

# Head of Medusa, or realism in films of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety

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We can hazard a guess that when considering post-war Polish film up till 1989, it was in the movement called the Cinema of Moral Anxiety <sup>1</sup> that realist tendencies, which earlier for various reasons had only appeared vestigially, were most strongly felt. It is here that the belief that cinema is an art of reality, which can show a true picture of the real world based on the observation of contemporary life, most clearly manifested itself. As a result, we can also say that this cinema inherited the main difficulties and limitations of realist art.

The category of realism causes considerable problems within the aesthetics of the twentieth century, and not only because of the multiple concepts of realism, and therefore the difficulty of strict definition. One of the reasons for these problems <sup>2</sup> is the mix of epistemology and axiology characteristic of realism, which can be seen at the root of most concepts. Generally speaking, this applies to two main and extreme claims of realism: the axiological postulate of the conceptualization of general truths (*realis* – true) and the cognitive anticipation of the most detailed possible depiction of reality (*realis* – real). As noted by Zofia Mitosek, *this mix of epistemology and axiology made realism in the second half of the twentieth century an indigestible dish* <sup>3</sup>.

Problems with realism also become apparent thanks to the heightened awareness in the twentieth century of how much the realist motivation is in fact subordinate to compositional and aesthetic motivations (and also, like it or not, ideological ones), thanks to which the illusion of reality is produced. Obviously in this context the problem of non-transparency of artistic languages also becomes important.

The troubles of realism did not spare film and reflection on cinema. Here, however, the belief in the special recording abilities of film, based on its photographic “bond” with reality, came to the rescue of the practice and theory of realism. This as it were ontological quality of film, together with the use of innovative cinematic techniques (mobile camera, shots on location, long shots, sound recorded on set) and various stylistic devices and conventions rooted in literature (e.g. the episodic character of a storyline) resulted in feature film movements after World War II which can be defined as realist (neorealism, the English Angry Young Men, the Czech new wave).

But the difficulties of realism in Polish post-1945 cinema were of yet another specific character. They were the result, to a large extent, of the socio-political situ-

ation. As noted by Tadeusz Miczka, they originated from the extreme ideologization of the postulates of realism that occurred in socialist realism, and the resulting artistic strategy (in many instances successful) based on an ability to *generate a specific tension between the conventions of film realism and the surplus of aesthetization and symbolism* <sup>4</sup>. These tensions naturally found their highest artistic expression in the films of the Polish School. According to Miczka, it was from this ambiguous (because strongly allusive) strategy that CMA originated. But it was precisely the creators of this movement, by adopting the program of *moral purification* – as pointed out by Miczka – who used the form of *extreme film realism* <sup>5</sup>. They also overcame the *reluctance towards photographic realism* found in Polish cinema <sup>6</sup>.

The phenomenon of realism can be explored with three main reference points in mind: as an author's strategy, as the property of a work, and as a set of expectations held by the public <sup>7</sup>. In the case of films classified as CMA, each of the three levels seems to be important. In fact this cinema created, with the help of particular cinematic methods, a specific code which had to reach the viewer in a defined historical time and social context.

Let us recall the voices of a few filmmakers from the period. In 1977, Krzysztof Kieślowski said in a newspaper interview: *In cinema I favour the propositions close to realism. Tradition does not really inspire me, more what my life is about, what surrounds us* <sup>8</sup>.

In 1978, Agnieszka Holland, still before her feature-length film debut, said this in a survey on the situation of young Polish cinema, conducted by the monthly periodical "Kino": *There appeared something like institutional (television used to prefer /.../ the realist contemporary film drama) and social demand (the audience for various reasons awaited this type of film). (...) Because we were all convinced that large areas of our life, even family life, had not yet been shown, it was necessary to show how people live, how they eat, how they talk, and what their work is like* <sup>9</sup>.

While years later (but still during the period of making of these films), Feliks Falk thus added to their common principles: *When journalism was silent, our films told the truth about reality, therefore fulfilled an extremely important function. They informed the public, or rather publicly stated what society knew, but which it had to keep quiet. Yet even then it was not our task to offer solutions* <sup>10</sup>.

Already these brief statements draw attention to two essential areas mentioned at the beginning, related to the perception of realism: epistemology and axiology. In other words – the most important objectives of CMA realism are: first, a description of reality consistent with the truth; second, a function of exposure and awareness related to *moral reflection* <sup>11</sup>.

Both objectives evidently referred to the reality of the second half of the 1970s, a time of sharply manifested economic downturn, social breakdown, workers' protests (in 1976 – leading to the rise of the opposition and the beginning of an independent culture), as well as a period in which mass culture had an increasing impact on society, so everything that Andrzej Friszke described as *the crisis of the new social contract* <sup>12</sup>. Andrzej Kijowski in 1977 bluntly characterized this period in the pages of his *Journal: The loss of prestige of the social and political activist. The loss of prestige of ideology. The decline in the value of words. The collapse of social values. A new version of the old individualism: cunning selfishness* <sup>13</sup>.

Of particular importance to filmmakers was the impact of the tenets of Young Culture, and later the work of poets who were part of the so-called new wave and their desire to describe and identify by artistic means *unrepresented reality*<sup>14</sup>. As Mariola Jankun-Dopart put it: *The authors of "The Unrepresented World" called for a realist novel, but found no response among writers. In this vacuum the young filmmakers arrived – and probably very consciously*<sup>15</sup>. *To exist, means to be described in a culture – the realist method had to serve as a description and the latter was to raise awareness, to help find oneself in a social situation, therefore to cognitively objectify it*<sup>16</sup>. This is how a film movement considered to be a message on social reality was born, with a characteristic hero (showing several variants) – the *man who saw through*<sup>17</sup>.

When we reflect on the realism of CMA films, this area of the artistic output seems essential, belonging as it does to the field of feature films made in the years 1976-1981, strictly *associated with the picture of the present*<sup>18</sup>, which Tadeusz Lubelski symbolically called *canonical*<sup>19</sup>. In the context of the problems mentioned above, we can reflect on the set of characteristics associated with the cinematic image in the works of the period. It would primarily deal with that element of *photographic realism*, in which the desire to describe reality most fully manifested itself, and which was obviously the result of authorial strategy and remained closely related to the reflection on the subject of this reality. As Mariola Jankun-Dopart noted, in many CMA films, just as in new wave poetry, *the aesthetic value of accurate description also reveals the ethical value, and the truth connects the two axiological fields*<sup>20</sup>. However, since the accuracy of this description also depended on the type of cinematic method used, it may prove interesting to look at the films of this movement in terms of visual and cinematographic strategies employed.

*Pairing of directors and cinematographers* – wrote Maria Kornatowska – *was often formed as early as college. They were linked by similar interests and artistic views, as well as by their dates of birth. In the first half of the 1970s, the filmmakers, cinematographers and actors born in the 1940s came to the fore, and in the second half, those born in the 1950s made their debut. The generational bond (encompassing roughly ten years) played a significant role in shaping the new cinema*<sup>21</sup>.

We can add that it was to a certain extent a continuation of the tradition of close cooperation between directors and cinematographers that had existed in earlier Polish cinema, and that there emerged a new generation of cinematographers of the "Polish School", many still active today. This was thus a continuation of sorts, albeit under new historical and working conditions, and with new aesthetic rules.

At one point, there was much criticism of the form of CMA films. The two key complaints typically relate to the oversimplified dramaturgy (and schematism of characters) and the aesthetics of the footage. In this context they were, however, as a rule limited to rather general, repetitive objections and comments. Tadeusz Miczka, for example, wrote about the *deliberate mediocrity of shots, which was supposed to reflect the mediocrity of life based on a crisis of values*<sup>22</sup>. These matters were discussed at greater length by Dobrochna Dabert in her extensive monograph on CMA. But except for the interesting proposal of a typology of "diegetic space" characteristic for the films of this movement<sup>23</sup>, the author writes little about methods of creating the "screen space", while observations on these issues refer only to

the influence of the documentary and the technical faults of the shots (e.g. fuzziness). In other cases, criticism was limited to similar observations<sup>24</sup>.

Thus important questions can arise. Is it right that the visual side of these films is deprecated? Is it true that, as regards the shots, each of the films reveals the same kind of form and style? How is “photographic realism” manifested in them, and how does it complement the director’s reflections? And finally, how (if at all) do the aesthetics dominant in them carry the difficulties and limitations typical of realism?

