

Chapter Three

The First Steps of *Auteurs* on Polish Soil

Before analyzing how *auteur* signifies in Poland, a few words must be said about the term *auteur* itself. In American film theory, the concept functions in its French form: *auteur* is a filmmaker whose individuality is present throughout his/her work, and who is largely in control of the otherwise collective process of filmmaking. The French word *auteur* in English signifies an individual filmmaker's vision and at the same time alludes to the 1950's French New Wave.

In Polish film terminology, however, the term is more vague. First of all, the French word *auteur* is not borrowed wholesale, as in English; in the first Polish translation of Bazin's text, "De la Politique des Auteurs," published in 1963, the Polish translator uses the term *autor* ("author" in English) which, above all, simply means "author-writer." The much more common Polish term to express the idea of *auteur* is *twórca filmu autorskiego*, which literally translates into "the creator of authorial film." But, in fact, the most popular phrase is simply *film autorski*, which means "authorial film." What is striking in the Polish terminology is the emphasis on the film itself, on the artistic product, rather than the person who makes it. The word choice also reveals the ideology behind the various terms, which, in this case, also speaks to my thesis: Polish terminology, unlike the term *auteur* in Western film theory, downplays the individual role of a filmmaker and highlights the artistic product itself. The whole point of the French New Wave filmmakers' advocating *auteurs* was precisely to endow filmmakers with more significance, to make them the sole "authors" of films that reflect their personal attitudes.

Besides *film autorski*, Polish film criticism also uses terms such as *autor filmowy* ("film author"), but this term does not have the same resonance as *auteur* in English,

and its context always has to be specified. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, in talking about Polish filmmakers who were associated with *film autorski*, I will use the French/English term *auteur*. In short, I will call certain filmmakers of the Polish Film School “auteurs.” I will also employ the term *film autorski* as it was used in Polish writing on the French theory.

Birth of the *Auteur*: French *Auteur*

The notion of *auteur* appeared in Poland in the context of the French New Wave in the late 1950s. Although in France it was easy to associate the concept with individual names such as Bazin, Truffaut and Astruc, I will argue that in Poland the term surfaced as an anonymous part of the *nouvelle vague* “manifesto,” rather than as a creation of particular individuals. Nevertheless, since Polish critics were familiar with the writings of those *Cahiers du Cinema* critics (this is clear from numerous references to their articles), it is worthwhile to look at the texts that formulated and defined the concept of auteurism in postwar Western Europe: “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La camera-stylo” (Alexandre Astruc, 1948), “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (François Truffaut, 1954), and “De la Politique des Auteurs” (André Bazin, 1957). Establishing the basis of “French auteurism” will help me to demonstrate how and why the Polish understanding of *auteur* is different from the French notion and why its meaning shifted.

The two iconic texts, “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” and “De la Politique des Auteurs” are now considered the foundation of *auteur* “theory.” But although their authors François Truffaut and André Bazin were close friends and co-editors of *Cahiers*, their conceptions of an *auteur* are different. While Truffaut’s ideas directly spring from Astruc’s essay, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La camera-stylo,” Bazin scrutinizes the already formed concept, pointing out all its advantages and disadvantages. What is even more relevant for my thesis, however, is the fact that

the reception of the texts in Polish film culture took two different paths. In Polish discourse of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Truffaut functioned only as a filmmaker, as one of the representatives of the “bourgeois” French New Wave, rather than as a critic. Bazin was a much more celebrated figure whom Polish critics tried to “save” from the “snobbish” practices of the *nouvelle vague* directors. Astruc’s text – although also referenced often – occupies yet another place in Polish film criticism.

In his lecture, entitled, “What Is an Author?” Foucault asserts: “it is obvious that even within the realm of discourse, a person can be the author of much more than a book – of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate.”¹⁷⁰ If we accept such a definition of an author, Bazin, Astruc and Truffaut are far more than mere authors of articles. They, in fact, laid the foundation for an important concept in film criticism. But even so, when exploring the question of auteurism, one must remember that none of its founding fathers aimed at creating any kind of universal theory, or even admitted the existence of a “school.” Truffaut once wittily commented on the supposedly unified New Wave movement: “I see only one common point shared by young directors: we all play pinball while older directors drink scotch and play cards.”¹⁷¹ The very fact that the *nouvelle vague* director-critics did not want to be associated with one another is very telling: belonging to one artistic “school” denies or at least undermines the uniqueness of the individual. And it is precisely the idea of individualism that laid the foundation for the concept of *auteur*.

But although most French filmmakers managed to stand out as unique artists, they nevertheless (together with the critics associated with Bazin and *Cahiers du Cinema*), even if unintentionally, created a unified program that characterised the path that new French cinema would take. Very quickly, Truffaut’s provocative essay published in 1954 became, to use Grant’s words, “a touchstone for *Cahiers*, giving the

170. Donald F. Bouchard, ed., “What Is an Author?,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews/Michel Foucault* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113–27.

171. Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 26.

magazine's various writers a collective identity as championing certain filmmakers and dismissing others."¹⁷² A few years later, Bazin joined the discussion on auteurism, but the concept turned out to be so appealing that it quickly crossed French borders and became a part of global discourse about film. Andrew Sarris, a prominent American critic, published "Notes on the *Auteur* Theory" in 1962, initiating the discussion on the topic in Anglophone countries; Pauline Kael and Peter Wollen among others readily joined a debate that, arguably, has lasted into the present. The debate can be narrowed down to one very simple question: can a filmmaker be the "author" of a film in the same way as a writer is the author of a book?

From today's perspective, to associate a director's name with a concrete film is an obvious thing to do: oftentimes we do not go to the movie theater to see a particular film, but rather, for example, "a Tarantino film" or "a Spielberg film." This has not always been the case. Until the 1950s, there was a clear division (with some notable exceptions) within the film industry between literary men preparing scripts for production, and directors who were seen as some kind of manufacturers adding "pictures" to literary works. It is worth remembering then, and can never be stressed sufficiently, that the legacy of the French New Wave filmmakers goes beyond breaking the cinematic rules of the time, but, above all, to urging that filmmakers be given authorial power - in the sense of exercising control over all aspects of the creative process (the screenplay, *mise-en-scène*, directing of actors, and cinematography).

Alexandre Astruc

When it comes to the question of whether a filmmaker is the "author" of a film, Alexandre Astruc is quite straightforward. In his essay, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La caméra-stylo," he states: "The filmmaker/author writes with his camera as

172. Barry Keith Grant, *Auteurs and Authorship. A Film Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 9

a writer writes with his pen.”¹⁷³ Astruc claims that we have arrived at the point where a film is a means of expression for a filmmaker, and there should no longer be a division between a screenwriter and director. What is more, cinema has developed its own language, its own means of conveying meaning, “a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel.” Astruc already senses the winds of change, as he calls this new age of cinema “the age of *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen).”¹⁷⁴ It emphasized the fact that visual imagery, in all of its aspects, was a means of expression on a par with the written text. In short, Astruc advocates for something more than just the idea of a filmmaker who writes his own script; rather, he sees a filmmaker as somebody who, above all, expresses personal attitudes in his works. Yet he neither places a director within any particular social context, nor does he acknowledge the collective nature of filmmaking. What he does, though, is make a filmmaker more significant in the hierarchy of artists. His concept serves more as means to advance the extra-textual status of filmmakers, supplying them with authorial power, than it offers technical or theoretical tips on effective directing. In some sense, Astruc not only anticipates Truffaut’s future harsh criticism of directors relying on literary adaptations, but also the passionate and fierce language of the younger New Wave critics, as it will come to define their “school.”

Although Astruc’s essay was in many ways revolutionary, the text quickly started circulating in the Polish press as a kind of common knowledge, without bearing any association to its author. This is exactly what happened elsewhere. As Richard Neupert remarks: “Astruc is one of those mythical figures of the New Wave era who is mentioned in every history as a key inspiration but then is generally too

173. Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo,” in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). The original text was first published in France in 1948. See Alexandre Astruc, “Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo,” *L’Écran française*, March 30, 1948.

174. *Ibid.*

quickly passed over.”¹⁷⁵ In Poland, Astruc’s famous essay was briefly summarised and reprinted in the journal *Film* in 1959. The author provides some facts from Astruc’s life, adding that, “one utters the name of the director of *Les Mauvaises rencontres* [*Bad Liaisons*, 1955] without stopping for breath.” Indeed, Astruc’s film enjoyed great popularity as – through the use of extensive flashbacks – it showed the life of an ambitious journalist who prioritizes her career over her personal life. The Polish article further highlights a clear admiration for Astruc: “Being dazzled by Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*, Astruc decided to fight against ‘routinized’ film art. He now works as a film critic and is preoccupied with creating the theory of a new film expression which he calls ‘camera-stylo’ – camera-pen or writing with camera.”¹⁷⁶ The whole article, although very appreciative of Astruc’s contributions to the world of cinema, did not provoke any further critical response. His name quickly disappeared from the Polish press – and his idea of writing with a camera became part of common knowledge, a vague slogan, rather than a significant concept that he initiated.

How quickly Astruc’s name vanished from the discussion of auteurism in Polish film culture became apparent only a few months after the publication of the short text about him. In the first long article devoted to the New Wave, Aleksander Jackiewicz describes the phenomenon of the whole “school”: “They [*nouvelle vague* filmmakers] make films as if they were writing books.”¹⁷⁷ Such a clear reference to Astruc’s ideas passed unnoticed not only by Jackiewicz, but also by the French screenwriter Henri Jeanson, whose words are quoted in the same article. Jeanson maliciously remarks: “Some of them [*nouvelle vague* directors] are filmmakers and critics at the same time. That makes things easier. Mr. X writes favorably about Mr. Z who in turn writes well

175. Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, Second edition (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 46.

176. “Nazwisko reżysera ‘Niedobrych spotkań’ wymienia się ostatnio jednym tchem ...”, ”Po obejrzeniu ‘Obywatela Kane’a’, olśniony mistrzostwem Orsona Wellesa, Astruc postanawia rozpocząć walkę przeciw zrutyinizowaniu sztuki filmowej. Zajmuje się krytyką filmową i tworzy teorię nowej ekspresji filmowej, której nadaje nazwę ‘camera-stylo’ – kamera pióro, albo pisanie kamerą,” “Alexandre Astruc,” *Film*, no. 24 (14 June) (1959), p. 5.

177. “Robią filmy jakby pisali książki,” Aleksander Jackiewicz, “Nouvelle Vague,” *Film*, no. 26 (1959), pp. 12-14.

about Mr. X. That's writing with a camera."¹⁷⁸ Not only is the idea of *caméra-stylo* used ironically here, but it is not mentioned in any association with Astruc's name. When discussing a new film by Tadeusz Konwicki, *All Souls' Day*, Konrad Eberhardt writes: "Is he [Konwicki] going to convince us that it is possible to 'write' a film with a camera the same way that one writes a poem?"¹⁷⁹ Once again, Astruc is not credited here. In fact, the Polish press did not dedicate any more extensive articles to Astruc, despite the French New Wave occupying a prominent place in Polish film criticism well into the early 1960s.

François Truffaut

Truffaut follows Astruc's steps in the debate over the symmetry / opposition in film vs. book authorship. His notion of a filmmaker emerges directly from Astruc's writings: both believe that filmmakers should strive for more creative power in the process of producing moving pictures. Truffaut attacks screenwriters as those who downgrade the role of directors when he ironically remarks: "when they [the scenarists] hand in their scenario, the film is done; the *metteur en scène*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the picture to it and it's true, alas!"¹⁸⁰ Truffaut believes that men of letters cannot really appreciate the nature of images, and that is why they make the whole cinematic world "literary," and thus removed from everyday human experience. What is worse, Truffaut asserts, was that since literature as art is valued much more than film, men of letters enjoy much more esteem than filmmakers. This view responds to the tendency at the time to see directors as mere manufacturers who only add some technicalities to the works of real artists – the writers.

178. "Kilku spośród nich – to filmowcy i krytycy jednocześnie. To bardzo ułatwia zadanie. Pan X mówi dobrze o panu Z, który z kolei mówi bardzo dobrze o panu X. To jest 'pisanie kamerą.'" Ibid., p. 13.

179. "Czy przekona nas, że można 'napisać' film kamerą tak, jak się pisze poemat?", Konrad Eberhardt, "Niespełniony dług wspomnieniom," *Film*, no. 50 (1961), p. 4.

180. François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. Garry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). The original text was first published in France in 1954. See François Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance du cinema français," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 31 (1954), pp. 15-21.

Truffaut blames the depreciation of filmmakers on the so-called “Tradition of Quality,” a school relying on the work of various screenwriters most notably Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Although Truffaut admits that the “Tradition of Quality” produces solid and technically advanced films, he criticizes it for creating dry and old-fashioned adaptations of literary works characterized by “sleek photography” and “complicated lighting.” Truffaut opts instead for cinema that is closer to the psychology and experiences of a particular filmmaker, rather than to the literary source text. He summarizes his objections with respect to the whole tradition:

This school which aspires to realism destroys it at the moment of finally grabbing it, so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world, barricaded by formulas, plays on words, maxims, instead of letting us see them for ourselves, with our own eyes.¹⁸¹

In Truffaut’s mind – as was later confirmed by his own practice as a filmmaker – carefully composed and skillfully lit cinematic scenes together with eloquent and witty dialogues seem to deform the onscreen “flow of real life.” As a result, all movies are only creating fake onscreen realities instead of depicting life as it is experienced.

The eagerness with which Truffaut champions the elevation of the filmmakers’ status mirrors the enthusiasm of his language. In fact, he wrote this critical essay when he was barely twenty-two years old – the pages of his text exude a kind of defiant youthfulness. His oftentimes cynical and witty criticism mercilessly crushes the films of the “Tradition of Quality.” But although Truffaut expresses a rather low opinion of contemporary French film represented by the productions of the “Tradition of Quality,” he admits that there do exist French directors, or rather, “*auteurs* who often write their dialogue and ... invent the stories they direct.”¹⁸² Such filmmakers – whom Truffaut admires – include Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson and Jean Cocteau, among others. Truffaut clearly tries to promote the idea that directors, just

181. Ibid., p. 15.

182. Ibid., p. 16.

like writers, deserve equal recognition as artists. He believes that filmmakers should be *auteurs* in control of their cinematic works, especially their scripts, which would eventually help to promote a filmmaker's personal worldview or judgment. Just like Astruc, he praises artistic individuality, rather than the collective effort of filmmaking. In sum, Truffaut wants to diminish the role of literature in film art and turn a *metteur en scène* into an *auteur*. He does not propose any set of rules for the future of the French cinema, but rather concentrates on elevating the status of the filmmaker.

Although at first "A Certain Tendency..." does not seem to engage in political disputes, Michel Marie rightly acknowledges that in France, at the time, the article itself became troublesome for political reasons. The publication of the text was delayed:

Bazin and Doniol-Valcroze [*Cahier's* editors] were both leftist Christians ... and they admired the films of Rene Clement and some by Claude Autant-Lara. Another *Cahiers* critic, Pierre Kast, who participated at a very young age in the French Resistance and remained deeply involved in leftist politics, was very opposed to this tract, launched by what he saw as the 'hussars of the new right wing.'¹⁸³

What is even more important is the fact that, to use Marie's words again, "the public image of the 'Hitchcock-Hawksian' tendency within *Cahiers* was considered to belong to the conservative right."¹⁸⁴ The right-wing label of the French New Wave was rather a touchy subject when it comes to reception of the *nouvelle vague* in the Communist Bloc. The beliefs that right-wing politics embraces, such as the fact that business should not be regulated and that social inequality is inevitable, if not desirable, are ideologically at odds with communism. But that is perhaps obvious. What is less apparent, however, is the fact that the concept of *auteur* was adjusted to fit a socialist context in Poland, precisely because it bore a hierarchical right-wing characteristic at

183. Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, pp. 33-4.

184. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

odds with Marxist thought. In other words, the idea of an *auteur* promotes individuality; it promotes unique individuals who present themselves as being above the “equal” level of fellow citizens. This was the idea that authorities in the Communist Bloc attempted to fight.

André Bazin

Although Bazin is now considered one of the fathers of *auteur* theory, it is worth remembering that what he does in his famous essay “De La Politique Des Auteurs” is to analyze an already formed concept, rather than invent a new term.

While Truffaut’s essay stresses the status of a filmmaker, Bazin systematically weighs all the pros and cons of the notion of *auteur*. Even on the level of language, Bazin manifests the maturity of an experienced critic that starkly contrasts with Truffaut’s passionate and somewhat chaotic writing. At the time of the writing of his article, Bazin had already completed the main bulk of his film theory – thus, the in-depth analysis of film art was his profession. In his essay, he polemicizes with Truffaut’s text by praising the appreciation of filmmakers as artists, and criticizing the idea that only a certain kind of director is able to produce a good film. Bazin asserts:

To a certain extent at least, the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario, he always says the same story, or, in case the word “story” is confusing, let’s say he has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters. Jacques Rivette has said that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person: it’s a good definition.

Bazin stresses the fact that an *auteur* must inevitably end up creating a repetitive list of productions since his attitudes toward his subjects will not change. Bazin continues: “The *politique des auteurs* consists, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference.” To put it differently, a certain film is good as long as it contains some degree of a director’s personal “touch.” At this point, it isn’t clear whether by saying “personal factor” Bazin means a set of references to a filmmaker’s

biography, the filmmaker's ideology and values, or some kind of stylistic approach distinguishing one director from another. But while he thinks it is important to express personal visions in film art, he also asserts: "the individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him."¹⁸⁵ Thus, Bazin hints that social meanings are inevitably present in films even in a film with auteurist tendencies.

