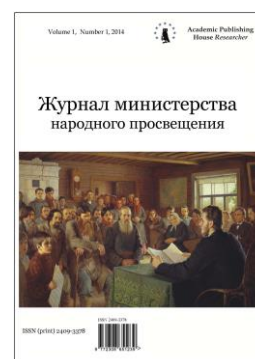


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Articles

Polish Cinema on the Eve of “Solidarity”

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Abstract

In the 1960s, Polish cinematography lost some of its leading artists, both the founders of the "Polish school" and young masters. In 1961, Andrzej Munk fell victim to a car crash. In 1967, actor No. 1 of Poland Zbigniew Cybulski died under the wheels of a train... In 1963, went to the West "prodigy of the Polish screen" Roman Polanski. In 1968, his example was followed by another young director and actor Jerzy Skolimowski. Later, one of the best Polish cameramen Jerzy Lipman, the director Aleksander Ford, talented cartoonists Jan Lenica and Walerian emigrated. During the whole decade of the seventies only one film by Wojciech Has was released. After spending several years abroad, Jerzy Kawalerowicz returned to Polish cinema only at the very end of the 1970s. Only one film in the seventies shot Tadeusz Konwicki... Of all the masters, only Andrzej Wajda continued to work fruitfully. So, in the 1970's new masters came to the fore, many of whom were born after the war. This article is about Polish films of 1970s. The main method is the hermeneutic analysis, including ideological, identification, iconographic, plot, and character analysis.

Keywords: Polish films, 1970s, movie, cinema, moral anxiety, film criticism, Poland.

1. Introduction

In the 1960s, Polish cinematography lost some of its leading artists, both the founders of the "Polish school" and young masters. In 1961, Andrzej Munk (*Eroika*, *Passenger*, etc.) fell victim to a car crash. In 1967, actor No. 1 of Poland Zbigniew Cybulski died under the wheels of a train... In 1963, went to the West "prodigy of the Polish screen" Roman Polanski (*Knife in the water*). In 1968, his example was followed by another young director and actor Jerzy Skolimowski (*Walkover*, *Barrier*). Later, one of the best Polish cameramen Jerzy Lipman (who shot *Canal*, *Ashes* and other classical tapes) and the director of the famous *Crusaders* Aleksander Ford emigrated. The talented cartoonists Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk preferred to work in the West...

Discussions about the films of Eva and Czeslaw Petelski, Witold Lesevich, Stanislaw Lenartowicz, Jan Rybkowski, Stanislaw Rózewicz and other older filmmakers were considerably hushed up. During the whole decade of the seventies only one film by Wojciech Has was released (*Sanatorium under the Hourglass*, 1974). After spending several years abroad, the author of *The Train* and *The Pharaoh* Jerzy Kawalerowicz only at the very end of the 1970s set up a retrodrama of *Death of the President* (1978) on the murder of Polish President Gabriel Narutowicz

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in 1923. Only one film in the seventies shot Tadeusz Konwicki, who once conquered the Venetian festival poetic *Last Day of Summer* (1959)...

Of all the masters, only Andrzej Wajda continued to work fruitfully, putting in the 1970s such significant movies as *Landscape after the Battle*, *Promised Land*, *Man of Marble*, etc.

So, in the 1970's new masters came to the fore, many of whom were born after the war. "Third Polish Cinema" was distinguished by "the desire to explore the spiritual world of its contemporary" (Kolodyazhnaya, 1974: 78).

2. Materials and methods

The research materials are Polish films of 1970s. The main method is the hermeneutic analysis, including ideological, identification, iconographic, plot, character analysis, etc. I have also analyzed film critics' articles related to these films.

3. Discussion and results

The Zanussi phenomenon

One of the most talented representatives of the "third Polish cinema" is rightfully considered to be Krzysztof Zanussi. "Conflicts of his works are always internal, we can say, spiritual, as it were, flowing secretly, without violent external manifestations", – wrote about the work R. Sobolev (Sobolev, 1979: 78).

