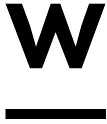

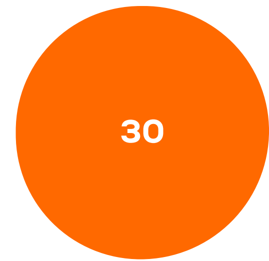

Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:
Film and the Politics of Negative Community. Krzysztof Kieślowski's Dialectic in the Late 1970s Polish People's Republic
author:
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source:
Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 30 (2021)
URL:
https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2021/30-visuality-of-social-classes-structures-and-relations/film-and-the-politics-of-negative-community1
doi:
https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2021.30.2384
publisher:
Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture
affiliation:
SWPS University
University of Warsaw

keywords:

class; solidarity; film; Krzysztof Kieślowski; negative community

abstract:

Polish People's Republic (PRL) in the late 1970s saw an increased alliance among, and indeed, a blending of, workers and intellectuals, young and old, women and men, actively struggling against the state. A new kind of solidarity emerged that threw off tired notions of what constituted the working class. The preeminent filmmaker of this time, Krzysztof Kieślowski, is often seen as increasingly depoliticized as he moved into fiction, but in this paper the author argues for the dialogic value of his work with respect to political organizing. Kieślowski's documentarist sensitivity to registering Polish reality and the intimacy of human engagement with the world led him to question the prevailing mode of representing these shifts in politics and class. His feature films, in articulating failures of representation, challenge a "realism" that purported to be universal, but instead reified a certain historical anxiety in the Polish political imaginary (workers vs. intellectuals, urban elites vs. peasantry), or precisely that which was being unraveled by the praxis of the late 1970s. Further, they refuse to cordon off interests of individuals from the very state shown to be oppressing them. Here we have a filmic counterpart to the immanent praxis of workers and intellectuals that turned one of the engines of the state—the trade union—into the greatest weapon against it. The author shows how this functions, in negative terms, in Kieślowski's first feature, Blizna/The Scar (1976), in which class solidarity is felt stylistically as aporia, and is further developed in Amator/Camera Buff (1979), which expresses the personal as political in the tension between the desire for spokój (peace and quiet) and czegoś wiecej (something more). Rather than a retreat, we should see this in correspondence with the revolutionary consciousness being inscribed in individual Poles by the collective labor action of Solidarity in 1980.

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Film and the Politics of Negative Community. Krzysztof Kieślowski's Dialectic in the Late 1970s Polish People's Republic

> The absence of community is not the failure of community. Absence belongs to community as its extreme moment or as the ordeal that exposes it to its necessary disappearance.[1]
>
> Maurice Blanchot

> The principle of representation is not able to grasp that the nothing that it should compensate for is not a loss of substance, foundation, or value, which suddenly dissolved a previous order but the very character of our being-in-common.[2]
>
> Roberto Esposito

The late 1970s in the Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, hereafter PRL) saw a new alliance (indeed, in the labor activism of the Solidarity movement, 10 million strong by 1981, a blending) of workers and intellectuals, young and old, women and men, actively struggling against the state. A non-monolithic political subject had assumed center stage, challenging received notions as to what constituted the working class in a state socialist country.

The preeminent Polish documentarian of the era, Krzysztof Kieślowski (1941–1996), had captured the discontent that led to this moment, in trailblazing, closely observed short works like *Office* (*Urząd*, 1966), *Factory* (*Fabryka,* 1970) and *Workers '71: Nothing About Us Without Us* (*Robotnicy '71: Nic o nas bez nas*, 1972, unreleased). Kieślowski's subsequent, mid-decade shift into feature filmmaking is sometimes viewed as the beginning of a slide into the interiority,[3] perhaps even insularity, that characterized his late work, the internationally lauded French co-productions of the 1990s.[4] It seems that just as the working class in Poland was heating up, its most astute filmmaker was cooling down. However, this evaluation presumes