Two things are noteworthy here: 1) Bazin expands Truffaut's and Astruc's notion of *auteur* by adding to it the social context in which every filmmaker functions; in other words, Bazin understands that society affects the way artists create; 2) he tries to diminish the individualism promoted by the idea of *auteur* in favor of some kind of "higher" mission that cinema carries. In short, Bazin complicates the concept of *auteur*, asserting that no filmmaker can create in a vacuum. Almost at the very end of his text, Bazin expresses his concern, namely, the fact that Truffaut and Astruc's definitions of *auteur* do not depend on a filmmaker's ability to present "the social truth [as] integrated into a style of cinematic narration."¹⁸⁶ In other words, in the very last lines of his essay, Bazin suggests that an *auteur*, a real artist, should strive to develop his/her unique cinematic style in a way that will be effective in depicting pressing social issues. What matters to him is the stylistic and aesthetic level of filmmaking, rather than the extra-textual status of a filmmaker. Only after acquiring practical tools is one able to express important issues in a film, and does one have something important to say. In sum, Bazin understands the social dimensions of auteurism, but the theory as-we-know-it is closer to Truffaut's and Astruc's vision, rather than to Bazin's careful evaluation of the term. Truffaut and Astruc promote filmmakers who freely express their individual artistic visions in films, but, unlike Bazin, they do not think to take into account the extent to which artists' works are determined by collective, rather than individual, experiences. But even Bazin's hint at

185. André Bazin, "De La Politique Des Auteurs," in *Auteurs and Autorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 25. The original text was first published in France in 1957. See André Bazin, "De la politique des auteurs," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 70 (1957), p. 2-11.

186. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the social implication of filmmaking is not emphasized throughout his text, as Bazin, above all, was concerned with cinema in aesthetic terms.¹⁸⁷

Bazin's modest remark at the end of his article emphasizes not only his enduring attention to realist approaches, but also the lack of them in the popular concept of *auteur*, as it was developing in New Wave films. Although Truffaut hints in his text at the need to create films truthful to life, such an idea is not definitive of the notion of *auteur* – this is confirmed by the practice of certain French New Wave auteurs such as Alain Resnais. The excessive use of flashbacks in his *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), as well as the repetitive, highly stylized and narratively ambiguous scenes in *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961) distort a sense of “real life” rather than highlight it. Even Truffaut, in his second feature, *Shoot the Piano Player* (*Tirez sur le pianiste*, 1960) moves away from using the long takes that were so characteristic of his famous debut *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups*, 1959) in favor of more unorthodox cuts and camera angles. What is more, for Bazin, the personal stylistic signature of a filmmaker should not be a decisive factor that distinguishes great directors from bad ones. Such a criterion of value would inevitably lead to the danger of “an aesthetic personality cult.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, as mentioned earlier, *auteur* theory is rooted in a concept of individuality that right at the outset created certain issues in the context of communist Poland. One of the reasons is that it has clearly capitalistic undertones: the term glorifies an individual who raises himself above the masses through competition, which runs counter to ideas of equality and collectivity central to Soviet socialism. Discussion of the concept of individuality under socialism – especially in creative processes – can be summarized in the words of Marx himself: “Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, highlighting the individualistic qualities of an

187. Bolesław Michałek, “Paradoksy André Bazina,” in *Film i rzeczywistość* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1963), pp. 237–66.

188. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

189. Ian Forbes, *Marx and the New Individual (RLE Marxism)* (Routledge, 2015).

artist destroys the possibility of creating an equal society. Creative process ought to be, in essence, a communal enterprise. What is important here, then, is the fact that this notion of excessive individuality was at odds not only with communist ideology but also, paradoxically, with the Polish Romantic concept of *wieszcz*, as *wieszcz* (although a unique individual) was subject to collective expectations and acted as the voice of the nation.

Bazin's appreciation of the dangers that excessive individuality in film can create is perhaps one of the reasons why he became such a celebrated figure in Polish film criticism. In his essay on Bazin, published in 1963, Bolesław Michałek states: "Bazin ... was a wizard, who was dying precisely at the moment when his apprentices [French New Wave filmmakers] were just about to start their work"¹⁹⁰; he refers to the legacy of Bazin's *politique des auteurs* amongst his "apprentices," the French New Wave filmmakers. Michałek writes a whole section on Bazin's theory, but the question of auteurism appears only on the last two pages and is rather marginal. Nevertheless, the quote suggests that Bazin's premature death left his understanding of authorship vulnerable to deformations and reinterpretations. And that is, according to Michałek, exactly what happened. Although Bazin was concerned with auteurism in aesthetic onscreen terms (hinting at its social implications only because Truffaut and Astruc dismissed this entirely), the *nouvelle vague* filmmakers had transformed it into a concept that influenced not only cinematic language, but also defined the moral character of their protagonists as well as emphasized the extra-textual role of a director.¹⁹¹ And that was the initial meaning of auteurism in Poland that only, with time, developed further: first of all, as a concept bearing very little association to Bazin (and rightly so) and secondly, as an almost completely technical (i.e., filmmaker equals screenwriter) term having very little in common with an *auteur*-artist who "speaks in the first person."

190. "Bazin był czarnoksiężnikiem ... , który umierał w chwili, gdy uczeń brał się do dzieła." Michałek, "Paradoksy André Bazina," p. 266.

191. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Since Michałek was the first scholar who alluded to confusion around auteurism in Poland, his idea served as a point of departure for my exploration of the shift in the meaning of *film autorski*: how and why Polish criticism attempted to save Bazin from the way in which, in their view, his “apprentices” inflected the term *auteur*.¹⁹² Tadeusz Lubelski in *Encyklopedia kina* explains that in the 1960s the term *film autorski* had two meanings: the first meaning applied to the films whose shape was strongly marked by a director’s personal concepts and artistic style, while the second one meant films made by a writer-screenwriter, who, though inexperienced, directs the film as well.¹⁹³ But although Lubelski makes such an important distinction, I want to develop it further and establish in what sense the term operated before the sixties. In doing so, I will be able to defend a central point of my main hypothesis: Polish auteurism is a concept whose meaning was shifting because it carried forward the Romantic legacy of art fulfilling collective goals. That is to say, the term primarily referred to extra-textual and somewhat ethical, rather than stylistic characteristics. Such an “ethical” take on the French idea was, I argue, a continuation of the Romantic tradition that stressed the role of an artist within (and for) society.

Given the political and historical situation in Poland in the 1950s and 60s, the cult of individuality that *auteur* theory invites could not have been possible in the same way as it was possible in France. Even the Polish Romantic notion of a *wieszcz*, although it at first seems to embrace a cult of personality, is married to the notion of “common good,” as demonstrated above in previous chapters. The role of a Polish artist (an individual) living in a Soviet satellite state was married to the idea of national responsibility (society), a burden that post-war French filmmakers did not have to carry. In other words, Polish artists had to reflect to some degree Communist Party views on art, as well as advocate certain ideas of freedom; this made “creating films as one pleases” a rather difficult task.

192. Michałek writes only a short text about the confusion around auteurism but he is the first scholar in Poland to do so. The first full article on auteurism is the one written by Morawski.

193. Tadeusz Lubelski, “Autorski film,” in *Encyklopedia kina*, ed. Tadeusz Lubelski (Krakow: Biały Kruk, 2003), pp. 56-57.

Once *auteur* theory surfaced and operated in Poland, Bazin himself was resituated within Polish criticism: he emerges as a kind of *auteur*-critic. A survey of his essays printed in the Polish press, as well as scholarly articles of the late 1950s and early 60s, provide a convincing portrait of the Polish take on Bazin – “a wizard” whose faith in viewers’ interpretive powers became irresistible during the period of the Polish Film School. What is relevant here is the fact that the so-called Polish Film School emerged roughly in the mid- 1950s, thus, almost at the same time when Bazin’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* started shaping its ideas about auteurism.

Poles on French Auteurs: Too Bourgeois

In 1965 a Polish film critic, Stefan Morawski, writes: “We do not have any discussion about so-called *auteur* film, but all signs in the heavens show that such discussion is in the process of crystallization.”¹⁹⁴ In fact, Morawski’s is the first full scholarly article where an author attempts to question thoroughly the notion of *film autorski*. And indeed, the discussion appears rather late: in 1965 Western scholars such as Ian Cameron, Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael are already in the middle of heated debates on auteurism.¹⁹⁵ Such a belated Polish reaction not only indicates that it took more time for the Western idea to penetrate the Eastern Bloc, it also signifies that up until the mid sixties, *film autorski* had rather unproblematic parameters in Poland.

Although it is difficult to establish for sure when exactly the term appeared in Poland for the first time, it seems quite probable that it was in the first full article devoted to the French New Wave in June 1959. Its author, Aleksander Jackiewicz,

194. “Nie ma u nas dyskusji o tzw. filmie autorskim, ale wszelkie znaki na niebie wskazują, że jest ona w trakcie krystalizacji,” Stefan Morawski, “O tak zwanym filmie autorskim,” *Dialog*, no. 8 (1965), pp. 91-96.

195. Ian Cameron, “Films, Directors and Critics,” in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 29-34. Pauline Kael, “Circles and Squares,” in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 46-54. Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory,” in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 35-45.

wrote that the French filmmakers, “under the auspices of and in keen collaboration with the prematurely dead André Bazin created the theoretical foundation of their movement.” They believe that “...a film should be like poetry, it should be a means of expression of one person only. They call it *auteur* film.”¹⁹⁶ The quote indicates that Bazin is associated with his “apprentices,” and the idea of *film autorski* becomes something that will change very soon. In the same article we read a translated conversation between French filmmakers in which Jaques Doniol-Valcroze talks about auteurism again. After reading their discussion, one gets the impression that their notion of *auteur* goes hand-in-hand with what Jackiewicz writes in his short introduction: auteurs should strive for individual expression in cinema. Thus, what is highlighted is the status of a director who makes films according to his or her own artistic impulses without having to surrender to anybody else’s dictum.¹⁹⁷ Such a definition, in fact, aligns with what Astruc and Truffaut advocate in their texts, but not with Bazin’s careful reassessment of the concept.

This trend continued in the years that followed. Although the term *film autorski* did not appear often, the first long article by Jackiewicz set the tone: from then on the overwhelming majority of articles about the French New Wave emphasized the individual and free character of its creators.¹⁹⁸ For example, in a short interview translated from the French and published in *Film*, Louis Malle asserts: “I wish for all

196. “Teoretyczną podbudowę dla tego ruchu stworzyli w dużej mierze oni sami ... gdzie pod patronatem przedwcześnie zmarłego André Bazina i przy jego gorącym współudziale pisali, że film, jak poezja, winien być środkiem wyrazu jednego człowieka. Nazywają to filmem autorskim.” Jackiewicz, “Nouvelle Vague,” p. 12.

197. Leon Bukowiecki, “Najnowsza fala (1),” *Ekran*, no. 19 (1960), p. 10.

198. I researched all issues of the two most important popular film journals published in Poland at that time, *Film* and *Ekran*, as well as issues of *Film na Świecie* and *Kwartalnik Filmowy*. I also checked magazines devoted to literature and theatre that published essays on cinema (*Dialog*, *Twórczość*). More on the Polish film press can be found in Ryszard Koniczek Marek Halberda, “Czasopisma filmowe,” in *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku. Film Kinematografia*, ed. Edward Zajicek (Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1994), pp. 477–93. The list of articles about the French New Wave as an already formed group and their representatives includes: Leon Bukowiecki, “Najnowsza fala (2),” *Ekran*, no. 20 (1960), p. 11., Jean-François Walter, “Film a państwo (I): Pęknięte lustro współczesności,” *Ekran*, no. 21 (1960), p. 10., Jean-François Walter, “Film a państwo (II): Pęknięte lustro współczesności,” *Ekran*, no. 22 (1960), p. 10, Krzysztof Zanussi, “Nie lubię mówić o nowej fali: rozmowa z Claude Chabrolem,” *Ekran*, no. 23 (1960), p. 7., Jean Taverne, “Przeciwko ‘Nowej Fali,’” *Film*, no. 41 (1961): pp. 12–13., Krzysztof T. Toeplitz, “Co się dzieje w filmie?,” *Dialog*, no. 1 (1961), pp. 153–55., “Film jako literatura,” *Dialog*, no. 6 (1961), pp. 158–60.

filmmakers -including myself - to make only films in which a part of ourselves is concealed.” The French New Wave “manifesto” is printed in the same issue of *Film*. One line reads: “we all want the freedom to create films that an author wants to make.”¹⁹⁹ In 1960 Bukowiecki writes that the huge advantage of the French New Wave filmmakers is that they not only do not have to consult with anybody on their scripts, but that they have the freedom to choose actors and specialists to work on their productions.²⁰⁰ An interview with Claude Chabrol, a key filmmaker of the French New Wave, also highlights the freedom needed for making *auteur* films. In fact, Chabrol himself invested his wife’s inheritance into the production of his first feature - he “hired” friends to play in it and he improvised whenever possible.²⁰¹ In other words, writing on the French New Wave stresses the fact that filmmakers make the films they feel like making, without being responsible for anything else apart from their own artistic vision. Yet none of these articles name Bazin directly. In the following section, I turn to why the characteristics of French auteurs presented in the Polish press between 1959 and 1961 did not enter into discussions of films by Polish filmmakers.

Suspicious French Morality

Apart from stressing the individuality of the French *nouvelle vague* auteurs, a survey of the Polish press between 1959 and 1961 highlights another common characteristic, this time with respect to both the filmmakers and the content of their films, as well as the moral depravity and superficiality of their protagonists. Bukowicki started this trend in a subtle way. He praises the wave of young French artists for mastering cinematic language; this, to him, results in very well-done productions. Bukowiecki only worries

199. “Życzę wszystkim i sobie samemu, żebyśmy robili jedynie takie filmy, w których zawarta jest cząstka nas samych,” “swoboda robienia filmów takich, jakie autor zechce,” Jackiewicz, “Nouvelle Vague,” p. 13.

200. Bukowiecki, “Najnowsza fala (1),” p. 10.

201. Zanussi, “Nie lubię mówić o nowej fali: rozmowa z Claude Chabrolem,” p. 7.

that those “youngsters” do not necessarily always know what to make their films about. He tries to justify them, however: “It is clear that we cannot always expect from debutants – especially the young ones ... to express in perfect artistic form something that would have a deeper meaning.”²⁰²

Only a few weeks later, critics are not as polite. Taverne, a “progressive” French critic writing for the Polish press, titles his two-page article in a very telling way, “Against the New Wave,” describing the French New Wave filmmakers as follows:

Revolutionaries? If we judge those young people from a sociological point of view, their revolutionary nature becomes quite suspicious. They are multimillionaires driving in their Jaguars – they are not the best forerunners of progress in the art of cinema. They are a snobbish and bored generation that rebels through spleen and glut. The theme of their artistic rebellion confirms my thesis. ... They do not bring to French cinematography anything apart from eroticism.²⁰³

Taverne does not end here. His harsh criticism is grounded in moral principles and the idea that film should have some kind of deeper message, if not commentary on universal truths or social issues. He continues his scathing critique:

The young filmmakers did not and still do not have anything to say. ... That’s why eroticism replaces faith, ideas and hope. Nay! Even the lack of hope isn’t there. Socially ignorant and over-eroticised film art of the young generation is

202. “Rzecz jasną jest, że nie zawsze od debiutantów – zwłaszcza tych młodych wiekiem – można wymagać, aby w doskonałej formie artystycznej powiedzieli coś, co miałyby większe znaczenie,” Bukowiecki, “Najnowsza fala (1),” p. 10.

203. “Rewolucjonistów? Gdy oceniamy tych młodych ludzi od strony socjologicznej, ich rewolucjonizm staje się dość podejrzany. Multimilionerzy, rozjeżdżający sportowymi ‘Jaguarami’ – to chyba nie najlepsi chorążowie przełomu i postępu w sztuce filmowej. Raczej pokolenie snobistyczne, znudzone, zbuntowane spleenem i przesytem. Tematyka ich artystycznego buntu potwierdza moją tezę. ... nie wniosły do francuskiej kinematografii nic poza erotyzmem,” Jean Taverne, “Przeciwko ‘Nowej Fali,’” *Film*, no. 41 (1961), pp. 12-3.

worthless. It doesn't touch any basic truth of human existence, it doesn't ask questions, but rejects everything - like a child bored with his toys.²⁰⁴

Curiously enough, Taverne makes a comparison between the French New Wave and the Polish New Wave (i.e., Polish Film School). Leaving aside the question of whether there ever existed anything like a *nouvelle vague* in Polish cinematography,²⁰⁵ Taverne quotes what another French critic said after watching Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*: "The difference between the Polish 'new wave' and the French one is that in Poland young filmmakers learn their profession and acquire experience first. Only afterwards - if they have something to say - do they get the means and money to make films. In France it is the other way round."²⁰⁶ Creating such an opposition - Poles as those who have something to say, and the French as those who don't - is certainly much too simplistic of a statement to make. But there is, in fact, a certain existential heaviness in the films of the Polish Film School (even in comedies) that makes the criticism's claim quite appealing.

Many of the most notable Polish auteurs, for example Andrzej Wajda, Wojciech Jerzy Has and Jerzy Kawalerowicz, started their cinematic careers working as assistant directors. Only after gaining experience did they get a chance to make their debuts - and always in close collaboration with other film specialists and writers. The majority of their features from the 1950s deal with complex and rather dark issues. Wajda in *A Generation (Pokolenie, 1955)* depicts a group of young people who must make very difficult decisions in the face of war and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In *Canal (Kanał, 1956)* Wajda portrays the tragic end of young participants in the

204. "... młodzi twórcy nie mieli i nie mają nic do powiedzenia. ... Stąd erotyzm zastępuje wiarę, ideę, nadzieję. Ba, nawet prawdziwy brak nadziei. ... Niezaangażowana społecznie, przeerotyzowana sztuka filmowa młodego pokolenia jest bezwartościowa. Nie dotyka żadnych spraw zasadniczych z życia ludzkiego, o nic nie pyta, wszystko odrzuca - jak dziecko znudzone zabawkami." Ibid., p. 13.

