

# The Economics of Nostalgia

## *Socialist Films and Capitalist Commodities in Contemporary Poland*

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While the very first non-communist government in Polish post-war history “demonstrated the truism that only revolutionaries are able to impose austerity,”<sup>1</sup> its executives declared that austerity measures would bring fruits only when all links with the past were broken. The Prime Minister announced in his inaugural speech the need to draw a “bold line” between the inglorious past and the brighter future, and the technocratic finance minister justified the drastic dismantling of socialist industry by his belief that a market economy could be built only on completely new foundations. This revolutionary ambition to make a radical break with the past was never realized: sociologists and other observers soon noticed that the new order was not being built *on* the ruins of state Socialism, but *with* those ruins.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1987 and 1994 dozens of feature films critical of the socialist regime were made. Most of them were still financed by the socialist economy until the “austerity measures” introduced in January 1990 cast the film industry into dire financial straits. The latest among them—Kazimierz Kutz’s *Death as a Slice of Bread* (*Śmierć jak kromka chleba*, 1994), describing the violent confrontation between Silesian strikers and police at the *Wujek* coal mine after the imposition of Martial Law in December 1981—was already co-financed by private investors including the workers who were determined to put their tragedy on celluloid (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> The political climate changed after the elections that brought a post-communist party to power in 1993. The post-Communists embraced the

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Aronowitz, *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 48.

<sup>2</sup> László Bruszt, David Stark, *Post-Socialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Kazimierz Kutz, “Mordega” [The Grind], *Kino 5* (1994): 4–8.



Fig. 1 Kazimerz Kutz's *Death as a Slice of Bread* came out when the ethos of Solidarity was at its lowest point (courtesy Studio Filmowe TOR)

“bold line” approach, and preferred to “choose the future.”<sup>4</sup> What their critics described as “the politics of amnesia”<sup>5</sup> soon turned into the politics of nostalgia. Public television started broadcasting old socialist series and comedies, and the emerging private channels followed suit. In many cases such “recycled” films were more popular than those in the very same genre produced after 1989.<sup>6</sup> While some films acquired cult status, attracting millions of viewers who knew parts of them by heart and referred to them in daily conversation, only two “nostalgic” films were made.<sup>7</sup> The period of “nostalgia” (roughly from 1994 to 2003), when the socialist hits

<sup>4</sup> Aleksander Kwaśniewski's campaign slogan in 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Michał Głowiński, “PRL-owskie mity i realia” [Myths and the truth about the people's Poland] in Michał Głowiński (ed.), *Dzień Ulissesa i inne szkice na tematy niemitologiczne* [Ulysses's day and other essays] (Cracow: PiW, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Karolina Wajda, “07 wciąż się zgłasza” [07 still on duty], *Kultura Popularna* 10 (2004): 41–9.

<sup>7</sup> Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, “Kultura popularna i nostalgia za komunizmem” [Popular culture and nostalgia for Communism], *Kultura Popularna* 10 (2004): 33.

regained their popularity, partially overlapped with the rule of the post-communist Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who won the elections of 1995 by a small margin, but whose support never fell below 80% in the last four years of his presidency.<sup>8</sup>

The post-Communists began to lose the upper hand in symbolic politics in late 2002, when a major corruption scandal broke out and a Parliamentary commission was formed to investigate it. Its sessions were broadcast live and followed by millions, as if they were a top-rate television series.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, established in 1998 and holding exclusive rights over the archives of the communist secret services, initiated a wide debate on the role of the secret police before and after 1989 by a variety of publications, documentary films, and especially by documents brought to the attention of the public through the media. These were the main instruments employed by the political right in making a case that Communism was a crime and post-Communists were criminals.<sup>10</sup> When in 2005 a right-wing government was formed it already had a clear vision of the “historical politics” it wanted to pursue. The newly appointed president of public television declared that *Four Troopers and a Dog* (*Czterej pancerni i pies*, 1966–1970), a highly popular socialist series about the liberation of Poland from the Nazi occupation by the Red Army with the help of Polish soldiers, would never again be broadcast by public television, which would sponsor an alternative series showing the “historical truth” instead.<sup>11</sup>

Since the novelty in politics after 1989 was the immense influence of the mass media, it is no wonder that the way Socialism was portrayed can be easily correlated with the distribution of political power. This is especially the case because public television, traditionally loyal to the government, was the most important institution financing the production of films and documentaries in post-socialist Poland.<sup>12</sup> The farewell to traditional politics and the growing power of the electronic media, or in Alek-

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<sup>8</sup> Kacper Pobłocki, “Europe, the Pope and the Holy Left Alliance in Poland,” *Focaal. European Journal of Anthropology* 43 (2004): 130.

<sup>9</sup> Kazimierz Kutz, “Śląsk jest, Rywina nie ma” [Silesia exists and Rywin does not], *Przekrój* 28 (2003): 28–31.

<sup>10</sup> Karol Modzelewski, “IPN: kto historyk, kto trąba?” [Who works at the institute for National Remembrance?], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (13–15 August 2005): 12.

<sup>11</sup> Renata Radłowska, “Szarikowi uciąć ogon” [Cutting Szarik’s tail off], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (24 July 2006): 6.

<sup>12</sup> Marek Haltof, *Kino polskie* [Polish cinema] (Gdańsk: Słowo, obraz/terytoria, 2004), 218.

sander Kwaśniewski's words, the replacement of (political) vision by television, was a bitter consequence of the way modern liberal democracy worked. When the populace turned into an electorate in 1989, the political elite had to communicate with it, and popular tastes, often despised by the highbrow establishment, suddenly had to be taken into account. Those who appreciated this change, like Kwaśniewski who during his 1995 campaign danced to the allegedly "crass" *disco polo* music, triumphed.

Just as the uncompromising anti-Communism of the late 1980s and the films that severely criticized the regime were clearly a political project closely associated with the Solidarity movement, the moment of "nostalgia" came as a grassroots reaction to it. Nostalgia was a late "rebellion of the masses," formerly repressed by the socialist system that tried to steer television from above, as Teresa Bogucka argued.<sup>13</sup> Already in 1997 she regretted that young people found socialist comedies amusing, arguing that Socialism was "more sinister and destructive than what emerges from the hodgepodge served today on television. Entertaining people with images of how ridiculous People's Poland was is a further humiliation for those who had been repressed by it."<sup>14</sup> Despite some efforts to understand the roots of nostalgia, most intellectuals simply deplored it.<sup>15</sup> The highbrow media sounded the alarm, for example, at the results of a survey which demonstrated that over half the Polish population thought that Edward Gierek, the 1970s socialist leader, had accomplished more for Poland than Lech Wałęsa, the legendary head of Solidarity; soon after Gierek's death in 2001, statues of him were erected and streets named after him.<sup>16</sup> The recent "historical politics" of the right-wing government is clearly a reaction to the alleged collective amnesia, or a penchant for "history without guilt."<sup>17</sup> Yet despite the efforts of the right-wing elite to teach the masses about "true" Polish post-war history and to remind them of the communist crimes, for example by commemorating the 25th anniversary of the imposition of Martial Law in Poland, over half

<sup>13</sup> Teresa Bogucka, *Triumfujące profanum. Telewizja po przełomie 1989* [Triumphing profanum. Television after 1989] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Bogucka quoted in Talarczyk-Gubała, "Kultura popularna i nostalgia za komunizmem," 36.

<sup>15</sup> Filip Modrzejewski, Monika Sznajderman, *Nostalgia. Eseje o tęsknocie za komunizmem* [Nostalgia: Essays on longing for Communism] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> "Komuno wróć" [Who wants Communism back?], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (26 May 2004): 1; Waldemar Kuczyński, "Dlaczego tęsknimy do Gierka i PRL" [Why do we long for Gierek and People's Poland?], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, (4 June 2004): 16.

<sup>17</sup> Talarczyk-Gubała, "Kultura popularna i nostalgia za komunizmem," 36.

the adult Polish population still regarded the decision to declare Martial Law as correct.<sup>18</sup>

This contrast partially boils down to a difference between political and private history. Jacek Kuroń argued in 1995 that the “history of People’s Poland is not only the history of anti-communist struggle, but it is also the history of the people who built post-war Poland with their day-to-day toil.”<sup>19</sup> Oskar Kaszyński confessed that the idea for his nostalgic *Segment ’76* (2003) had emerged from conversations with his father, who would not complain about the secret police or the curfew, but rather told stories about daily coping with economic shortages.<sup>20</sup> It was not a coincidence that private history focused mainly on the early 1970s—the heyday of State Socialism—and, in a sense, filled in the pages of history written, with little enthusiasm, by professional historians.<sup>21</sup> Political historians and filmmakers associated with Solidarity clearly preferred the Stalinist era, which fitted the anti-communist template best. The contemporary Polish historiography of Socialism can also be divided according to the political/private dichotomy. Many of the established historians affiliated with the well-subsidized Institute for National Remembrance focus on political history-writing even in the genre of crime fiction,<sup>22</sup> whereas a younger generation, born predominantly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, gathered mainly around Professor Marcin Kula and since 2000 has published over thirty volumes (mostly Masters’ and some doctoral theses) on the cultural, social or even material history of People’s Poland.<sup>23</sup>

#### MAKING SOCIALISM VISIBLE

Visual material is indispensable in the debates on the recent past. The very first attempt to write a comprehensive history of People’s Poland—Jacek Kuroń’s and Jacek Żakowski’s *People’s Poland for Beginners*—

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<sup>18</sup> Małgorzata Solecka, “Pamiętamy tak jak chcemy” [We remember what we like], *Rzeczpospolita* (13 December 2006): 1.