When discussing this subject, we must bear in mind the evolution of the phenomenon that was CMA. The beginning of the “canonical” period can be dated to 1975, with Krzysztof Kieślowski’s television film *Personel* (*Personnel*), and 1976, with the cinema films *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*) by Andrzej Wajda, and *Barwy ochronne* (*Camouflage*) by Krzysztof Zanussi. This period came after a wave of documentaries made at the turn of the 1960s, and more or less successful attempts in the first half of the 1970s to produce something of a “hybrid” film, inspired by documentaries and the aesthetics of the Czech new wave (films by Antoni Krauze, the brothers Janusz and Andrzej Kondratiuk, Marek Piwowski, but also the episodic film *Obrazki z życia* /*Pictures from Life*, 1979/<sup>25</sup>). The second important type of realizations directly preceding CMA were television films (of medium-length), shot by the majority of young film directors before their full-length debuts, and the episodic films made for television by the film unit “X” in 1975-1976 (*CDN*, 1975; *Zdjęcia próbne* /*Screen Tests*, 1976/; the TV series *Sytuacje rodzinne* /*Family Situations*, 1976-1977/; and the aforementioned *Pictures from Life*). We can already pick out two possible aesthetic models here: the documentary film, but also the aesthetics of the feature film adapted to the production and broadcasting needs of Polish Television (TVP). In 1978, Agnieszka Holland said this about the specificity of feature films made for television, based on her own experience: *The film made for television created a new quality in the public reception (...). All of this has specific implications. Some thematic areas (mainly the present time) and some styles (particularly the realist, perhaps even veristic, convention) can count on a large television audience (leaving aside the strictly entertaining productions). In general the viewer expects the reality shown in the TV film to be believable. (...) Contrary to appearances, the attractiveness of a storyline or the accuracy and originality of artistic expression do not play a particularly large role here. Fulfilling the audience’s expectations risks entering the shallows of small realism, or conventional journalism, but on the other hand creates opportunities for a dialogue on important current issues with a very broad range of spectators. (...) And so a television film has a better chance of reaching the audience when it is a “photograph of life”, and a smaller chance when it is a creation, composition, generalisation*<sup>26</sup>.

There were also other dangers that arose in connection with the production of television films, about which Kieślowski said in 1978: *I have the impression – to put it briefly – that the image of the world on television is always an official image, there is only one point of view, one perspective, and we already know the other pieces of the puzzle. We may be surprised by some fictional or artistic dénouement, never by a point of view*<sup>27</sup>.

However, the key films of the CMA movement usually demonstrate a much more complex form and content than earlier documentaries and TV films. Amongst the cinematographers who contributed to it, the achievements of three in particular

attract our attention: Sławomir Idziak, Edward Kłosiński and Jacek Petrycki. They shot the most important films of this period by Kieślowski, Wajda, Falk and Holland. The input of Krzysztof Wyszyński, the permanent collaborator of Janusz Kijowski, into the movement was also important. They all belonged to the generation mentioned by Kornatowska. The first three especially held at that time a very strong position in Polish cinema <sup>28</sup>.

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Let us start with Sławomir Idziak and his role in the feature-length film debut by Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Blizna (The Scar, 1976)*, which is interesting because it combines the documentary strategy, characteristic for Kieślowski, with a very precisely rendered form of shots. The film tells the story of the problems of the director of a large industrial plant – an honest and good “manager” (Franciszek Pieczka), who is forced however to make far-reaching compromises. These are the result of operating in the socio-political realities of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) from the mid-1960s to December 1970. The life and actions of the director, shown in a number of episodes, are portrayed as a gradual process of loss of influence on the company’s policies, something that in fact turns out to be part of the wider historical process. We have here the fundamental conflict of those years: the authorities *contra* society. The problem of the authorities’ isolation from society, and at the same time its expansiveness, also found expression in the visual concept of the film. It illustrates the reality of the degradation of private and public spaces, the result of the grandiosity of socialist industrialization plans. In addition to the events of the narrative, the conflict between authorities/planning and people/realities was also suggestively depicted through the visual principle of contrasts. This is mainly achieved by the choice and importance of space, and its photographic arrangement in Idziak’s shots. The space of authority, and its attributes, is contrasted with the space of the local community. The “seizing” of the space by the authorities (and politics) is shown right from the first sequence of the film as a physical intervention in space – parades of black cars driving through the forest from the local Regional Committee to Olecko. The expansion of industrial space, planned in offices, brings instant results: felling of the forest, degradation of the land. The building process is transformed into a process in which the old natural and social fabric is destroyed. The pictures created by Idziak tell us more about this than any dialogue (for example, the scenes of the people’s protests at meetings organized by factory management).

Maintained in cool colour schemes and based on the contrasts of chiaroscuro, Idziak’s shots display artistic coherence, despite the mix of the *stricte* fictional with the para-documentary. Scenes from the small town to which the director returns after many years, and where nearby a factory is being built, are in the convention of documentary observation. In just a few takes, the provincial and impoverished character of this small town is highlighted. The picnic to celebrate the opening of the plant and the First of May demonstration are shot as documentary-reportage. The documentary model most fully comes to the fore, however, in scenes of meetings between the authorities and the town people arranged by the filmmaker. These scenes, based on the filming of “talking heads” in the manner characteristic of Kieślowski’s documentaries, use a mix of genuine statements and newspeak. The



*The Scar*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1976)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

radical reduction of the background detail in the scenes of meetings and party conferences filmed indoors was a very interesting way of arranging the shots to emphasize the aforementioned conflicts and the division between authority and society. The backdrop is then generally dark and flatly composed. This remains in contrast to the outdoor pictures and those that show the space of the town, which are filled with a large number of details.

One of the qualities of the cinematographer's work in *The Scar* is the skilful combining of shots taken with "wide" lens with those taken with long-focus lens. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that Idziak often uses the long-focus lens throughout the film. It is distinctive that the shots taken with this lens are not exclusively limited to documentary and observational functions. The long-focus lens was also used in many entirely staged scenes. The footage made with these lenses is characterized by a compositional and staging precision (a careful choice of background, a composition of intra-frame motion), and the sensitive use of natural conditions and aerial perspective (e.g. snow, fog, smoke). The "narrowing" of the space visible in the frame, typical of shots made with long-focus lenses, allowed the filmmakers to highlight certain elements of that space as particularly significant in the background behind the actors (e.g. the red and white flags during the celebration of the First of May), and helped create an impression of the main protagonist's deepening isolation in relation to his surroundings.

In *The Scar* we can also detect certain attempts at metaphorising the space and the picture. This happens in the important "family" scene, where the director talks to his daughter against the backdrop of a cemetery lit by candlelight in the distance. This scene is also shot using a long-focus lens. In the final sequence of the film, the image of the workers' demonstration in December 1970, seen from behind net curtains in the director's office, is enveloped in winter fog.

The main intention behind the staging (and at the same time its problem) in *The Scar* was to convincingly weave documentary elements, authentic places and people's behaviour in the fictional structure of the film. The aesthetic quality of the footage, however, goes far beyond the documentary manner. It is characterized by artistic consistency and visual unity. There is a cool elegance about it but it certainly does not try to embellish reality. Instead, it seeks the visual synthesis of the aforementioned semantic conflicts. Yet behind this visual unity lurks reality degraded, full of gaps and incomplete statements. The intentions and actions of the hero sink into the substance of the physical world and prove to be too weak and ineffective.

There is in *The Scar* a kind of distance from the represented reality. The reasons for this probably lie in the subject chosen, which is associated with the "poetics of production"; it is also evident in the acting of Franciszek Pieczka, and in Idziak's accurate shots. In his subsequent feature films from the 1970s, Kieślowski will continue to prefer the methods of documentary and strive for a greater transparency of image than in *The Scar*. Idziak, working with other directors on CMA films, will also somewhat change his mode of expression. This is particularly evident in two later works – *Dyrygent (The Conductor)* by Andrzej Wajda, and *Kontrakt (Contract)* by Krzysztof Zanussi.

*The Conductor* (1979, released in 1980) is a story about the quest for higher values – the ideals of art – in a world devoid of such values. The potential for freedom contained in art, which in the film is embodied by a "real artist", the world-famous conductor (John Gielgud), who after many years returns to the country, is contrasted with the conformism of an arriviste, the director of a provincial orchestra (Andrzej Seweryn). The main setting for the events, a middle-sized town (Radom), is depicted in a rather schematic visual way as a degraded space. The most obvious manifestation of this is an old pre-war house (the protagonists live there) frequently shown in the film, standing in the middle of unrendered communist apartment blocks. These pictures are in turn contrasted with the monumentalised modern space of New York, from where the Conductor comes. Additionally, the streets and the empty concert hall lobbies, photographed by Idziak, have a despoiled character, deprived of energy. In *The Conductor*, the limitations of the space of action and the lack of a strong dramatic storyline meant that the film lacked convincing detail; furthermore, the methods of shooting and directing, focusing on a "behavioural" description, were not able to penetrate the psyche of the characters, recording only their grimaces (Andrzej Seweryn) or their statuesqueness (John Gielgud). They failed even in the case of the main protagonist, played by Krystyna Janda. Her final monologue, in which she says that *only those who truly love music are free* with the aim – as Krzysztof Mętrak wrote – *of shedding light on any doubts and giving the audience a specific direction of interpretation, is in fact – we believe – tautological in relation to the picture, and a rather unfortunate addition*<sup>29</sup>. Paradoxically therefore, the film that was to bear witness to the freedom that real art can bring became one of Wajda's least creative undertakings. Possibly it was because *the film director never had any particular inclination or great devotion to the "small realism" background, the superficial "small details of life", and if he did, it was for the genre and individuality*<sup>30</sup> – argued Mętrak, stating at the end of the article that although *The Conductor* was almost certainly born of noble intentions, the final result lacked in some way clarity, an emotional, pictorial message, stylistic dis-

*tinctiveness and the wonderful tension between Picture and Issue, which emanates from Wajda's best works* <sup>31</sup>.