205. See: Barbara Piwowarska, Łukasz Ronduda, ed., *Polish New Wave: The History of a Phenomenon That Never Existed* (Warsaw: Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2008).

206. "Różnica między poską 'nową falą' a francuską polega na tym, że w Polsce młodzi filmowcy uczą się swego zawodu, zdobywają doświadczenie fachowe. Dopiero potem, jeśli mają coś do powiedzenia, otrzymują środki materialne i pieniądze i wówczas realizują film. We Francji jest akurat odwrotnie." Taverne, "Przeciwko 'Nowej Fali,'" 1961, p. 12.

Warsaw Uprising that is announced right at the beginning of the movie. Kawalerowicz in *The Real End of the Great War* (*Prawdziwy koniec wielkiej wojny*, 1957) explores the impossibility of forgetting the horrors of Auschwitz, which eventually leads to the main protagonist's suicide, despite his attempts to start his life anew. Similarly, Wojciech Jerzy Has in *The Noose* (*Pętla*, 1957) concentrates on the psychological state of an alcoholic who is unable to stop drinking. Even in the comedies of the Polish Film School a high degree of gravity penetrates the supposedly hilarious antics of main protagonists. In Munk's *Eroica* (1957) the filmmaker makes fun of excessive Polish patriotism by showing how false certain national legends are and how the behavior of those who adhere to these concepts can be hypocritical and ridiculous. One of the subplots is the story of a prisoner-of-war, Zawistowski, who is believed by his fellow prisoners to have escaped the camp. It turns out, however, that Zawistowski did not manage to escape, but instead hid himself in the barrack's attic. Although Munk portrays the whole story in a humorous and often absurd way, he nevertheless does not let the cinematic heroes find out the truth about Zawistowski, who wants to keep up the legend for the others. Certainly, those examples only confirm the stereotypical East European pessimism and fatalism in the arts, but they also are loaded with a certain existential heaviness. Thus, Taverne's quote about Polish filmmakers as those who really have something to say is not entirely groundless: they, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters, indeed act as *wieszczce*, who accept their obligation to advocate certain national recovery projects.

One might assume that Taverne's harsh attack on the French New Wave is only an exception on a list of rather flattering texts dealing with the movement. However, another left-wing French critic writing for the Polish press, Georges Sadoul, after initial enthusiasm in his article of 1960, eventually expresses similar worries. In the article "The Present Day of the French New Wave," in which he summarizes the achievements of the movement, Sadoul writes about the films' heroes: "They did not have any worries other than running out of money. Between drunkenness, rowdy love

affairs, and a car trip, they occasionally talked about the hardships of life.”²⁰⁷ Sadoul worries that some of the new French filmmakers will simply become a part of the commercial film industry. In the second part of his article, printed in Polish *Ekran* one week later, Sadoul seems to be milder in his criticism, although he does admit that the French New Wave had its moment of “hesitation,” and did not know where to go next.²⁰⁸

Yet another French critic, Jean-Francois Walter, wrote two extended articles for the Polish press entitled, “Film and the State: The Broken Mirror of the Present Day.” Although his overall opinion about the young French cinema is rather positive, he nevertheless criticizes it for its lack of involvement in social issues. Walter writes:

We did not live through the period of socialist realism, unfortunately. I write “unfortunately” because in this lies the drama of French cinematography that has never turned its camera toward the real social issues of the present day... it has never prioritised the truth over film atelier artistic convention.²⁰⁹

Walter, just like Taverner and Sadoul, points at the rather shallow character of French New Wave productions.

There are two quite relevant facts when it comes to Walter, Sadoul and Taverner. First of all, they were commissioned to write for the Polish press. Second, they read films through an ideological lens. Taverner designates social and political engagement as the main criterion for evaluating films. Similarly, Sadoul praises Claude Chabrol for being “an engaged artist who is sensitive to social issues.” He also maliciously criticizes Jacques Dupont for directing pretentious films full of men with eyeglasses and beautiful women dressed in costumes made of gold trimmings, explaining that,

207. “Owi bohaterowie nie mieli żadnych trosk prócz tej, aby im nie zabrakło pieniędzy. Między pijaństwem, awanturką miłosną lub wycieczką samochodem zdarzało się mówić o trudnościach życia”. Georges Sadoul, “Dzień dzisiejszy francuskiej ‘nowej fali’ (I),” *Ekran*, no. 44 (1961), p. 3.

208. Georges Sadoul, “Dzień dzisiejszy francuskiej ‘nowej fali’ (II),” *Ekran*, no. 45 (1961), p. 3.

209. “Nie przeszliśmy, niestety, przez etap socrealizmu. Piszę ‘niestety’, ponieważ w tym kryje się dramat kinematografii francuskiej, która nigdy nie zwróciła się całkowicie ku ważnym problemom współczesności ... nie dała prymatu prawdzie nad ‘atelierową’ konwencją artystyczną...” Walter, “Film a państwo (I): Pęknięte lustro współczesności,” p. 10

after all, making such films can only be expected from a man who “during the Korean war was the head of anticommunist film.”²¹⁰ Walter writes about Carné’s film: “In sum, Carné’s movie only reinforced the myth of the amoral and senseless existence of young people in the scenery of dining rooms, sumptuous feasts and orgies. But in real life, things look much more modest and less impressive.”²¹¹ The fact that the only French critics who were asked by the Polish press to write on the *nouvelle vague* presented pieces criticizing it for somewhat “bourgeois” features may provoke some suspicions. Indeed, one should not underestimate the way in which the Polish press, just like all other media, was controlled in communist Poland.²¹² Certainly, articles published in various journals (including the film press) had to go hand-in-hand with official state ideology. What is more, Sadoul was known for his communist sympathies—this would explain the way in which he reads films.

Nevertheless, it was not only the commissioned French critics who highlighted the bourgeois character of the French New Wave. Konrad Eberhardt compares the films of the movement to classic Chinese painting characterized by flatness, and elusive aristocratic features, where “a human shape appears only to suggest its presence.” One could see French films in a similar way – Eberhardt calls *Jules and Jim* (*Jules et Jim*, François Truffaut, 1962), *Cleo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*, Agnès Varda, 1962), and *Last Year at Marienbad*—three examples of “aristocratic cinematic painting.”²¹³ Similarly, Aleksander Jackiewicz, in his article “Chabrol’s *Hamlet*,” ironically points out that the very same auteurs who condemned literature for being

210. “Claude Chabrol jest z pewnością twórcą zaangażowanym, którego coraz bardziej niepokoją zagadnienia socjalne,” “... który kierował podczas wojny koreańskiej na froncie amerykańskim filmem antykomunistycznym,” Sadoul, “Dzień dzisiejszy francuskiej ‘nowej fali’ (I),” p. 3.

211. “W rezultacie film Marcela Carné spowodował tylko utrwalenie mitu amoralnej, bez troskiej egzystencji młodych ludzi w scenerii salonów, wystawnych przyjęć, orgii itd. W istocie rzeczywistość wygląda o wiele skromniej i mniej efektownie.” Walter, “Film a państwo (I): Pęknięte lustro współczesności,” p. 10.

212. Anna Misiak, *Kinematograf kontrolowany: cenzura filmowa w kraju socjalistycznym i demokratycznym (PRL i USA)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), p. 111.

213. “Sylwetka ludzka ... jest po to, aby tylko zasugerować swą obecność”, ”Oto trzy przykłady francuskiego ‘arystokratycznego malarstwa’ filmowego,” Konrad Eberhardt, “Kinematografia mandarynów,” *Film*, no. 24 (1962), pp. 12-3.

not cinematic enough started adapting literary classics.²¹⁴ Alicja Helman simply states: “Some films of the key representatives of the French New Wave ... are typical upper-class dramas depicting subtle, pretentious and polished love triangles.”²¹⁵ Michałek adds that what characterizes the French New Wave films is the “... contempt toward society – contempt that is based on a specific sense of superiority as well as belonging to the new elite, which respects no laws with the exception of their own right to a ‘dangerous and piquant life.’”²¹⁶

All of the comments criticizing the French New Wave films for their shallowness, social disengagement, and “bourgeois” protagonists suggest that such was indeed the profile of the whole movement. And while this certainly is not the case, as socially-involved films such as Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*, Chabrol’s *Beautiful Serge (Le Beau Serge, 1958)* or Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour (1959)* clearly confirm, many of the *nouvelle vague* films can be seen as somewhat decadent and bourgeois. Truffaut’s second feature, *Shoot the Piano Player* did not include any of the zeal with which the filmmaker directed *400 Blows*. In fact, Truffaut admitted himself that he wanted to make a movie that would “please the real film nuts and them alone.”²¹⁷ In Taverne’s view, the meaning of Chabrol’s *Cousins (Les Cousins, 1959)* can be boiled down to the “triumph of laziness, buffoonery and lack of moral conscience.”²¹⁸ Similarly, Godard’s *Breathless (À bout de souffle, 1960)* strikes the viewer as a rather senseless search for authenticity that remains only a superficial game between the male and female

214. Aleksander Jackiewicz, “Zapiski krytyczne,” *Film*, no. 50/51 (1962), p. 3.

215. “Takie utwory czołowych przedstawicieli Nowej Fali ... to typowe ‘dramaty z wyższych sfer’, misterne wielokąty miłosne, pretensjonalne i wychuchane”, Alicja Helman, “Francuska nowa fala,” *Ekran*, no. 11 (1963), p. 11.

216. “Ta pogarda dla społeczeństwa – podszyta swoistym poczuciem wyższości, przynależności do nowej elity, której żadne prawa nie obowiązują, z wyjątkiem prawa do ‘niebezpiecznego, ostrego życia.’” Michałek, “Paradoksy André Bazina,” p. 264.

217. Peter Brunette, *Shoot the Piano Player: François Truffaut, Director* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 134.

218. “... sens filmu sprowadza się do wykazania triumfu lenistwa, kabotynizmu i braku sumienia,” Taverne, “Przeciwko ‘Nowej Fali,’” p. 13.

protagonists.²¹⁹ Bolesław Michałek in his critical article on Bazin supports his arguments by referring to Jacques Siclier and his view of the French New Wave productions. Siclier states: “Those are the films whose moral character is exclusively aesthetic: thus, there are films full of contempt, films which know nothing about human nature, films which do not unveil any deeper structures.”²²⁰

At this point, if being an *auteur*, an individual expressive artist, means to create disengaged and over-eroticized films, it should not be surprising that the term could not apply to filmmakers in Poland. And not necessarily because of puritanical Polish values. I would like to suggest two reasons why filmmakers behind the Iron Curtain could not have been accepted as being *that* kind of *auteur*. The first one is a continuation of the Polish Romantic tradition and its views on the role of an artist within society, a complex phenomenon which I describe in Chapters One and Two. One could say that this is a voluntary attitude of Polish artists dictated by national responsibility. The second factor was the criteria imposed by the political and historical circumstances of the late 1950s; Communist Party dictates about usefulness in building a socialist society could not be ignored.

Communist Collectivity Vs. Capitalistic Individuality

While the time period that I am discussing here is a period that granted artists and citizens in general more freedom, it is important to remember that the Khrushchev Thaw (1954 until the early 1960s) did not turn Poland from a communist country into a democracy. Certain general ideas about collectivity and its importance in sharing labor and rewards, and thus creating a more equal, socialist society, certainly

219. Helman, "Francuska nowa fala," p. 11.

220. "Oto filmy, których moralność ma character czysto estetyczny: a więc filmy pogardy, filmy, które nie znają człowieka, filmy pozczasowe, nie ukazujące żadnych głębszych struktur...", Michałek, "Paradoksy André Bazina," p. 264.

continued to be the dominant ideology.²²¹ By definition this created an ideological resistance to the “bourgeois” notion of *auteur*. As mentioned earlier, the idea of *auteur* inherently resonates with capitalist undertones, since it envisions an individual raising himself above the level of the masses through competition, thus negating the idea of equality and collective effort. This, of course, was the official position in theory: when we look at the practice, it becomes apparent that socialist states did indirectly encourage individual competition, if only to show the rest of the world how excellent communist sportsmen, scientists and artists were.

The Polish state’s official line, however, partly accounts for the policies that organized artistic modes of production in Poland. One does not need to quote Lenin (“For us cinema is the most important art”), to understand why cinema was an important medium in formulating Communist ideology, and I do not mean here its power of manipulation. Cinema seems crucial on a more abstract level because it palpably glorifies both technological progress, and the collective labor definitive of Marxist thought. Although Marx could not have taken a stance on the subject of cinema for obvious reasons, his definition of *a collective laborer* quite nicely coincides with the process of film production. In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, he writes that a collective laborer is “...formed by a combination of a number of detailed laborers.”²²² If we translate that statement to cinema, it means that in order to make a film, it is necessary to hire a number of detailed laborers – such as a cameraman, director, screenwriter, costume designer, music composer, etc. – that would create a collective laborer. And that very notion of collectivity becomes greatly criticized by the French filmmakers. This is the case because collectivity denies a film director the right to be the only creator of his or her work; it denies the filmmaker the title of artist. In Poland, however, matters appeared differently. The ideological emphasis on

221. For more about the Thaw in Poland, see Anthony Kemp-Welch, “Thaw,” in *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 49-75.

222. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1906).

the benefits of collective work resulted in concrete policies that restructured film production in Poland.

While the French tried to individualize film art, their Polish contemporaries formed official “Film Units” that further reinforced the collaborative nature of film production. After 1955, all cinema specialists were organized around such film units: they worked on film production together, starting from the selection of good material for a script and ending with the final shape of reels ready for distribution.²²³ The main goal of organizing the units was not only to raise the artistic level of Polish cinematography, but also to concentrate different artists around similar artistic goals. As a result, not only did graduates from film school end up working together on the same projects, but, more importantly, notable writers of the period collaborated with them. Edward Zajicek, a Polish film historian, states: “Never did such a large number of writers work in film as back then.”²²⁴ Many distinguished novelists, including Marek Hłasko, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, Tadeusz Konwicki, Stanisław Lem and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz aided filmmakers; this by no means brought Polish directors any closer to the French notion of *auteur*, although it notably inclined Konwicki toward making films as director, as well as writer. While Truffaut and Astruc univocally condemned film adaptations and criticized any assistance of men of letters in the process of filmmaking, in Poland, the very fact that writers collaborated closely with directors was seen as securing the high artistic level of Polish productions. This was also the case because traditionally writers in Poland enjoyed great esteem as representatives of “high art.” By associating film with established writers cinema itself was elevated to a higher status.

The degree to which film units and the idea of collaboration contributed to the artistic quality of the Polish Film School’s production was affirmed many decades later. After the political and economic transitions of 1989 (which resulted in very poor

223. Edward Zajicek, “Kinematografia,” in *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku: Film, Kinematografia*, ed. Edward Zajicek (Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1994), pp. 35–100.

224. “Nigdy tylu literatów nie pracowało na rzecz filmu.” Edward Zajicek, *Poza ekranem: kinematografia polska 1918-1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992), p. 143.

domestic films), initiatives were undertaken to restart the work of film units in the hope of bettering the conditions for Polish cinematography.²²⁵ Piotr Marecki initiated the formation of a film unit called “Restart” that openly alluded to the tradition of the prewar group START, whose members came up with the idea of creating film units in the 1950s. Tadeusz Sobolewski, a prominent Polish critic, recalled the exceptional period of the Polish Film School in the fifties, writing in 2010: “Who is going to ... create images that will shake us, that will bring catharsis? Only contact with young literature and young criticism can help – only the return to collectiveness.”²²⁶

Indeed, the structure of film units introduced in 1955 promoted teamwork. Each unit consisted of an artistic director (picked from among the most distinguished filmmakers), a literary director (a writer or critic), and a production director (“a businessman”). Additionally, a few mature and many young, aspiring directors made up each team. The “mother” institution that supervised all units was the state-run Enterprise for Film Production; its role was to provide other film specialists such as cameramen, editors, art directors etc.²²⁷ One of the most famous auteurs of the Polish Film School, Kazimierz Kutz, says about the benefits of working in the Film Unit “Kadr”: “In practice it was one of the most important elements of the relaxed path to my cinematic debut; in fact, it was the Unit that – out of care for me – prepared the field for my artistic activity.”²²⁸

Certainly, the collaboration between different personalities did not always go smoothly. Oftentimes, personal animosities, petty jealousies, and contrasting ideological and artistic ideas seriously hindered certain projects or even made them impossible. Aleksander Ford and his efforts to prevent the making of *The*

225. Piotr Marecki, Marcin Adamczyk Marcin Malatyński, *Restart zespołów filmowych* (Kraków-Łódź: Korporacja Halart, 2012).

226. “Kto dzisiaj zmiesza szyki, stworzy obrazy, które wstrząsną, przyniosą *katharsis*? Może temu służyć kontakt z młodą literaturą i młodą krytyką – powrót do zespołowości,” Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Restart polskiego kina,” *wyborcza.pl*, October 16, 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8518956,Restart_polskiego_kina.html.

227. Marcin Adamczyk, *Restart zespołów filmowych*, pp. 17-18.

228. “W praktyce to jeden z najważniejszych elementów mojej spokojnej drogi do debiutu, bo to w gruncie rzeczy zespół, w trosce o mnie, przygotowywał mi pole działania,” *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Headquarters of the Dead (*Baza ludzi umarłych*, 1958, directed by Czesław Petelski) is just one example. It is possible that Ford considered the project of little artistic value, but the eagerness with which he literally guarded all the copies of the film after it had been eventually made indicates that he was driven by his open aversion to Petelski.²²⁹ It was not possible to avoid such situations. Nevertheless, the formation of film units during the Polish Film School period that stressed the collaborative nature of filmmaking not only gave various artists more freedom from the state's direct supervision, since this was managed by film artists at the production level, but also improved the artistic quality of domestic filmmaking. What is more important, though, in terms of the concept of film authorship, is that such organisation of the film industry in Poland further reinforced the notion that film is a collective art rather than the *auteur's* personal domain.