<sup>19</sup> Jacek Kuroń, Jacek Żakowski, *PRL dla początkujących* [People’s Poland for beginners] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1995): 280–2.

<sup>20</sup> See his interview in a documentary by Piotr Boruszkowski and Sławomir Koehler, *The Fashionable 1980s (Moda na Obciach, 2003)*.

<sup>21</sup> Krzysztof Burnetko, “O jaką przeszłość walczymy?” [What sort of past are we fighting for?], *Polityka* 47 (2006): 10.

<sup>22</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, “Śmierć rewizjonisty” [Death of a revisionist], *Polityka* 41 (2006): 80.

<sup>23</sup> Burnetko, “O jaką przeszłość walczymy?” 14.

put visuals and text on an equal footing. Its over 300 pages featured more than 500 color illustrations, ranging from photographs of the people, places, or events described, through reproductions of posters, cartoons, archival documents, money, newspaper articles, manuscripts, stamps, and book covers to photographs of commodities and material objects. It was supposed “not to be a memoir, nor a school book, but a kind of illustrated guidebook” that would constitute “the very first step towards building a museum about People’s Poland” where Żakowski, who “remembered only half of People’s Poland’s history personally,” could bring his children.<sup>24</sup> As a “critical witness” to the entire socialist period, Jacek Kuroń presented himself as an ideal guide through such a virtual museum. The book and the visuals it contained thus intended to provide a bridge between three generations who had spent their respective childhoods in the interwar period (like Kuroń, born in 1934), during or just after Stalinism (like Żakowski, born in 1957) and during the final years of Socialism (like Żakowski’s children, born in the 1980s).

Images served as epistemic bridges and constituted “testimonies” of Socialism as important as those provided by its eyewitnesses. As early as the 1980s the generation of filmmakers making political cinema, too young to remember Stalinism personally, created a vision of it anchored in socialist realist iconography. Socialist realism was extremely “photogenic” with its banners, red flags and stars, huge portraits, mass parades, rallies of enthusiastic youth, monumental construction sites, and black limos carrying secret police in black coats, as was confessed by Robert Gliński, the author of *Sunday Pranks* (*Niedzielne igraszki*, 1983, first screened in 1988) where the day of Stalin’s death is seen through children’s eyes. Gliński was one of the many directors from the “Martial Law Generation” who chose to set their films on Socialism in the years of their own childhood. They did so partly because Stalinism had been “closed” and they were officially allowed to criticize it, and partly because Stalinism could serve as a powerful metaphor for Poland in the early 1980s.<sup>25</sup> The youngest generation of filmmakers who grew up under Martial Law, however, did not set their films in the gloomy early 1980s. Both *Sztos* (*Sztos*, 1997) by Olaf Lubaszenko (born in 1968) and *Segment '76* by Oskar Kaszyński (born in 1978) were set in the mid-1970s. Although this period was the heyday of Socialism, neither film

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<sup>24</sup> Kuroń, Żakowski, *PRL dla początkujących*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Haltof, *Kino polskie*, 268, 259.

glorified it. Rather, they sought to reject the language of political revisionism, and embraced a wholly different critical aesthetic.

It would be misleading to call these films nostalgic, as critics did.<sup>26</sup> It was not nostalgia, but fetishism—a concept germane to nostalgia but belonging to economic theory—that constituted them. Just as in Kuroń and Żakowski's quasi-museum, "Socialism" in both films was communed with by "objects." Both films were "economic comedies" and starred things as well as people. *Sztos* shows how two swindlers make easy money: they cheat Western tourists while changing their hard currency into Polish zlotys. Desire for a fashionable furniture item known as *segment* is the reason why a young graduate embarks on "economic tourism" in *Segment '76*. Neither Lubaszenko nor Kaszyński intended to meticulously reconstruct the economic realities of People's Poland, but rather mocked them.<sup>27</sup> The low-key *Segment '76* seemed not to feature actors, but merely today's twenty-somethings who "dressed up" as their parents when they were in their twenties. The acting in *Sztos* was criticized for not being convincing enough. This lack of realism only strengthened the impression that both films were fakes. Both films were first and foremost pastiches of Western movies—*Sztos* was a tribute to George Roy Hill's *The Sting* (1973) and *Segment '76* drew heavily from Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000). It could be argued that *Sztos* does not even use "real" locations, but takes the audience on a guided tour through old socialist comedies. It bristles with intertextuality and allusions to places from other movies and even uses their original soundtracks, as it does in the crucial scene in which the two protagonists, trying to fall asleep in a hotel room, hear a famous conversation from Andrzej Kondratiuk's *Uplifted* (*Wniebowzięci*, 1973).<sup>28</sup> Even though the two characters from *Uplifted* indeed had that conversation in a hotel corridor, this "quote" in *Sztos* was doubly false: first, it consisted of sentences from two different dialogues, and second, such a virtual meeting could never have taken place, because the heroes of both films visited hotels in different cities.<sup>29</sup> Just as the Western tourists were left with fake cash in *Sztos*, the viewers face a "counterfeit Socialism" in these two films.

<sup>26</sup> Andrzej Kołodyński, "Nostalgia bliższego stopnia" [A closer look at nostalgia], *Kino 7* (1997): 42; Talarczyk-Gubała, "Kultura popularna," 33–8.

<sup>27</sup> Talarczyk-Gubała, "Kultura popularna," 37.

<sup>28</sup> Kołodyński, "Nostalgia bliższego stopnia," 42.

<sup>29</sup> Maciej Łuczak, *Wniebowzięci czyli jak to się robi hydrozagadkę* [Uplifted or how to make a hydro-puzzle] (Warsaw: Prószyński i Spółka, 2004), 15–6.

*People's Poland for Beginners*, *Sztos*, and *Segment '76* were all attempts to build “quasi-museums” of People's Poland, where fetishes of Socialism were gazed at. Why was Socialism suddenly put on public display? The invasion of audiovisual culture that surprised and often irritated commentators in the early 1990s, to which Kuroń and Żakowski's book was a clear response, and the post-modern intertextuality of *Sztos* and playfulness of *Segment '76*, deplored by the critics of “nostalgia” were actually the harbingers of an emerging economic order where signs, commodity fetishism, the commercialization of culture, and advertising played key roles<sup>30</sup> and which manifested itself in the “replacement of politics by economics.”<sup>31</sup> Similar changes were affecting the cinema, where commercial films of mainly North American provenance quickly replaced the local productions. Film directors, who were used to high social esteem, after the change of the regime were deprived of their romantic mission to illuminate and guide the nation. If in 1991, 18% of all films distributed in Polish cinemas were Polish, in 1995 this number fell to 10%. The Polish films' share of all the profits derived from ticket sales was even more modest: 9.4% in 1991 and 5.2% in 1995.<sup>32</sup>

Succor to the “national pride,” damaged by the domination of Hollywood, came from old socialist comedies, watched by millions—when the public television broadcast Stanisław Bareja's *Teddy Bear* (*Miś*, 1980) on 26 January 1998, it was watched by over 22% of all television viewers.<sup>33</sup> While films by erstwhile giants of national cinema such as Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Zanussi were largely ignored—Zanussi's *At Full Gallop* (*Cwał*, 1996), showing how a former aristocrat lived through Stalinism, was watched in cinemas by a mere 5000 people<sup>34</sup>—Bareja's comedies were cherished in retrospect as the “best documentaries and archival sources on the socialist era”<sup>35</sup> and works that “tell more about People's Poland than lofty volumes.”<sup>36</sup> The notion of

<sup>30</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telis Press, 1981); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 284–307.

<sup>31</sup> Haltof, *Kino polskie*, 219.

<sup>32</sup> Haltof, *Kino polskie*, 217–9.

<sup>33</sup> Maciej Luczak, *Miś czyli rzecz o Stanisławie Barei* [Teddy bear or the story of Stanisław Bareja] (Warsaw: Prószyński i Spółka, 2001), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Haltof, *Kino polskie*, 263.

<sup>35</sup> Bożena Janicka, “Misiór” [The Teddy bear], *Kino 3* (1997): 19.

<sup>36</sup> Rafał Ziemkiewicz, “Miś nieśmiertelny” [The immortal Teddy bear], *Cinema Polska 12* (2003): 23.