Visual effects used by Idziak in *The Conductor*, by which we generally mean the use of wide lens, frequent medium group plans and half close-ups, the hand-held camera, the quest for the neutral effect of daylight, and a high contrast of lighting in the indoor night scenes based on enhanced effect lighting (e.g. night lamps or chandeliers), resulted in a much more convincing effect in *The Contract* by Krzysztof Zanussi.

*The Contract* (1980) is something of a caustic pamphlet on the Polish middle classes and the intelligentsia of the late 1970s. The film footage successfully sets people and events in the material realities of Poland – this time in the capital city. We see the grey, wintery city centre of Warsaw, mainly the indoors – an airport, a bar, and the home of a local worthy (Tadeusz Łomnicki) in particular, where a wedding and the ensuing psychodrama takes place. A certain neutrality of lighting and composition of shots allowed the filmmakers to reproduce the film set detail and, together with the technique of hand-held camera, it remained open to improvisational acting (movements, gestures), typical of Zanussi's methods of directing. The result is a richly detailed picture of human types and of reality, with an element of caricature to it. Just as in *The Conductor*, however, if any positive values are allowed to appear in it, it is only against a strongly negative background related to the description of the material world and the human behaviour that is part of it.

It is equally difficult to find such values in the world depicted in *Constans* (*The Constant Factor*, 1980), another of Zanussi's films shot by Idziak. *The Constant Factor* differs from *The Contract* in that its storyline is from a clearly individual perspective. Its form is relatively close to the film essay, already known from *Struktura kryształu* (*The Structure of Crystal*) or *Iluminacja* (*Illumination*). It shows a fragment of the biography of a young boy from an intelligentsia background, a typical Zanussi hero, and the process of his internal crystallization and his attempts at diagnosing the external reality. The sphere of internal beliefs and the empirical sphere are radically contrasted here, while at the same time shown to be in a mutual relationship. The hero strongly disagrees with the rules in force in human relationships, or rather with the lack of them (dishonesty, hypocrisy, corruption, "connections"). The area that fascinates him, and in which he discerns such rules, is mathematics. As an ideal science, however, it is obviously outside of empirical experience and everyday life. Zanussi asks questions about the possibility of choosing the reasons for one's actions and about their criteria, and the potential and nature of freedom. It is freedom that explains the hero's conduct. It is freedom that becomes apparent in the infallible voice of conscience. But is it truly infallible? The moral anxiety of Zanussi's protagonist is revealed as a conflict between "existence and duties". He constantly wavers between mundane reality and the bright ethical ideal, but when he finally gains unwavering certainty, it is destroyed by chance or fate. These problems are of course visualised through Idziak's shots.

Most of the film is based on wide lens shots, taken with a hand-held camera, in dynamic compositions set in the substance of the external world, but also frequently focused on the faces of the protagonists. The ambient outdoor light is amplified with artificial light indoors, magnifying the expressiveness of the picture. The





*Camouflage*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1976)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

space, although ordinary, carries hidden meanings, while shots emphasising details or enhancing the colour of the light contribute to it. The public spaces typical of communist Poland (PRL) dominate here – backyards, houses, estates, streets, hospitals, places of work and others, all described with visual shortcuts. This is definitely a hostile space accompanied by a sense of neglect and emotional coldness. It is an empirical reality in which wanton decay and death lurks (see the scenes with the hero's dying mother). Significantly, the symbolic spaces – the church or the cemetery – are also depicted with a strong emphasis on the material element of reality. In the physical and moral sense, the empirical and social reality turns out to be sick. The hero unsuccessfully seeks refuge in it.

Opposing this is the true and at the same time imaginary space of the mountains. It appears in the film right from the beginning and then in a few storyline scenes, or is shown in shots not directly involved in action. Mountains represent a space of longed for freedom, missing down below, and are also a sign of something, which in Kantian terms could be described as the sublime, infinity revealed in sensual nature, and therefore the predestination of the moral being.

Yet another kind of space appears in the film. Its presence is related to the hero's business trip to India. This space, shot with the clear dominance of warm colours and light tones, symbolizes the acceptance of the "order of the universe" characteristic of the Eastern cultures, with which, however, the hero from Poland cannot, or will not, identify.

*The Constant Factor* is a film in which we observe the struggle of a fully conscious individual for independence from the sphere of empirical and social determinism. In the visual layer, it is governed by the principle of contrasts, although used by Idziak differently here than in *The Scar*. The shots are carefully composed (mainly in motion), yet dynamic and to a certain degree open – they contain a certain density of significant detail.

When making films in the 1970s and 1980s, Krzysztof Zanussi knew *how to enrich dialogue with a religious, metaphysical or scientific content, while still keeping it as the most everyday and trivial determination*<sup>32</sup>. He also knew how to enrich a film with such content. Undoubtedly the cinematographers played a large part in this. This is aptly exemplified in *Camouflage*, a film considered to be one of the first of the CMA movement, made with the cinematographer Edward Kłosiński. His contribution to the movement and more generally to the Polish film is enormous. If we just consider the years that interest us here, 1976-1981, it was he who shot the best films by Wajda, Falk, Zaorski and Zanussi<sup>33</sup>. Although Kłosiński's area was unquestionably the feature film, and not the documentary, as was the case for some of his colleagues, in most of his works he produced shots particularly receptive to reality. This was certainly the result of a conscious creative strategy, about which he said at that time: *I consider myself a continuator, if not an heir to a certain thought that has existed in the cinema for some time and whose exponents here are Jerzy Wójcik and Witold Sobociński. I aim for the maximum "naturalization" of shots, I believe, for example, that the so-called creative lighting or the evidently creative method of filming is only suitable for a few subjects. Photography cannot be a "sheet" separating the film from the viewer. If the shots are so aggressive that the spectator in the cinema begins to rave about "how beautiful they are", the essence of the film eludes him. I try not to "stick out" from behind the camera, not to dazzle with special shots (...)*<sup>34</sup>.

This is also the case in *Camouflage* (1976, released in 1977), one of Krzysztof Zanussi's most successful films. The hidden intellectual potential, the brilliant analysis of human behaviour, and the intimate form of the film, bring to mind what Roman Polański and Jerzy Lipman did a few years earlier, filming *Nóż w wodzie* (*Knife in the Water*) – but this time in a different milieu and period. Just as in that film, here the ambiguous meaning of the film is also achieved by limiting the space and time of action; here also there is a distinct conflict between the attitudes of the main protagonists, inscribed in a realistic setting. The emotional and mental tension that permeates the film results from an accurate harmonization of the dialogue, the acting, and the camera work. At the same time, Zanussi remained entirely within the sphere of his own artistic, situational and intellectual interests.

In its first layer of meaning, it provides a picture of an academic community – students, lecturers, and the university authorities, set in the confined space of an academic camp, a specific study therefore of the relations between members of academic intelligentsia. The first shots in the film, taken with a hand-held camera in the manner of a reportage, introduce the viewer into the milieu. Immediately, however, the style of reportage is subject to correction. Images become saturated with metaphorical meanings, set in natural but significant scenery. Two protagonists are singled out from the group of people – a young, principled assistant (Piotr Garlicki), and an "old hand", a cynical, "devilishly" intelligent assistant professor (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz). The conflict of their attitudes and beliefs (as well as the unmasking of the illusions that accompanied them) can be interpreted on at least three levels – as a realistic psychodrama with some elements of comedy; as a morality play; and as a philosophical dialogue in which one of the main threads is to try to answer the question of what beliefs and ensuing attitudes can be based upon, including those that are called "ethical".

Throughout the film, Kłosiński's shots accurately reflect these three levels, maintaining precision and internal unity. They are in particular characterised by the excellent use of the space of action – interior spaces, and chiefly exterior locations, which are in mutual relationship. We see a closed space with the potential for an opening contained in it. Kłosiński has successfully used natural conditions in the footage, such as for example the wooded copse in the park, where the protagonists wander, or the open-air location by the river. In confrontation with the dialogue, they create the added value of the film.

Another key feature of the film footage is the clever use of natural lighting. There is the chiaroscuro contrast on the faces introducing anxiety – the effect of sunlight and shade from the trees; there are brilliantly used sunsets and dusk effects reinforcing the artistic expression of the shots through the colour of the light; and finally in the closing scene, there is rain. The natural light was complemented with artificial light. A “realistic pretext” for its use was usually some ambient lighting effect, for example coming from an open window of a building or from above the entrance to the camping cabins.

But the most important method, used very consistently throughout the film, is the technique of shooting with the hand-held camera. It is important that in this case it does not always adopt the manner of reportage (only in some scenes). It is primarily used to get the viewer closer to the actor and his acting, and to brilliantly compose movement within the frame. The latter on the other hand significantly enhances interpersonal tensions and dependencies, at the same time setting it in a micro-social and natural environment.