Although the film units enjoyed some degree of autonomy, they were not in control of accepting scripts for film production, as that was the role of censors. The implications of censorship were considerable: the presence of censors further complicated the notion of *auteur* as they officially intervened in artists' projects. Certainly in France, as well as in other free market economies, producers played the role of censors to some degree. However, one of the main postulates of the French New Wave directors was to make low budget films that would free directors from the censorship of producers. Thus, while the French could actually get away from these pressures, to completely avoid state censors in socialist countries was nearly impossible. There was one notable instance in Polish cinematography in the late 1950s, when a low-budget, "amateurish" film was produced. Tadeusz Konwicki, a prominent writer and the literary director of the Film Unit "Kadr," with the help of a few friends, directed his debut film *The Last Day of Summer* (*Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958) on a really tight budget. The rationale behind such an idea was not to avoid censorship

229. Misiak, *Kinematograf kontrolowany: cenzura filmowa w kraju socjalistycznym i demokratycznym (PRL i USA)*, p. 182.

though, as that was impossible regardless of the budget, but rather to make it possible for Konwicki, who had no film training whatsoever, to direct an experimental film.²³⁰

There is no doubt that during the first few years of the Polish Film School (1956–1960), filmmakers enjoyed a more relaxed political atmosphere than their colleagues working before 1956. Nevertheless, state censorship continued. Anna Misiak states:

[After 1956] it was possible to both say and show more in film. But the party was still on alert, even though it changed its standards a bit. The Thaw started, the Polish Film School emerged, but the censorship was constantly at work – continuing to use the old mechanisms in a somewhat milder form. Those mechanisms survived the Thaw and hit the film industry with double force in the sixties.²³¹

A censor became yet another person that intervened in filmmakers' projects; in a sense, the censor was an additional film crew member; this topic will become one of the major focuses of Chapter Four.

Censorship and the formation of film units were not the only aspects of the cinema industry that “forced” Polish filmmakers to collaborate with others: the fact that after the war there existed only one higher institution in Poland educating future filmmakers – the famous Łódź film school – created a situation where future artists, whether they liked it or not, had to interact with one another. Certainly the reason there was only one film school in Poland after the war was not dictated by ideology. There was little money for investment in the film industry in a situation where major cities had to be rebuilt and people had to be fed. But perhaps precisely because there was only one film school in Poland, the best prewar filmmakers and critics taught there. Thus, Jerzy Toeplitz, Aleksander Ford, and Wanda Jakubowska among others

230. Zajicek, *Poza ekranem: kinematografia polska 1918-1991*, p. 155.

231. “W kinie można było mówić i pokazywać więcej. Partia jednak nadal czuwała, choć zmieniła nieco standardy. Zaczęła się odwilż, powstała polska szkoła filmowa, ale cenzura działała, wciąż używając starych mechanizmów w nieco złagodzonej formie. Ta maszyna przetrwała odwilż i w latach sześćdziesiątych uderzy w środowisko filmowe ze zdwojoną siłą”. Misiak, *Kinematograf kontrolowany: cenzura filmowa w kraju socjalistycznym i demokratycznym (PRL i USA)*, p. 111.

created the basis of future Polish cinematography, just as the first graduates from Łódź created the Polish Film School movement.

Andrzej Wajda liked repeating his favorite anecdote about the Łódź school. When he was already working as a director, he was present at a lecture that professor Jerzy Toeplitz gave in Copenhagen. The scholar talked beautifully and with high praise about one particular film school – Wajda, listening, dreamt that it would have been great to study at such an amazing place. Only after a while did he realize that Toeplitz was talking about the Łódź school, from which Wajda himself graduated. After some years, however, Wajda tempered his disdain for the school as he understood that the institution did an excellent job of educating future film specialists – it was the Stalinist period during which he studied that made his memory of the school rather bitter.²³² Although Wajda openly criticized the school, he could not deny the great benefits that came out of his years in Łódź. Apart from the practical knowledge that he gained, he also met a group of young talented people with whom he later collaborated on his film masterpieces: the cameraman Jerzy Lipman and the actors Tadeusz Łomnicki, Zbigniew Cybulski and Tadeusz Janczar. In other words, although the structures of the school were far from ideal, the institution did attract promising artists who ended up collaborating on films now considered the greatest in Polish cinematic history such as *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament*, 1958, Andrzej Wajda), *Eroica* (1957, Andrzej Munk), and *Knife in the Water* (*Nóż w wodzie*, 1961, Roman Polański).²³³

To summarize, the presence of one training school, the collective nature of the film units, as well as the dominant communist ideology, were the main reasons why *auteur* theory, understood as the freedom to “make films as one pleases,” could not operate in Poland in the same way it operated in France. Another reason was the long and still prevailing Polish tradition of the role of an artist within society, a phenomenon I explored in the first two Chapters. In this second respect, I see the first

232. Tadeusz Lubelski, *Wajda* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2006), p. 51.

233. Since Polański belongs to a somewhat younger generation of filmmakers than the artists from the Polish Film School, he also collaborated with younger filmmakers, notably with Jerzy Skolimowski.

step toward saving Bazin from his “apprentices:” the French critic writes that “...the individual transcends society, but society is also and above all *within* him.” As demonstrated in the first Chapter, this could also be the definition of a Polish Romantic artist.

Considering these historical contexts, the “ethical” (or ideological) role of an artist in Polish culture was arguably the most important reason why it was difficult at first to apply the term *auteur* to Polish filmmakers. Moreover, it seems that such an “ethical” element is also the reason why Bazin’s name was removed from the articles discussing *film autorski* and the criticism of his “apprentices.” It does not matter whether the articles condemning the French New Wave for its “moral depravation” are justifiable or fair; they do, in fact, help us to understand what kind of connotation the notion of *film autorski* at its inception evoked in Poland. What is also very telling is that only the articles summarizing the French New Wave movement are very critical of its bourgeois tendencies; pieces dedicated to individual filmmakers oftentimes are quite flattering. One thing is clear, though: until 1961 Polish film grapples with the notion of *auteur*—an individual who does not care for any sense of community and for whom the most important thing is to keep his artistic impulses unrestrained by any sense of obligation or external pressure. Thus, the term appears only in the discussions of French filmmakers. Since Polish directors have to carry the burden of national responsibility, the term does not apply to them.

***Auteur* = Director and Screenwriter**

The meaning of the term *auteur* defined by Polish criticism prior to 1961 changed quickly, however. Although it is difficult to find the reason why this happened, it seems quite likely that the growing popularity of auteurism in the world of cinema and the appearance of some unique filmmakers in Polish cinematography shifted its

meaning. In other words, Polish critics needed the term *film autorski* in discussions of domestic productions, since it had become a common term in film criticism.

In 1961, *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, a Polish film journal addressed to film journalists, printed a short note about a new film by Tadeusz Konwicki. The last sentence says: “*All Souls’ Day* [Konwicki’s film] is a typical example of so-called *auteur* film, where its creator is a director and a screenwriter at the same time.”²³⁴ Two things are noteworthy here: first of all, for the first time we get a clear-cut definition of *film autorski* that applies to a Polish filmmaker. Secondly, the term no longer evokes social and ethical concerns, but rather becomes a technical label describing a component of the practice of filmmaking – the fact that one individual occupied two positions on the team. This latter definition does not directly challenge the idea of collective production. These two different definitions could be, and often were, conflated.

Konrad Eberhardt similarly describes an *auteur* in his review of Konwicki’s second film, *All Souls’ Day*. He asks: “In what direction will the talent of Konwicki go? Is it going to define better that new kind of *auteur* film in which there is no division between a filmmaker and a screenwriter because everything starts in the mind of one artist only?”²³⁵ If one understands auteurism in this way, it becomes easy to classify filmmakers as auteurs: only filmmakers who direct *and* write their screenplays are auteurs. Thus, artists such as Charlie Chaplin, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jean-Luc Godard and Tadeusz Konwicki are auteurs, while Alfred Hitchcock, Alain Resnais and Andrzej Wajda are not—overall, a rather restricting clarification. In fact, not even a year later, Bolesław Michałek published the translation of Bazin’s theory together with his essay pointing at confusions around the term *auteur*. It is at this point that he declares that

234. “Zaduszki’ są typowym przykładem tzw. filmu autorskiego, jako dzieło którego twórcą jest scenarzysta i reżyser w jednej osobie,” “Filmy pełnometrażowe,” *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, no. 14 (1961), pp. 5–7.

235. “W jakim kierunku pójdzie rozwój talent twórcy ‘Ostatniego dnia lata’? Czy określi ściślej ten rodzaj filmu całkowicie autorskiego, w którym nie ma już podziału na sferę kompetencji ‘scenarzysty’ i ‘reżysera,’ gdyż wszystko poczyna się w wyobraźni tego samego twórcy?” Eberhardt, “Niespłacony dług wspomnieniom,” p. 4

Bazin was concerned with auteurism in aesthetic terms, while his “apprentices” saw it as a social matter.

Not only critics, but filmmakers themselves seemed to comprehend the restrictions of *film autorski* as a term understood to refer only to director *and* screenwriter, objecting to this view. In an interview from 1960, Tadeusz Konwicki says: “A filmmaker has his own vision and has no responsibility to care too much about a screenwriter’s imagination. I predict that soon in film art different functions will be performed by one man – a film’s author who will be a screenwriter, a music composer, an art director, and of course, a director.” It seems that at first Konwicki also provides a 2-in-1 definition of an *auteur*. He adds: “Nowadays we only like a film that is directed ‘in the first person,’ if it is maximally personal and if it’s the private property of a filmmaker in the smallest possible detail.”²³⁶ Konwicki specifies his definition and, understanding the limitations of the director + screenwriter meaning, moves closer to the notion propagated by Austruc and Truffaut, i.e. related to the social status of a filmmaker.

Therefore, what followed Konwicki’s interview and Michałek’s translation is rather predictable: the term *film autorski* becomes more and more unclear. The same journal that in 1961 reports that to be an *auteur* means to be a director *and* a screenwriter, in 1965 provides a different definition. The short article again uses the term with respect to Tadeusz Konwicki and his new film *Salto*: “That film, formally unique and very poetic in its atmosphere and imagery, is an *auteur* work in its full meaning; it is directed ‘in the first person’ and it is very personal.”²³⁷ Not only does such a description clearly refer to Bazin’s essay, it also provides a more complex

236. “Reżyser ma ... swoją własną, odrębną wizję i nie ma obowiązku liczyć się z nadto z wyobraźnią autora. Przewiduje jednak proces skupiania różnych funkcji w filmie artystycznym w rękach jednego człowieka – autora filmu, który będzie twórcą scenariusza, muzyki, scenografii, no i reżyserem,” “... Film nam dziś tylko wtedy się podoba, jeżeli jest nakręcony ‘w pierwszej osobie,’ jeżeli jest maksymalnie osobisty, jeżeli jest w najdrobniejszym szczególe prywatną własnością reżysera.” “Filmy pełnometrażowe,” p. 7

237. “Ten niezwykle formalnie, bardzo poetycki w nastroju i obrazie film jest dziełem w pełnym tego słowa znaczeniu autorskim, nakręconym w ‘pierwszej osobie’, ściśle osobistym,” in “Pełny metraż,” *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, no. 7 (1965), pp. 4-8.

notion of film authorship. One month later, Stefan Morawski writes the first full-length article elaborating on the controversial idea of auteurism. Only at that point does Polish criticism enter into the world debate on film authorship.

Bazin's Voice Appears in the Discussion

In 1962 Jackiewicz highlights the contradictions with respect to the French auteurs: they first claimed to make films completely free from any influences, and then they surrender to literature; what is more, they often do not write their screenplays but hire writers to do so.²³⁸ Jackiewicz also adds: "André Bazin tolerated it [literature] but his students – especially at the beginning but theoretically up until today – have nothing to do with it."²³⁹ It is not important whether Jackiewicz is right or not. What matters here is that he signals a difference between the "master Bazin" and his students, something that not even a year later Boleslaw Michałek in his critical article on Bazin's theory will strongly highlight. Michałek's essay, "The Paradoxes of André Bazin" is a milestone in the reception of the notion of *auteur* in Poland: first, because it warns about the huge gap between the critic's and his students' understanding of the term; secondly, the book actually provides the first translation of Bazin's "De la Politique des Auteurs." Although it is quite likely that Polish critics read that essay before, it seems that it did not penetrate the Polish press earlier. What is also noteworthy is that Truffaut's "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" did not appear in the Polish press in those years either. Thus, perhaps that can partly explain why the term at its inception does not evoke much discussion and is used rather loosely.

238. Jackiewicz, "Zapiski krytyczne," p. 3.

239. "André Bazin wprawdzie tolerował ją, ale już jego uczniowie – zwłaszcza na początku, teoretycznie zaś do dziś – nie mają z nią nic wspólnego." Ibid.

What about Bazin? What is his place in forming the idea of auteurism in Polish film culture? As mentioned above, once *film autorski* starts being associated with the “immoral” characters of French New Wave film, Bazin’s name disappears from the discussion, but only because the French critic forms a separate space in the Polish press. Dudley Andrew writes: “In writing about him, many people have been tempted to call Bazin ‘a modern Saint Francis.’ With his reverence for the natural world, his personal modesty, and the simple standard of behaviour and logic he applied to every event in his life ... he could not help but to spread humour, intelligence, and good will about him.”²⁴⁰ Although Andrew does not mention Polish criticism, his description could actually be about Bazin’s position in Poland.

Bazin’s first and only visit to Poland was in 1956 when he accompanied René Clair.²⁴¹ Shortly thereafter, Polish critics begin to quite regularly translate and print his articles in the monthly journal *Film in the World* (*Film na Świecie*). The journal specialized in reprinting works related to cinema written by foreign authors, though they did not include any commentary and did not engage in any critical debates. Until the death of Bazin in 1958, *Film na Świecie* published five articles by him, unaccompanied by commentary: the first two were about André Cayatte’s²⁴² and Orson Welles’s²⁴³ cinema, the next is about the avant-garde movement.²⁴⁴ The other two texts discuss the question of eroticism in film.²⁴⁵ ²⁴⁶ Bazin’s take on eroticism is not puritan, but he nevertheless expresses some worry about overtly eroticized films. He wittily states: “Perhaps Sophia Loren will kill neorealism” because of her sex appeal.²⁴⁷ His elaboration on eroticism in cinema fits quite nicely with Polish filmmaking of the Polish Film School that avoided explicit sexual allusions – and

240. Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 234.

241. “Po zgonie André Bazin,” *Film*, no. 48 (1958), p. 5.

242. André Bazin, “Pieńko nienagannej logiki,” *Film na Świecie*, no. 3 (1956), pp. 58–64.

243. André Bazin, “Głębia ostrości Orsona Wellesa,” *Film na Świecie*, no. 6 (1965), pp. 50–55.

244. André Bazin, “Nowa awangarda,” *Film na Świecie*, no. 6 (1957), pp. 8–10.

245. André Bazin, “O erotyzmie w filmie,” *Film na Świecie*, no. 12 (1957), pp. 71–76.

246. André Bazin, *Film na Świecie*, no. 3 (1957), pp. 49–50.

247. “Być może, Sophia Loren zabije neorealizm.” *Ibid.*, p. 50.

seemed attractive in a country where artists and intellectuals must play the role of advocate for certain national goals. The aura of Bazin significantly grew only after his death: Polish authors describe him as a creator of the school of criticism that was “... independent, unbelievably ambitious and intelligent.”²⁴⁸ They even provide a description of his physical appearance making him look like a martyr: “He was short, wan and with a suffering face.”²⁴⁹

A year later, a feature article in *Film* considers Bazin and his thoughts on criticism (commented on as being “astonishingly simple and apt”).²⁵⁰ Michałek’s next essay, “The Paradoxes of André Bazin,” is the apogee of Bazin’s esteemed reception in Poland. Although the title indicates that the French critic’s theory has many inherent contradictions, Michałek eventually defends him: as long as we understand Bazin’s theory in aesthetic and structural terms, it offers a very consequential, solid, and modern set of thoughts. However, the controversies emerge when we try to use his theory to talk about cinema as a social phenomenon.²⁵¹ As I demonstrated above, this is what initially happened with auteurism in Polish criticism. But perhaps this is another Bazinian paradox that Michałek himself does not mention: can one really avoid talking about film as part of a larger social structure? Can one theorize eroticism in 1950s films without – even if unintentionally – hinting at its moral implications? What if one is already an *auteur*-critic? Can Bazin detach himself from the social sphere and talk about aesthetics only (regardless of the fact that his opinions and ideas directly influence the development of cinema as a social phenomenon)?

Apart from the fact that Bazin was an intellectual whose thoughts had a pronounced effect on the art of film, his theories on spectatorship were especially attractive in Poland. Michałek mentions that, for Bazin, it is important to create a

248. “... powstała swego rodzaju ‘szkoła krytyki’ niezależnej, niezmiernie ambitnej i inteligentnej”, “Pogrzebie André Bazin,” p. 5.

249. “Niski, mizerny, o twarzy cierpiącej,” Ibid.

250. “zdumiewającego prostotą i trafnością,” André Bazin, “Rozmyślenia nad krytyką,” *Film*, no. 11 (1959), p. 11.