But these words seem to me to be true only for the initial stage of creativity of K. Zanussi (*Structure of the Crystal*, 1969; *Behind the Wall*, 1971; *Role*, 1972; *Illumination*, 1973, etc.). Already in the *Quarterly Balance* (1974), seemingly impassive, filmed "under the document" subject tissue pierced the explosive episodes, where the heroine of the film (her role was played by Maya Komarowska) gave free rein to their restrained feelings, emotional splash.

The story of a married woman, suppressed by tedious work, unsettled life and relationships with her husband, in fact, more focused on the intellect, not the feelings of the audience. But still in the *Quarterly Balance* can be seen the origins of the fierce cinematography of the open conflict, which came to the director on the brink in the films *Constant* and *Contract*.

V. Kolodyazhnaya, in my opinion, precisely defined the main problem of K. Zanussi's creative work as the problem of "moral responsibility of man" (Kolodyazhnaya, 1974: 81). With each new film of this director became tougher, sharper and more emotional. And if the heroes of his first films were characterized by a certain isolation, isolation from the life of society, in-depth attention to their own inner world, in *Constant* and *Contract* came to the fore the problems of social. Heroes of Zanussi (he is also a screenwriter of his films) did not solve purely personal, intimate or scientific-philosophical issues here, but the conflict problems of the relationship between the individual and society.

K. Zanussi's films are always in the spotlight of Polish critics. Each of his new works causes controversy on the pages of the cinematographic press. Other critics, interpreting the director's work, attribute very controversial ideas to him. For example, Czeslaw Donzillo is sure that "Krzysztof Zanussi in all his films speaks of the finitude of resistance to individual moral qualities" (Donzillo, 1980: 6).

Let's try to understand the problems of *Constant* and *Contract*.

At first glance, *Constant* (1979) fully fits into the usual idea of K. Zanussi's films: indiscretion, restraint, "documentary" objectivity. "The film is edited with musical smoothness, with a mass of light blurredness, as if in passing captured, not designed for the effect" (Sobolewski, 1980: 8). However, there are also episodes of bursts in *Constant*: a nervous scene of burning a dead young Indian woman, when it is shown in close-up how ants are still running on a beautiful face, fleeing from the flames of a huge fire...

Polish critic Zbigniew Klaczynski believes that this scene "is associated with the motive of death, which in the movie comes back as a refrain in different ways; death in a fight with fate, the death of the closest person, taking away like a part of the life of those who were orphaned" (Klaczynski, 1980: 4). It seems to me that such far-reaching conclusions do not necessarily follow from the essence of the film.

The story of the young Vitek (Tadeusz Bradecki) is not a fatal story of death. On the contrary, the story of how a person strives to live with a *constant* of his morality, based on honesty, integrity and uncompromising.

Vitek is surprised and outraged to find that in hospitals doctors take bribes, and in the firm where he works, all sorts of machinations flourish. He struggles with all this, but he is defeated and decides to live "calmly" without interfering in anything. "In a crystal-clear hero there is no will to fight, no spiritual strength, no ability to improve the world around him" (Klaczynski, 1980: 4).

And here's the dramatic ending: Vitek, who finds a job at the construction site, carelessly drops down the bricks, and there, under the very wall of the house runs the baby... Stop-frame makes the bricks collapsing from the height of the bricks freeze in the air...

What is it? A symbol of the limb resistance to evil? There is no absolute constancy in life – constants – neither in the moral responsibility of a person, nor in the "moral turmoil", nor in an attempt to stay out of the way, complacency... That's what I think the director was thinking about.

The same problem of moral tranquillity and anxiety, responsibility not only for their own destiny, but also for the fate of society is even more acutely put Zanussi in the *Contract* (1980).

The *Contract* is a portrait of the Polish intelligentsia claiming to be a great society in Paris. Petty bustle, willingness to sell everyone and everything... The action of the film is compositionally tied at one dramatic wedding party at a chic country villa. The groom and the bride understand that their supposed marriage is a contract, is subordinated to purely material calculation. The bride runs away from under the crown, but guests (friends from Sweden, relatives from England, local businessmen) have already gathered for the celebration, and parents do not dare to cancel it...