*In order to say something to someone's face we need a close-up. These days we describe events in close-ups – said Krzysztof Zanussi when taking part in a debate on the style of Polish film, published in 1980 in the monthly magazine “Kino”<sup>35</sup>. Whereas at that time, Edward Kłosiński specified his method of filming as follows: *The distance of the camera from the actor has its importance. The actor was used to the camera being away from him by two or three meters. Zapasiewicz, after the first day of shooting “Camouflage”, when I was walking with the camera between the actors, said: “I can't act; this thing is looking at me all the time”. A small black box disrupts the intimacy of the actor's experience, and so he acquires different reflexes, knowing that he is being watched almost police-like. But after the first projection Zapasiewicz was convinced*<sup>36</sup>.*

It is precisely on this special closeness between camera and actor (once again, Zbigniew Zapasiewicz) that the shots for the 1978 *Bez znieczulenia* (*Rough Treatment* or *Without Anesthesia*) by Andrzej Wajda are largely based. We watch the mental and physical demise of the main protagonist in a whole range of close-ups. He is a well-known journalist and writer suddenly condemned to solitude (his wife has left him) and professional isolation (he is no longer “useful” to the authorities). Throughout the film, the camera work is chiefly focused on observing the gradual process whereby energy for life drains from the hero. The spaces in which he moves – the anonymous lobby of the publishing house, the crowded law office, the court (where the divorce case takes place) and other offices – which are shown as we follow the disastrous trials and tribulations of the hero, are contrasted with the space of his home, which until now was a refuge for him and yet turns out to be a death trap in this new situation (the final explosion of gas). Despite the limited space of



*Contract*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1980)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

action and a certain “transparency” of operational methods used by Kłosiński (open compositions, hand-held camera motion, natural light, and sparse use of artificial light indoors), *Bez znieczulenia* convincingly depicts the drama of a hunted man, mainly thanks to Zapasiewicz’s own performance and the precise organization of the screen space in Kłosiński’s shots.

Right from the very first scene of the film, the image of reality in which the drama unfolds, with its devastating lack of clear standards of conduct and official “machinations”, is contrasted with the fictional reality created by the television – a reality cognitively and ethically “muffled” according to predetermined schemes and methods convenient for the authorities. The TV “hype”, i.e. the ubiquitous pictures in the reality of the late PRL, versus true reality, is a constant motif present in CMA films. The pressure of television also makes its presence felt in the finale of *Wodzirej* (*Top Dog*) – a film by Feliks Falk, with shots by Kłosiński.

In *Top Dog* (1978), the filmmakers have managed to fully use two fundamentally new technical improvements, which appeared in Polish film in the 1970s: the complete recording of sound on set, and the quiet and mobile camera allowing the recording of this sound while freely moving in natural interiors. It was precisely the use of these methods that helped realize the potential of Falk’s screenplay and Jerzy Stuhr’s dialogues. In *Top Dog*, we can see an almost perfect blend of two distinctive features of CMA realism: a dynamically developing storyline with a distinctive hero, and authentic scenery, saturated with local detail. The plot revolves around the adventures of “a man in a hurry” – a provincial stage performer pursuing at all cost his goal, which for him is to achieve success, i.e. to lead a prestigious



*Contract*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1980)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

ball. In reality, the true subject is the problem of a career, and more specifically the lack of principles in the efforts undertaken towards one's advancement. Danielak played by Stuhr, is the "man from nowhere", who seemingly has nothing to lose. Consequently, he decides to act with a vengeance, not paying any attention to honesty. The dynamics of his actions are reflected in the dynamics of Kłosiński's shots – in the movement and the compositions of the frames. The camera almost incessantly squeezes through narrow flats and corridors, through labyrinth-like auditorium lobbies and restaurants – empty during the day and filled with people in the evening; it tracks Danielak's progress – in front of him, behind him and from the side, below and above, it pauses with him for a while to take a breath, and then moves on right up to the final musical procession of the ball that Danielak eventually leads, having got rid of the competition. These dynamic scenes are mostly shot with a wide lens, which as if by chance records the details of the real background – the cramped and cluttered flats, the tacky decor of the stage platforms. This type of shot is sometimes countered with still frames, capturing a face in the crowd or a detail in the background.

The expression of the film visually enhanced but close to reality, is also affected by the lighting used. Kłosiński freely mixes natural and artificial light, ambient light (e.g. the fluorescent lamps in hallways) with light he himself set up. He reinforced the latter with many special light effects, which are often visible directly in the frame (e.g. spotlights on stage). Of course all these effects – the spotlight sharply defining portraits, the coloured light, and the multicoloured light reflections in the background – were considerably amplified and organized into a pulsating

whole. In between shots of interiors, we see images of grey PRL streets. Danielak makes his way within this environment. The ambivalence of his person lies in the fact that he is similar to a “fireball”, casting some “black light” on the world which surrounds him, a world deep in inertia, tacky and devoid of values. Danielak moves within this world, he is its own product, and at the same time undermines it by his dynamism and ruthlessness. He is a mixture of evil and a vital force, which forces him into action. It is hard to resist the thought that the blow he receives from a betrayed friend at the end of the film fails to eliminate this ambivalence.

This ambiguity in the protagonists’ portrayal and the creative dynamics are lacking in the next film by Falk and Kłosiński, *Szansa* (*Chance*, 1979, released in 1980).

Kłosiński used other, quite minimalistic methods when working with Janusz Zaorski, firstly in *Pokój z widokiem na morze* (*A Room With a View on the Sea*, 1977, released in 1978), and then in *Dziecinne pytania* (*Childish Questions*, 1981). In the first movie, the intimacy of action significantly restricted the visual possibilities available to the filmmakers. On the other hand, Kłosiński decides in *Childish Questions* on an almost complete transparency of the cinematic processes used. The film is about a group of friends, young architects, who are working on the plans and construction of a housing estate. The economic and social realities of communist Poland make it impossible for them to fulfil their youthful dreams. Soon they are forced to compromise both their lives and their work. The theme here is the disintegration of the intellectual community that happened after March 1968 (the film refers to that period in short flashbacks), the lack of influence the intelligentsia had on reality in the second half of the 1970s, as well as the resulting pauperization of intellectuals and the fictitious nature of communist economic plans. At the visual level this is clearly illustrated by the scene of action – an unfinished housing estate, cramped flats, gloomy bars, grey crowds of people on neglected city streets. This is the typical scenery of many CMA films, captured with “transparent” photography this time and unobtrusive to the viewer.

Jacek Petrycki, the cinematographer in Agnieszka Holland’s feature film debut *Aktorzy prowincjonalni* (*Provincial Actors*, 1978, released in 1979), was a product of the school of documentary film. Before *Provincial Actors* and in the 1970s alone he shot several dozen documentaries, working with, among others, Krzysztof Kieślowski (e.g. in *Robotnicy 1971 – Nic o nas bez nas* /*Workers 1971 – Nothing About Us Without Us*/ in 1972; *Pierwsza miłość* /*First Love*/ in 1974; *Szpital* /*Hospital*/ in 1977) and with Marcel Łoziński (e.g. *Jak żyć* /*Recipe for Life*/ in 1977) or Irena Kamińska (*Zapora* /*The Dam*/ in 1976). Although he had no experience of working on a full-length feature film when he began to film *Provincial Actors*, he had already completed the following successful and prominent television productions: *Spokój* (*The Calm*, 1976, released in 1980) with Kieślowski, and *Coś za coś* (*Something for Something*) with Holland. His ability to bring the authenticity of documentary to staged shots proved very valuable in *Provincial Actors*. This is what Agnieszka Holland had to say about him: *Jacek had such an incredible sense of truth. His shots were not as impressive as some of his colleagues, even Jurek Zieliński. He had some technical troubles, for example he was a very incompetent camera operator. His lighting was naturalistic, a little dirty; it was always on the border of technical acceptability. At the same time he had his own wonderful feeling for the truth. The reality he shot was always extremely convincing. That was one thing that I liked. And this*

came from the documentary, but also resulted from his honesty. (...) He suited me very well, because we both wanted this film to have a realist texture<sup>37</sup>.

*We have to do something, something that depends on us* – repeats the main protagonist in the film, played by Tadeusz Huk. *Provincial Actors* is a work in which the main issues are the inauthenticity of official culture, the disintegration of community (the family, society), the result of the distorted rules governing reality, hopelessness and a conformist reluctance to fundamentally change this reality. These problems were dramatized using the example of a provincial theatre. The main character, a relatively young actor, dreams of playing the honest and important role of Konrad, in the staged play *Wyzwolenie (Liberation)* by Wyspiański. These dreams do not materialize of course since everyone else treats the work on the show as nothing more than a paid job. Reality reveals its degenerate and hypocritical face and our hero is left at the end with no illusions as to the possibility of changing it. This image of reality, and the people trapped in it, is further complicated by the fact that these problems of inauthenticity and lies also directly concern the main hero. His intentions and conduct are not as crystal clear as he thinks. His artistic ambitions are accompanied by a prosaic desire to get a position in a better theatre and to escape the provinces. His obsessive, ultimately ineffective efforts to achieve these goals are one of the reasons for the disintegration of his marriage. His wife feels rejected and increasingly lost and lonely (an excellent performance by Halina Łabonarska, awarded the prize for best actress at the Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk in 1979).

