). Additionally, in 1993 at least one third of the current Polish political elite was said to have belonged to the old political elite (Wasilewski 167). *Summa summarum*, the extent of political and ideological intersections, on the one hand, may be a factor preventing the portrayal of "good commies" and, on the other, it also explains the urge to sharpen the divisions between the good oppositional "us" and the "bad" communist "them" wherever possible, as well as the tendency to downplay the nature and/or degree of the "necessary" compromises outlined earlier.

Despite Marek Haltof's hopeful claim in 2002 that black-and-white portrayals of the past were gone from Polish cinema (217), they remain very much in demand for reasons explained above and are likely to remain so until the collective memory of the PRL becomes history or those who lived through it complete the process of working through it and reconciling with it. Even if some filmmakers and critics would deem the distinction between good oppositionists and bad commies obsolete, almost all films about the PRL made between 1989 and 2004 rely on that division.<sup>9</sup> In this context, nostalgia for the past seems even more problematic as is any explanation of the strong sentiments for Gierek's decade (Pietsranik 6). Possibly this view stems from a comparison of the standard of life as perceived "now" with that of the romanticised PRL of the "Gierek era." Or it might stem from a general narrative predisposition within the Polish public/popular sphere, which was formed by and in Polish Romanticism and which has been pivotal for national narratives for over two centuries.

These and other dilemmas remain unresolved 15 years after the fall of communism in the public/popular sphere, as well as in a form of Polish film that rarely ventures to embrace the communist past with all its complexities and intricacies. As stated earlier, all films about the communist past made after 1989 have not so much projected history as it was, as they have reflected the ideological climates in which they were made.

### Cinema as a Memory of the PRL

Two films that are often invoked as proposing a more balanced, "truer" concept of the communist past are Grzegorz Królikiewicz's *Pekosiński's Case* (*Przypadek Pekosińskiego*, 1993) and Barbara Sass's *Temptation* (*Pokuszenie*, 1995). *Pekosiński's Case* is based on a true story of a man with no apparent origin and an inexplicable talent for chess. (**Fig. 2**) Pekosiński arrives from nowhere and is tempted by various conflicted forces in the PRL—the Party's intriguing protectorate and the not always accommodating Catholic Church. In his

final act of self-discovery, which is never to be completed, Pekosiński accepts the Virgin Mary as his mother and protector. This act, according to Tadeusz Lubelski, a renowned Polish film scholar, defines the psychotherapeutic premise of *Pekosiński's Case* (4-9). Yet, this way of interpreting Pekosiński's final resolve is valid only from a vantage point that accommodates the Virgin Mary as an acceptable, or in fact desirable, identity-formation device. In 1993, the Church was still only beginning to formalise the seat of its institutionalised political and social powers in post-PRL Poland, so Pekosiński's story was not only a story of his past, but also of the past that validated the changes happening at the time of the film's release in Poland.

*Temptation*, by comparison, offers a more ambiguous take on the past through a story of a young woman whose devotion and love for a man is tested by the fact that he is a high-ranking priest and she—as a nun serving him in his government-imposed seclusion—is tempted by government officials to collaborate against him. The film is inspired by the story of Cardinal Wyszyński's imprisonment, as is Kotlarczyk's *The Primate* analysed in more detail later. Yet, *Temptation's* unresolved ending, in which the nun is possibly abandoned by both (ideological) players—the Church and the communist system—points to a tacit anti-clerical undercurrent in post-1989 Poland involving people unimpressed with the overpowering presence of the Catholic Church in Polish public life. *Temptation* is also another film that points to the larger complexities of communist and post-communist realities. To some commentators this suggested a greater than hoped for fluidity in the distinction between an oppressive “them” and a victimised but eventually victorious “us” (Kurpiewski 82), a distinction that is made irrevocably clear in films like *Escape from Cinema “Freedom.”*