*Bareizm*, coined in the early 1970s by Bareja's colleague at the Łódź Film School to denote kitsch and formal mediocrity, now stood for a perfect depiction of the absurdities of the socialist system. Interviewed for a documentary entitled *Bareizm* (1997), figures like Wajda and Zanussi admitted that Bareja had been unfairly criticized and marginalized before 1989, and in fact the formal mediocrity of his films (partly because he did not have the resources to re-shoot scenes, and partly because he did not care) perfectly captures the chaos of the socialist economy.<sup>37</sup> In 1998, a glossy magazine declared that Bareja's films were fetishes of the 1980s, consigned them to the same "fetish" basket as socialist commodities and advertising slogans, and hailed his television series *Taxi Drivers* (*Zmiennicy*, 1986) as a "ballad about Turkish jeans."<sup>38</sup> "Original" socialist comedies constituted better showpieces for the quasi-museum about People's Poland than any films made in the 1990s. That was how the television set became a private virtual "museum" of sorts, where Socialism was directly accessible via its many fetishes. Socialist comedies were broadcast on television in the 1990s as a cheap and very reliable method of attracting wide audiences and raising TV rates for commercials. When in January 2007 a ski-jumping contest was suddenly cancelled, public television broadcast Bareja's *Teddy Bear* instead, and still three million sport fans found watching it worthwhile, although *Teddy Bear* had been shown on public television alone nineteen times since 2000.<sup>39</sup>

After over a decade of such visual "recycling," film critics have gathered enough material to identify the new role of commodities in writing history. Rafał Marszałek's *The Cinema of Found Objects* is a compelling attempt to trace how Poland's twentieth century history, especially its socialist period, was recorded in its cinematography.<sup>40</sup> Marszałek envisioned a "Bureau of Lost Objects" where he placed various imponderables culled from Polish films. By describing how selected props "acted" in Polish films over the last century, Marszałek excavated the history of Polish everyday life and traced how dress code, interior design, and sexual habits were transformed. Material objects, commodities,

<sup>37</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 27, 87–8, 139.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> Krystyna Lubelska, "Kochany Pan Tym" [The beloved Mr. Tym], *Polityka* 5 (2007): 62.

<sup>40</sup> Rafał Marszałek, *Kino rzeczy znalezionych* [The cinema of found objects] (Gdańsk: Słowo, obraz/terytoria, 2006); see also Dorota Skotarczak, *Obraz społeczeństwa PRL w komedii filmowej* [The image of People's Poland and its society in film comedy] (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2004).

and even money were at once the starting points and the protagonists in his story. However, in order to understand the intertextuality of *Sztos*, the playfulness of *Segment '76* and the mesmerizing “fetish” qualities of socialist comedies, we need to go a step further and turn to the economic theory that reveals the circumstances under which socialist commodities were made *visible* after 1989.

Before the fall of Socialism, as Frances Pine has argued, labor was the main measure of value, and work done for the state, unlike work done “privately,” was considered exploitative and hence downgraded.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, commodities produced in the state sector were devalued, and social status was measured by one’s access to, and possession of, rare Western goods, acquired outside the state economy. This socialist “cargo cult,”<sup>42</sup> an incarnation of commodity fetishism that usually occurs when the production and consumption of commodities are geographically separated, was possible because the actual process of production of the Western goods was *invisible* to the socialist consumers.<sup>43</sup> When the post-1989 order clearly started privileging Western goods, undercutting Polish producers, it was viewed by many as a betrayal of the promises pinned upon the demise of State Socialism. Consumers tried to unite the domains of consumption and production that had been so painfully divorced by the new economic order and began valuing goods produced by well-known and *visible* processes, which led them to favor “intrinsically” Polish goods over imported ones. Socialism was re-envisioned as a system where Poles produced accessible goods for the domestic market, and the two domains of production and consumption were reunited in the mythical body of the family, the nation, and the socialist past. These were, Pine suggested, the roots of both that recurrent banal nationalism and the nostalgia for Socialism, the two being opposite sides of the same coin.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Frances Pine, “From Production to Consumption in post-Socialism?” in Michał Buchowski (ed.), *Poland beyond Communism: “Transition” in Critical Perspective* (Fribourg: University Press Fribourg, 2002), 209–24.

<sup>42</sup> Pine, “From Production to Consumption in post-Socialism?” 210.

<sup>43</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value” in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 48; Pine, “From production to consumption,” 210.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

## CONTRASTING SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM

Before Socialism was watched “ritually” on TV screens,<sup>45</sup> it became a key element in restructuring labor, for example in the Polish socialist firm Alima, which was sold in 1992 to the multinational Gerber. Even though labor had been commoditized in Socialism,<sup>46</sup> the most novel thing about the post-1989 order was a free market that restructured the exchange of commoditized labor for money between employees and employers. Facing the constant threat of “redundancy,” Alima-Gerber’s Polish employees, as Elizabeth Dunn described, made tremendous efforts to transform their erstwhile socialist “selves” into “capitalist persons.”<sup>47</sup> They did so to prove, both to their American employers and to the colleagues with whom they competed on the emerging labor market, that their labor had a higher value, because it was “capitalist.” That is how both Socialism and Capitalism became “things” one could sell as part of one’s commoditized labor, or “identity.” Therefore, local managers “managed” their new personalities by consuming Western prestige goods, and slick salesmen imagined themselves as living advertisements, believing that their private penchant for “movement” in life ensured a swifter market circulation of the commodities they sold. White-collar workers established their “capitalist” identity in opposition to the manual workers, who were labeled “socialist” and not allowed to participate in consuming the fruits of Alima-Gerber’s market success on the grounds that they were relicts of the “socialist past” rather than important elements of the capitalist machine.<sup>48</sup>

The enormous success of Alima-Gerber’s soft drink *Fruugo* was a telling example of the use of such dichotomies in advertising. *Fruugo* television spots featured a hip teenager dressed in baggy clothes, spray-painting a “gray” world populated by “socialist” talking heads openly outraged by his joyfulness and dynamism. The four flavors of the soft drink featured four versions of “socialist” adults admonishing the teenager’s unfettered consumption. In the “red” *Fruugo* advertisement, for example, a fat old lady in a black suit shouts at the camera: “today’s unruly youth should realize that we often lacked beets and could not even dream about fruits!”

<sup>45</sup> Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, “Kino kultu po polsku” [Polish cult cinema], *Kultura Popularna* 13 (2005): 23–8.

<sup>46</sup> Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of the Polish Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>48</sup> Dunn, *Privatizing Poland*, chapter 3.

This advertisement from 1996 sought to reconstruct the “ambience” of Socialism by presenting some of its fetishes—furniture, interior decoration, clothes, the staple foods of the shortage economy, and especially the image of an infuriated communist talking head. However, there was not a speck of nostalgia in it. *Frugo* glorified the new market economy and its central protagonist—the possessive individual—and soon became for many journalists the epitome of aggressive and unforgiving “young” Capitalism.<sup>49</sup>

The authors of the *Frugo* campaign did not invent the stark contrast between Capitalism and Socialism, but exploited a construct that had emerged in the 1980s.<sup>50</sup> Even though it has been argued that Socialism was conceived as the “anti-world” to Capitalism,<sup>51</sup> it was the crisis years of the late 1970s and early 1980s, at least in Polish cinematography, that first gave birth to a dichotomy that reified Socialism and Capitalism as two distinct worlds. Films critical of Socialism had been made and screened ever since the “Thaw” period of the late 1950s, and after 1976 the criticism accelerated and was codified by critics and filmmakers as “cinema of moral anxiety.” It is regarded as having made its appearance in 1976, the year of the first outbreak of the series of economic crises within the planned economy and the emergence of the radical opposition group, KOR. It was curbed in 1981, when Martial Law was imposed, the Solidarity trade union banned, its major figures detained and the screw of censorship tightened. It criticized the growing rift between official propaganda and everyday life under “really existing Socialism,” presenting the (im)moral choices that people—especially young intellectuals in provincial towns—faced in their everyday lives. However, as Maria Kornatowska argued, the “cinema of moral anxiety” provided only constructive criticism from within, not due to limits imposed by censorship, but rather because of its “intellectual naivety and formal poverty.”<sup>52</sup> It never actually portrayed Socialism as fundamentally evil, but only showed how minor cogs in the socialist machine—such as its provincial executives—“got it wrong.” This limitation could also be a consequence of the time-lag in-

<sup>49</sup> Marcin Meller, “Pokolenie Frugo” [The Frugo generation], *Polityka* 14 (1998): 6–8.

<sup>50</sup> Michał Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2006): 463–82.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), chapter 1; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 29–31.

<sup>52</sup> Maria Kornatowska, *Wodzireje i amatorzy* [Top dogs and amateurs] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1990).

trinsic to film production in socialist Poland—for example, Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z marmuru*, 1976), which told the bitter story of a 1950s *Stakhanovite* who lost his initial enthusiasm for Socialism, was written in 1962, but it took fifteen years of struggle with Party officials to make the film.<sup>53</sup> The “cinema of moral anxiety” addressed the issues that were significant before 1976 and failed to respond to the unfolding economic crisis. Only the commercial cinema of the early 1980s did so, and that is why the highbrow cinema of the 1970s and early 1980s collected dust on archival shelves, whereas socialist comedies, formerly looked down on, triumphed in the 1990s.<sup>54</sup>

These comedies rested on the dichotomy between “abnormal” and “normal” worlds. The concept of “normality,” as Jacek Kurczewski argued, emerged in the 1980s and served as a template for the envisioned post-socialist order.<sup>55</sup> It was central to both the popular rejection of “really existing Socialism” in the 1980s and the initial support for economic restructuring in the early 1990s. The desire to live in a “normal world” disguised the criticism of socialist economic reality. In part, it was a return to the socialist governments' policy of “normalization,” a rhetoric that in the 1980s urged the population to reject the Solidarity “anarchists” and “madmen,” and to revert to the stability and order of early 1970s Consumer Socialism.<sup>56</sup> It grew out of the everyday experience of Martial Law, which had suspended the previous order and created a new reality literally overnight,<sup>57</sup> urging people to reject “Polish surrealism,” as one of the Solidarity leaders did in the late 1980s in Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz's *History of a camera* (*Historia pewnej kamery*, 1993). The “everyday surrealism” of Martial Law grew out the economic crisis that struck Poland between 1976 and 1981, when—with the foreign currencies being the only “real” money in the country—everyday routines were turned upside down.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Andrzej Wajda tells the story in Stanisław Janicki's documentary *Dreams are More Interesting* (*Marzenia są ciekawsze*, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Janicka, “Misiór,” 19.