The references to *Liberation* bring two additional semantic planes to Holland's film: the self-reflexive and the metaphorical. In the first, the main issue is the false attitude towards culture, or manipulation, which can obscure the truth about the meaning of art and the realities of life (the creative methods of staging art proposed by the film director); while in the second – just as in Wyspiański – the question is how can we liberate art and life from lies<sup>38</sup>. Despite the presence of this interesting metaphorical sphere, the visual layer of the film adheres to the reality of the provincial theatre and the family life of the main hero and his wife (Halina Łabonarska).

Petrycki usually used open frame compositions in his shots, often including many people in the theatre scenes and two people in the household scenes. By using neutral-coloured lighting, he created an effect of natural light or amplified the artificial light effect indoors (e.g. with small lamps in the dressing room). This method of lighting makes it possible to see the texture and detail of the background behind the actors. Of course this is made easier by using wide-angle lens. We see in the film, however, a tendency to narrow the space on screen and focus on characters' actions. This creates an illusion of a deepening claustrophobia. The reality in the background appears fragmented. From this chaotic scenery micro-observations are sometimes drawn, especially in open-air locations (the workers digging a hole in the ground in front of the theatre, a queue in front of a shop at six o'clock in the morning, a messy dustbin in front of the hero's house).

It is characteristic that the metaphorical meanings appearing in the film, interwoven in the plot thanks to references to *Liberation*, are not directly reflected in the picture. The film's only style is realism. Despite this, says Mariola Jankun-Dopart, the semantic duality specific to Wyspiański's drama is also in some way present in Holland's film – in an ironic way: *The period style is replaced here with a realistic picture of a theatrical community in the second half of the 1970s, with*

*all its intellectual shallowness, artistic superficiality, vulgarity of language and triviality. Private life is only an extension of what we see in the theatre; Wyspiański's postulate to merge art with life acquires here an ironic character*<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the metasense of Holland's film is made of fragments of reality captured in Petrycki's shots and parts of texts and situations drawn from *Liberation*<sup>40</sup>. To summarise our observations on *Provincial Actors*, we can say that the shots by Petrycki are less aesthetically pleasing, in terms of colour and composition, than those by Idziak in the discussed CMA films, and less dynamic than Kłosiński's, but more sensitive in their observation, more attentive.

Such an intense attention and precision are present to an even greater degree in the film *Amator* (*Camera Buff*, 1979) by Krzysztof Kieślowski. There Petrycki refined and developed a realistic style of photography, achieving at the same time – in conjunction with the filmmaker's rhythm of narration and editing – a particular purity of expression. We can discern an exceptional appropriateness of cinematic methods employed in relation to the undertaken topic. The incoherent and fragmented nature of reality is captured in a coherent manner that is nevertheless open to interpretation. The veristic, sometimes even paradocumentary, means used are carefully organized into a whole. They include: light imitating the quality of ambient light, natural on location at different times of day and artificial indoors; camera angles chosen so that one feels one is an invisible participant in events in real settings: in front of a block of flats on an unfinished housing estate, on the street of a provincial town, in flats and offices, etc.

But from behind this veristic picture another level of reality emerges. The film becomes a vehicle for reflection on the cinematic medium. The hero, the eponymous amateur filmmaker Filip Mosz (Jerzy Stuhr), suddenly loses his peace of mind and familial happiness because he begins to see more and differently than before – through the camera. This transformed way of seeing is also evident in the pictures created by Kieślowski and Petrycki. Paradocumentary methods are combined with precise staging. This makes what is happening merge on screen with the author's point of view. Ironically, by using apparently transparent means the filmmakers show that these in fact do not exist, that everything is a matter of decision and a constant search for adequate methods of seeing in relation to the captured reality. Ambiguity is created by weaving cinematic fragments and quotations into the fabric of the narrative – the veristic picture of reality. The amateur learns to make films, and at the same time to look at the world. The "crumbs of life" (a child, people, pigeons on the window sill) filmed by him at the beginning gradually turn into a directed record of reality set in time (we see the same window view in several scenes shot over a long period of time). Later, it transpires that this also records memories (of his friend and his now deceased mother). Then there is the problem of the fictional meta-reality that the film creates (a quotation from *Camouflage*). The subsequent paradocumentary record of the meeting between the audience and Krzysztof Zanussi introduces a motif of uncertainty, of doubting visible reality. Zanussi is saying that the artist is "never sure". This uncertainty and unawareness, however, become a proper motivation for artistic expression based on a thought-out concept and a choice of point of view. The amateur shoots his film. Using the example of an individual, he wants to depict the "wider problem" (for example, the film about an old employee). Here a confrontation begins not only with the substance of reality and cinematic methods used, but also



with the reception of the film. The film enters the public circuit (screened on TV) and gives rise to conflicting reactions from the audience (Mosz, the film's hero, friends, the director, and the authorities). In effect – the film describes reality but its complex meaning escapes it – and simultaneously creates its own reality. Here the story must start again, but this time with a deeper awareness and on another level. Which one? Mosz turns the camera on himself...

*His first documentary films* – Agnieszka Holland said years later about Kieślowski – *were done the way he was taught by his master, Kazimierz Karabasz, but Krzysztof quite quickly decided that this “pure” documentary form killed off his inspiration, was quite stiff, and does not adequately express the mystery of life. So he began to play with it, which in turn meant that he headed in the direction of storylines. “Camera Buff” was still pretty much based on his documentary style, but when we look at “Blind Chance” – we see a huge change*<sup>41</sup>.

In the second half of the 1970s, the film director Janusz Kijowski and the cinematographer Krzysztof Wyszynski formed a generational duo and played a significant part in the CMA movement with their two films – *Indeks (Index)* and *Kung-fu*. *Index* was their graduation film made jointly in 1977 under the aegis of the Film School, but its premiere only took place in 1981. This was the result of a bizarre situation – their second film *Kung-fu* (1979, released in 1980) received the award for best director debut (!) at the Festival in Gdańsk in 1979.

Krzysztof Wyszynski is a forgotten figure in Polish film. His cinematographic career in Poland ended abruptly in 1980. He made only a few pictures and his fate after 1980 is not widely known. However, in shooting three films for Kijowski (in addition to the two already mentioned there was *Głosy /Voices/* in 1980) he left his artistic mark on Polish cinema. His shots for *Index* and *Kung-fu* display features typical of other CMA films. They are dominated by open dynamic frame compositions, created using a wide lens and hand-held camera motion close to the actors, as well as neutral lighting adapted to the ambient indoors and open-air conditions, only occasionally artistically enhanced. Consequently, they are dominated by descriptiveness. It is important, however, that in Wyszynski's case this is a descriptiveness in which the camera is not limited to spying on the world and its inhabitants; instead it penetrates reality with an increased force. This is where the power of these images lies. The dynamics of Wyszynski's camera, its intrusiveness, contribute to a large degree to the edgy style of narration characteristic of Kijowski's films.

From the beginning, the action of *Index* is set in the specific historical context of March 1968, among the student community in Gdańsk. In short scenes we see the university, the streets, the police station and the coal depot, where the main protagonist works. All this is shown with naturalistic detail. Throughout the film, a remarkably wide variety of spaces are filmed with meticulous attention to detail: flats, offices, municipal offices, and metropolitan locations. However, three main types of setting can be defined: the spaces of the middle class/intelligentsia (the hero's girlfriend's home, the newspaper editorial office, etc.), the working class (the coal depot), and the authorities (UB or Office of Security, the dean's office). All these apparently separate territories interpenetrate in the film in a kind of morbid symbiosis.

Whether he likes it or not, this is the environment in which the hero operates. He is suspended in it. This is a man who wants to be honest; Józef Moneta (Krzysztof Zalewski) resigns from studies in solidarity with a colleague expelled

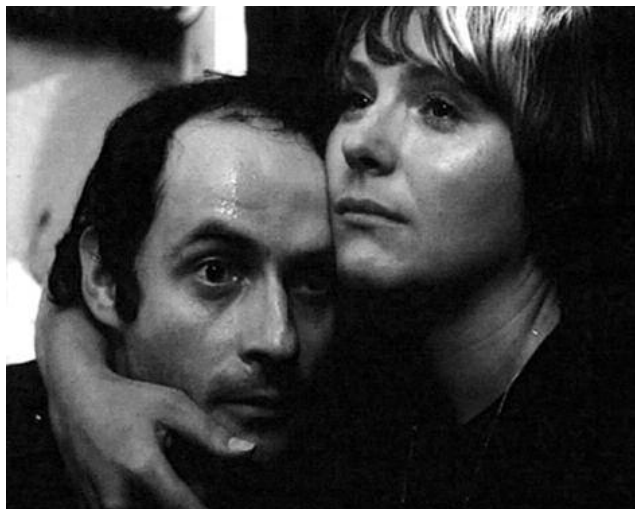
from the university. His intransigence (and temperament) is so radical, that almost every attempt to come to terms with reality ends in disaster. In fact, Moneta (and Kijowski) is trying to prove that intelligence is something more fundamental than the ability to “adapt to conditions”, as most of his friends understand it. The film strongly emphasizes the need for an authentic community; it is also a record of *the student subculture of the mid-1970s*<sup>42</sup>. We watch meetings of young people who sing the poetry of Herbert and Okudzhava: *Hey friend, give me a hand, Hey friend give me a hand – because separately they will wipe us out...*

But this realistic story seems to be in quotation marks; it becomes a metaphor – surprising for the viewer, and probably not entirely consistent in relation to the whole. We refer to the penultimate scene – the hero’s wedding. All the characters that were previously in conflict with the protagonist are present. Although he seems resigned to “reality”, he suddenly delivers a startling monologue about how “cheaply one can sell oneself”. An argument breaks out – the wedding turns into a wake. Is this the hero’s last nonconformist gesture? This scene is abstracted from the physical background and – interestingly – includes the same quotation from Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Liberation* that ended Agnieszka Holland’s *Provincial Actors*.