#### Last Moments of the PRL Close Up: *Escape from Cinema “Freedom”*

For Marczewski, *Escape* is self-proclaimed auto-therapy, created after the director's return from his tenure in the Copenhagen Film School. It was meant to allow him to release the anger brewing in him since the introduction of Martial Law in 1981 (qtd. Sobolewski, 2004: 65). Filming was finished in April 1990, around the time the Polish Parliament passed the bill abolishing censorship. The film, a striking example of meta-cinema, centers on the figure of a film censor (Janusz Gajos), disillusioned by his profession and by his unrealised professional longing to be a film critic, who comes across his greatest professional challenge: characters in a new Polish film, *Daybreak (Jutrzenka)*, screened in a cinema in Łódź called “Freedom” rebel against their script and refuse to carry on as they should according to the film's final version. (Fig. 3) *Daybreak* is the story of a blind woman, Małgorzata (Teresa Marczewska, Marczewski's wife), who recovers her sight after an operation by her filmic husband. As she does so, her father is supposed to die of a heart attack, and he is the first character to rebel against the script that demands his undignified death. After his act of rebellion, with every consecutive screening of the film-within-a-film, the characters of *Daybreak* descend further and further into anarchy.

*Escape* starts with a medium shot of the censor talking to a group of people seated in the darkness. He seems to be tired but content when he explains that “a good censor should be an artist” and that “after the institution of censorship is abolished, its responsibilities will fall on you.” For a very brief moment, in a close-up, he looks straight into the camera as if the viewer was one of the listeners in his on-screen audience. The cameraman suggested the opening scene to the director as a way of explaining the institution of censorship—if it needed to be explained—to a foreign, for instance American, viewer. It is also the first

indication of the breakdown between reality and fiction that will follow. Here the censor addresses the film's viewers directly; later he enters *Daybreak*, the title of the film-within-a-film, after "Tom Baxter," a character from *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985) comes into *Daybreak* as well from *The Purple Rose*, when it and *Daybreak* are accidentally projected on the same screen at the same time. This is one of very few instances of meta-film being used in Polish cinema. Unlike the characters in *The Purple Rose*, those of *Daybreak* do not expose their one-dimensionality, providing instead a rebellious filmic antidote to the "real" world in *Escape*. By not considering the option of leaving *Daybreak* to return to what is "real" in *Escape*, the characters (and the director) suggest the superiority of celluloid existence over the enslaved and corrupted reality outside it. Tom Baxter, or rather the actor Jeff Daniels, is no less one-dimensional in his lack of comprehension of Polish reality than is his character in *The Purple Rose*. Although the two films play with collapsing the "fourth wall" of cinema, *The Purple Rose* eventually exposes only the celluloid illusion of the film-within-film, while in *Escape* both the characters in the film-within-a-film and the censor in the frame story abandon their respective roles.

The challenge that the censor faces in *Escape* comes not so much from his loss of control over the characters in *Daybreak*, but from the audience's enthusiasm for these characters' claim to freedom. *Daybreak's* audiences applaud when the father, a music professor, says to them "you can stick it up your arse" in response to what he perceives as an undignified life. He also says "fuck off" to his film daughter's husband, to the great amusement of the on-screen audience and the protests of a woman who screams "there are children here". The professor's response is "drown the children." All these exchanges provoke laughter from the audience watching *Daybreak* in *Escape*, even laughter from the censor's assistant. But the exchanges are also significant because they anticipate changes in the accepted and expected linguistic register of the Polish popular cinema soon to come.

Suffering a physical breakdown as a result of this ordeal and the ambiguous demands of his professional life, the censor resolves the problems posed by *Daybreak* by having all of the tickets to all of the screenings "sold." This means that everything will continue as usual: *Daybreak* will not be officially subjected to censorship in any way and yet no one will be able to see it. However, he does not anticipate that the film has already caused significant ripples that take the shape of an epidemic of people singing Mozart's *Requiem*, with affected people bursting into spontaneous arias. The film has also aroused the interest of the "authorities." A dignitary from Warsaw (Michał Bajor) arrives to investigate the phenomenon. Using familiar communist rhetoric, he declares with distaste that what happens in *Daybreak* is reflective of the state of Polish cinema in general, which is slow-paced and full of banalities. He proclaims that all art is a fraud and that he does not mind being deceived by it, as long as it is the "real thing," a contradiction in itself. Then, instead of proposing a Soviet model of filmmaking, he praises Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* and orders it to be screened immediately, at which point Tom Baxter crosses over to *Daybreak* and demands to call his agent in New York. This causes great amusement for the characters of *Daybreak*, who know that such a phone call would be a "mission impossible" in communist Poland, where international phone calls had to be pre-booked, sometimes days in advance. Baxter's act of crossing over presents a double meta-filmic effect: not only do the actors of *Daybreak* communicate with their audience in *Escape*, but also recent Hollywood meta-fiction (as evidenced in *The Purple Rose*) crosses over into the fiction turned anarchic reality of *Daybreak*.