<sup>55</sup> Jacek Kurczewski, *The Resurrection of Rights in Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 351–68.

<sup>56</sup> Kuroń and Żakowski, *PRL dla początkujących*, 252; Jolanta Muszyńska et al. (ed.), *Obraz codzienności w prasie stanu wojennego: Gdańsk, Kraków, Warszawa* [Everyday life in the martial law press: Gdańsk, Cracow and Warsaw] (Warsaw: Trio, 2006), 248. See also the propagandist film *Dignity* (*Godność*) by Roman Wionczek, 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Muszyńska, *Obraz codzienności*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Marszałek, *Kino rzeczy znalezionych*, 86; Kuroń, Żakowski, *PRL dla początkujących*, 147.

Already under Martial Law some people experienced conditions as “surreal” and amusing. For example, the Krakow Automobile Club organized “rallies of economical driving,” where prizes were given to those who used the least petrol. In 1982 one such rally was won by a Polski Fiat owner, who used only 3.31 liters of petrol per 100 kilometers (much less than on official test drives).<sup>59</sup> Such festivities ridiculed the 1970s “catching up” project (with Polski Fiat as its supposed miracle product). In the 1980s the “normal world” of unlimited consumer goods was usually located beyond the Iron Curtain. The two worlds appeared ontologically different: an “ersatz state” Socialism was plagued by notorious shortages, while Capitalism seemed from afar a land of plenty safeguarded by a “natural” (a metonym for “normal”) order.<sup>60</sup>

Such a dichotomy between the “natural” and “artificial” worlds was first captured in Juliusz Machulski’s *Sexmission* (*Seksmisja*, 1983). It was a cathartic anti-utopia, watched by over thirteen million Poles just after Martial Law was lifted.<sup>61</sup> Its two main characters decide to become guinea pigs, placed in hibernation to be brought back to life three years later. However, when they wake up they discover that many more years have passed and a nuclear holocaust has wiped out all life on the Earth’s surface, including all male human beings. The underground society consists only of women, who have mastered the methods of artificial reproduction. Eventually the two heroes escape and realize that the underground world is a fake. The head of the women’s council turns out to be a man who has always been afraid of women. They join him in his comfortable cottage in a breathtaking natural surrounding, together with two Amazons, who quickly turn into pliant kittens, as the men teach them the basics of conventional reproduction.

Although Machulski’s film was one of the cult comedies of the 1990s, it was Bareja’s *Teddy Bear* that, for most people, captured the essence of the socialist world in a nutshell.<sup>62</sup> The ironic science-fiction language deployed by Machulski was transparent enough already in the 1980s: the scene in which the two heroes walk across a post-nuclear wasteland, discovering that it is a fake, was an intelligent pastiche of socialist science fiction, except that here the astronauts faced “neither good or bad Com-

<sup>59</sup> Muszyńska, *Obraz codzienności*, 266.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Mirowski (ed.), *Natural Images in Economic Thought: “Markets Red in Tooth and Claw”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Łuczak, *Miś*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Haltof, *Kino polskie*, 206.

<sup>62</sup> Janicka, “Misior,” 19.

munism” but a natural order, based upon patriarchal relations.<sup>63</sup> As Agnieszka Graf argues, *Sexmission* rested on the popular 1980s myth that Socialism, commonly referred to by the feminine word *komuna*, symbolically castrated Polish men, who ceased to be the real breadwinners and economic heads of families as women became the “hunters” who stood in endless queues for long hours. The men could regain their masculinity only by engaging in anti-communist politics.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike Bareja’s *Teddy Bear*, *Sexmission* could never provide a relevant representation of the “absurdities” of Socialism<sup>65</sup> because its vision of a natural order was political and not economic. *Teddy Bear* opens with a scene in which socialist traffic policemen set up dummy cardboard houses next to a highway, so that they can fine drivers for speeding in a “built-up area.” While the police officers explain to the drivers why they have to pay, one of the three dummy houses falls apart when somebody accidentally pulls out one of the pegs that held it upright. Since two houses do not count as a built-up area, the fines are null and void. Socialism, Bareja suggests, is a system designed for exploitation, but does not actually work very well.

The person who accidentally ruins the police’s wicked plan is Ryszard Ochódzki—the manager of a second-rate sports club on his way to a tournament abroad—who just stopped for a pee. At the border it turns out that somebody has torn several pages from his passport. He realizes that it was his former wife, who hoped to stop him going to London, where they have a large sum of money in a joint bank account. Since she has married a high party official, Ochódzki cannot get a new passport. He therefore contrives a complicated intrigue in the hope of withdrawing the money before she can. He tells a film director whom he has befriended that an English aunt has been sending him money ever since he was a child. His parents, in order to get more, once told her that he had a twin. After many years, the aunt now wants to come for a visit, and Ochódzki needs a look-alike to pose as his non-existent brother. He promises his friend the money the generous aunt is bringing for his twin. He is given a small role in a film and pretends to fall ill, providing the excuse to search for a double. When they find one, Ochódzki gets a naïve actress to seduce him and steal the passport that Ochódzki has meanwhile arranged for his look-alike. She

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<sup>63</sup> Andrzej Sapkowski and Witold Bereś, *Historia i fantastyka* [History and fantasy] (Warsaw: Supernowa, 2005), 34.

<sup>64</sup> Agnieszka Graf, *Świat bez kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* [A World without women: Gender in Polish public life] (Warsaw: WAB, 2001), 22–5, 268–72.

<sup>65</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 35.

believes that Ochódzki needs the passport so that they can leave for London together and act in a Polański movie, but he goes alone, and arrives just in time.

Ochódzki is cunning, guided by crude self-interest, and the only person who actually knows what the entire intrigue is about.<sup>66</sup> The resources needed to pull it off are enormous—Ochódzki and the film director spend large sums of public money only to draw a small private profit from it. But, as Ochódzki says in a crucial scene, when he persuades his friend to participate in the scam, “we should not be *Pewexes* and mix up two systems of thought,” that is, mix up the state socialist economy with the real economy based upon foreign currency.<sup>67</sup> *Pewex* was the trademark of “internal export,” a franchise where Poles could buy both Western goods and Polish “export” commodities for hard currency; it was designed to drain the population of the precious Western cash that the government urgently needed to pay back foreign loans. The universe of Bareja’s *Teddy Bear* is saturated with the schizophrenic division between the fake socialist economy that all its characters have the misfortune to live in and the capitalist world that they apparently all long for.

Ochódzki is a classic anti-hero of the cinema of moral anxiety, very much like the main character in Bareja’s earlier *What Will You Do When You Catch Me?* (*Co mi zrobisz jak mnie złapiesz?*, 1978). In that film, however, Socialism is portrayed as a system ruined by the managers’ greed but otherwise worth living in. It is not the same world of scarcity as in *Teddy Bear*, which we see in the scene of the employees rushing to munch tasty snacks after listening to an upbeat speech by their CEO. When the CEO and his deputy travel to the West they do not find it fundamentally different from socialist Poland, apart from some oddities, such as the French habit of eating frogs, that make them laugh. Although, as Krzysztof Toeplitz noted in 1978, Bareja had already coined his unique visual register in this film, it was only with *Teddy Bear* that he transcended the conceptual framework of the cinema of moral anxiety by showing Socialism and Capitalism as two wholly incommensurable worlds.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ziemkiewicz, “Miś nieśmiertelny,” 23.

<sup>67</sup> Marszałek, *Kino rzeczy znalezionych*, 86.

<sup>68</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 35, 84–5.

## FROM NORMALITY TO ANTI-POLITICS

It was not merely the contrast between Socialism and Capitalism as economic systems, but rather the contrast between Socialism and Capitalism as icons and modes of visual expression that explains the success of the *Fruugo* campaign in the mid-1990s. As Iga Mergler has argued, the *Fruugo* ad heavily relied on the video-clip MTV aesthetics that in the early 1990s were perhaps the most uncommon approach seen on the “traditional” television channels available to the Polish public. As the first “stream television” that was not organized around a narrative principle and had no traditional programming, it was MTV that prepared the ground for *Fruugo*’s astonishing success.<sup>69</sup> The *Fruugo* “capitalist” teenager lived in a “video-clip” world of unfettered consumption, where limitations were imposed only by boring “socialist” adults. However, he could spray-paint the screen from the inside, thus making adults disappear—in the same way as a young viewer can easily zap channels. Unlike the adults, the teenager behaves as if being on television were wholly natural for him, and he obviously enjoys it. In other words, two modes of television—a “Capitalist” and a “Socialist,”—are contrasted. “Socialist” television, however, featured not only socialists: among the allegedly “socialist” talking heads only one is a communist activist. The remaining three could just as well be right-wing propagators of austere Catholic morality. The indifferent teenager, therefore, seems to be as weary of communist propaganda as he is bored by the Catholic rhetoric of austerity. The Socialism and anti-Socialism of the 1980s merge into one mode of “traditional television,” contrasted to the new video-clip universe.