Maria Kornatowska believed that the visual layer of *Index*, due to the deliberately anti-aesthetical nature of the shots, *sets straight the visual clichés of depicting so-called everyday life; it exposes the stereotypical character and false vision of reality created and disseminated by the mass media, with television leading the way*<sup>43</sup>. In this manner, *Kijowski and Wyszyński are close to the poetic attitude of the new wave, replacing the pursuit of truth in the word with a pursuit of truth in the image*<sup>44</sup>. In some ways this is true.

It is interesting that in one of the scenes from this film, the students gathered at a conspiratorial meeting in someone’s home debate history. Opinions are voiced, which distinguish history from ideology. Ideology is based on a selection of facts according to pre-determined theories; history on the other hand, is in some ways semantically open. The students are aware, however, that to talk about history, even as a description of actual facts, is always an interpretation depending on the choice of these facts. A description is never objective. Not without reason Kijowski himself appears on the screen at the end of this scene. The relationship between the described current and historical reality and the form in which they can be captured is one of the artistic problems of CMA. This is also the dilemma in Kijowski’s films. In view of the communist ideology dominant in Poland, the filmmaker seems to suggest that describing is not enough. A rebellious counter-proposal, even an artistic one, is needed, based this time on fragments of undistorted reality.

This strategy precisely was adopted by Kijowski in *Kung-fu*, a film about an old group of college friends, who reunite years later in order to help one of them in any possible way. Here again the realism of the depiction is associated with a certain tendency to metaphorise. The realistic element of the shots is achieved through filming interiors and natural spaces, as well as through use of the dynamic hand-held camera, penetrating these spaces, and following the protagonists “on the run”; the use of natural light in outside locations and “ambient” light indoors (e.g. fluorescent light) also contribute to it. Moreover, Wyszyński considerably strengthened the colour of the light in a few scenes, to indicate the potential energy the protagonists are trying to release in order to mobilize themselves, for example, in the scene of



*Provincial Actors*, dir. Agnieszka Holland (1978)

their group kung-fu “dance” to the rhythm of the music and flashing colourful lights. Undoubtedly, *Kung-fu* has the characteristics of a rebellious manifesto... in keeping with the times. As Wanda Wertenstein wrote: in the film, *the changes of perspective, the interrupted motifs, the rapid transitions from one subject of action to another, constantly remind us that what we see on the screen is not a direct reflection of life, but cinema par excellence, and thus an arbitrary selection of events put together by the author, an artistic processing of the picture of reality*<sup>45</sup>.

\* \* \*

It is time to summarize the above observations. The discussed photographic layer is the principal foundation of realism in CMA films, although certainly not the only one. It relies on diverse ways of reproducing and describing the material world, external reality. It is important that we see consistently developed and used methods of filming in most of the discussed works; they aptly correspond with the character of the adopted realist convention. The charges of formal failings levelled at these films seem to be a misunderstanding; especially from today’s perspective, having experienced the success of *Dogme 95* or of Cannes award-winning films by the Dardenne brothers and others, which are characterized by a certain freedom of filming (abandoning the sophisticated artistic form to capture the real “truth”). From this perspective, CMA films can be seen as a link in the chain of realist tendencies of European cinema, which reach the present day. The concreteness of the image, typical for them, is based on cinematographers’ use of a common pool of visual methods and cinematic devices, taking into account nevertheless the preferences of individual directors and the subjects of their films. For example, in Zanussi’s films, the camera usually works dynamically with the actors – it follows them in a particularly sensitive way to capture the spontaneity of their acting; in Agnieszka Holland’s work, the camera penetrates deeply into the material world and explores the relationship between human behaviour and physical environment;

while in Kiesłowski, the camera alternates – at times an empathetic participant in life, at others a distanced observer.

The filmmakers' consistency of method was not limited to the photographic dimension of their films. Undoubtedly all CMA directors mentioned here were aware that a film is never a "one to one" reflection of reality. Even when the realist intention is particularly emphasised, the success of the film, the end result, depends on the synchronization of many formal factors. The successful results of such a harmonization – the treatment of subject, the dramaturgy, the shots, the acting, the dialogues, the sound, and possibly the music – can particularly be seen in *Camouflage*, *Top Dog*, *Camera Buff* or *Provincial Actors*. Not only the realities they depict, but also their form – often overlooked – made them as convincing then, as they are now.

Nevertheless it is true that this form remains largely hostage to external reality<sup>46</sup>. This is the price of the realist formula adopted. Characteristics other than the visual determine the realist nature of these works. The most important are: a desire for the typical (problems, surroundings, characters, etc.), the use of colloquial language, a preference for "real" fiction, and so complete abandonment of fantasy and subjective visions – a symbolic meaning never appears in the form of an autonomous image in these films. It also includes in particular a preference for a cause and effect, linear representation of reality and events. Despite a descriptive tendency occurring in these films, reality is shown to be an "objective" process, thus an emphasis on the action and moves of the protagonists becomes important too<sup>47</sup>.

*It is about building events in a chain of cause and effect phenomena, a multi-layered structure, directing many characters in parallel, emphasising the conflicts* – said Krzysztof Zanussi in 1978<sup>48</sup>.

We should also take into account the cognitive and axiological motivations underlying the above methods. These two last features of realist works and the discussed films – the actions and motivations of the protagonists – are in fact related. The principle of causality allows the cognitive classification and systematization of reality, while the subject's actions, resulting from his will – as Roman Ingarden noted – may be a vehicle for morality<sup>49</sup>. This general scheme and the main features of realism can be identified in the films discussed. We can assume that they depict the conflict between the individuals acting as potential "carriers" of values and the world's realities, mainly social and political. The main hero is usually part of the intelligentsia (an engineer, journalist, scientist, teacher, actor, architect, student, etc.) or aspiring to this (an amateur – *Camera Buff*). Whereas the social reality depicted in the films revealed a state of an "axiological depression" – the relativism of basic values and the attempts to create new canons of distorted values, characteristic of the Polish communist era – as Dobrochna Dabert put it<sup>50</sup>. In this context in particular some fundamental questions may arise.

Even if we assume that a moral action does not just depend on the subject's higher awareness (e.g. a categorical imperative), and can be part of a certain "order of existence" as part of empirical conditioning (for example politically or related to social custom), an important question remains: what conditions these values? And what is the status of values?

Roman Ingarden wrote that values are influenced in four fundamental ways: by the valuable object; by the evaluating subject; in both ways (by object and subject); or in a way that is independent of object and subject<sup>51</sup>.

According to Ingarden, as far as the status of values is concerned, it may be real (existing just as objects, people, and animals do) or intentional (like thoughts, feelings, volitions/wants) <sup>52</sup>. We should also remember that Ingarden advocated finding a third, intermediate “mode of existence”, which would combine the real and the intentional <sup>53</sup>.

In this context, we note that the status and conditioning of values in the CMA films discussed are particularly ambiguous and difficult to grasp. They are not to be found in external reality, they are also not conditioned by any higher necessity. We can say that if they appear it is instead in an intentional way, because generally they are limited to the realm of the protagonists’ ideas, feelings and desires and, incidentally, are usually unfulfilled. Such an intentional status of values can also be in danger of illusoriness.

But as Adam Workowski writes: *Ethical values are realized in the inner life of man – and not externally. An ethical hero has a turbulent inner life, but does not want to be different from others. His activities are repetitive, because what is creative is happening inside him. (...) Ethical values are usually not revealed in the moment, but over time* <sup>54</sup>.

Another question arises here: was this inner sphere in which values may crystallize with time adequately recognized, understood, and depicted in these films? This relates both to the realist convention of these works, as well as to the protagonists themselves as a potential medium of values. In other words: can realist motivation and form be sufficient to depict the world of values? It seems that the filmmakers were aware of this question, although in most cases they were not entirely able to cope with it.