*Escape* finishes with the frustrated censor's attempt to join the characters of *Daybreak* when he learns that the officials are planning to burn the film print. After the censor gets onto the rooftop, where all the film's characters now reside inside *Daybreak*, he is confronted by an actor who reminds him of all the characters and scenes he censored in his career. The actor calls for the censor's punishment, but the censor keeps repeating that he does not remember any of this, a sign of traumas to come in post-1989 Poland. These calls for punishment from those wronged by the old system are countered by acts of forgetting by those who maintained that system. At this stage of Polish cinema, forgiving a humanised communist was not an option. Banned from the rooftops, abandoned by Małgorzata, who is the only character sympathetic to him because he helped to launch her career, the censor gets out of *Daybreak* and returns to the real city of Łódź. He slowly walks back to his place observing life in the streets, which goes on as if nothing has changed. In the last scene, he draws the curtains of his apartment and sits in the dark, with only the contours of his face visible.

The absurdity of the film's plots, according to Marczewski, reflects the absurdity of the PRL. In his view, people who lived through the absurdity of the PRL accepted it, and now they have difficulty separating from it. Hence, the nostalgic sentiment for those times.<sup>10</sup> For Marczewski, *Escape* is not the only way of expressing his frustration with the compromises and passivity of the PRL's inhabitants. In an interview conducted a few months after the film's release, Marczewski claimed that everyone in the PRL was guilty, even—or especially—those who made films against the system because they used censorship as a promotional vehicle (qtd. Sułkowski, 1990: 11). This opinion is echoed in his famous statement: "Friends, did you really have to make all these films?" (Adam Mickiewicz Institute), uttered by Marczewski at a Film Festival forum in Gdynia. A year earlier, in another interview he proclaimed that everyone had had a choice of not cooperating with the system, of avoiding compromise. Interestingly, however, when probed by his interviewer, Bożena Janicka, he also admitted that he was fortunate to have had the option of not compromising by working abroad (Janicka 3-5). In other words, he managed to escape the "philosophy of survival" by opting out rather than by objecting to it directly, *in situ*.

Similarly, the majority of the characters inhabiting the rooftops at the end of *Escape* migrated there after they were censored out *Daybreak*, which means that they must have attempted to accommodate themselves to the system. Yet, Marczewski's film implies that the victims are the just "us" of the film and there is no forgiveness for collaborators, who must suffer punishment as a result of their crimes. According to Marczewski, there were not 352 censors at the end of the PRL, but 40 million of them (Furdal 26), and *Escape* is about all of them. Given Marczewski's insistence on this point, it is surprising that Tadeusz Lubelski singles out the censor as the bearer of a responsibility that cannot be escaped (2004: 149). Sobolewski, by comparison, sees Marczewski's treatment of the censor in *Escape* as open to forgiveness (2000: 124-126). In both cases, the reading by the commentators is different from the one intended by Marczewski and avowed in his interviews, and is in line with the reaction to the film described by Mirosław Przyłipiak, a prominent Polish film scholar:

I was at the festival [of Polish Feature Films in Gdynia] in 1990 or 1989 when Marczewski showed this film... Marczewski had not made a film for ten years during communism. The implications were obvious. Those who made films, sold out. Kieślowski in particular was attacked as someone who kept making films.... At the press conference there were film journalists, filmmakers, all those people who had lived [in Poland] in the 1980s [and]

wrote articles, made programs, shot films.... All of them could identify with the censor because they had worked in that system. And all of them identified with the characters on the roof [who kept their morals—metaphorically—by not engaging with the system at all]. (Przylipek, 2004)