The “traditional” iconography was derived from the 1980s pastiches of socialist realism. The new video aesthetics appeared in Magdalena Łazarkiewicz’s *The Last Schoolbell* (*Ostatni dzwonek*, 1989), a story set in 1988 which features a group of high-school students setting up a theatre group. They prepare a play called “History Lesson,” in which they criticize the official historiography and offer their own symbolic vision of it—a surreal mixture of distorted images derived from socialist realist iconography. The school principal tries to stop them going to a festival, but they get round his authority by making a video clip that they send secretly to the festival committee. They qualify, and during their actual performance they screen their clip in the background. Video technology came to Poland

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<sup>69</sup> Iga Mergler, “Chodź, pomaluj mój świat” [Come and paint my world], *Kultura Popularna* 14 (2005): 54.

in the 1980s mostly with Western “humanitarian aid” and offered the opportunity to bypass the state monopoly of information. Not only were tapes of Western action films privately exchanged, but Polish films banned by censors were also watched on illegal video copies. The underground Video Studio Gdańsk even started making documentaries that were envisioned as an alternative to official production.<sup>70</sup> Łazarkiewicz signaled the expressive potential that this new medium had for the younger generation and embraced the video-clip aesthetic that dominated the depictions of Socialism after 1989.<sup>71</sup>

This new aesthetics was part and parcel of “anti-politics”—a crucial aspect of the neo-liberal governance in post-socialist countries and arguably in the world at large.<sup>72</sup> Soon after the “shock therapy” the meaning of “anti-politics” in Poland changed. If in the early 1980s it brought hopes of a more just social order based on civil society that was outside the state and the market, achieved by a strategy of social openness, commitment to dialogue, political self-restraint and eschewal of force, its neo-liberal version embraced the “market” and conflated “democratization” with “marketization.”<sup>73</sup> The spirit of neo-liberal anti-politics virtually dominated the Polish popular culture of the 1990s. Its emblematic literary figure—Geralt the Witcher from Andrzej Sapkowski’s fantasy sagas—was a “professional” whose greatest desire was to eschew the petty political quarrels of his contemporaries and simply “do a good job.” As many critics have noticed, he closely resembled Franz Maurer, the cynical former secret police officer in Władysław Pasikowski’s *Dogs (Psy, 1992)*, who was “beyond the good and evil” of contemporary Polish politics and eliminated “baddies” irrespective of their political affiliation (Fig. 2).<sup>74</sup> Pasikowski’s scandalous film was iconoclastic towards both the previous system and those who fought against it. It mocked a famous quasi-documentary scene from Wajda’s *Man of Iron*

<sup>70</sup> Aired on “Kino Polska” TV channel on 23 September, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Kuroń, Żakowski, *PRL dla początkujących*, 259–60.

<sup>72</sup> James Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jean Comaroff, John Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Post-communist Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 94–106, 190–3; Gil Eyal, “Anti-politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 49–92.

<sup>74</sup> Sapkowski, Bereś, *Historia i fantastyka*, 53–7.

(*Człowiek z żelaza*, 1981) where workers solemnly carry their dead co-striker on their shoulders. Pasikowski showed how secret police officers, on their way to burn the police files at night, carry their drunken colleague and sing the very same protest song as the workers in *Man of Iron*.



Fig. 2 Politics of amnesia - burning archives in Władysław Pasikowski's *Dogs* (courtesy Studio Filmowe Zebra)

The characters of socialist cinema brought back to grace in the 1990s were marked by their a-political attitude. To some extent the post-1989 success of *Teddy Bear* can be attributed to its 1991 sequel *Controlled Conversations* (*Rozmowy kontrolowane*, 1991), where Ryszard Ochódzki suddenly changed sides and—partly guided by opportunism and partly by accident—became a leading Solidarity resistance fighter, which showed what little regard he had for the ideals of either side. Konrad Szolajski's *Man of...* (*Człowiek z...*, 1993) was an open mockery of Wajda's diptych, the story of how a “man of flesh and blood” embarks on a risky anti-communist venture to prove his masculinity to a girl who is only willing to love a hero. Even though Szolajski started working on the film as early as 1989, he had trouble financing it; he claimed that the post-Solidarity elite had rejected his project on political grounds and that socialist censorship *à rebours* ruled supreme in post-1989 Poland, though with economic

rather than political instruments.<sup>75</sup> After a few years of Hollywood hegemony in Polish cinemas, *Man of...*, together with Marek Piwowski's *The Hijacking of Agata* (*Urowadzenie Agaty*, 1993), attracted audiences to Polish films.<sup>76</sup> The latter film was based on the true story of the escape of the daughter of the vice-chairman of Parliament, who could not tolerate her autocratic father. He was the same politician who in 1988 was still giving speeches on the need to reject "Polish surrealism." Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz confessed in 1994 that she now found this scene from her own *History of a Camera* amusing, and that Agata's father was as "surreal" as his political opponents seemed back in 1988.<sup>77</sup> When *Man of...* was shown on French television in 1995, a famous Polish actor explained to the foreign audience that the very fact that politics could be laughed at meant that Poland was "finally a normal country."<sup>78</sup> By the mid-1990s, anti-politics and "normality" had become synonymous.

#### ENVISIONING THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

The anti-political laughter was directed at the socialist period and the timeless "national character" at the same time.<sup>79</sup> Marek Piwowski's *The Cruise* (*Rejs*, 1970) or Bareja's *Teddy Bear* were extraordinarily popular in the 1990s, not only because they ridiculed Socialism, but because their humor was ripe with "inside jokes" that were said to be funny only for Poles and unintelligible to outsiders.<sup>80</sup> Polish comedies of the 1970s, as Anita Skwara postulated already in 1990, became the basis for envisioning a commercial alternative to Hollywood productions. It was the "third way" that reached beyond the propagandist socialist realism and the lofty neo-romanticism of the Polish film school engaged in a deadly battle.<sup>81</sup> If

<sup>75</sup> Wiesław Kot, "Czkawka" [Hiccup], *Wprost* 37 (1993): 76.

<sup>76</sup> Zygmunt Kałużyński and Tomasz Raczek, "Sprawiedliwość śmiechu" [Laughter as a judge], *Wprost* 41 (1993): 78–9.

<sup>77</sup> Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz, "Wolę się śmiać" [I prefer to laugh], *Kino* 5 (1994): 9.

<sup>78</sup> Aired on "Kino Polska" TV channel on 2 February, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Kosecka, "Ciało i dyscyplina. Rejs jako próba pewnej strategii syntezy" [Body and discipline: The cruise as an attempt at a certain synthesis], *Kwartalnik filmowy* 18 (1997): 36–7; Talarczyk-Gubała, "Kino kultu po polsku," 27–8.

<sup>80</sup> Kosecka, "Ciało i dyscyplina," 34; Sławomir Mizierski, "Jeśli już oglądaliście, zobaczcie koniecznie" [If you have seen it already, watch it again], *Polityka* 17–8 (2006): 76.

<sup>81</sup> Anita Skwara, "Między socrealizmem a romantyzmem" [Between Socialist Realism and Romanticism], *Kino* 3 (1990): 21.

the “spontaneously neo-romantic” films from the “Polish school” of the 1950s and 1960s “became a large-scale educational project disseminating the knowledge of national mythology and cultural tradition” to complete the nineteenth century romantic national project, Polish comedies watched in the 1990s on television promoted a new national identity.<sup>82</sup> Reified “Socialism” became a central component of this new national culture as did the belief that being a Pole is a joke, that “life is a comedy.”<sup>83</sup> *Frugeo*’s success, according to most commentators, lay not in the way it criticized Socialism, but in the way it combined the latest “Western” aesthetics with the local cultural content. It was supposed to be the very first thoroughly Polish yet highly professional advertising campaign, and its authors have been hailed ever since as innovative bridge-builders who succeeded in combining global trends with local meanings.<sup>84</sup>

“Nostalgia” for socialism was often accused by its highbrow conservative critics of being equivalent to “amnesia,” because it departed from, and even criticized, narrative-based history-writing in favor of an MTV “hodge-podge” style. It may be argued that in the 1990s the socialist films were viewed not as narrative representations, but rather as a post-modern “assembly” of largely independent scenes.<sup>85</sup> This explains the phenomenon of cult films, which were so well-known to their fans that it made no difference whether they were watched from the beginning, the middle, or the end. Piwowski’s *The Cruise* was inspired by Umberto Eco’s idea of the open text and comprised a series of skits that constituted a loose plot: seemingly random people meet on a cruise on the Vistula river and decide to stage a performance to celebrate the Captain’s birthday.<sup>86</sup> The characters were mainly played by amateurs, accompanied by a handful of professional actors who were there to “provoke” the amateurs and incite “happenings.” Even though in the 1990s *The Cruise* was regarded as a freestyle improvisation provoked more by vodka than by Piwowski’s arrangement, it had a very detailed albeit open script written by three authors. The scenes that

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<sup>82</sup> Skwara, “Między socrealizmem a romantyzmem,” 21.