that the political content of narrative film art takes the same form and function as it would in political activism and its discourses – that is, expressing a position and working towards a political goal. Kieślowski's Polish features, I shall argue, harbor a deceptive, dialogic energy with respect to the work of organizing and praxis. His achievements lay not in assuming the Romantic mantle of the dissident artist,[5] but in taking seriously his role as a filmmaker under state socialism to speak for *all* citizens, and to render their progressing circumstances in increasingly challenging terms. As a documentarian, his sensitivity to the intimacy of human engagement with the world led him to progressively question the ability of the prevailing aesthetic he had helped forge to register these shifts in class and worker resistance. While the pragmatist in Kieślowski acknowledged he could do and say more – and intrude on lives less – by adapting his documentary aesthetic to fiction, his late 1970s work also stands as a challenge to the entire notion of realist representation in political filmmaking.[6]

If Kieślowski's work indeed grew more subjective, formally as well as personally, it was because it retained an openness with respect to the ever-shifting political reality in the PRL, rather than merely reacting to events. Beginning with his autobiographical first feature for television, *Personel* (1975), these films resist the documentarian impulse to "reflect" the times, and forego the narratively closed art cinema that likewise tended to fix and symbolically load representations of subjects who were engaged in an ongoing political process (i.e., the Polish Film School inheritance of Andrzej Wajda (1926-2016), especially in his *Man of Iron/Człowiek z żelaza*, 1981). Instead, true to the spirit of his nonfiction work, Kieślowski interpellates the viewer not as a receptacle for the transmission of political content, but as a "partner" in assembling meaning.[7]

In so doing, these works bridge the gap between the self and the other[8] that is also reflective of implicating oneself in solidaristic activity, i.e., becoming a political actor in a situation outside of one's immediate personal sphere. They develop a dialectic that moves between the protagonists' conflicting, stated desire for *spokój* (peace and quiet), located in the nuclear family, and *coś więcej* (something more), a collectivizing impulse that internalizes the political as personal, and can prompt both class unity and solidaristic action, as stated above.

Via close readings of his late '70s features, in particular, Kieślowski's first theatrical feature *The Scar* (*Blizna,* 1976), and *Camera Buff* (*Amator,* 1979), classic examples of the late 1970s filmmaking trend usually known as the Cinema of Moral Anxiety (*kino moralnego niepokoju*), I shall show how this dialectic of desire functions relative to what political scientist David Ost has referred to as the politics of interest, rather than (only) class, under state socialism; that is to say, interest as a category that is both fluid and historically determined, shaped by and structurally dependent on the ever-present state under "really existing socialism."[9] Kieślowski's films reckon with the various messy, competing interests present in 1970s Poland by facing, on a narrative level, the implications of the negativity that was, for better or worse, endemic to Polish art.[10] Rather than a political retreat, there is at the heart of these works, which introduce formal and thematic elements of absence and loss, an attempt at uniting competing interests *negatively.*

In other words, the films mediate the threat of the dissolution of *community*, a much-abused concept that nonetheless has the advantage of being both abstract and concrete, suggestive of structures of feeling as well as workaday materialist reality. As such, they speak to what Maurice Blanchot has referred to as *negative community,* or "the community of those who have no community."[11] This notion is rooted in Georges Bataille's attempt in the 1930s to create an antifascist, affective dialectics,

centered on a radical understanding of "communication," one that could withstand the seduction of fascist imagery in the wake of the failure of both liberal politics and, to his thinking, a more orthodox left-communist critique.[12] His friend and disciple Blanchot would apply these insights to the experience of another period of political instability – May 1968. He conceived of the negation of received reality – the friendship of *refusal,* he put it – along lines of spatiality and movement, to match the exuberant rhythm of the Parisian streets; and with it, the repurposing of both social spaces and given identities.[13] This is also to say that there is something inherently cinematic in the 1968-era notion of affectively mapping a community where none currently exists.[14] I have elsewhere, and more directly, related Bataillean communication to avant-garde Polish documentary;[15] Kieślowski's films, as we will see, do not attempt the same subversion, but develop a post-1968, immanent critique of realism. As stated above, the dialectical tension that they generate responds to a mediating concept of community, while gesturing at the possibility of a hopeful real-world synthesis.