The closed space of the villa helps the director to reveal the true essence of the guests – bribe takers, thieves, thieves, artfully hiding their essence under the mask of intellectualism and "modern morals". In fact, this "modernity" comes down to gluttony, drinking, sex, and most importantly – to the thirst for money, high positions, etc.

The film by K. Zanussi has many capacious metaphors and symbols. Here is just one episode.

... The company of guests decided to take a sled ride through the winter forest. Horses are running fast, and in the cart two former ballerinas are trying to sing a melody of dance from Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*... It turns out to be fake and ridiculous. And suddenly their duo as if picked up the music, sounding louder and louder. But why do the introduction tacts repeat themselves over and over again, and the melody doesn't start in any way? Musical running on the spot, acceleration without continuing enters into a significant counterpoint with a distorted melody, which is deduced by two faded primes. And the horses all carry them forward, and none of the guests knows that the master's son in despair lit the villa to destroy the symbol of prestige and well-being...

Cameraman Sławomir Idziak perfectly filmed the final of *Contract*. The fire is extinguished. Guests are going home. The bride walks through the woods alone, and suddenly she meets a beautiful dumpling. The operator, through the blurring of snow-covered branches, brings sad, clean eyes of a forest giant closer to us...

– *What should we do? How do we move on?* – asks the character.

And in return, the silent reproach of the deer's eyes...

Ahead of the 1981 events, Krzysztof Zanussi harshly, uncompromisingly, harshly denouncing the powers that be, posed difficult questions that are still without a clear answer...

And what about others?

Of course, it was not only Zanussi who in the 1970s touched upon the sharp edges of society's moral problems. There were other Polish directors next to him. For example, Jerzy Stefan Stawinski confirmed his reputation as a subtle connoisseur of psychology, an ironic storyteller who gave "serious topics" (scripts for *Channel*, *Eroica*, etc.) to the biggest directors in Poland, and preferred to put modest, chamber stuff. In 1973 Stawinski filmed his own story *Peak Time* – a sad parable about a man who all his life considered himself to be his favorite boss, husband, father, beloved lover, etc., but one day he found out that all this was a bluff...

In 1978, Eva and Czesław Petelski shot a hard drama *The Return Ticket* – the story of the sad fate of a peasant woman, in the hope of wealth going overseas to Canada...

Janusz Morgenstern in the drama *Need to kill this love* (1974), protecting the purity of feelings, denounced the commoner, sucking the main character of the film – a young guy who traded the poor bride-nurse for a promising increase in the love affair with the wife of the boss...

An alarming refrain of the film was a symbolic scene of friendship and enmity between a gunpowder warehouse guard and a dog. Lonely and gloomy man in rare moments of good mood feeds a homeless dog. But usually, languishing from idleness, teasing and mocking him...

The last "joke" of the watchman is fatal: having planned to blow up the dog, he straps it with dynamite, burns the fuse and drives away... But the frightened animal, having smelled the wrong, desperately screaming, rushes to the open door of a warehouse. The camera of one of the best Polish cameramen, Zygmunt Samosiuk, is filming the flying fragments of a dilapidated building and the surprised faces of people around...

They were silent many times watching a sadistic guard torment a dog, and only an explosion made them distract themselves from everyday life for a moment...

It was a metaphorical protest of Y. Morgenstern against indifference, complacency, isolation in the shell of comfort and complacency...

Roman Zaluski held a similar position in Polish cinema in the 1970s. In the melodrama *Anatomy of Love* (1972), in a parable, ironic form, "anatomizing" the psychology of relations between two 30-year-old heroes (they were played by Barabara Brylska and Jan Nowicki), he opposed the replacement of true love "partnership", "making love".

In 1978, R. Zaluski put *Sanctuary* – a picture on the theme of moral conformism.

... 1946. The protagonist of the film is confident that now that the war is over, he can safely live somewhere in the middle of nowhere in the countryside, without interfering in anything, thinking only about the daily bread. But in Poland, there is a civil war, you have to make a choice...

No less acute and problematic films were made in the 1970s by Janusz Majewski, Marek Piwoski, Andrzej Trzos-Rastawiecki, Andrzej Kondratiuk, Janusz Nasfeter and other directors of the older and middle generation.