<sup>83</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 153.

<sup>84</sup> Krystyna Lubelska, “Dwugłowy smok—Iwo i Kot” [A Double-headed dragon: Iwo and Kot], *Polityka* 34 (2005): 62–3; for the uses of local knowledge in the 1990s see Don Kalb, “The Uses of Local Knowledge” in Charles Tilly and Robert Goodin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 579–96.

<sup>85</sup> Mergler, “Chodź, pomaluj mój świat,” 54.

<sup>86</sup> Maciej Łuczak, *Rejs czyli szczególnie nie chodzę na filmy polskie* [The cruise or I do not go for Polish movies] (Warsaw: Prószyński i Sówka, 2002), 24–6.

eventually appeared in the film were carefully selected from a massive corpus of material gathered over several months of shooting. The result looked like a low-key production, and in the 1990s was often compared to Danish Dogma films, but was actually quite expensive to produce. Piwowski's mentor from the elder generation regretted that *The Cruise* resembled "scattered beads." Some, he argued, were beautifully polished, but Piwowski had failed to string them on a thread that could make up the necklace that a comedy as a genre must constitute.<sup>87</sup> Some other cult comedies also used a "serial" structure, such as Andrzej Kondratiuk's *Hydro-Puzzle* (*Hydrozagadka*, 1970), a comic-book-like mockery of socialist superheroes, or Bareja's comedies that consisted of independent gags.<sup>88</sup>

Piwowski's critical mentor did not appreciate what many others noticed later: that *The Cruise* established the national Polish comedy.<sup>89</sup> As early as 1970 Andrzej Wajda wrote that he was extremely surprised when he saw how the audience reacted to this "badly acted and terribly shot" film. "No previous Polish comedy filmmaker, including myself, had managed to establish such an instant and intimate relationship with the audience. There was no *such* laughter and *such* applause at the screenings of the films we had made before. It turned out that what I initially took for playful intellectualism corresponds to people's daily experience and is in high social demand. Its authors discovered what the contemporary audience wants to laugh at. The capital they have collected is priceless, and should soon be invested in a new, equally important and desired film."<sup>90</sup> *Teddy Bear* further developed the style used by Piwowski (even though he drew copiously on the Czech New Wave).<sup>91</sup> Bareja made slapstick comedies *à rebours*. His 1960s operetta-like films were still immersed in pre-war comedy aesthetics. In the 1970s, however, he turned his eyes towards everyday life.<sup>92</sup> As Krzysztof Toeplitz put it, initially Bareja found showing how people throw cream pies in each other's faces funny. "When Bareja started making comedies about how we can no longer produce such cream," wrote Toeplitz, "he finally found his own, unique register."<sup>93</sup> This style was gaining popularity in the 1980s—*The Cruise* was hardly

<sup>87</sup> Łuczak, *Rejs*, 24, 31, 38.

<sup>88</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 80–1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Andrzej Wajda quoted in Łuczak, *Rejs*, 115 (original emphasis).

<sup>91</sup> Karolina Dabert, "Świat chaosu czy chaos świata?" [A world of chaos or chaos of a world?], *Kwartalnik filmowy* 18 (1997): 39.

<sup>92</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 34, 42–4.

<sup>93</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz quoted in Łuczak, *Miś*, 35.

ever screened before 1980, and received full acclaim only after 1989 when it became the local response to the “deluge of Hollywood productions.”<sup>94</sup>

This anthropology of the “national character” drew on a panoply of sources. Funny gags notwithstanding, *Teddy Bear* is a film about the working class, allegedly the apple of the Party’s eye, needing to regain its own tradition and history.<sup>95</sup> Ochódzki’s double works as a coalman and is, like his buddies, so uprooted that he does not know what the very word “tradition” means. One of his friends hears a radio announcement that “a new lay tradition was born.” He assumes that “tradition” is a proper name and wants to give it to his daughter. “Tradition” remains an empty signifier throughout the film until the very last scene, in which a “wise man” explain in lofty words: “You cannot give your daughter that name. Nothing can simply be called tradition. Nobody can declare a tradition or establish it by decree. Those who think they can, shine like a dim candle in daylight. Tradition is a thousand-year-old oak. Our cultural tradition is a fortress. It is the Christmas carol, the Christmas dinner, folk songs, it is our forefathers’ tongue, it is our history that cannot be changed.” Then a giant straw teddy bear, which was bought earlier in the official “folk souvenir” shop and which embodies national culture perverted by the Communists, explodes. That is why Maciej Łuczak compared Bareja’s film to the acclaimed theatre performance *Description of Customs (Opis obyczajów, 1990)*, where actors dressed in contemporary costume recite lines from an eighteenth-century diary by Jędrzej Kitowicz, one of the most important sources used by historians and anthropologists to describe everyday life in early modern Poland. Both Bareja’s films and Kitowicz’s diaries reveal, Łuczak argues, what “contemporary Poles are really like. The whole truth about contemporary Poles lurks behind the historical costume. The world as Bareja saw it did not perish when Socialism came to an end, because absurdity is an integral part of every society.”<sup>96</sup>

Piwowski was the other ethnographer, described by Łuczak as a contemporary Kitowicz, whose sequel to *The Cruise*, he suggested, should be titled “The Poles’ self-portrait.”<sup>97</sup> Piwowski did his “fieldwork” in the Praga district of Warsaw, where he spent long hours socializing with the proletarian fringe of the socialist society. Praga seemed to him and to other Warsaw intellectuals to be the place where “Socialism had no ac-

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<sup>94</sup> Łuczak, *Rejs*, 105.

<sup>95</sup> Janicka, “Misiór,” 19.

<sup>96</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 137–8.

<sup>97</sup> Łuczak, *Rejs*, 138–9.

cess,” being its “anti-thesis,” “governed by other rules.”<sup>98</sup> Amateur actors who came from society’s margins were, for Piwowski, more “authentic” than professional actors who could not speak “the same way people speak in real life.”<sup>99</sup> That is why Piwowski’s stars were the duo Jan Himilsbach—a Praga gravestone mason and occasionally a writer—and Zdzisław Maklakiewicz—a second-rate heart-throb who gave superb performances for friends in bars but always lost his extraordinary acting faculties when confronted with the camera lens. Before 1989 their genius was appreciated only by Piwowski and Andrzej Kondratiuk, and in the 1970s screenplays written for them were rejected by film associations. Both actors became “cult figures” in the 1990s, because they were the most suitable folk heroes for post-socialist times. *Sztos* is actually a tribute to *Uplifted*—both are quasi-road movies where two male friends embark on a journey that seals their friendship. In both, the decisive moment is the “test of money,” when the men have to show that they value each other more than material goods or women. In *Uplifted*, Maklakiewicz and Himilsbach win the lottery and decide to spend the money flying planes: they waste the money in order to realize one of their dreams. In *Sztos* two petty criminals go on a journey around Poland’s coast, cheating German tourists; they do so not to “make money” but to set up a spectacular revenge on a disloyal friend. Both films tell the story of how male friendship survives commercialization. Maklakiewicz and Himilsbach were perfect anti-bourgeois heroes, who were worshipped not because they were “on top” like regular film celebrities, but because they were sympathetic losers who cared as little about money and the conspicuous consumption it offered as they cared for work. If they lived today, Andrzej Kondratiuk claims, they would be even more marginalized than they were in the 1970s, when the post-1989 commodity cult had already started.<sup>100</sup>

#### DIFFERENT SHADES OF NOIR

Marek Hłasko, a central figure of the “Polish October” of 1956, regretted in 1966 that even though history was generous towards Poles with the countless tragedies they had to endure, none of these was transformed into

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>99</sup> Łuczak, *Rejs*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Łuczak, *Wniebowzięci*, 151–3, 161, 172.

world-class literature. Instead, he argued, Beckett, Ionesco, and Kafka had become favorite authors in Polish intellectual circles (Ionesco was actually the most important inspiration for Stanisław Tym, who co-authored *Teddy Bear* and played the main role).<sup>101</sup> Polish intellectuals preferred blissful ignorance, believing that they lived in a “land of absurdity,” rather than in a hell. Gombrowicz’s *Ferdydurke* became their “Bible,” he recalls, and the elite refused to see what everybody else saw with the naked eye. “They found refuge in laughter only so as not to see that they were laughable: it is better to be a jester attracting wide audiences than a Hamlet talking to empty seats.”<sup>102</sup> He argued that Polish literature lacked realism: daily life, especially in its economic dimension, was taboo. Unlike with the great European classics, Hłasko regretted, future readers would not be able to infer the value of money from reading contemporary Polish novels.<sup>103</sup> It seems that he pinned more hope on film, on which his own writing drew deeply and which it mimicked. Hłasko, dubbed the East European James Dean, was obsessed with the *cinema noir*, which he knew extremely well, regarding Humphrey Bogart, next to Dostoyevsky, as one of his idols, and when socialist realism ruled supreme, he, like many other Poles, found refuge and inspiration in watching Western films.<sup>104</sup> He authored scripts for the “Polish School,” and even tried writing for Hollywood, but died prematurely.