Putting aside the accusatory tone of the film and its formal absurdities reflective of the general irrationalities of living in the PRL, the People's Republic shown in *Escape* is a world of grey streets, long dark corridors with closed doors on both sides, and interiors that immediately suggest the social status of their inhabitants. For instance, the censor's flat is bleak, simple, filled with antiques and an expensive sound system. It is almost entirely furnished in black and white, with some unpacked boxes suggesting a state of impermanence. Offices are dark and cluttered, but tidy. There is nothing outstanding or intrinsically "PRL-ish" about the people who inhabit them. Men in power are weak because their power comes only from the position they hold, not from their personal strength or charisma. Women are secretaries or femmes fatales (the censor's ex-wife) or young rebels (the censor's daughter). The most humane and the only strong, compassionate character in the film is Małgorzata in *Daybreak*, although she also succumbs to the pressures of her loyalty to the non-collaborators on the roof.

In general, *Escape* is a hasty assessment of the last days of the PRL, when freedom was near. While freedom is already part of the world of *Daybreak*, the onlookers in *Escape*—passive and not so passive participants in the communist system—can only amuse themselves by attempting to look into the world of the free on the screen in the film-within-a-film. Although they burst into singing Mozart's *Requiem* (or *Requiem* for the censor) from time to time, which also may be taken to be a sign of freedom, that type of rebellion is less specifically politically motivated than that of *Daybreak*'s characters, who reject the hegemony of the (communist) scriptwriter. At the same time, the dominance of the PRL's power structure is not itself convincing. Its representatives are exhausted by it (the censor) or removed from it (the security police official, who "likes the people," but only from the height of his office's window). The young assistant to the censor is incompetent and visibly confused about the ideological underpinnings of what he stands for. When the old censor says that the demonstrators in front of the movie-theater "Freedom" "are waiting for a miracle, a different government, better children," the assistant has an immediate response, miscalculated and impassioned: "I would fucking let them..." But by the time he arrives at the end of this unfinished utterance, it is clear that he is no longer convinced that he really would want to prevent "them" from obtaining "a miracle, a different government, better children."

According to Marzewski, in her unwavering and consequently confident disgust for her father's chosen profession, the censor's daughter's shows with whom the future lies. Sadly, even the censor's attempts to regain his daughter's respect go unanswered, and instead of being allowed to speak with his daughter when he arrives at night at her student hotel, he is greeted by a portrait of the Polish Pope, John Paul II. Given Marzewski's own stand, expressed in 1990, that in the new Poland the only real threat of censorship is likely to come from the Catholic Church (qtd. Sobolewski, 1990: 5), including the Pope's image in *Escape* makes it into an even more powerful symbol. On the one hand, the Polish Pope guards the censor's daughter from her father's untimely visit, and, on the other, the Pope's image is given undue powers—powers to guide toward and through freedom, but also powers to censure. The world created by Marzewski leaves its viewer with a sense of relief that it does

not constitute current reality. In the world of the film, where the blame is generously distributed amongst its participants, there are no winners, nor are there any true heroes.

### Martyrdom in the Stalinist Past: *The Primate*

When Teresa Kotlarczyk spoke of her new film in 1999, she expressed her strong commitment not to adhere to the “heroic genre” when making a film about Cardinal Wyszyński (Andrzej Seweryn) and the three years he spent under arrest by the communist authorities of Bierut’s government. (Fig. 4) Yet, at the same time, Kotlarczyk spoke of her admiration for the Cardinal, who was not broken by his imprisonment and who deserves the admiration and following he gets (Sobieszek 118). She believed that showing the strength of Wyszyński’s soul and the authenticity of emotions were the imperatives that guided her through the decision-making process when shooting and editing the film. Not all viewers, however, found this imperative of “authenticity” convincing. While Bogdan Sobieszek, a film reviewer, insisted that the film is “completely faithful to facts” (117), another reviewer, Bartosz Żurawiecki, observed: “Polish artists love to puff themselves up. They fall into an exaltation that is especially unhealthy when its source lies in national sanctities and taboos. This leads to a film like *The Primate* by Teresa Kotlarczyk—a life of a saint who has never been to the bathroom” (32). Similarly unimpressed reviews came from other commentators. For instance:

It is obvious that a film about Wyszyński has to be a hagiographic film. The question is “at which level of hagiography is it going to stop?” Is it going to be awfully hagiographic, or maybe just a little bit hagiographic? But it cannot be anything else.... When someone makes a film, ... they have to have certain freedoms. At the beginning of working on a film, everything has to be allowed. When one makes this kind of film, not everything is allowed. (Przyłipiak, 2004)

Even if the three quarters of a million of tickets sold to *The Primate* were largely due to Church-based promotion, *The Primate* was the most watched Polish cinematic release of 2001, despite critical comments like those above. It was also a story with significance for the historical narratives of post-1989 Poland.

Cardinal Wyszyński, the hero of *The Primate* was one of the most visible, if not outstanding, diplomats of the Catholic Church in the PRL, whose standing continues beyond his death in 1981. Stefan Wyszyński became Cardinal at the beginning of 1953. He was not allowed by the Polish authorities to travel to the Vatican to receive the ordination and was put under arrest by the government of Bolesław Bierut in September of the same year, six months after Stalin’s death. Unwavering in his faith and his belief that the Catholic Church was the main defender of freedom in communist Poland, Wyszyński used his release in 1956 to negotiate significant concessions for the Church, a fact omitted from the film, which focuses on the hagiographic aspects of Wyszyński’s imprisonment.

The title of the film itself positions its story in the much larger historical context of the millennium. It refers to the title “Primate of the Millennium,” used for Cardinal Wyszyński in 1966, on the 1,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polish acceptance of Christianity. The film relies to a large extent on notes written by the Cardinal himself during his imprisonment. The register and style of these notes, however, make them into not so much a factual text, as one inspired by religious devotion and the pathos allowed under its aegis. Already in the

introduction Cardinal Wyszyński says he is glad that his arrest eliminates his disappointment for not yet having received “the honor ... of going through concentration camps and prisons” (15). A few sentences later he reminisces on a lesson from his liturgy teacher, in which priest Antoni Bogdański warned of the “unimaginable” suffering that the priests will have to go through in the not too distant future (15). Several pages later, Cardinal Wyszyński contradicts his earlier statement by saying that it was the Polish state that accused him of willingness to become a martyr, while it was not his intention—although he does not exclude such a possibility (19).

The rhetoric of immanent, if not desirable, martyrdom is steeped in Catholic Messianism, closely linked to traditional Romantic nationalism; yet, in general, the stylistics of religious elevation find limited appreciation in someone not devoted to a similar cause. The discursive specificity of this Messianism is reflected, for instance, in Cardinal Wyszyński’s description of one of the fifteen significant events of his three-year imprisonment: “8 December 1953—Imprisoned Primate commits an act of spiritual surrender to the Mother of God and places his fate completely in Her hands. In this act he agrees to every fate assigned [to him] by God” (9). For a believer, this statement has factual if not material value. To someone not versed in the discourse of Polish Catholicism, this statement’s significance may not be so obvious. The literalness with which it is approached in the film indicates the type of viewer the filmmakers expect for *The Primate*. Again, while obvious to a believer, the Cardinal’s spiritual surrender to the Mother of God in the film, may seem to an unsuspecting viewer to be a case of the Cardinal’s over-interpretating the sight of a villager with a baby as a sign from the Mother of God. So, while scenes like this may be powerful for Polish Catholic audiences, the way *The Primate* “remembers” the past for those outside this discourse may be—or, as Polish Catholicism evolves and possibly moves out of the politicised public sphere, with time may become—different from the viewpoint intended by Kotlarczyk.

The film’s opening text, announcing the “ruthless repressions of the Catholic Church that existed legally in Poland” at the beginning of the 1950s and that “under the pretext of anti-state activities many bishops and priests were arrested and a large part of the church’s possessions was confiscated,” sets up expectations of factuality. This text is followed by scenes of *en masse* arrests, which were quickly pointed to by foreign commentators as lacking historical validity (Manetti, 2001). The music of Zygmunt Konieczny, who also composed the score for *Escape*, complements the *film noir* style of cinematography, in which statesmen in glamorous hats, coats, and expensive looking leather gloves confiscate Catholic artefacts, and cast long shadows on the windows of the churches and convents raided at night.