251. Michałek, “Paradoksy André Bazina,” p. 265.

cinematic world where not everything is said directly; each film must include some kind of secret ambiguity. And the task of unveiling that secret belongs to spectators who must learn how to read between the lines.²⁵² As investigated in previous chapters, Romantic writers (Mickiewicz especially) created the prevailing Polish mythology and later generations of writers used it in a very clever way to pass politically unacceptable messages to their readership. During the period of Positivism, for example, readers had to learn how to “decode” certain nationalistic texts to know what authors really wanted to say but could not speak of directly due to heavy censorship.²⁵³ That coincides with what Andrzej Wajda says: “Hunting for encrypted meanings in everything is typical for us Poles.”²⁵⁴

Certainly, Bazin does not advocate heavily symbolic and structured films, but rather he endorses works where the reality presented is open to additional readings. In fact, most of the productions of the Polish Film School invite audiences to read between the lines in such a way: the result is that viewers are able to discover a more complex side of reality than the one promoted by the state. Thanks to such strategies, Polish filmmakers-auteurs were able to achieve two key goals: to trick censors, and to preserve a level of ambiguity that opened up space for anti-official readings amenable to national recovery projects. Since they were expected to appease both “parties,” the space for individual auteurist experimentation was very limited and was directed toward aesthetic experimentation, because of the politicized nature of Polish cinematography it was pushed in the direction of Słowacki’s concern for art’s formal properties. Whether Bazin influenced Polish filmmakers or not, he certainly

252. Ibid., pp. 255-256.

253. Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, “Pisarz, jego sytuacja społeczna i świadomość,” in *Literatura polska: Romantyzm, Pozytywizm*, ed. Maria Straszewska Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990), pp. 279–85.

254. “Doszukiwanie się we wszystkim zaszyfowanych znaczeń jest typowe dla nas Polaków.” Wanda Wertenstein, *Wajda mówi o sobie: wywiady i teksty* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1991), p. 31.

represented values and ideas that were attractive to Polish Film School filmmakers. Those values and ideas will be the focus of Chapters Four and Five.²⁵⁵

255. The matter is not straightforward. Alice Lovejoy writes that the French critic influenced the Czechoslovak New Wave in the 1960s'. The Polish Film School, however, started emerging after the thaw in 1956 – at the time when Bazin's writing was just becoming more available. See Lovejoy, "From Ripples to Waves: Bazin in Eastern Europe."

Chapter Four

Tadeusz Konwicki: An *Auteur* of the Collective

While French filmmakers could freely engage in postwar disputes over the “left-wing” or “right-wing” shape of their national cinema, Polish directors were in an entirely different situation.²⁵⁶ The “patronage” of the USSR, although disguised as a brotherly union, did not leave much room for autonomous activities: not only was the Soviet aesthetic of socialist realism imposed on the arts, but also all cultural activity was heavily censored.²⁵⁷ As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the people who came to shape the nascent Polish film industry in the Republic of People’s Poland, i.e. Aleksander Ford, Wanda Jakubowska, Eugeniusz Cękański and Jerzy Toeplitz, were leftists, but they did not blindly follow the regime’s vision of film art. In fact, Jakubowska’s *Last Stage (Ostatni etap, 1947)* as well as Ford’s *Border Street (Ulica graniczna, 1948)* exhibited some fresh aesthetic and thematic qualities; nevertheless, after the film conference in Wisła in 1949, when socialist realism was accepted as the main aesthetic principle in film art, possibilities for cinema’s development in Poland diminished. In effect, the years of the Stalinist period preceding the emergence of the so-called Polish Film School (in 1955) brought typical products of the Stalinist era, films which praised the primacy of Marxism-Leninism and supported the Communist Party’s view of

256. Amber McNett, “The Politics of the French New Wave,” *New Wave Film.com*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.newwavefilm.com/about/french-new-wave-politics.shtml>.

257. Marek Haltof defines the aesthetics of socialist realism as follows: “The doctrine of socialist realism demanded the adherence to the Communist Party line, the necessary portrayal of the class struggle (the struggle between the old and new), the emphasis on class-based images, the rewriting of history from the Marxist perspective, and the elimination of ‘reactionary bourgeois’ ideology.” Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 56.

recent history.²⁵⁸ According to Wojciech Włodarczyk, during that time art had no authors, because the state was considered to be the main author.²⁵⁹ But in fact, there were the previous START members, who would direct films close to their beliefs, as well as many other artists (most notably writers) who eagerly joined the Polish film industry. What is important is that many of them were not forced to write scripts in the vein of socialist realism, but rather were convinced that this new aesthetic can do something good, and may in fact be better than giving into pressures of prewar extreme right Polish nationalistic circles.²⁶⁰ Tadeusz Konwicki was one of them – in 1955, for example, he wrote a typical socialist propaganda screenplay for a film *Career* (*Kariera*, Jan Koecher), as well as a few socialist realist novels (*Przy budowie/By the Building Site*, 1950; *Władza/Power*, 1954–55). Only later did he realize that the ideology promoted by the Communist regime was founded on exploitation and false promises.

The first years of the Polish Film School coincided with the so-called Thaw, which began in earnest in 1956. Nikita Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin's "cult of personality" that year, together with the death of the Polish communist leader Bolesław Bierut, resulted in a brief period of liberalization in Poland. For the film industry, this meant not only the building of more movie theaters, but also an increase in the number of international films imported; the Thaw also brought huge interest in organizing cine-clubs, where films excluded from official distribution due to censorship could be viewed.²⁶¹ Filmmakers and writers suddenly gained the freedom to express more. But to express more did not mean to become like French auteurs, who expressed a wide variety of personal viewpoints. Rather, it meant to try to unveil and demythologize the Soviet interpretation of history that had been reflected in the arts since the end of the war. It meant to create heroes whose actions were not simply

258. Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego* (Katowice: Videograf II, 2009), pp. 153-156. There were not many feature films made in Poland between 1947 and 1955 (for example, between 1950-1954 there were twenty-three), and although not all of them were a clear-cut exercises in socialist realism, consideration of the few exceptions lies beyond the scope of this project.

259. Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 70

260. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 175.

261. Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, 2002, pp. 77-78.

right or wrong from a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint; instead, ambiguous characters were reflective of the mutilations of both the war and the immediate postwar Soviet-dominated Communist period. In short, when the political climate in Poland became more liberal, Polish filmmakers' major priority was to comment on "touchy" topics such as the real effects of the Second World War in Poland.

Certainly, Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Kazimierz Kutz and Tadeusz Konwicki, just like their French contemporaries, showcased morally ambiguous and rebellious youth. But the defiance of their protagonists carried an enormous existential weight - they rebelled against killing (e.g. Maciek Chełmicki in *Ashes and Diamonds*, directed by Andrzej Wajda in 1958), the emotional devastation caused by historical forces (e.g. The Man in *The Last Day of Summer*, directed by Tadeusz Konwicki in 1958) or the idea of being a "war hero" (e.g. Dzidzius Górkiewicz in *Eroica*, directed by Andrzej Munk in 1958). In contrast to the common criticism launched against French protagonists such as Michel in *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) or Francois in *Beautiful Serge* (Claude Chabrol, 1958) there was nothing decadent or snobbish about the heroes of Polish films. Although Wajda's and Munk's films depict past events and not present situations, it is obvious that they use the past as a strategy for commenting on the situation in Soviet-controlled territories. Janina Falkowska, a historian of Polish film, believes that Wajda's first three full-length films made during the Polish Film School period "...reveal Wajda not only as a promising and skilled director, but also as a passionate assessor of Polish history."²⁶² Similarly, Konwicki's films and novels express a full range of Polish complexes and psychological sufferings.²⁶³ The art of both filmmakers - each in its own unique fashion - carries forward certain totalizing statements about the Polish collective imagination. In the following two chapters, I argue that Konwicki and Wajda - from the perspective of the 21st century - gained their status as national bards of the Polish screen in a manner

262. Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema* (New York: Bergham Books, 2007), p. 35.

263. Łukasz Maciejewski, "Kronika wypadków filmowych Tadeusza Konwickiego," *Kino*, no. 6 (2006), pp. 58-62.

reminiscent of Mickiewicz and Słowacki, and were subject to analogous political pressures. I base my conclusions not only on the Polish Film School filmmakers' extra-textual statements from the period about how they understood their role in society, but also on close analyses of selected films. In other words, while Chapter Three explored how the theoretical foundation of auteurism developed in Poland, Chapters Four and Five look at the practices of Konwicki and Wajda to demonstrate how they had to express their artistic individuality (become "auteurs" in the Western European sense), while simultaneously appeasing the state censors, and appealing to the nation. In order to further contrast the notion of auteurism in Poland with its French equivalent, I will highlight the role of the censors in the process of filmmaking in Poland.

To be sure, not only Konwicki and Wajda were labeled spokesmen on Polish matters. As I pointed out in the introduction, the whole Polish Film School movement quite soon became associated with the Romantic tradition. But while the basis for those comparisons are thematic and stylistic, I argue that they also apply to the status of a filmmaker in the communist era. Paradoxically, the high status of an artist brings to mind a concept of individuality similar to that of Truffaut and Astruc. But can one really "speak in the first person" (to use Bazin's quote) if one must also speak on behalf of society? Therefore, what I am emphasizing here is the notion of a unique artistic individual, whose individuality is submissive to the collective (but not the Soviets). And, because Polish Romantic artists initiated the notion of advocating for the Polish cause, the notion of making films "as one pleases" or creating disengaged films was out of the question in Poland under communism. To put it differently, Polish auteurs were perceived by themselves and others as having a mission to fulfill, to make people aware of certain political mechanisms. And that sense of responsibility for the "common good" contrasts with the dominant idea of auteurism as declared by the French filmmakers.

The Censor as Part of the Crew

As I highlighted in the first chapter, throughout the history of Polish culture literature has traditionally performed the role of a political tool. With the emergence of film art, however, this agitating role shifted from the pages of a book to the screen. The immense potential of moving pictures became particularly attractive in countries devoid of democracy, as it turned out that it was far easier to avoid the damaging effects of censorship in cinema than in literature. As Wajda says: “Yes, it is possible to cut out some words from *Ashes and Diamonds*, but it is impossible to censor the acting of Zbigniew Cybulski. It was his behavior, his way of dealing with people that contained that ‘something’ which was politically unacceptable.”²⁶⁴ What Wajda highlights here is not only the ability of images to convey nuanced ambiguous meanings, but also the power of non-verbal gestures and body language. Thanks to this ambiguity of cinematic images and actors’ performances, film became an exceptionally powerful tool with which to subvert official ideology.

It was not only the nature of the cinematic medium, but also the very profiles of the film censors that made it easier to subvert official ideology on screen/stage than in print. In an interview, Andrzej Wajda laughingly recalls the way in which state censors checked his newest theatrical adaptation of *Antigone* before general release. Wajda says:

And suddenly a choir dressed as the Gdańsk shipyard workers in white helmets appeared on stage and preached to Creon. Surely, anyone in one’s right mind would say: “Wait a minute! What’s going on? Is this *Antigone*?”. However, in the last row sat censors. And what did they do? They were holding flashlights trying to illuminate the copies of *Antigone*, only from time to time looking at the stage. The censors reasoned that since the audience was clearly reacting to the play, we must have changed something in the text. But the text was exactly the same as

264. Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, p. 61.

the lines pronounced by the actors on stage. ... So they stamped the script and approved the whole play for release.²⁶⁵

Paradoxically, censors were so busy following the text of *Antigone* that they did not notice that the “ancient” choir was dressed as the real-life Gdańsk workers who had protested against the communist regime.

Many years later another brilliant Polish filmmaker, Krzysztof Kiesłowski, also made fun of censors in his movie *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979). There is a scene where an amateur filmmaker Filip is asked by a Communist Party boss to make a short film about the upcoming jubilee of his plant. Filip films the celebration but also cuts in some shots of pigeons sitting on a windowsill and then flying off that he recorded out of boredom. After seeing the pigeons, his boss feels incredibly uneasy; he understands that on the surface the shots only show innocent birds, but he nevertheless fears that they can represent some kind of “subversive element.”

The fact that film censors paid more attention to words than images (and that oftentimes they were not trained in reading the latter) turned cinema into a powerful tool for smuggling ambiguous messages. Writers understood this shift as well; in fact, the most notable authors such as Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, Tadeusz Konwicki, Marek Hłasko and Jerzy Andrzejewski joined different film units in order to collaborate with filmmakers on certain productions. This not only contrasted with the idea of *auteur* film proposed by the French, where filmmakers were supposed to write their own scripts, but also resulted in ambiguous dialogues written for films by writers who were accustomed to playing “word games” with the censors. In other words, a censor (next to the Poles who sought to make sense of WWII trauma) was the primary and

265. “A jeszcze dalej wkracza na scenę chór, który grozi i poucza Kreona i jest ubrany za stoczniovców w białych hełmach. No to przecież każdy przy zdrowych zmysłach mówi: ‘Chwileczkę, chwileczkę! To co to jest za przedstawienie? Jak ono się nazywa? Antygona?’ W ostatnim rzędzie siedziała cenzura. Co robiła cenzura? Cenzura miała latarki i świecili latarką na egzemplarz „Antygony” i tak czasem robili. Oni kombinowali, że jeżeli publiczność reaguje, to myśmy musieli przerobić tekst. A tekst był zrobiony tak jak trzeba. ... I oni sprawdzili co trzeba, tekst jest, i przybili pieczętkę.” Telewizja Polska S.A., *Andrzej Wajda: Rozmowy poszczególne*, 2014, <http://ninateka.pl/film/rozmowy-poszczeg-lne-andrzej-wajda>, ‘14:20.

mandatory viewer of all potential productions.²⁶⁶ Since no film artist could escape censorship, Polish auteurs had to create films with an official viewer and commentator in mind: the censor, whose approval was obligatory.

While Wajda and Kiesłowski do not speak highly of the censors' competence, it is particularly interesting to consider the historical research on the Main Bureau of Press, Publication and Spectacle Control (*Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk*) informally known as the Bureau on Mysia Street. No matter how unsophisticated the censors may have been, they nevertheless prevented many cinematic ideas from being realized: the best proof is Andrzej Wajda's Archive in Kraków where one shelf is filled with scripts banned from production. Mechanisms of censorship did operate successfully in blocking many projects. What is more, the notion of what should and should not appear in any given work was dictated not only by the list of regulations imposed by the Bureau on Mysia Street, but also by the general atmosphere of caution: the notion of self-censorship which was based on, as the historian Maria Bogucka puts it, "self-control and self-regulation," and very often determined scholars' and artists' line of work.²⁶⁷ In other words, creative individuals very often avoided certain topics in advance, anticipating that they would not pass censorship.

As much as there is no doubt that censorship hindered artistic development in Poland, the presence of a censor is oftentimes quoted as the reason why Polish film in the PRL was full of striking visual metaphors, or rather "necessary metaphors," as filmmaker Agnieszka Holland describes it.²⁶⁸ To this day, the most comprehensive book on censorship under communism is *The Great Book on Censorship in the Republic*

266. Tadeusz Lubelski explores the degree to which postwar Polish viewers demanded domestic productions to bring both entertainment and commentary on recent war experiences in *The History of the People's Poland Non-Existent Cinema*. See: Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia niebyła kina PRL* (Kraków: Znak, 2012), <http://www.znak.com.pl/kartoteka,ksiazka,3329,Historia-niebyla-kina-PRL>, p. 19.

267. " ... autocenzura, polegająca na indywidualnej samokontroli i samoograniczeniu się," Maria Bogucka, "Życie z cenzurą," in *Cenzura w PRL. Relacje historyków* (Warsaw: NERITON, 2000), pp. 45-50.

268. "Metafory 'konieczne,'" Dobrochna Dabert, "Kino polskie z cenzurą w tle," *Horyzont polonistyki*, n.d., pp. 6-12.

of Poland in Documents (*Wielka księga cenzury PRL w dokumentach*). In the book, Tomasz Strzyżewski provides the actual “censors’ manual,” which he illegally hand-copied from the Bureau while he was employed there. Although he first published it in 1977, most of the guidelines for censors had not changed since 1946. What was constantly changing, however, was the list of names that were to be banned from any public mention.

One of the key misconceptions about censorship, Strzyżewski asserts, is the degree to which censors intervene in any given work. A censor’s job is to cut as little as possible – not as much as he can – so the reader and viewer experience no sense of being manipulated. Strzyżewski recalls with admiration one of the “ideal censors”: “He would softly take a pencil in his hand and make a subtle movement, or a few movements only, and then would change entire texts with this subtle gesture—like a magician.”²⁶⁹ In film, this principle of invisible intervention had more at stake: filmmaking in Poland was fully state-funded and any changes (including adding new scenes, reshooting the existing ones, etc.) involved huge financial losses. Certainly, there is no doubt that money was of lesser importance when ideology was being compromised – therefore, in order to avoid budgetary losses, the usual practice was to harshly scrutinize the script itself. This not only resulted in disqualifying many film projects, but also, in making the censors’ life easier: they did, in fact, deal primarily with written texts.

The establishment of film units (see previous chapter), however, gave film artists slightly more freedom to get the censors’ approval; each unit had a literary director who was responsible for making the initial selection and changes in the submitted film scripts. Only after that did the scripts go through inspection at the Bureau on Mysia. Very often the positions of literary directors were held by established writers skilled in persuasive writing. In the “Kadr” Film Unit, for example, Tadeusz Konwicki acted

269. “Brał ołówek delikatnie w palce i robił subtelny ruch, ewentualnie kilka ruchów i odmieniał całe teksty. Jak magik,” Zbigniew Romek, “Kłopoty z cenzurą. Kilka refleksji zamiast wstępu,” in *Cenzura w PRL. Relacje historyków* (Warsaw: NERITON, 2000), pp. 7–41.

as literary director (1956-1968), and this often helped other directors avoid the censors' condemnation of certain projects. Konwicki recalls: "As a 'film clerk' I was extremely modest and very capable. I wrote insane official state-building explications supporting my friends' cinematic projects. In order to make a film, I tried to charm and cheat the so-called state elements."²⁷⁰ Although Konwicki admits that his cunning writing did not always suffice to "save" film projects, what mattered was the fact that people from artistic circles, rather than state bureaucrats, had more say at this stage of the creative process. In sum, the position of an artistic/literary director within film units helped in dealing with censors; nevertheless, it did not eliminate the notion of self-censorship, which regulated and directed artists' ideas and encouraged them to take certain precautions.