The Polish post-war cinema was largely structured by the conundrum of the Stalinist terror. Historical debates after 1989 hinged upon the controversy as to whether Socialism was a tragedy or a farce. Those who thought it a tragedy, envisioned it as a *political* tragedy, those who thought it a farce, envisioned it mostly as an *economic* farce. The former conceived characters like the light-hearted cabaret actress in Bugajski’s *Interrogation* (*Przesłuchanie*, 1982), who discovers that there is nothing funny about a Stalinist jail. It was Bugajski’s *Interrogation*, and not works by Wajda and the other filmmakers of the “cinema of moral anxiety,” that became known as “the most anti-communist film in the history of the Polish cinema.”<sup>105</sup> Even though *Interrogation* was shot in 1981 and edited in 1982, it was shelved for seven years. Its 1989 release marked the coun-

<sup>101</sup> Tym also wrote a play titled “Dear Mr. Ionesco!”

<sup>102</sup> Marek Hłasko, *Piękni dwudziestolenni* [The Beautiful 20-year olds] (Warsaw: Da Capo, 1966), 165.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–8.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–4; Marszałek, *Kino rzeczy znalezionych*, 149.

<sup>105</sup> Jacek Szczerba et al., “Cztery perły w tym ‘Psy’” [Four pearls including *Dogs*], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (3 November 1999): 18.

try's transition to post-socialism. In a speech introducing *Interrogation* at its first public screening, Wajda declared that "this première ends the film history of People's Poland. Tomorrow will be the very first day of free Poland's cinematography."<sup>106</sup> *Interrogation* tells the story of a cheerful cabaret actress, hailed by one critic as the "new Antigone,"<sup>107</sup> who is unjustly arrested and undergoes a brutal interrogation in a Stalinist jail, in order to manufacture false charges against somebody she once knew. It is the story of her psychic transformation from recklessness and ignorance to stony defiance. When she is eventually freed, she is reunited with her daughter, who was fathered by one of her interrogators and born in jail. Just as the jail scenes were read as an allegory of Poland in the 1980s—it was not by chance that the première took place on 13 December 1989, the anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law—so the final scenes offered a spark of bitter hope for the future. The film perfectly suited the role Wajda envisioned for it—to be a cathartic moment that separated the difficult past from the brighter future, and to serve as the foundation on which Democratic Poland could bring to light a "secret truth" about communist crimes. Before *Interrogation* was first screened in 1989, it was watched on illegal video copies or read in printed samizdat versions throughout the 1980s.<sup>108</sup> Prevented by censorship from being publicly shown, the further it was kept out of sight, the more powerful its impact became. This role was confirmed by the avalanche of prizes it received at the Polish Film Festival in 1990, and by the Golden Palm awarded to Krystyna Janda as female lead in Cannes in the same year.

Initially a commercial success, *Interrogation* virtually disappeared from public memory and sight soon after 1990. While socialist comedies ruled supreme, modest visual productions showed Stalinism by "localizing" Hollywood clichés. Some action movies, like Jacek Bromski's *Polish Cuisine* (*Kuchnia Polska*, 1991), were inspired by the success of *Interrogation* and starred its main actress, Krystyna Janda. Others, like Janusz Kijowski in *State of Fear* (*Stan Strachu*, 1989), chose a dramatic actor as their hero. Reciting Hamlet's monologues to empty theatre seats, he plans to flee abroad, but is against his will entrusted with a suitcase full of money intended for the Solidarity underground. He decides to deliver it, even though the secret police are constantly on his back and break every-

<sup>106</sup> Andrzej Wajda quoted in Maria Brzostowiecka, "Nowa Antygona" [The new Antigone], *Ekran 4* (1990): 6–7.

<sup>107</sup> Brzostowiecka, "Nowa Antygona," 7.

<sup>108</sup> Muszyńska, *Obraz codzienności*, 222.

body except him with beatings and intimidation. In Wojciech Wójcik's early film *Kill me at the End* (*Zabić na końcu*, 1990) two factory workers decide to carry out a bank robbery inspired by the script of a Hollywood action movie. Even though they find the script perfectly realistic and follow it meticulously, Polish reality proves entirely different from the film clichés. The robbery fails, and the film's refrain drives the point home: "Casablanca will never happen here." It was black comedy, and not black crime fiction, that turned out to be the more appropriate representation of Socialism for the wider population. It was not a political tragedy, but an economic farce told in the language cobbled together by Bareja and Piwowski (whose sense of humor Bareja exploited and continued) that turned out to be a more credible rendering of Socialism for both the population and critics of different political preferences.<sup>109</sup>

This victory was short-lived. Banal nationalism in a nostalgic mode was soon replaced by a slightly less benign nationalism in its neo-conservative version. Marcin Meller, who in 1998 coined the phrase "Frugo generation" and rebuked the superficial video-clip youth culture for its historical amnesia,<sup>110</sup> confessed in Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz's documentary *Generation '89* (*Pokolenie '89*, 2001) that because of the crime prevailing in the streets, Poland needed its Giuliani, and neo-conservatism was the only way forward. A Giuliani duly arrived in the person of Lech Kaczyński, first an uncompromising minister of justice, then the "sheriff of Warsaw," and since 2005 the President of Poland. Still in the late 1990s, the old socialist TV crime series *Calling 07* (*07 zgłoś się*, 1976–1987) was more popular than professionally-made "capitalist" films such as Wojciech Wójcik's *Extradition* (*Ekstradycja*, 1995). The socialist TV series featured, as Katarzyna Wajda argued, only petty and mildly dangerous crime that seemed more realistic and appealing than the international mafia networks, exorbitant sums, ruthless characters and spectacular explosions that were the substance of new crime films.<sup>111</sup>

The neo-noir aesthetic has gradually gained realism, however, and it has done so by putting on historical costume. The plot of Wójcik's *There and Back* (*Tam i z powrotem*, 2001) virtually copied his earlier *Kill me at the End*. It too is set in the city of Łódź, but this time in 1965, where a bank robbery is organized for the purpose of buying fake passports and

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<sup>109</sup> Ziemkiewicz, "Miś nieśmiertelny," 23.

<sup>110</sup> Meller, "Pokolenie Frugo," 8.

<sup>111</sup> Wajda, "07 wciąż się zgłasza," 41–2.

fleeing the country. If Hollywood clichés seemed unsuited to Polish reality in *Kill me at the End, There and Back* was saturated with a *noir*-like aesthetic: the malicious secret police in black leather coats were omnipresent, the machine-like system ruined individual talents, and the positive hero was separated from the outside world and his own family. Around 2001 the biggest private television channel TVN changed its profile and turned to portraying crime virtually non-stop. TVN journalists became masters of sensational news, and interventionist TV programs and documentaries were interwoven with crime series, Hollywood films, and reenacted court hearings; recently TVN produced a feature film about the Polish mafia.<sup>112</sup> It also sponsored a spectacular documentary series called *The Great Escapes* (*Wielkie Uciezki*, 2005), partly reenacting and partly narrating real stories of people who attempted to flee socialist Poland to live a “normal” life beyond the Iron Curtain.

The vision of socialist Poland as a police state was most powerfully realized in *One day in People's Poland* (*Jeden dzień w PRL*, 2005) by Maciej Drygas, who was called by one critic “the George Orwell of Polish documentaries.”<sup>113</sup> This film is a compilation of socialist documentaries, archival TV footage, amateur movies and socialist newsreels, edited with masterly precision and accompanied by a soundtrack of voices reading out fragments of letters, official correspondence, police reports, and even radio programs with weather forecasts. Drygas takes the viewer on a dawn-till-dusk tour through 27 September 1962, the date of a private conversation between a high party official and a Catholic bishop, of which he had found a secret recording, although eventually he did not include it in the film. The documentary is structured upon the juxtaposition of banality and terror: stories of mundane daily activities intersect with images of police surveillance (Fig. 3). Although Drygas’s crew researched that day’s events in various state archives, it was in the archives of the secret police, stored at the Institute for National Remembrance, that he found his key data: “Initially, I did not have a thesis to prove,” he said in an interview, “but the more I immersed myself in the Institute’s archives, the more I was stunned by the scale of police surveillance.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>I owe this point to Iga Mergler. See also Bianka Mikołajewska, “Szkłana Temida” [TV justice], *Polityka* 6 (2007): 89–91.

<sup>113</sup>Jacek Hugo-Bader, “Jeden dzień w PRL” [One day in People’s Poland], *Gazeta Telewizyjna* (11 November 2005): 10.

<sup>114</sup>Maciej Drygas, “Ciężar prawdy” [The heaviness of truth], *Film & TV Kamera* 4 (2006): 10.