In each of the discussed films we can discern a common realist tendency, and two main difficulties that accompany it. Firstly, there appeared the desire to show a true picture of the real world. This vision was created mainly on the basis of the filmed reflection of the real world. The first difficulty was therefore the confrontation between the reality reproduced on the screen and the truth about it, understood as something more than just adequacy of description, but largely as a revelation of the presence or absence of values and norms. Thus, the actions of the protagonists, through which the presence or absence of values could be revealed, proved to be primarily entangled in the material inertia of the depicted world. Here appeared a second difficulty, namely the authorial (director’s and cinematographer’s) awareness, more or less acute, of being entangled in realist convention, in a behavioural method of describing the world. The principle of metonymy that the CMA’s creative strategy was based on was not enough <sup>55</sup>. Attempts were consequently undertaken to metaphorise or parabolise the filmed reality, through various dramatic and visual devices (but still within a quite rigid realistic framework). This has worked with varying degrees of success, as illustrated by *The Constant Factor* (the pictures of mountains), *Camera Buff* (the self-reflexive motifs), *Provincial Actors* (the thread of *Liberation*) or *Index* (the wedding scene). But the gravity of material reality, lying at the heart of the realist film description, always dominated. So the world depicted in these films appears above all “unsubstantialist”, as an irrational substance like a sponge cohesive and porous at the same time – as the philosopher György Lukács would perhaps put it <sup>56</sup>.

Attempts to define the specific nature of the CMA films were accompanied by observations, mentioned in this article, on certain similarities between the film-

makers' artistic principles and the strategy proposed by the formation Young Culture, expressed in the poetic works of the new wave. This connection seems to be indisputable. However, while the ideology of Young Culture was truly close to the CMA creators (the move towards social reality, description, ethical reflection etc.), the question arises as to how much the form of these films may correspond to the methods preferred by poets. Obviously, it is difficult to find clear analogies because of the different artistic material and creative process of these works. It is however worth reflecting on. It is important that the fundamental method for the poets was based on a certain play with the language that dominated life and social awareness in communist Poland. As noted by Michał Głowiński, the openness and clarity of this play was based on the language's exhibited visibility<sup>57</sup>. It was about revealing the mechanisms of official language, in order to discredit it. A poem thus carried an explosive charge – it negated what it was made of i.e. language<sup>58</sup>. But the poets moved from criticism of language to criticism of the world in which that language functioned. Linguistic poetry proved to be social poetry, moving *from playing with language to moralizing*<sup>59</sup>.

In CMA films, the intensity of this manipulation, its subversive power, appears to be much weaker, although undoubtedly traces of such a practice can be found, for instance in the aforementioned attempts at parabolization or metaphORIZATION. Where else? In the frequent quotations of television pictures? In the dynamics of film production, as a way of “annexing” methods specific to performances of popular culture for their own purposes? In the authorial irony that appears at times? It is difficult to resist the thought that this revealing play on the language of cinema, television, pop culture and propaganda was somewhat suppressed by the “iron corset” of realist convention. We can say that although the “solidity” of language served poetry well, in film, based on photographic solidity, some other device could perhaps have helped to break conventions and clichés<sup>60</sup>. It is difficult to find a clear answer. Nevertheless in sticking with realism, the filmmakers were condemned to dealing with the weaknesses and incoherence of the depicted exterior world – hostile to ideals and antagonistic to the human soul.

*Biological and sociological life* – wrote György Lukács – *has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence; men want only to live, structures want to remain intact (...)*<sup>61</sup>. Had the CMA filmmakers not encountered precisely what the philosopher called the “unrepresentability” of the world in a directly sensual creation?

*Both the parts and the whole of such an outside world defy any forms of directly sensuous representation. They acquire life only when they can be related either to the life-experiencing interiority of the individuals lost in their labyrinth, or to the observing and creative eye of the artist's subjectivity: when they become objects of mood or reflection*<sup>62</sup>. Are this “life-experiencing interiority” and the clearly formulated “artist's subjectivity” not lacking in the discussed films? In this context returns the issue of the hero as a potential vehicle of values, as well as the question of the presence and cinematic status of these values. Furthermore, Lukács's quotations from his *Theory of the Novel* are not recalled here by accident. He wrote: *for the subject is constitutive only when it acts from within – i.e. only the ethical subject is constitutive*<sup>63</sup>.

Mariola Jankun-Dopart, who described the CMA hero, called him a “problematic hero”, referring precisely to Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*. He is not just a man

wary of reality (the influence of Young Culture), but above all a stranger in a world devoid of the clear landmarks and goals that might provide a direction in life<sup>64</sup>. Strictly speaking, however, the CMA films show only *the birth* or *the awakening* of the problematic hero, according to Dopart; this might happen through a *false initiation* experienced by the hero, which contributed to the growth of his self-knowledge – *he already realized that he must undergo by himself another, authentic initiation, that he must identify reality for his own use, to bear witness to his own values (...)*<sup>65</sup>.

So we can say that the typical CMA hero – although it is difficult to make far-reaching generalizations – might barely aspire to the rank of “problematic hero”. But was he becoming one in reality? Is it possible that these protagonists might receive one more chance of initiation, apart from the negative one shown in the films, to truly become such a hero? If so, then they most certainly were not given this chance in the filmic reality of the discussed works. For this reason it is difficult to call them “problematic heroes” in the true sense of the word, attributed to it by Lukács. The difference is that the real “problematic hero” as a rule aims much higher and looks much further. He is a stranger in a world “without gods”, alone, yet at the same time totally aware of his inner freedom as an ethical subject (in the Kantian sense). Certainly reconciliation with social reality is dear to him, but his main strength of action is Goethe’s “demonism”. If we consider the CMA protagonists, these are only the features of some of them (e.g. the hero of *The Constant Factor*, perhaps *Index?*).

Most of all however – and this is probably the biggest difference – the “problematic hero” belongs to a work that in its configuration seeks to restore the whole of the world, the balance *between becoming and being*<sup>66</sup>; such a hero is part of work based on the *ethic of the creative subjectivity*<sup>67</sup>, in which, however, the danger of ethical subjectification of the world<sup>68</sup> is removed by ironic reflectiveness<sup>69</sup>. *This world* – wrote Lukács at the end of his book – *is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority*<sup>70</sup>.

In the CMA films the actions of the protagonists – however much we sympathize with them – do not lead us to this “total world”, because these heroes do not in fact form the strong core of these works. The inner world of the hero is not made accessible to the viewers through elements of the outside world, and if so, only to a small degree. The subjective core becomes fragmented precisely because it is engulfed by the outside world around it, by matter. If we were to look for “problematic heroes” in Polish cinema we could find them not in CMA, but in the works of Has, Różewicz, Konwicki or Żuławski. Only Lukács’s later thoughts might prove useful when attempting to reflect on CMA – those related to the theory of realism that is the conception of art as a materialist reflection of reality. But this is a rather different Lukács, more distant from the youthful idealism that permeates his *Theory of the Novel*. He at that time wrote: *The more “artless” a work of art, the more it gives the effect of life and nature, the more clearly it exemplifies an actual concentrated reflection of its times and the more clearly it demonstrates that the only function of its form is the expression of this objectivity, this reflection of life in the greatest concreteness and clarity and with all its motivating contradictions*<sup>71</sup>.

The mirroring of reality is one of the main commandments of realism, film realism included. In his *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer recalled the following mythical story in order to illustrate this: Perseus was able to kill Medusa (Gorgon) only because he did not look at her face, but at her reflection in the polished shield offered to him by Athena – thus he escaped her deadly gaze. For Kracauer it is precisely the film screen that acts as a polished protective shield, and is at the same time a method of *inducing the spectator to behead the horror it mirrors*<sup>72</sup>.

*If you cannot destroy the enemy – destroy his reflection. The enemy is the mirror of our mistakes* – the protagonists of *Kung-fu* by Janusz Kijowski cry out to each other. Perhaps in these words lies part of the paradoxical truth about CMA films. For their makers, this was a reflection both sinister and intriguing. They had played a dangerous game – dangerous, given the fact that usually the realist view of the world was not accompanied by belief in an internal order of the world, which could be mirrored using the realistic method. Agnieszka Holland stated years later: *Polish cinema was established in anger. We were awfully disgusted with the times, with what was going on around us, not just because of the attitude of the authorities, about which none of my generation and friends had any illusions, but the fact that people just let themselves be so sovietised. The paradox lies in the fact that we were making films that kicked the current situation in the guts, and we were allowed to continue making them*<sup>73</sup>.

Kracauer, ending his mythical tale, recalled that *Perseus, the image watcher, did not succeed in laying the ghost for good*<sup>74</sup>. The terrible gaze of Medusa comes back to us thus in fragments of cinematic reflection. It seems tamed, but in reality it has not lost its deadly power. For at one time it pierced us right through – coming at us from not just the screen. Perhaps that is why (among other things) CMA films are still worth watching, watching carefully and critically.

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Translated by KATARZYNA KRZYŻAGÓRSKA-PISAREK

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter I will use the abbreviation CMA.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly in the reflection on literature, but these issues can also be related to cinema.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Mitosek, *Realizm*, in: *Słownik literatury polskiej*, ed. A. Brodzka, M. Puchalska, M. Semczuk, A. Sobolewska, E. Szary-Matywiecka, Wrocław 1993, pp. 916-917.