Close analyses of Konwicki's and Wajda's films demonstrate how the two directors managed to express messages in line with official state ideology and at the same time satisfied Poles' need to internalize postwar national trauma. Making sense of collective post-war trauma, which to a significant degree was inflicted by the Soviets,²⁷¹ became the artists' task; the best way to do so was "through the elaboration of myths and legends defining moral boundaries of society,"²⁷² as Arthur G. Neal notes in his book on national trauma. In short, just as the bloody suppression of the November Uprising of 1830 became fertile ground for Mickiewicz to create Polish myths, the memory of the Second World War's carnage, and the post-war suppression of non-Communist Poles, prepared the ground for Wajda and Konwicki to reinvent new myths, as well as revisit the Romantic ones.

270. "Jako urzędnik filmowy byłem strasznie pokorny i zapobiegliwy. Pisałem szalenie państwowotwócze eksplicacje do projektów moich kolegów. Usiłowałem oczarować i okłamać tzw. czynniki, żeby można było robić film," Tadeusz Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), p. 19.

271. As explained in the introduction, Soviets, traditionally equated with Russians, were inscribed into the Polish national imagination as more threatening invaders than the Germans (although the crimes committed by both sides - if such comparisons could be made - were equally devastating).

272. Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience* (M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p. 20.

Tadeusz Konwicki and His Ordinary Protagonists

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Tadeusz Konwicki was the first Polish filmmaker labeled an *auteur* by Polish criticism. His films not only defied the rules of cinema at the time and manifested his unorthodox individual creativity,²⁷³ he was the only one²⁷⁴ who – unlike his famous contemporaries – directed and wrote his productions himself (in fact, Konwicki established himself above all as a writer, not a filmmaker). Everyone familiar with his films and novels can immediately trace motifs and stylistic strategies that reappear in his works again and again (protagonists hunted by war memories, the closeness of the apocalypse, folk superstitions, the mixture of Catholic piety with pagan beliefs, suicides, the presence of supernatural forces and premonitions). These “patterns” perhaps place him quite close to the Western notion of auteurism in foregrounding individuality in his work. Tadeusz Lubelski acknowledges his closeness to the *nouvelle vague* tradition, and writes about Konwicki’s debut *The Last Day of Summer* (*Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958): “Who could have imagined that the film would become – *avant la lettre* – the first New Wave experience of our cinema, preceding the set of rules that would very soon be established by the group of *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics?”²⁷⁵

Nevertheless, although Konwicki’s filmmaking probably best fits the Western paradigm, the artist himself asserts: “Individual complexes do not exist, just as individual diseases do not exist. An artist’s complexes are just the same as social

273. Stanisław Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyściça. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim* (London: Aneks, 1986), p. 70.

274. Apart from Konwicki, there were two other writers who decided to direct films: Jerzy Stefan Stawiński and Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski, yet their films did not possess the same level of sophistication as Konwicki’s productions. See: Stefan Morawski, “O tak zwanym filmie autorskim,” *Dialog*, no. 8 (1965), pp. 91 - 96.

275. “Któż mógł przypuszczać, że stanowi on – *avant la lettre* – pierwsze nowofalowe doświadczenie naszego kina, wyprzedzając pod tym względem system reguł, które za chwilę ustanowi zespół krytyków *Cahiers du Cinema*”? Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 216.

complexes.”²⁷⁶ When talking about his novels, Konwicki adds: “Readers consist of both angels and boors. We, the writers, have some kind of pedagogical authorization with respect to our readers. At the moment when a reader reads my work, I have the right to point out to him his ugly inclinations.”²⁷⁷ Both statements underline my primary argument: the first de-individualizes the traces of individual personality in film art, while the latter acknowledges the pedagogical role that any artist was expected to fulfill, be it a writer or a filmmaker (Konwicki states: “A writer is an authentic director who directs whole scenes and situations using sentences.”).²⁷⁸ Although there is no doubt that Konwicki’s films heavily allude to his biography, and recycle the same themes, at the same time, Konwicki adapts his Polish-specific experiences to broader social experiences. His cinematic debut, *The Last Day of Summer*, one of the top achievements of the Polish Film School, well illustrates this point.

The Last Day of Summer (Ostatni dzień lata, 1958)

After the premiere of *The Last Day*, and even many years later, there was a lot of confusion surrounding Konwicki’s film. Both the plot (or rather the lack thereof) and style were completely novel in the world of cinema. Indeed, in 1958 *The Last Day of Summer* appeared to be, as Konwicki put it, “a freak.”²⁷⁹ The whole movie was shot on location, without sound, so the film crew had to learn actors’ lines by heart in order to recreate them in a studio later; what is more, two scenes were recorded with a hand-

276. “Nie ma kompleksów indywidualnych – powiada Konwicki – tak jak nie ma indywidualnych chorób. Kompleks artysty odpowiada określonym sektorom kompleksów społecznych,” Stanisław Janicki, *Film polski wczoraj i dziś* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1986), p. 83.

277. “Czytelnicy składają się w takiej samej mierze z aniołów, co z chamów. Mam zatem pewne uprawnienia pedagogiczne w stosunku do swojego czytelnika. W momencie, gdy obcuje ze mną, mam prawo wytknąć mu brzydkie skłonności,” Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, p. 242.

278. “Pisarz jest autentycznym reżyserem, który przy pomocy zdań reżyseruje całe sceny i sytuacje,” Ibid., p. 169.

279. “Mój film był wtedy jak wybryk,” Tadeusz Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), p. 31.

held camera, something “one could get shot for by film specialists at the time” as Konwicki asserts.²⁸⁰ The film includes only two characters: a man and a woman [Fig. 4.1]. The woman spends her last day of summer on the beach. A man appears on the scene and tries to get closer to her. They have a limited conversation that reveals only small pieces of their respective biographies. She is in pain because she keeps thinking about a man she loved during the war who flew to England and never came back. He is disappointed with life too. He is restless because of some unclear war memories, memories that left a deep wound on his psyche. From the very beginning, they each try to get closer to each other, but are unable to. The man proposes that the woman spend her life with him; they try to create a sense of “home” on the empty beach by arranging dinner using wooden sticks as forks and an empty box as a table. The brief moments of apparent joy are very quickly interrupted by sad memories and remnants of the past war: planes crossing the sky and a grenade which the man finds on the beach. Their day together ends soon and brings no happy end. The woman wakes up from a nap alone on the deserted beach. The steps left on the sand lead directly to the sea, suggesting that the man drowned himself.

280. “Wtedy za coś takiego można było zostać zastrzelonym przez fachowców filmowych,” Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba*, p. 33.



Fig. 4.1: Novel style of narration with only two characters

Not only the “plot” but also the ascetic style and innovative nature of the film – which will come to define Konwicki’s authorial signature – confused critics. Reviews were marked by a certain degree of perplexity, but were rather negative: for some, the movie echoed the contemporary fashion for existentialism²⁸¹ and concentrated on the immaturity of the characters, an alleged trait of the Polish Film School,²⁸² others focused on the erotic game between the male and female characters.²⁸³ One review was even entitled “A Drifter and a Chick on the Beach.”²⁸⁴ Yet, the key role in the movie is played by the spectre of war, which remained the central theme of Konwicki’s later works, both cinematic and literary. As Bolesław Michałek said: *The Last Day* is a film about people scorched by the war; the war itself is expressed not by battle scenes but by the “enormous weight which contemporary people carry inside their hearts.”²⁸⁵ Michałek pushes his interpretation even further, as he elevates the

281. Z. Wawrzyniak, “Grand Prix - Wenecja 1958,” *Kurier Polski*, no. 223 (1958), pp. 18-9.

282. K. T. Toeplitz, “Bohaterska niedojrzałość,” *Dialog*, no. 6 (1959), pp. 82-97.

283. Karol Eberhardt, *Aktorzy filmu polskiego* (Warsaw 1962), pp. 62-3.

284. “Knajak i cizia na plaży,” Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyścića. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, p. 124.

285. “Nie wyraża się batalistyką, ani opisem czynów bohaterskich, tylko olbrzymim ciężarem, którzy noszą w sobie współcześni ludzie,” Bolesław Michałek, “Ostatni dzień lata,” *Film* no. 27 (1964), p. 11.

torments of the cinematic characters to that of the entire nation: “[The film] is not a superficial reminiscence of war suffering. For Poles, the war was not only the sum of its physical destruction but also a source of incredible moral conflicts; not everyone knew how to cope with them.”²⁸⁶

Michałek’s comments gesture toward totalizing experiences of war; two nameless protagonists from *The Last Day of Summer* represent the whole postwar generation that survived those terrible times. Although the film is by no means a typical narrative film with a clearly developed plot, viewers of the time seemed to appreciate it precisely because Konwicki touched the very core of Polish postwar society. In the weekly publication *Film*, one of the readers wrote a letter to the editor entitled “In Defense of *The Last Day of Summer*.” He asserts: “I won’t hesitate to call *The Last Day of Summer* a masterpiece because it communicates a lot of truth about life ... The tragedy of the protagonists is terrifying precisely because it finds its confirmation in the life of our young generation.”²⁸⁷ While this viewer states Konwicki’s film mirrors the dilemmas of Poles in a post-apocalyptic time, Maria Oleksiewicz in her interview with Konwicki in 1958 stated that many critics said that in *The Last Day* “there is no Poland.”²⁸⁸

286. “Nie jest to zresztą ogólnikowe wspomnienie cierpień wojennych. Wojna dla Polaków była nie tylko sumą żywiołowych zniszczeń; była przecież również źródłem wielkich konfliktów moralnych, którym nie wszyscy umieli sprostać,” *Ibid.*, p. 11.

287. “Nie zawaham się nazwać ‘Ostatniego dnia lata’ filmem wielkim – dlatego, że przekazuje dużo prawdy o życiu. ... Tragedia bohaterów jest przerażająca, tym bardziej, że znajduje ona potwierdzenie w życiu młodego pokolenia.” Teodor Helman, “W obronie ‘Ostatniego dnia lata,’” *Film*, no. 8 (1959), p. 7.

288. “... w tym filmie brak Polski,” Maria Oleksiewicz, “Powiem Pani bezwstydnie,” *Film*, no. 41 (1958), pp. 4-5.



Fig. 4.2: Ascetic landscape underlying intimate character of Konwicki's film

Indeed, in a literal sense, there is no Poland in Konwicki's debut. He chose to shoot the entire film on a deserted beach that does not have any characteristic features alluding to a concrete geographical area.²⁸⁹ Apart from a grenade and the planes passing the sky (both symbolizing WWII), there aren't any other artifacts representing the present day; the two protagonists do not discuss politics nor do they comment on their current lives. Instead, they recollect the past and try to simply communicate, to find the way to their hearts after the worldwide cataclysm they both lived through. They do not succeed, however. Although Konwicki doesn't make any direct references to present-day Poland, he gives voice to those who were not necessarily war heroes. To use Lubelski's words, the nameless hero in Konwicki's debut "...represents both the

²⁸⁹. What suggests the Baltic coast in the film are the shadows – protagonists cast shadows to their right side, which means the beach is facing North.

author and the people from his generation.”²⁹⁰ [Fig. 4.2] The artist clearly sympathizes with “a common man” for whom the war will never end. Notably, he leaves his protagonist nameless. What does such uncertainty about identity create in an artistic work?

There is a scene in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*, directed by Alain Resnais, from a screenplay by Robbe-Grillet, 1961) where the narrator tells a story about the meaning of a stone sculpture showing a woman and a man. The female protagonist asks the narrator what the names of the stone figures are. He confesses: “It doesn’t matter [...] They might as well be you and me. Or just anyone...” In Konwicki’s production, when the woman asks the man who he really is, he replies: “What’s the difference? There are many like me roaming around the world.”²⁹¹ The man does not think it is important to disclose any information about his identity; he does not have a name. Such anonymity not only creates a rootless protagonist with disrupted selfhood, but also introduces the concept of “Everyman”—characters who come to represent all and anyone.

The sense of an “ordinary man” who tries to cope with the trauma of WWII is further reinforced by the opening scene of *The Last Day*. The camera rolls over the empty landscape; there is the sound of the sea and blowing wind in the background; a small human figure crosses the beach. The voiceover reads Tadeusz Różewicz’s agonizing poem, “Voices”:

Men torn lacerated
the grimace of mistrust and hatred
a blind alley
with only the oblivious faces of walls
pock-marked with shot

men herded in carts

290. “Anonimowa postać chłopca ... reprezentowała autora i ludzi jego formacji,” Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 216

291. “Co za różnica? Mało takich jak ja włóczy się po świecie?” Tadeusz Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958, '29:20.

unloaded like cattle
and guarded by dogs
only by dogs
I know that I am wrong
I know I know
And yet
when a friend stretches out a hand
I flinch as if before a blow
I flinch from a human gesture
I flinch from an affectionate impulse²⁹²

The poem is recited by Irena Laskowska, the actress who plays the female protagonist in the movie. The poetic lines serve as a kind of window into the character's psychology (otherwise very limited), and the poem itself sets up the historical reference to the past war. Arguably, in Polish postwar literature perhaps there exists no other poet who expressed the horrors of WWII so acutely as Tadeusz Różewicz. His poems were very popular at the time, just like Konwicki's novels and films, which obsessively referred to war memories. The force of Różewicz's poetry lay in its simple language and the fact that instead of concentrating on the battlefield, soldiers and partisans, he speaks on behalf of ordinary men. There is no pathos, heroism, or exaggeration. There are only the emotions of simple characters with their sincere sufferings – Różewicz's "grey" people.²⁹³ As in his most famous poem, "The Survivor," Różewicz describes in "Voices" very personal experiences of witnessing horrible war crimes. Yet, he simultaneously places them in the context of collective experience. He writes in the plural: "Men herded in carts/unloaded like cattle" – as if to avoid individualizing the war trauma, which, in fact, was shared by so many people. Tadeusz Lubelski argues that this poetry sequence in *The Last Day* is so different in terms of

292. "Było rozdarcie nienawiść / Niechęć wzajemna i grymas / był zaulek ślepy / i płaskie twarze murów / dziobate od salwy / wywalani z bydłych wagonów / stado pędzone razami / i rykiem / a obok tylko łapy psów / łapy psów / łapy psów. / Ja wiem nie trzeba tak / ja wiem ja wiem / ale / kiedy przyjaciel wyciągnie rękę / zasłaniam głowę jak przed ciosem / zasłaniam się przed ludzkim gestem / zasłaniam się przed odruchem czułości," Tadeusz Różewicz, *Poezja*, vol. 1 (Kraków, 1988), p. 191.

293. Robert Cieślak, *Oko poety. Poezja Tadeusza Różewicza wobec sztuk wizualnych* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 1999), p. 44.

style from the rest of the film that it should be understood as a separate narrator's commentary.²⁹⁴ Yet, if we look at the movie as a production depicting the attempt to overcome traumatic war experiences, this poem is not necessarily excluded from the actual "action." Konwicki's choice to have Różewicz's poem read by the anonymous female protagonist, placed in a nondescript landscape, pervades *The Last Day* as the central motif.

What is more, the director's coming-to-terms with war themes (one of the most popular topics in Polish cinema after World War Two), offers an unusual vision of intangible spaces devoid of obvious historical references. This structure universalizes the Polish national experience of war. Although the film is sparse in its use of clearly Polish cultural codes and contexts, everyone in postwar Poland would have no trouble understanding the references to the war. For example, even the beach, where the Man finds a grenade, is immediately associated with the German invasion of Poland in 1939 through its naval attack on Westerplatte on the Baltic coast. In short, Konwicki's film fulfills a specific national recovery project, as it externalizes the trauma of Polish "common men." What is striking about *The Last Day*, however, is that Konwicki, unlike Andrzej Wajda, avoids glorification or glamorization of the war; on a formal level, this does not fit nation-formation strategies well. When exploring the ways of dealing with national trauma (which in fact make up one of the major components of national identity in general) Arthur G. Neal states:

Stories are told about extraordinary events, noteworthy accomplishments, and unusual tragedies. Such accounts provide ingredients for the creation of a sense of moral unity among any given group of people and permit linking personal lives with historical circumstances. Notions about "who we are" and "what we are to become" are shaped, to a large degree, from the shared identities that grow out of both extraordinary difficulties and extraordinary accomplishments in the social realm.²⁹⁵

294. Tadeusz Lubelski, *Poetyka powieści i filmów Tadeusza Konwickiego* (Wrocław, 1984), p. 91.

295. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, p. 20.

In Konwicki's film, the lack of "extraordinary events" is traded for the real impacts that these events have on human lives, something equally crucial in understanding national identity. In other words, the Polish filmmaker makes a gesture towards nameless people, men and women, who were thrown into the war, and now are trying to process its effects; and to do that, Konwicki seems to say, is no less an "extraordinary accomplishment" than firing a gun. To be sure, his film does not leave the viewers with much hope for a happy ending. Quite the contrary - the two protagonists are unable to erase their war memories and start anew. But focusing on continuous suffering, and the sense of being history's victim, is also a typical characteristic of Poles' national self-image.²⁹⁶ In short, in *The Last Day*, Konwicki feeds the collective national imagination - even if he does it using very modest cinematic means bearing no (or very subtle) association to Polish culture.