The story of Cardinal Wyszyński’s imprisonment is told from the moment he gives an inspiring sermon to a crowd in the church of St. Anna through his arrest, imprisonment, and release, and is followed by archival footage of Cardinal Wyszyński at the Pope’s feet. Cardinal Wyszyński is assigned two fellow-prisoners, a priest Stanisław Skorodecki (Zbigniew Zamachowski) and a nun Maria Leonia Graczyk (Maja Ostaszewska), both hastily transported from other prisons to join the Cardinal. While Sister Leonia surrenders to the Cardinal’s oppressors, agreeing to relay information to them about his movements in exchange for some oranges and other items difficult to obtain in Stalinist Poland, Skorodecki in the course of his imprisonment becomes the Cardinal’s assistant and confessor.

Ironically—though probably accidentally—Zamachowski, the actor palying Skorodecki, had a supporting role in *Escape*, but on the other side of the political divide.

Another actor with a connection to *Escape* is Krzysztof Wakuliński, who played an eye surgeon in *Daybreak* and who became an irresponsible womaniser “high on freedom” soon after the rebellion. (Fig. 5) In *The Primate*, Wakuliński plays a solemn colonel who almost never surfaces during the day and whose face has qualities of Humphrey Bogart. Depending on whether *The Primate* is viewed as a portrayal of a Stalinist moment or as a sign of the times in which it was produced, a comparison of the roles played by Zamachowski and Wakuliński can be interpreted either as indicative of the exhaustion of the initial euphoria of freedom or as indicative of the negative evaluation of the PRL of the early 1950s. The juxtaposition of shots filled with the Cardinal’s followers with shots of dark scenes, alienated close-ups of Bolesław Bierut and his co-operators behind pieces of furniture that overwhelm and minimise people points in the direction of emphasising the disjunctive rupture from undesirable pasts. (Fig. 6)

*The Primate* represents a past that is dominated by fear. The Cardinal and his allies are afraid that their courage might not be great enough to withstand their incarceration. At the same time, the representatives of various state and police institutions are afraid that the Cardinal’s power might withstand theirs. The first group has the moral high ground and cooperates with each other, while the second is shown as alienated, emerging from darkness and sinking back into it once they deliver their lines. (Fig. 7) There is never any ambiguity about where viewers’ sentiment should lie. The Cardinal not only does not neglect his Christian and priestly duties, but from the beginning he warns against “the sin of self-neglect,” and establishes the rules of his behaviour by reminding himself and Father Skorodecki that “one should not complain or hold anything against anyone.” In the moment of his greatest weakness, when he learns that his communication with his sick father is limited by his captors, he gathers all his strength to say: “God, help me not to learn how to hate.” His captors, meanwhile, remain manipulative, yet weak and directionless at the same time.

The world of *The Primate* is predominantly grey, austere. The ideological affiliation of the male characters determines how they are represented. Their enjoyment of life and power to live also seem to depend on their ideological allegiances. In the traditionally unifying moment of Polish Christmas Eve, one of the communist guards thanks the Cardinal for his blessing, a brief humanising moment, before the guard steps back into the shadowy corner of his guard-post. Women, by contrast, are scarce in *The Primate*. The only woman with a significant physical presence in the film, Sister Leonia, is not so much treacherous as unworthy of the great responsibility bestowed on her by fate and the state. (Fig.8) She has nothing in common with the Mother of God. She is weak. At the same time, weakness, as it is used in the film, has a humanising effect. The evil of the communist state stems from weakness, yet it is not excused by it. It is the unwavering faith and strength of the likes of Cardinal Wyszyński that allowed for Polish deliverance from the PRL. That univocal message is a desirable commodity in post-1989 Poland as it attempts to come to terms with its uncomfortable past.