Fig. 3 An Orwellian ‘antidote for nostalgia’ in Maciej Drygas’ *One Day in People’s Poland* (courtesy Drygas Production)

In order to show the “true image” of People’s Poland Drygas, like many historians associated with the Institute for National Remembrance,<sup>115</sup> reproduced the secret police point of view. Unlike the authors of *The Lost Archives of the Secret Services* (*Tajne taśmy SB*, 2002), who in 2001 found a handful of “operational” footage of the main Warsaw dissidents made by the secret services and not only showed it in their documentary but also interviewed its authors and thus unveiled some fascinating aspects of the “relationship” the secret services developed with the people under surveillance, Drygas in his documentary tried to reproduce the gaze that the secret services were supposed to have trained on society at large. *One Day in People’s Poland* has no individual hero, but shows Socialism as a Polish collective tragedy, sometimes with elements of farce. The jury of the Krakow Documentary Film Festival commended *One Day in People’s Poland* as “a convincing account of the absurdities of a totalitarian system,”<sup>116</sup> and one critic recalled that even though he had

<sup>115</sup> Modzelewski, “IPN: kto historyk, kto trąba?” 12.

<sup>116</sup> <http://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php/4221231>, accessed 1 February, 2007.

burst out laughing while watching it, on second thoughts the absurdities of Socialism were not funny at all.<sup>117</sup> Drygas's "time travel" was received as the best therapy against nostalgia.<sup>118</sup> It subverted the "realism" of Bareja's comedies by concentrating on the very mundane realities of everyday life and put some classic tropes from Piwowski's *The Cruise*—such as a police investigation into an anti-socialist slogan on a toilet wall, or criticism of a poem that was not "optimistic enough"—into an Orwellian account of a police state.<sup>119</sup>

Those who praise Drygas's documentary as the first "anti-nostalgic cure" forget that Bareja was actually the pioneer of crime cinema in Poland and had made the first Polish criminal series in the mid-1960s. It seems, however, that Bareja deliberately abandoned this genre, although police officers appear in all his comedies. The central character of his series *Alternatywy 4* (*Alternatywy 4*, 1983) is a housing-project caretaker called Stanisław Angel (*Anioł*) who tries to observe, control and terrorize the entire community he is actually supposed to help. Rather than emphasizing his power, Bareja reveals its limits, and shows how the community gets rid of him.<sup>120</sup> When Szołajski's *Man of...* was attacked by right-wingers Zygmunt Kałużyński wrote that they were behaving as if "they had walked into a cabaret and made a fuss that they were unable to pray there;" instead, he argued that "the filmmaker who understands that our national condition is hilarious will be a master."<sup>121</sup> Szołajski's film was a tribute to the tradition initiated by the prematurely dead Andrzej Munk, who was first to show the Polish tragedy tongue-in-cheek.<sup>122</sup> Against Kałużyński's expectation, it was not a young director, but a dead one—Stanisław Bareja—who became the post-1989 master of irony and whose popularity supported Kałużyński's opinion that, in the long run, laughter is a fairer judgment than any attempt to moralize over politics.

<sup>117</sup> Hugo-Bader, "Jeden dzień w PRL," 10.

<sup>118</sup> Tadeusz Szyma, "Koniec świata PRLu" [The end of People's Poland], *Kino* 12 (2005): 44–5; Krystyna Lubelska, "Wycieczka do PRL" [A journey to People's Poland], *Polityka* 45 (2005): 67.

<sup>119</sup> Wojciech Szacki, "Jeden dzień w PRL" [One day in People's Poland], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (15 November 2005): 2.

<sup>120</sup> Łuczak, *Miś*, 119–22.

<sup>121</sup> Kałużyński and Raczek, "Sprawiedliwość śmiechu," 79.

<sup>122</sup> Aired on "Kino Polska" TV channel on 4 February, 2005. Mirosław Przyłipiak, "Kim jest dla nas Andrzej Munk" [Who is Andrzej Munk for us], *Kino* 5 (1994): 18–9; Łukasz Działkiewicz, "Andrzeja Munka Portret niepełny" [Andrzej Munk's incomplete portrait], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (21 January 2007): 22.

## POLAND'S PROTRACTED TRANSITION

It could be argued that the cinema that turned Socialism into a fetish was in fact part and parcel of a novel genre of the Polish commercial cinema of the 1990s, often dubbed by critics as “personal,” “private” or “nostalgic.”<sup>123</sup> Its major representatives—Jan Jakub Kolski, Andrzej Barański, and Andrzej Kondratiuk—shot art-house films which praised the “slow” life of the Polish countryside, far away from the centers of power and politics. Their blend of the spirit of anti-politics with attempts at pinpointing the national character drew on the peasant lifestyle and re-valued folk culture. Even though some of their films were set in the 1950s and 1960s, any reference to the historical context was usually bracketed. For example, Kolski’s *Jańcio the Water Man* (*Jańcio Wodnik*, 1991), tells the story of a folk “philosopher-errant” who is tempted to market his healing powers but finally comes to realize that material gains and physical pleasures are transitory and it is more worthwhile to search for one’s private metaphysics. The only “marker” of the time is a car produced in the 1950s—a gift by some people whom Jańcio has healed.<sup>124</sup> Such “escapism” from the post-socialist commercial world produced a counter-reaction in the form of “socially engaged cinema.”<sup>125</sup> However, rather than being a mere “documentation” of post-socialist realities, it drew heavily on Hollywoodian aesthetics. Krzysztof Krauze’s acclaimed *Debt* (*Dług*, 1999) was a psychological thriller, based on the true story of two young businessmen murdering a psychopath who terrorizes them by demanding the return of a non-existent debt. Robert Gliński’s *Hi, Tereska* (*Cześć, Tereska*, 2000), a black-and-white quasi-documentary feature on an innocent teenage girl from the Warsaw Praga district who becomes a mindless killer, was hailed as an accurate portrayal of life in the post-socialist “urban ghetto.” Yet, as Marek Radziwon wrote in a devastating review, Gliński’s film had grown out of a provincial desire for a “Polish Bronx” and was as inadequate as a depiction of Polish realities as the Hollywood-inspired action movies.<sup>126</sup> The phenomenon of post-socialist crime and the media-induced “fear”

<sup>123</sup> See for example Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Liczy się kino robione z pasją” [Only cinema made with passion counts], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (5 January 2004): 13.

<sup>124</sup> Marszałek, *Kino rzeczy znalezionych*, 102.

<sup>125</sup> Andrzej Kołodyński, “Wrzeczono czasu” [Time spindle], *Kino* 7–8 (2002): 44–6; “Niezapomniane, 1991–2001: polskie kino naszych czasów” [The unforgettable: Polish cinema 1991–2001], *Kino* 9 (2002): 33.

<sup>126</sup> Marek Radziwon, “Nie wierzcie Teresce” [Do not believe Tereska], *Dialog* 5–6 (2002): 120–8. See also the film *The Błokers* (*Błokersi*, 2001) by Sylwester Latkowski.

made it easier to ascribe all the present problems to the socialist past and the doings of post-communist criminals.

The cinematography of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s cannot be looked at separately from the films made in the 1980s. There is a sense in which post-socialist cinematography began in 1981 with Stanisław Bareja's *Teddy Bear*. Although the 1980s are usually perceived as “stagnant,” Poland was undergoing a protracted transition towards flexible capitalism, reflected also in the symbolic regime with its stark contrast between reified Socialism and Capitalism, later to become central to the 1990s order. Erstwhile party officials, strongly resembling Ryszard Ochódzki, took to the seemingly “new” capitalist reality like fish to water. 1989 was neither the end, nor the beginning, but a middle point in this “protracted transition.” Even though 1989 was a breakthrough, the 1976–2006 period saw numerous continuities. As the economist Kazimierz Poznanski argued, it was Edward Gierek, the first independent Polish socialist leader, who by taking loans from Western banks and governments triggered the Polish “protracted transition.”<sup>127</sup> Although initially Gierek's modernization project seemed to work, in 1976 his government began to lose control over it, and the concomitant crisis years pulled socialist Poland into the orbit of global “casino Capitalism,” where fluctuating exchange rates became a prime factor determining the stability, or otherwise, of local economies.<sup>128</sup>

The bizarre economic regime of 1980s Poland, where the only real value—“hard” currency—was officially banned and where the pockets of “capitalist” private entrepreneurship gradually prevailed over the official state economy, was an example of a classic post-Fordist restructuring and devaluation of industrial spaces that took off in the early 1970s in the world at large.<sup>129</sup> Even though the socialists and the alternative elites promoted by the Solidarity trade union were officially engaged in a deadly symbolic strife, their goals were quite convergent—both sides hoped to end the “surreal” situation and restore “normality.”<sup>130</sup> Commodity fetishism and the consumer culture that was so painfully experienced in Poland

<sup>127</sup> Kazimierz Poznański, *Poland's Protracted Transition: Institutional Change and Economic Growth 1970–1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>128</sup> Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>129</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 284–307.

<sup>130</sup> Kurczewski, *The Resurrection of Rights in Poland*, 117–8, 351–2; Dariusz Grala, *Reformy gospodarcze w PRL w latach 1982–1989. Próba uratowania socjalizmu* [Economic reforms in Poland between 1982 and 1989. An attempt to rescue Socialism], (Warsaw: Trio, 2005).

in the early 1990s had first taken root in the early 1970s and dominated the “occult” economy of the 1980s. The post-Fordist aesthetics and new national culture, reflected in the films of Piwowski and Bareja, received full acclaim in the 1990s, becoming part of an emerging regime that sought to reinvent the local “culture” in order to find a stable anchor for value.

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