There is one more significant fact here, however. By concentrating on the very intimate characters of his film, framed in an unorthodox way, Konwicki not only succeeds in manifesting his artistic singularity and expressing collective Polish experiences, but also avoids violating Communist expectations. The subject matter - the impossibility of communicating after the war - remains a safe topic because it does not delve into the political and historical nuances of WWII and its psychological devastation. The very few instances where war references appear in *The Last Day*, they are introduced in a subtle and ambiguous form, which made it difficult for censors to object to their content. In one of the scenes, the Woman confesses: "Only once in my life I really loved. The war broke out... He went to England... he was a pilot somewhere. I've been waiting so long."²⁹⁷ Although she gives no more details, from a Communist point of view a pilot who decided to stay in England after the war was simply considered a "Western provocateur." But, at the same time, the Woman's

296. Ivan Krastev, "The Plane Crash Conspiracy Theory That Explains Poland," *Foreign Policy*, December 21, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/21/when-law-and-justice-wears-a-tinfoil-hat-poland-russia-smolensk-kaczynski/>.

297. "Raz w życiu bardzo kochałam. ... Poszedł na wojnę, potem przedostał się do Anglii, latał gdzieś na jakichś samolotach. Tyle lat czekam," '32:08.

sentence recognizes to the Polish pilots (members of the Polish Air Forces) who greatly contributed to the Allied victory in the Battle of England. From the perspective of the Romantic “patriotic” perspective, they were the heroes who fought in the name of freedom.

Similarly, Konwicki frames the Man’s experiences in a way that can satisfy both the Communist censors and patriotic circles. The Man confesses: “I’ve been everything in my life: a student, a soldier, a musician, a clerk, a lover, a politician, a deserter.”²⁹⁸ Konwicki does not specify in which army he served: either the Red Army or AK. Only very careful evaluation of his behavior (his unrest, young age, the way he is dressed) suggests that he is most likely a former Home Army soldier. Furthermore, the Man’s attitude brings to mind the model of a Romantic hero, whose duty is to die for his country and sacrifice his personal life in favor of the “common good.” When he asks the woman to stay with him, he says: “For the first time I want something only for myself.”²⁹⁹ His statement implies that while before he valued ideas for the community, but that now he has become tired and wants a personal life. By using half-finished sentences, ambiguous words and behaviors, Konwicki succeeds in creating a film which did not violate either Communist or Polish “patriotic” expectations. At the same time, it was a display of individual artistic creativity, as well as a successful attempt to advance Konwicki’s own personal thematic agendas that were to shape his next films and novels.

Although *The Last Day*, together with Konwicki’s novels and later productions, clearly bears the unique stylistic marks of Konwicki’s subjects, the artist always disguises them as “everymen.” He was labeled a creator of *film autorski* in Poland not only because he wrote his own scripts, but because he also broke the rigid rules of making films at the time (shooting on location, using hand-held camera etc.).³⁰⁰

298. “Czym ja nie byłem? Studentem, żołnierzem, muzykantem, urzędnikiem, kochankiem, politykiem, dezertorem,” Tadeusz Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata*, ‘23:35.

299. “Pierwszy raz chce coś dla siebie,” *Ibid.*, ‘45:30.

300. Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, p. 128.

Konwicki became associated with *film autorski* when the term in Polish film culture signified a director-screenwriter (Chapter Three) rather than a product of a “bored and snobbish” generation. With the pressure of a long-standing tradition of creating art that fulfills certain patriotic duties, Konwicki faced more difficulties in “making films as he pleases.” This attitude is further confirmed in Konwicki’s next film: *All Souls’ Day* (*Zaduszki*, 1961) – here, however, the filmmaker leans toward “extraordinary events,” and builds his film around very Polish cultural tropes – especially those related to the Polish Romantic tradition.

***All Souls’ Day* (*Zaduszki*, 1961)**

While in *The Last Day* there are barely any references to specific places, *All Souls’ Day* leaves no doubt that the story depicted is deeply rooted in Polish history and tradition. Konwicki’s novels from the period, especially the ones that depart from socialist realism, strongly highlight their cultural contexts: in *Marshes* (*Rojsty*, written in 1947, published in 1956) Konwicki draws on his own experiences as an AK partisan fighting in Lithuanian forests, and attempts (unsuccessfully) to de-romanticize the ethos of a fighting Pole. His novel *A Hole in the Sky* (*Dziura w niebie*, 1959) is a nostalgic journey into Konwicki’s “lost childhood” in Lithuania – a place that had strong emotional value for many Poles’ expelled from the Vilnius area to new territories of Poland after WWII. *A Dreambook for Our Time* (*Sennik współczesny*, 1963) is an agonizing attempt to rebuild one’s life after war experiences, most notably related to partisan activities.

All Souls’ Day also focuses on concrete historical contexts, but the general storyline follows a similar trajectory to that in *The Last Day*: two people, Wala and Michał, meet in a provincial town to spend intimate time together; but instead of sharing romantic moments, they end up recollecting war memories. Michał is a former Home Army soldier, an experience that makes him very reserved and suspicious of people. His reminiscences of being a partisan are inseparable from his

two love affairs: his first love, a charming female colonel Listek, dies during the battles in the forest. Michał's second girlfriend, a partisan nicknamed Katarzyna, turns from a remarkable freedom fighter into a bored and spoiled woman after the war, and she eventually cheats on Michał. Wala's memories are in no way more uplifting than Michał's: she also lost her loved-one. What is more tragic about Wala's situation is that she is partially responsible for her partner's death. Wala was a pro-Soviet People's Army sympathizer fighting the Home Army (AK) units. When she learns that her future husband was an AK partisan, she makes him confess his past to the authorities. He does so, but very soon afterwards he dies at the hands of his former fellow AK partisans, who took the man's confession as a betrayal. Thus, although Wala and Michał's relationship follows a similar dynamic to that of the two protagonists' in *The Last Day*, it is nevertheless more complex on an ideological level: Michał sides with the Polish patriotic AK, while Wala represents communist ideology. In some sense, this clear division between Wala and Michał mirrors what artists in postwar Poland were trying to reconcile in their works: the ideology dictated by the communist government and the national Polish mythology represented by Poles striving for independence. Filmmakers and other artists found themselves caught between those two contrasting ideological imperatives, which made it harder for them to carve space for manifesting their individual styles and artistic philosophy.

While *The Last Day* (although often called experimental) did not include any politically suspicious elements, the concrete historical references in *All Souls' Day* required more careful games with censorship. To what extent Konwicki skillfully got around censorship is clear from his script, which, unlike the script for *The Last Day*, is very literary and does not include information regarding camera angles and framing. The script for *All Souls' Day* reads like a carefully composed story, full of stylized descriptions and unorthodox dialogues. Since the language of Konwicki's script is very literary, two sections in particular come across as jarringly dissonant: the first describes Michał's political consciousness. Konwicki writes: "In this very moment he [Michał] was burning with patriotic love and he was discovering more and ever new

cavernous depths of his hatred for fascism.”³⁰¹ The pompous language of this passage not only contrasts with the language of the rest of the script but also clearly resonates with official communist phrasing. In short, this section fulfilled the censors’ expectation to “advance revolutionary consciousness and the fight against fascism” and was what gave the script the green light for production. The second passage (which also is in line with official communist ideology) is the dialogue between Wala and her fiancé. The woman insists that the man must confess his Home Army association to the communist Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*). In their talk, Wala uses the slogans characteristic of communist ideologues:

[Wala] - You killed others [...]

[Man] - I killed no one ... Communists also kill.

[Wala] - Only the enemies. [...]

[Man] - Could you serve evil, Wala?

[Wala] - We want happiness for all people.

[...] People like Derkacz must be destroyed [...] You must repent.³⁰²

Although the Man’s later explanation that he really believed in what he fought for is convincing, the one who wins in this conversation is Wala. Thus, Konwicki once again manages to appease the censors, as he includes ideologically appropriate dialogue in which Wala performs the role of a teacher enlightening the masses. Later on, however, when the Man is murdered, her insistence on his confession to the authorities appears senseless and unnecessary to the viewers; Wala herself turns into a rather bitter and sad woman. To be sure, the fact that Konwicki chooses the AK partisans to assassinate Wala’s fiancé was in line with the communist regime’s view of them as killers without compassion; yet, it is Wala’s stubborn and blind following of ideology which in the end appears foolish.

301. “W tym momencie płonął miłością do ojczyzny i coraz to nowe, przepastne głębiny nienawiści do faszystwu odkrywał w sobie,” Tadeusz Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata. Scenariusze filmowe* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1973), p. 92.

302. “-Zabijałeś ludzi. -Nie, nikogo nie zabiłem. ... Komuniści też zabijają. -Wrogów. ... -Czy ty mogłabyś służyć złu, Walu? -Chcemy szczęścia dla wszystkich ludzi. ... Trzeba zniszczyć takich jak Derkacz ... Musisz odpokutować,” *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

The fact that Konwicki includes in his script many scenes in accordance with communist ideology definitely helped him complete the movie. Nevertheless, when the film was finished, some scenes had to be cut.³⁰³ When asked about it, Konwicki admits that he indeed had a lot of trouble with the film, and could not remember what scenes exactly were cut – “maybe the one in which the Home Army unit disarms itself as there was no chance to fight any longer.”³⁰⁴ This does not seem to be the case, however, as the scene *is* part of the movie. What is more, a comparison of the script with the actual movie does not indicate there were substantial changes made to the film. In short, Konwicki succeeds in appealing to the authorities, which secures his cinematic project, but he also manages to include scenes clearly alluding to the Romantic traditions by showing the Home Army units in a hero-like (if desperate) fashion. This will become not only Konwicki’s way of feeding Polish national mythology, but will also determine part of his individual thematic agenda.³⁰⁵

The most obvious example in which Konwicki uses Mickiewicz-style literary tropes in *All Souls’ Day* is its title, as it refers directly to the tradition of *dziady* (literally “forefathers”), a Catholic version of the pagan holiday when people were supposed to “meet” with the dead. The custom of *dziady* was brought to prominence by Adam Mickiewicz in one of the most remarkable works of Polish Romanticism, *Forefathers’ Eve I-IV*. Mickiewicz constructs all parts of his drama around *dziady* not only to include elements of folklore and magic in his drama, but also to highlight another feature of Polish culture and identity: that of suffering and mourning. Konwicki states that while elsewhere in the world All Souls’ Day is a big celebration and carnival, in Poland this holiday is about sad reminiscences and remembering the

303. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 217.

304. “To mogło chodzić o scenę, w której oddział AK-owski sam się rozbraja, bo nie ma możliwości dalszej walki,” Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba*, p. 63.

305. The character of an AK partisan (supposedly) who grapples with Romantic ideals, only to eventually embrace them, appears in Konwicki’s film *Salto*, as well as in the novels *Marshes*, *Dreambook for Our Time*, *The Polish Complex*, and *Bohni*.

past. He adds that this character of All Souls' Day is "purely Polish."³⁰⁶ Therefore, the tradition of *dziady* serves for Konwicki not only as an excuse to honor the dead (in this case, the AK partisans), but also to refer to Mickiewicz, who in his famous drama mourned the death of young Polish patriots sent to Siberia by the tsarist Russian authorities.

There is another scene directly referring to the Romantic (Mickiewicz's) tradition: when colonel Listek, Michał's love, dies, her body is laid out in a forest hut on an improvised catafalque decorated by herbs and common flowers. A few village women together with AK soldiers pray over the deceased; the local women sing a mourning song. The whole scene with its elaborate painterly composition resembles the death of Emilia Plater, a Polish-Lithuanian woman-soldier and a national heroine, about whom Adam Mickiewicz wrote a famous poem. In the poem, entitled, "The Colonel's Death" Mickiewicz describes the last moments from Plater's life, stressing how she was loved by both simple people and professional soldiers:

And the soldiers turned pale from sorrow,
While the folk prayed kneeling at threshold.
Even Kosciuszko's old soldiers,
Although they shed theirs and others' blood
But not once a tear - yet, now they cried,
And whispered the prayers with priest.³⁰⁷

Konwicki, just like Mickiewicz in the poem, creates a scene in which people of different backgrounds unite to pay respect to Plater: both figures, the historical Plater and the fictional Listek, die in the fight for Polish freedom, and both are laid in a peasants' hut. The reference to Emilia Plater is easy to trace due to the fact that she actually died during the November Uprising and is, consequently associated with this

306. "To jest czysto polskie," Stanisław Nowicki, *Pół wieku czysćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1990), p. 137.

307. "I żołnierze od żalu pobledli, / A lud modlił się klęcząc przed progiem. / Nawet starzy Kościuszki żołnierze, / Tyle krwi swój i cudzej wylali, / Łzy ni jednej — a teraz płakali, / I mówili z księżami pacierze."

day in Polish culture - just like the tradition of *dziady*, both made prominent by Mickiewicz.



Fig. 4.3: The death of colonel Listek alluding to Emilia Plater's death

Konwicki appeals to the Polish national imagination by including scenes loaded with references to the Polish Romantic tradition. What is more, he also manages to preserve the individual cinematic style from his film debut. In other words, while reconciling two contrasting ideological projects, the artist succeeds in preserving his artistic "I." In fact, the Polish press for the first time used the term *film autorski* with respect to *All Souls' Day*. In 1961, *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, a Polish film journal addressed to film journalists, printed a short note about a new film by Konwicki. The last sentence says: "*All Souls' Day* is a typical example of so-called *film autorski*, where its creator is a director and a screenwriter at the same time."³⁰⁸ This short definition stresses the official view that being an *auteur* means to be a filmmaker who writes his

308. "Zaduszki' są typowym przykładem tzw. filmu autorskiego, jako dzieło którego twórcą jest scenarzysta i reżyser w jednej osobie", "Filmy pełnometrażowe," *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, no. 14 (1961), pp. 5-7.

own script, rather than one who makes films as he pleases; nonetheless, the film itself clearly qualifies Konwicki as an *auteur* in the broader French sense as well.

This seemingly more tangible reality created by Konwicki in *All Souls' Day* is nevertheless far less persuasive than the one in his cinematic debut. Konwicki's second film does not leave much space for different interpretations: the message is clear. The protagonists cannot overcome their memories. At the same time, they are afraid of forgetting that the war was closely connected with love. The flashbacks in *All Souls' Day* contrast with the diegetic present time: life in the past, although painful, was brighter. The images of the past which Konwicki frames are bathed in sunshine, unlike the gloomy town where the couple spends their intimate moments.³⁰⁹ Yet apart from direct representations of the war, Konwicki 'personifies' the past in another way too: one of the protagonists, Goldapfel, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, becomes a symbol of the war. He literally pops up in the least expected moments, appearing suddenly like a suppressed pang of conscience, always reminding us of his trauma, as he lost all his family during the war. Michał is clearly annoyed by the Jew's presence, as the man requests certain things from him: to inject his arm, to keep him company, to have some tea in his room. Since Goldapfel constantly interrupts the couple's most intimate moments, he plays a role similar to the protagonists' recollections: he is an obstacle in their attempts to communicate.

Creating this Jewish character, who clearly irritates people around him, as he keeps talking about cemeteries and death, is Konwicki's attempt to deal with postwar Polish-Jewish relations. While the nameless protagonists in *The Last Day* symbolized a whole generation of ordinary non-Jewish Polish people, here Goldapfel functions as the embodiment of Jewish people. Not only is he the last Jewish inhabitant of the provincial town – this literally makes him the sole representative of the once-numerous Jewish community – but he also appears in random places unexpectedly, as if he were omnipresent. The ghost-like Jewish character could be exploited

309. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 217.

metaphorically if he (and other protagonists, in fact) were not so two-dimensional. The multitude of flashbacks and subplots reduces Goldapfel, Michał and Wala to puppet-like figures too stereotypical to be taken seriously. In other words, by supplying his protagonists with obvious references to history and politics, Konwicki failed to paint a convincing portrait of his generation. Nevertheless, Marcin Czerwiński in his review of *All Souls' Day* in 1961, writes that a viewer unfamiliar with Polish history would see in the film “something contemporarily universal, some kind of tiredness in general ... the impossibility to love and make decisions.”³¹⁰ While the question of whether Konwicki succeeds in creating a message that embraced national experiences in *All Souls' Day* is debatable, he certainly attempts to do so. What is more important here, however, is that after the rather critical domestic reception of *The Last Day*, Konwicki became far more explicit in his references to Polish themes. As a result, in *All Souls' Day*, the imperative Konwicki felt to satisfy both the demands of the Polish Communist censors and the expectations of an audience that valorized Polish national sentiment led him to a more clichéd treatment. This denied him the possibility of foregrounding his more complex individual views. The political situation had changed as well: Konwicki was completing *All Souls' Day* at roughly the same time as when Władysław Gomułka condemned Polański's *Knife in the Water*, which initiated harsher censorship. In his third film, however, Konwicki managed to balance Communist with “patriotic” pressures quite well.

Somersault (Salto, 1965)

If *The Last Day* is devoid of any concrete historical references and *All Souls' Day* suffers from an abundance of them, Konwicki's third film was a felicitous combination of the two. The filmmaker certainly draws on Poland's difficult past as the main

310. “... jest w tym coś uniwersalnie współczesnego, jakieś zmęczenie ‘w ogóle’, jakieś psychiczne zamulenie ludzi, niemożność miłości, niemożność decyzji,” Marcin Czerwiński, “Z powodu ‘Zaduszek,’” 53, no. Film (1961), p. 7.

protagonist, Kowalski-Malinowski, is continuously haunted by memories of the war. Everything the protagonist has been through is manifested by his (often contradictory) half-uttered statements and dream-like visions, rather than extensive flashbacks as in *All Souls' Day*. But those visions and dreams are far more tangible than the general allusions to WWII in *The Last Day*. Thanks to careful doses of politically acceptable dialogue, Konwicki did not have much trouble with censorship and, above all, was able to negotiate space for his individual creativity by advancing his own philosophical views. In short, *Somersault* is a film which is both intensely individual ("a Konwicki film") and also appealing, in terms of both collective national Polish identity and the Communist vision of Poland's future.