#### Consumable Memories of Gomułka’s PRL: *There and Back*

In line with the heroic mode of constructing and delivering the communist past in post-1989 Polish film, Wójcik’s *There and Back* received a ten-minute standing ovation at the Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia in 2002. It has been described as “a story of a brave hero in a struggle against the security police” (Kłopotowski 66). The habit of seeing the communist past in terms of heroic struggle seems to have replaced the earlier way of seeing it as a space of helplessness and inescapable oppression. This may be reflective of

budding social empowerment, which began to emerge from the chaos, uncertainties, and disappointments of the first phases of socio-cultural transitions after 1989. Yet, in the words of Wójcik himself, *There and Back* is about two men who are “at variance” with reality. Such a comment seems to place the film in the wide pool of “outsider” films, which is in accord with Wójcik’s self-proclaimed commercialist desires; to him cinema by definition is a plebeian art that exists most of all to bring entertainment (Kornatowska 6-7).

The commercial promise of the *There and Back* lies in the promotional links of the film with the mystery of the “Polish bank robbery of the century” and/or with a “real” story about an ex-anti-communist Home Army (AK) soldier who is denied a passport, which prevents him from being reunited with his English wife and daughter, first in England and then in Australia. The factual setting of the film is accentuated by two texts: one at the beginning, which situates the action in Łódź in 1965, and the other at the end, informing the viewer of the subsequent fate of the protagonist, a talented surgeon, Andrzej Hoffman (Janusz Gajos). (Fig. 9). When compared to his role as the censor in *Escape*, the casting of Gajos in the role of the doctor can be seen as indicative of the changes Polish society underwent in the first 12 years post-1989. Even if Hoffman is not a courageous hero, even if his actions are at first motivated by helplessness and then by desperation, it is reassuring that in the newer visions of the communist past it is slowly becoming possible to exercise internal freedoms, in however limited a form. The framing of the main character of *There and Back* not only fulfils the need to resolve and systemize the communist past, but it is also dictated by the requirements of crime drama, which—given the genre’s popularity in Poland—facilitates the commodification of that past and a resolution of its traumas by invoking its generic familiarity.

Hoffman’s life story unravels in the first scenes of the film. It is told by his hospital superior as well as to Niewczas (Olaf Lubaszenko), a security police officer who keeps trying to talk Hoffman into becoming a security police informer. His efforts are unsuccessful. Hoffman keeps placing himself on the “right” side of the political divide. Hoffman spent some time in prison after the war, presumably as a result of his involvement in the Home Army. After his release in 1956, he refused to join the Party and to participate in the May Day celebrations, and kept reapplying for his passport so he could at least attempt to find his wife and daughter in England. He learns from Niewczas that his wife’s letters to him in prison were intercepted and that she never re-married, as he had been led to believe. He writes her, she calls him from Australia, where she now lives with their daughter, and the call gets cut off when he starts to explain that it is not easy to leave Poland. Soon after that, in an act of desperation, Hoffman consents to be part of a bank-van robbery, proposed by an unemployed painter, Piotr Jurek—also known as Piotr Klimek (Jan Frycz)—whom he knows from his Home Army years. (Fig. 10) The robbery goes wrong and despite Piotr’s earlier assurance that no one would be hurt, Piotr shoots the driver of the van when he aims his pistol at Hoffman. Hoffman ends up operating on the driver. He refuses to accept a passport and ticket to Sweden that Piotr bought him because “there was to be no blood.” Eventually, he is called upon at night by the security police to operate on the daughter of the official responsible for refusing Hoffman his passport. Hoffman accepts his offer of help and the last scene of the film shows Hoffman on a plane to Australia.

The communist world of Gomułka’s PRL in *There and Back* is—again—grey, beige, dark brown, and austere. There is not a trace of the *film noir* dress code that punctuates *The Primate*, yet *There and Back*’s set design is not devoid of the communist charm so much favoured by the nostalgia for communist aesthetics. Hoffman’s own flat contains a

combination of antiques and communist pieces of furniture, old photographs, drawings, and peeling pinkish wallpaper. That type of interior suggests a familial heritage that carries signs of a more prosperous pre-war capitalist past and an impoverished communist present. To accentuate Hoffman's difference from his vodka-drinking neighbours, he is shown to be partial to a glass of cognac in a time of need, which in Poland would imply a higher social standing.