<sup>4</sup> T. Miczka, “Kino moralnego niepokoju”. *Źródła i granice realizmu w polskim filmie fabularnym w latach 1976-1981*, in: *Sztuka czy rzemiosło? Nauczyć Polski i polskiego*, ed. A. Achtelek, J. Tambor, Katowice 2007, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 194.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Jaworski, *Realizm*, in: *Podręczny słownik terminów literackich*, Kraków 2007, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted after: S. Zawisliński, *Kieślowski. Życie po życiu. Pamięć*, Warszawa 2007, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup> A. Holland, “Kino” 1978, no. 7 (editorial survey).

<sup>10</sup> F. Falk, in: *Razem czy osobno?* Maciej Zaleski’s interview with Feliks Falk, “Kino” 1981, no. 7.

<sup>11</sup> As writes D. Dabert: *The main imperative of this cinema was truth; this is why the poetics of these films was so closely linked with ethics*, D. Dabert, *Kino moralnego niepokoju. Wokół wybranych problemów poetyki i etyki*, Poznań 2003, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> See A. Friszke, *Kryzys „Nowej umowy społecznej”*. *Narodziny kultury niezależnej (lata 1976-1980)*, in: *idem, Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 256-274.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kijowski, *Dziennik*, vol. II, Kraków 1998, p. 394.

<sup>14</sup> As stated by Mariola Jankun-Dopart, the common ground between the new film movement



- (which the author defines not as CMA, but as the “cinema of distrust”) and Young Culture was: *A return to reality and shared experience, understanding art as an operation on the concrete, defining the artist's social role in terms of common experience, democratism, the desire to clearly identify moral contradictions and (...) psychology of liberation, of release, so cathartic*. M. Jankun-Dopart, *Falszywa inicjacja bohatera. Młode kino lat siedemdziesiątych wobec założeń programowych Młodej Kultury*, in: *Człowiek z ekranu. Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, ed. M. Jankun-Dopart, M. Przyłipiak, Kraków 1996, p. 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 94.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.
- <sup>18</sup> See T. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego. Twórcy, filmy, konteksty*, Chorzów 2009, p. 379.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 378. From the films listed by Lubelski in the “canonical” group, I omit in my analysis the films by Tomasz Żygadło (*Rebus*, 1977 and *Ćma /The Moth/*, 1980) and *Klinch* (*Clinch*, 1979) by Piotr Andrejew, as works crossing the boundaries of realism, as well as the film *Bez miłości* (*Without Love*, 1980) by Barbara Sass.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Dopart, op. cit., p. 99.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Kornatowska, *Wodzireje i amatorzy*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 107-108.
- <sup>22</sup> T. Miczka, op. cit., p. 198.
- <sup>23</sup> This is the setting: “in the long shot” (urban reality, provincial world, image of abroad), and “space in close-up” (“official” places, “unofficial” places, private space), see D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 130-141.
- <sup>24</sup> See e.g. M. Kornatowska, op. cit., p. 192.
- <sup>25</sup> See T. Lubelski, op. cit., pp. 369-374.
- <sup>26</sup> A. Holland, *Blisko życia*, “Kino” 1978, no. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> K. Kieślowski, *Funkcje filmu w telewizji i w kinie*, ibidem.
- <sup>28</sup> In addition to the above mentioned cinematographers, also others of course had contributed to the development of the movement. Firstly Witold Stok should be mentioned (maker of documentary films and cinematographer in such works as *Przepraszam, czy tu biją /Foul play or Excuse Me, Is It Here They Beat Up People?*, 1976/ by Marek Piwowski, and *Personnel* by Kieślowski), Jacek Żygadło (*The Moth*), Krzysztof Pakulski (*Przypadek /Blind Chancel, Krótki dzień pracy. Widok z okna /Short Working Day. The View from the Window/*, both directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski – released after the establishment of martial law in Poland) and Wiesław Zdort, cinematographer of the older generation, in the films similar to the CMA movement: *Paciorki jednego różańca* (*The Beads of One Rosary*, 1979, released in 1980) by Kazimierz Kutz, and *Without Love* by Barbara Sass.
- <sup>29</sup> K. Mętrak, *O czym mówi Dyrygent?* “Kino” 1980, no. 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>32</sup> G. Deleuze, *Cinema II*, transl. H. Tomlinson, R. Galeta, The Athlone Press, London 2005, p. 69.
- <sup>33</sup> Kłosiński at that time of course also shot *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*) and, among others, films such as *Panny z wilka* (*The Maids of Wilko*) by Andrzej Wajda.
- <sup>34</sup> *Nie wystawać zza kamery*, Marcin Giżycki's interview with Edward Kłosiński, “Kino” 1978, no. 12.
- <sup>35</sup> K. Zanussi, in: *Spróbujmy określić styl...*, an editorial discussion, “Kino” 1980, no. 8.
- <sup>36</sup> E. Kłosiński, ibidem.
- <sup>37</sup> Quoted in: M. Hendrykowski, *Sztuka reżyserii: rozmowa z Agnieszką Holland*, in: *Debiuty polskiego kina*, ed. M. Hendrykowski, Konin 1998, pp. 249-250.
- <sup>38</sup> See M. Jankun-Dopart, *Gorzkie kino Agnieszki Holland*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 119.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibidem, pp. 136-137.
- <sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the subsequent films by Holland – *Gorączka* (*Fever*, 1980, released in 1981) and *Kobieta samotna* (*A Woman Alone or A Lonely Woman*, 1981, released in 1987) were based on literary adaptation (the former) and predatory realism with elements of naturalism and the grotesque (particularly the latter).
- <sup>41</sup> A. Holland, in: S. Zawiański, op. cit., p. 164. We must also add that even in 1981 Kieślowski had not completely given up his extremely realistic descriptive method of filming, as evidenced by a TV film parallel to *Blind Chance*, about the 1976 events in Radom called *Short Working Day. The View from the Window*. This little-known film (shot by Krzysztof Pakulski, released in 1996!) re-enacted the events of the Radom protests from a specific perspective – the office window of the Secretary of the Communist Party, trapped by the workers in a provincial committee. The paradocumentary form of staging contained interwoven internal monologues of the main hero, as well as short flashbacks and anticipations of political events that preceded and followed the events in Radom.
- <sup>42</sup> M. Kornatowska, op. cit., p. 204.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 115.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

- <sup>45</sup> W. Wertenstein, *Przyjaźń trudna jak życie*, "Kino" 1979, no. 12.
- <sup>46</sup> It is also a fact that a certain standardization of visual means resulting from the adoption of a common realist strategy led shortly to the exhaustion of these means and to their repetitiveness, mostly visible in less successful works and films made after 1981, in the CMA manner.
- <sup>47</sup> See Z. Mitosek, op. cit., p. 916.
- <sup>48</sup> K. Zanussi, in: *Spróbujmy określić styl*, op. cit.
- <sup>49</sup> R. Ingarden, *Wykłady z etyki*, Warszawa 1989, p. 288.
- <sup>50</sup> For instance human rights were replaced with "the human right to live in peace", elections with "the act of support", freedom with "the social liberation", and morality with "the ethics of socialism", etc. See D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 172-173.
- <sup>51</sup> R. Ingarden, op. cit., p. 338.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 337.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>54</sup> A. Workowski, *Refleksje filozofa o kinie wartości*, in: *W stronę kiną filozoficznego. Antologia*, ed. U. Tes, Kraków 2011, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>55</sup> As writes D. Dabert, *films of the movement mostly used metonymy. Using elements of contemporary reality, they told little stories about great problems. One could say that the details containing the truth about the world here and now added up, and replacing large plans, created quite a coherent overall picture*. D. Dabert, op. cit., p. 84.
- <sup>56</sup> See G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, transl. A. Bostock, MIT Press, Cambridge 1971, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>57</sup> M. Głowiński, *Literatura wobec nowomowy*, in: idem, *Nowomowa i ciągi dalsze. Szkice dawne i nowe*, Kraków 2009, pp. 76, 77.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.
- <sup>60</sup> For example, it happens in the works of Stanisław Bareja, where the photographic concreteness in conjunction with the parody of newspeak is such an explosive mixture, disintegrating the spruced up and conventional – official – image of the PRL reality.
- <sup>61</sup> G. Lukács, op. cit., p. 90.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.
- <sup>64</sup> See M. Jankun-Dopart, *Falszywa inicjacja...* op. cit., p. 106.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.
- <sup>66</sup> G. Lukács, op. cit., p. 73.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibidem, pp. 73-74.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 152.
- <sup>71</sup> G. Lukács, *Art and Objective Truth*, in: "Writer and Critic" and other Essays, ed. and transl. A. Kahn, BackinPrint, Lincoln 2005, p. 52.
- <sup>72</sup> S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Oxford University Press, New York 1960, p. 305.
- <sup>73</sup> A. Holland, quoted in D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
- <sup>74</sup> S. Kracauer, op. cit., p. 305.