No one who has ever read any of Konwicki's novels or watched his films can doubt that *Somersault* is a work created by the same artist. Konwicki not only once again introduces protagonists tormented by war memories, but also uses dialogue with language consistent across all of his artistic works.³¹¹ What is more, the film is set in a sleepy provincial town that seems both familiar and totally invented; invented because the town from *Somersault* does not have any name or landmark which would help identify it on a map; there is one church, a small river and a few streets, thus resembling any Polish provincial town. Nevertheless, the town may seem familiar to those who know how strongly Konwicki is attached to his birthplace, Nowa Wilejka in the Vilnius area (*Wileńszczyzna*), a town that became part of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic after WWII. Jan Walc suggests that in his literary works Konwicki deliberately describes Lithuanian landscapes, although oftentimes he calls them by different names.³¹² The same could be said about the location in *All Souls' Day* and *Somersault*. In other words, Konwicki employs the Vilnius (*Wilno*) area to create the space where his very personal memory meets with the collective memory of other Poles, who, after WWII, were forced to relocate from Lithuania and other eastern

311. Konwicki's cinematic characters from most of his films speak in a very similar fashion to his literary protagonists. Compare, for example, Kowalski-Malinowski's lines in *Salto* with Józef Car's in *A Dreambook of Our Time*.

312. Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, p. 11.

territories to the newly established Republic of People's Poland – or to Siberia. This collective memory of the lost Eastern Borderlands (or *Kresy*) with cities strongly rooted in Polish culture and history, such as Vilnius and Lviv especially, became a very important nostalgic component of postwar Polish identity. The *Kresy* had already served as an appealing element in national Polish identity: none other than Adam Mickiewicz was born near *Wileńszczyzna* and mythologized it in his extensive lyrical descriptions in *Pan Tadeusz* (1834). Konwicki himself admits how significant this Lithuanian homeland is for his creative impulses and the continuity he feels with the Romantic tradition:

If I were born in Warsaw on Górski street, without a doubt it would be much less eminent and dramatic. But because the Vilnius area is a lost land it produces a stimulating effect – just like in the works of my great predecessors [here: Mickiewicz and Miłosz].³¹³

Konwicki aligns himself not only with the creator of Polish national mythology, but also describes Lithuania as a biblical “lost paradise.” Through both of these turns, he succeeds in integrating his individual experiences with the mood of collective postwar Polish society.

The fact that in *Somersault* Konwicki indeed wants to allude to the Eastern provincial town is also signaled in the opening scene, as the credits run onscreen. The filmmaker shows a series of naïve paintings depicting bucolic landscapes. Each picture, with its numerous lakes and rivers surrounded by mild hills and birches, resembles distinctively Lithuanian landscapes that are reminiscent of Konwicki's childhood home. What is more, the folkloric paintings from the opening credits reappear later in the diegetic world: some of them hang on the character Helena's bedroom wall. The room is decorated like a child's room – tiny and full of light. Close-ups of the paintings are shown when Helena talks with Kowalski-Malinowski about

313. “Gdybym urodził się w Warszawie na ulicy Górskiego, wówczas bez wątpienia byłoby to znacznie mniej podniosłe i dramatyczne. Ponieważ jednak Wileńszczyzna jest to ziemia utracona, więc oddziałuje – podobnie jak w twórczości moich wielkich poprzedników – w sposób pobudzający,” *Ibid.*, p. 239.

her childhood; again, the camera zooms in on the paintings when the girl has sex with Kowalski-Malinowski – the picture at first appears in sunlight, but slowly fades into shadow, a symbolic way of depicting a rite of passage into adulthood.

Another strategy Konwicki uses to align his own individual self with the collective experiences of Polish postwar society parallels *The Last Day*. While in his cinematic debut he leaves his protagonists nameless, in *Somersault* he names the main character Kowalski-Malinowski – a common Polish name equivalent to the English Smith and Jones. Konwicki himself admits that Kowalski-Malinowski “is a typical citizen of this country [Poland]. Perhaps he is slightly dramatized and caricatured but I have to say that I’ve met this sort of person my whole life. Poles are a nation of poseurs.”³¹⁴ Indeed, the behavior of Kowalski-Malinowski, who acts as some kind of self-appointed prophet curing sick children and enchanting locals by his charismatic personality, acts in a defiant and exaggerated manner. He comes to the town claiming he has been there before – he stays at the Host’s house, whose life he supposedly saved during the war, and promises to unearth a treasure that he had buried somewhere in the town some time ago.

Kowalski-Malinowski’s restless behavior expresses some kind of existential rebellion, highlighted by the acting style of Zbigniew Cybulski. The choice to cast Cybulski, the Polish “James Dean” famous from Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds*, was a deliberate move on Konwicki’s part: Cybulski, the icon and the embodiment of the troubled postwar Polish generation, in *Somersault* caricatures his own generational legend. He no longer is the young and fearless Home Army partisan from *Ashes and Diamonds*, as there is no need to fight anymore; yet, he insists on wearing typical partisan’s shoes (*oficerki*) and a leather jacket, and he never loses the chance to remind others about his wartime efforts. He also does not seem to remember that he no longer is a young and vigorous man, but rather an aging and already plump man in his forties;

314. “To jest typowy obywatel tego kraju. Może nieco zdynamizowany i skarykaturowany, ale muszę powiedzieć, że przez całe życie spotykałem się z takim właśnie ludźmi. Polacy są narodem zgrywusów,” Ibid., p. 138.

despite this, he seduces the daughter of the Host and he has rather embarrassing sexual intercourse with her; furthermore, in the end it turns out that he is married. In other words, Kowalski-Malinowski is no longer an admirable war hero reminiscent of Wajda's Maciek Chełmicki in *Ashes and Diamonds*, but rather a middle-aged man who uses his past to impress others. Konwicki then attempts to demythologize and make fun of this kind of "war hero." Anna Tatarkiewicz in her review of *Somersault* in 1965 states that the film "is yet another attempt to come to terms with a certain type of Polish mythology and mythomania."³¹⁵

Certainly, the way in which Konwicki portrays Kowalski-Malinowski carries heavy doses of derision and caricature. The protagonist, despite his efforts to look wise and serious, is rather clumsy and too arrogant to be trusted. What is more, after telling all the locals that some "bad people" are after him and he has to hide, it turns out that he is, in fact, being chased by his angry wife and two kids. Nevertheless, in his attempt to lay bare Polish myths related to "freedom-fighters" such as Kowalski-Malinowski, Konwicki himself is trapped by his clear sympathy for this particular feature of Polish identity. As much as one can be suspicious about whether Kowalski-Malinowski really went through the experiences he describes - he talks about being imprisoned, walking miles in waist-deep snow, starvation, and reveals scars on his chest - he does not have any control over his dreams and visions. Three times he dreams that three armed soldiers walk up to him, read a death sentence, and shoot at him. Each time the three figures represent different military forces: Home Army partisans, People's Army soldiers and German soldiers. In none of the three scenes is there a trace of parody or caricature. Konwicki even visually stretches the figures vertically by using an anamorphic lens to make them taller, more ominous and ghost-like. Thus the filmmaker suggests that perhaps Kowalski-Malinowski's exaggerated and restless behavior is indeed the aftermath of war trauma. Employing representatives of three different military forces, Konwicki also points at the complexity and tragic situation

315. "Salto' jest kolejną próbą rozprawy z pewną odmianą polskiej mitologii i mitomanii," Anna Tatarkiewicz, "Refleksje o 'Salcie,'" *Film*, no. 29/30 (1965), pp. 6-7.

of people who found themselves in Poland during WWII, as he suggests that one could not stay neutral or remain a simple observer amidst conflicting forces. Refusing to fight on a particular “side” could result in immediate death.

This sense of a Gombrowiczian situation, in which a person struggles to escape certain masks and roles, but always ends up trapped by them, is in fact characteristic of Konwicki’s effort to ridicule Polish myths of martyrdom and sacrifice in *Somersault*.³¹⁶ But he does not hold them up to ridicule in the end. Not only do Kowalski-Malinowski’s visions add gravity to his irrational behavior, but there are also a few scenes where he, looking directly at the camera, addresses us, the viewers. The protagonist’s oftentimes pompous rant becomes serious and even “prophetic” when suddenly he turns towards the camera and speaks. In one such scene he even takes off his glasses (the actor Cybulski’s hallmark), and states with gravity: “I simply wanted to say that I have come back from the furthest corner of the Earth – to my place, to my people, to all which one is not able to forget.”³¹⁷ Konwicki here once again uses the memory of past events as glue to unite Poles in a particular sense of national identity; something one simply cannot erase, no matter how hard one tries. At the very end of the film, Kowalski-Malinowski (Cybulski) once again looks directly at the camera. He is just about to escape from the town; the locals have discovered that his wife is searching for him and call him “a drifter and skirt-chaser” so they attempt to “stone” him with apples. The protagonist pauses in his escape and says, looking at us, the viewers: “Why are you staring at me like this? I am one of you. We live in the same house. Everyday we share the same bread. We drink water from the same glass.

316. Witold Gombrowicz, a prominent 20th century Polish writer, brilliantly expands the notion of “escaping masks” in his novel *Ferdydurke* (1937).

317. “Chciałem po prostu powiedzieć: wróciłem z ostatniego krańca ziemi do siebie, do swoich, do tego, czego nie można zapomnieć,” Tadeusz Konwicki, *Salto*, 1965, ‘1:03:01.

Together we rise from the bottom and desperately hold on to the ladder leading to heaven; the ladder that has no rungs.”³¹⁸ [Fig. 4.4]

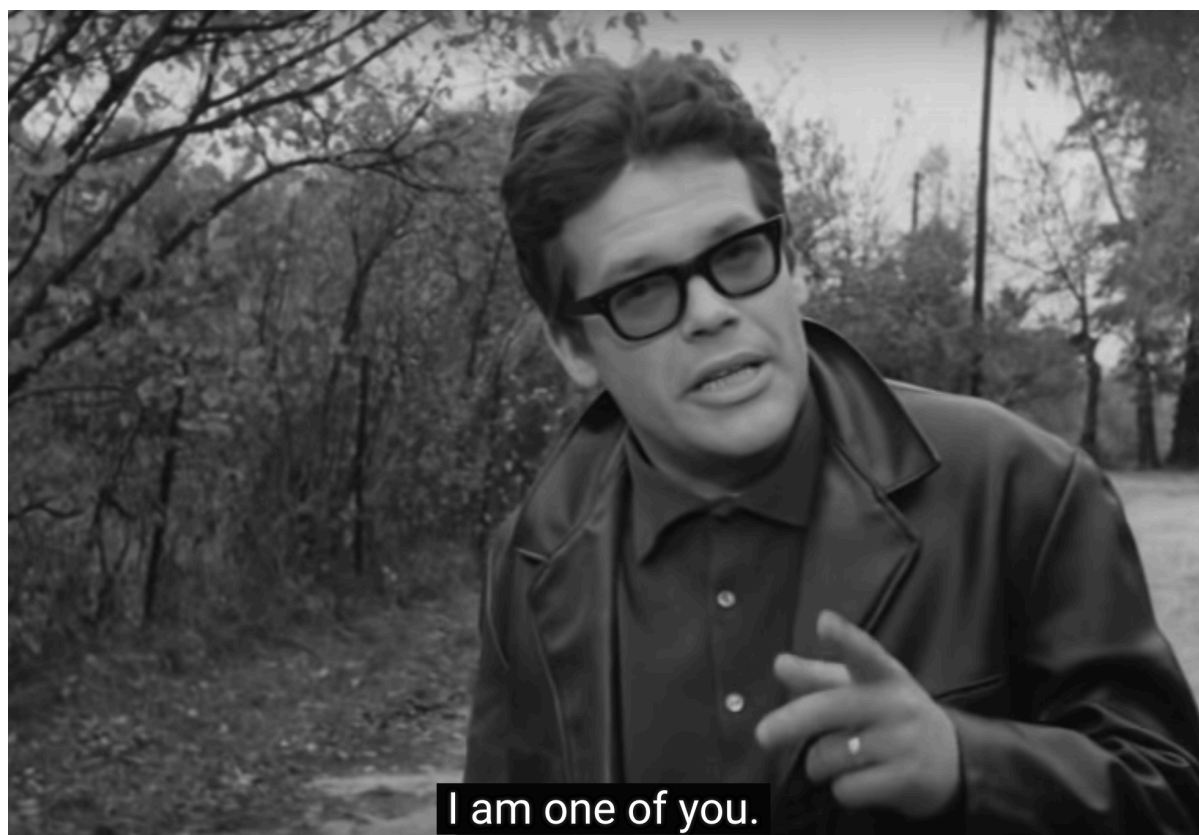


Fig. 4.4: Kowalski-Malinowski addresses the viewers

Kowalski-Malinowski’s words are mirrored by what Konwicki himself admits when talking about *Somersault*: “We continually live in a kind of martyrological delirium. *Somersault* undermines it. It seems to me, however – if I remember this film correctly – that in the final scene I admit that it also applies to me; that it is some kind of Polish syndrome, which doesn’t make me categorically against it.”³¹⁹

318. “I co tak wytrzeszczacie ślipia na mnie? Przecież ja jestem jednym z was. Mieszkamy w tym samym domu, codziennie wsólnie łamiemy chleb, pijemy wodę z tej samej szklanki, razem podnosimy się z dna i chwytamy się kurczowo drabiny prowadzącej do nieba. Drabiny, w której nie ma szczebli,” Ibid., ‘1:37:57.

319. “Żyjemy ciągle w jakiejś malignie martyrologicznej. ‘Salto’ w to godzi. Mnie się jednak wydaje - jeśli dobrze pamiętam ten film - że w finale przyznaję, że to i mnie dotyczy. Że to jest jakiś polski syndrom, który nie wywołuje we mnie kategorycznego sprzeciwu,” Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba*, p. 90.

In other words, in his attempts to diminish the mythology largely created by Mickiewicz, Konwicki paradoxically solidifies it, carrying the Romantic tradition forward.³²⁰

What is even more important is that in his expression of national traumas and identity he, once again, concentrates on the common man. In *Somersault*, as in *The Last Day*, Konwicki uses the fragments of different poems by Tadeusz Różewicz. This time, however, the poem is a part of the diegetic world and is recited by the Artist, a highly unpleasant and malicious character. The Artist is the only one who does not believe Kowalski-Malinowski's prophecies and tries to expose his lies to other people. No one really likes him and all the locals think he is just an unfulfilled artist jealous of others. When he recites Różewicz's poem during a local anniversary, his character, like Kowalski-Malinowski after his dreams and visions, transforms briefly into a serious and wise person. The Artist's poem is a very moving piece about how people fall – and how their falling is different now than in the past. The force of Różewicz's moral authority in this poem is highlighted not only by Stefan Morawski in his 1965 review of *Somersault*,³²¹ but once again by Konwicki himself who states: "... when reading his [Różewicz's] poems, I was more and more sure that in his poetry he is not only the voice of my generation, our war fate, but also our contemporaneity and our place in the world which was in the process of forming."³²² To put it differently, by using Różewicz's poems in *Somersault* and the figure of Kowalski-Malinowski Konwicki once again succeeds in solidifying Polish national identity.

What is unique about his strategy is the fact that he, unlike Wajda, gives voice to ordinary people. Paradoxically, one cannot call Konwicki's films anything but very individual – his films not only heavily reference his own biography, but also use an

320. For more on the links between Konwicki and Romantic writers, see: Andrzej Fabianowski, *Konwicki, Odojewski i romantycy. Projekt interpretacji intertekstualnych*. (Kraków: Universitas, 1999).

321. Stefan Morawski, "Refleksje o 'Salcie,'" *Film*, no. 31 (1965), p. 10.

322. "... czytając jego wiersze, utwierdzałem się w przekonaniu, że jest on w poezji wyrazicielem nie tylko mego pokolenia, naszego losu wojennego, ale i naszej współczesności, naszego miejsca w świecie, który się wtedy formował," Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawiają Katarzyna Bielas i Jacek Szczerba*, p. 99.

unorthodox visual style – he performs the role of a national bard. Although Konwicki was accused of “self-analysis,” in *Somersault*, he nevertheless became the foremost voice of the postwar generation.³²³ Katarzyna Zechenter, a scholar of Polish culture, opens her book on Konwicki: “Rarely has an author expressed the emotional, political and social predicament of a nation in such a compelling manner as Tadeusz Konwicki.”³²⁴ Similarly, Stefan Morawski wrote in 1965: “In his [Konwicki’s] art – so acutely autobiographical ... – there were and are included the accounts of my generation.” He adds that the complexities Konwicki depicts in his works are both “inside-individual” and “socio-national.”³²⁵ This inherent incongruity is the major reason why Konwicki, although he “speaks in the first person” and writes his own scripts, exceeds the Western definition of *auteur*. His role as a filmmaker, just like the role of the Romantic *wieszcz*, was to shape the collective national imagination and to be a nation-builder advocating freedom for Poland. What is important about Konwicki’s film art when compared with Wajda’s is that he has always made avoiding broader claims his principle. Wajda, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, made it his goal to become the “voice” of the Polish nation.

323. Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, p. 140.

324. Katarzyna Zechenter, *The Fiction of Tadeusz Konwicki. Coming to Terms with Post-War Polish History and Politics* (Lewiston, 2007), p. 1.

325. “W jego twórczości – na wskroś autobiograficznej ... zawarte były i są jednakże dzieje mojego pokolenia”, “kolizje wewnątrz-indywidualne jak i społeczno-narodowe,” Morawski, “Refleksje o ‘Salcie,’” p. 10.