Several internet reviewers of *There and Back* seem to be convinced that the film is set in Stalinist Poland, which suggests that the PRL might slowly be becoming a unified historical period, rather than a set of collective memories differentiated by its phases. In Wójcik's film, "our" side—that is, the anti- or non-communist side—is no longer identified with the high moral ground or with the taking of a superior ethical stand. Klimek, it turns out, is the person responsible for Hoffman's earlier imprisonment. Klimek's dubious ethics (leaving the scene after damaging a parked bike, insisting that shooting at the van driver is wrong only because the driver might recognize them) make the complimentary or even idealised view of that side of the ideological divide more problematic. Regardless of these changes of the representation of the "non-communist" side, it will take some time before Polish cinema creates a similarly problematised portrayal of a communist.

### Conclusion

The films analysed in this article support the view that these films answer the social and cultural needs of the time in which they were created, rather than being a faithful representation of those earlier times. Whether they portray the memory of a particular period of that past or treat that period historically, the narratives that underpin these films move away from the Romanticism, pessimistic visions of a helpless, victimised, and oppressed nation and its individuals. Furthermore, in several recent films where the action takes place against the backdrop of communist Poland, that backdrop is reduced to an aesthetic presence without any judgement. In some of them, the communist past is no longer despised; it is neither oppressive nor heroic. In Krauze's *My Nikifor*, the events play out with party slogans in the background while a Party opportunist facilitates the future international success of Nikifor, a handicapped, flea-infested primitive painter—played by actress Krystyna Feldman, who is astonishingly convincing in the male role. In Piekorz's *The Welts*, the introduction of Martial Law in 1981, which serves as the backdrop of one temporal setting of the film, is not a pretext for ideologically courageous acts, but simply a background to the everyday lives of a father-son relationship that is at the center of the film. The only moment of ideological or systemic demarcation is the depiction of the consumerist poverty of everyday life.

Films like *Escape from Cinema* "Freedom," *The Primate*, and *There and Back* not only populate the past and its enacted memory with post-communist noble non-communists ("us"), they also constitute the retrospective projection of an acceptable "us" onto the past. In most cases, this projection to a large extent rids post-communist Poland of ambiguities that could fragment the narrative of the Polish nation as it exists 15 years after the end of the communist system. It is also worth noting that in many cases these films are a way of venting anger and frustration with the injustices of the old system, a process characteristic of post-traumatic processes.

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<sup>2</sup> A few recent films are notable exceptions, using the Polish People's Republic only as a backdrop to their story. See, for example, Magdalena Pierkorz's *The Welts (Pręgi)*, 2004) and Krzysztof Krauze's *My Nikifor (Mój Nikifor)*, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Several Polish films that were released in 2004 treat life in the PRL as no different from any other place. This could be the first signs of the collective arrival at the completion stage of dealing with the PRL past, especially in the context of the progressive opening of the secret police's files, which were only selectively accessible before 2004.

<sup>4</sup> As the First Secretary and the Prime Minister of Poland in that period, Edward Gierek significantly increased Polish foreign debt, thus creating a temporary improvement in the life-style of the PRL's inhabitants.

<sup>5</sup> That attitude is obvious in a series of interviews published in 1991 with the communist leaders and participants—including Wojciech Jaruzelski, Jerzy Urban, and Kazimierz Barcikowski—of the Round Table talks. They reminisce candidly about the recent past and do not seem to be uncomfortable with their participation in the ruling elite of communist Poland. See Berezowski.

<sup>6</sup> This aspect of *Escape from Cinema "Freedom"* is discussed later in this article.

<sup>7</sup> Pietrasik paraphrases here the title of a well-known play, *Witnesses, or Our Small Stability (Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja)* by Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-), who wrote theatre of the absurd pieces ridiculing the lack of freedom in people's everyday lives, which are ruled by the pursuit of stability.

<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Bugajski's Canadian film *Clearcut* (1991), earned him there a similar notoriety as with the Polish state for *Interrogation*.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Krauze's *Long Weekend* (*Długi weekend*, 2004), a television feature screened at the 2004 Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia, portrays a couple who—having come from the opposite sides of the pre-1989 socio-political divide—decide to put aside their respective and superfluous ideologies so that they can get a house together as a prize in a blind-date television show.

<sup>10</sup> Marzewski in an interview released as part of the 2003 DVD *Escape from Cinema* "Freedom."