Of course, there were also traditional genre films. How else could it be? The Polish film industry, which produces about 30 films a year, cannot afford the luxury of total author's films. The leader of the box office of the decade was the *Flood* (1974) of Jerzy Hoffmann. Successfully passed through the screens of many countries and another made by Hoffmann screen adaptation – *Leprosy* (1976). Unfortunately, it seems to me that in this melodrama the director changed his taste, he failed to cope with the "tearful" element of the original source...

There were frankly unsuccessful, secondary imitative tapes, such as Western *All and no one* (1978) by Konrad Nałęczki, who moved the scheme *Seven Samurai – Magnificent Seven* in postwar Poland. There were allegedly significant, pretentious, but empty in fact pictures (*The funeral of the Cricket*, 1978 by Wojciech Fiwek, *The Complexity of Feelings*, 1976 by Leon Jeannot, etc.) were the stupidest and vulgar comedies (*A million for Laura*, 1975). There were films with naturalistic meticulousness restoring episodes related to anti-Nazi resistance (*Action at the Arsenal*, 1978; *One hundred horses to a hundred shores*, 1979; *Death Penalty*). But because of the average of the author's view, weak development of characters, they were undoubtedly inferior even to the average films of the "Polish school" on the military topic.

A strong professional Jan Batory in the films *Unusual Lake* (1972), *Con amore* (1976) and *Stolen Collection* (1979) in a simplified, adapted for young people in the genre of melodrama and comedy tried to reveal the problems of morality and ethics of love, which became the leading leitmotif of the leading filmmakers in Poland. *Unusual Lake* calls for sensitivity, generosity and responsibility, but the action is subject to chance, it is melodramatic, the images of characters are shallow, and as a result of moral problems is not seriously disclosed (*Kolodyazhnaya*, 1974: 86).

In short, the repertoire of the decade was diverse in genres and themes, and the problems raised in the films were addressed at different levels of skill and were designed for different levels of perception. Epic poems, dramas, comedies, detectives, melodramas, westerns, musicals and parodies... Good luck was in all genres, except, perhaps, the movies on a military topic. Here, it seems, since *Landscape after the Battle* (1971), Wajda has not been created a single outstanding film. Maybe it happened because the leading masters of Polish cinema turned to the present day, and the military theme went to the middle-class directors.

The debuts of young directors

At the end of the 1970s, Polish critics started talking about the "fourth generation" in national cinema. Indeed, the arrival of talented young people in directing in 1975-1976 showed that the debutants won the recognition of the audience, critics and jury of festivals. Moscow Festival Golden prize (1979) to socially acute and satirically caustic *Amateur* by Krzysztof Kieslowski. Prize for the best film of 1979 *Clinch* by Piotr Andrejew (prize awarded by the editors of "Film" magazine). Awards in Karlovy Vary, Mannheim, Cannes, Venice, Berlin... The Polish press has pages of interviews with young masters...

What was the reason for these success? Film directors' talent and professionalism? The knowledge of the laws of the genre and the mechanism of influence on the emotions of the audience? It seems, first of all, in other – in sharpness and freshness of a sight at the world, in aspiration to touch painful points of life.

Let's consider for example Piotr Andrejew's first feature film *Clinch* (1979) – a dramatic story about the fate of the working guy hedgehogs, who became a professional boxer.

Piotr Andrejew is a former documentary filmmaker, so it is not surprising that the movie was shot in an emphasized documentary manner – with an abundance of naturalistic details, sometimes even physiologically unpleasant. The image is deliberately darkened, no artificial light. The use of distorting wide-angle optics emphasizes the texture and volume of the interiors.

The main topic of the film echoes *Constant* and *Contract*: the rebellion of a nonconformist character against the machinations of the traffickers...

In the interview given by the director to the magazine "Film" (Andrejew, 1979: 4), Piotr Andrejew emphasized that "everyone makes a career. It's all about how they do it. He echoed the criticism of Oskar Sobański: "Athletes are only an occasion to show the usual career (...). Andrejew interprets sport only as an example. We are talking about the morals of our lives" (Sobański, 1979: 9).

Thus, both the director himself and one of the leading Polish film critics argued that the picture had a generalizing meaning, sport in it was just a pretext to show the life of the entire Polish society of the 1970s.

How is it presented on the screen? The leaders of the sports committee are fattened businessmen and lecherous, for whom boxers are a means for profit, coaches are desperate, drunk people... The main character of the metal in a gloomy, oppressive atmosphere. Old, dirty factory. Next to the passageway – a beer house, frequent drunken fights (shooting with a hidden camera), etc. This is the world of *Clinch*: society on the eve of the dramatic crisis...

Former cameraman Andrzej Kostenko chose the genre of melodrama on a modern topic for his directorial debut – *One on one* (1978).

...Thirty years of fashion, wealthy fashion designer, around which are constantly woven easily accessible women, and in many ways naive twenty-year-old student... Their relations are formed quite "modern": love meetings without burdening mutual obligations. Fatal case: some scum beat the fashion designer to death, and he will blind...

Here's the classic melodramatic turn of the classic melodrama. Of course, now all yesterday's friends and fans turned their backs on the hero. He doesn't need a new car and a luxuriously furnished apartment. And only one person stays next to him. Who? It is not difficult to guess – of course, a young student...

Skilfully using the classical scheme of melodrama, without fail influencing the feelings of the audience, Andrzej Kostenko inflated with concentrated doses gloomy, disgusting details and details: the hopeless drunkenness of the main character, his accentuated physical injury, rhyming with the damage of the world around him. There is no happy end to the usual melodrama – the former fashion designer tries to poison himself in some park. The camera captures for a long time how the poor man beats in convulsions, how his body gets cramped (an evil parody to the final of *Ashes and Diamond*?). Although Andrzej Kostenko did not let his hero die, after watching the film for a long time remained a feeling of hopelessness, loneliness among people caused by the film...

An even scarier, naturalistic chain of events arises in Philippe Bayon's debut *Aria for Athlete* (1979). In this retrodrama of the life of stray circus artists of the beginning of the century again becomes the main theme of loneliness, hostility, viciousness of the world ...

P. Bayon, not sparing the audience, saturated the picture with bloody scenes of violence. In a terrible purple light, in a smoky, staggering haze are held in front of the audience orgy of the protagonist and his friends. Drunkenness, drug addiction, debauchery, lack of the slightest hint of spiritual communication... Everything here is based on physiology: from performances in the arena to bed scenes. Sometimes a series of images was in counterpoint with the essence of the depicted. Bizarre, sophisticated colors and compositions of images even more vividly drawn the main idea of the film: behind the external beauty lurks flaw, inferiority, vice. Like *Clinch*, *Aria for an athlete* is also a kind of pessimistic generalization, performed with the virtuoso brilliance of directing, editing, the work of the operator and the artist.

Against this background, Janusz Kidawa's *The Sinful Life of Frantisek Bula* (1980) seemed quite optimistic. Not all the episodes in the film are of equal value, some of the characters are not

developed, only sketched out. But it should be noted that this is only the second film of a talented director (the first was *Horizontal Landscape*, 1978).

The main character of the film is also an artist of the circus – Franciszek, the son of a miner from Shlensk, a former miner himself... In the beginning it seems that the genre of the film is a farce. The comedy is on the verge of decency, funny love affairs of the character, satirically ironic sketches of everyday life of stray artists in the border areas of pre-war Poland... But gradually in the film there appeared disturbing motives (funny Volksdeutsch, boasting of his relatives in Germany, the collection of donations for a machine gun for border guards). September 1939. Germans occupy Shlensk almost without a single shot... And then Janusz Kidawa shows the birth of the Polish resistance, and among the disobedient – the freedom-loving funny Franciszek...

4. Conclusion

During the decade of the 1970s about 300 films were released in Poland. Among them there were a lot of movies, staged by debutants.

Of course, Polish filmmakers of the 1970s could not foresee the upcoming events of the triumph of “Solidarity” and martial law of the 1980s. However, as time has shown, the films of “moral anxiety” were a sensitive barometer of the inevitable social explosion...

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