Crucially, this nascent community lay not within the accepted parameters of "us vs. them," "regular Poles" vs. the State, or Opposition vs. Party,[16] but would constitute, as it were, *everyone.* In this Kieślowski recognized something (perhaps unusual for someone who came of age politically with the death of Marxist revisionism in 1968)[17] that was unique about state socialism; namely, citizens were not *apart* but rather *a part of* the state that they had helped build in the postwar period, *contra* western capitalism. In practice this meant Kieślowski balked at cordoning off the interests of "individuals" from the very state that was also shown to be oppressing them.[18] For all their documenting of negative phenomena, these films possess a rise-or-fall-together element that goes against the grain of dissident rhetoric and the Party-critical realist cinema that Kieślowski had

helped influence with his documentaries. We should see these features as challenging an art cinema and corresponding rationalist intellectual discourse[19] that purported to be progressive and universal, but instead reified a certain class discrimination in the Polish political imaginary – about which more below – or precisely that which was unraveled by the organizing of the late 1970s. Here we shall find a filmic counterpart to the praxis of the labor activists of Solidarity, who turned one of the engines of the socialist state – the trade union – into the greatest weapon against it.

Political cinema? Documentaries vs. Fiction

The notion of *political cinema* had long been a fraught one when it came to the reception of Polish film under state socialism. As Marek Haltof points out, in a foreword to the new edition of his classic text, *Polish National Cinema,* the critical tendency, within the country and without, was to automatically "read" each film as an expression of dissidence, irrespective of its aesthetics. Haltof quotes the late Silesian filmmaker Kazimierz Kutz[20] on how this impacted storytelling and style:

> Polish cinema in years past, propelled by anticommunism of the West, benefited from the permanent discrediting, because the theme had been always more important than the style. It never had to compete intellectually; we were allowed to enter salons in dirty boots to describe communism, which the public wished a quick death.[21]

Kutz resents, in critics as well as filmmakers, the lack of attention paid to filmmaking aesthetics and cultural value independent of overt political critique – this also seems to be Haltof's abiding concern. In addition, if we are generous, and given Kutz's own subtle and complex filmmaking we ought to be, we can also see here the demand that film texts be forged and mined for deeper meaning, whose political efficaciousness is not,

or should not be, that easy to determine – or instrumentalize.

Kieślowski's work is likewise dubious about the extent to which cinema can *represent* political activity (that is to say, *stand in for* it, with the tendency towards substitution that that implies). As a documentarian, he saw such activity as beginning not with the narrative voice of political discourse, but on a more micro, process-oriented level of human engagement. In a word, this was an operation carried out at the level of *community*, a word implying close contact and the local, "through which," as Raymond Williams put it, "the great abstractions Individual and Society operate in detail."[22] To draw out its intricacies took patient aesthetic investigation. This conviction took root in the documentaries he and colleagues such as Tomasz Zygadło[23] contributed, from the mid-1960s on, toward uncovering the social reality and meaning that they saw as having been occluded under official state culture. In 1971, Kieślowski and Zygadło, supported by the older, rebellious Party member Bohdan Kosiński, set down in writing their filmic attempts to politically infuse the poetic/observational cinema of their teacher and mentor Kazimierz Karabasz[24] and his generation. This "Kraków Group" manifesto,[25] as it came to be known, making use of a clinical metaphor with "film-protests" being a "scalpel," was part of a wider movement across many art and literature circles within Poland, known as *młoda kultura* (the Young Culture). Its ethos is exemplified in the writings of poets Adam Zagajewski and Julian Kornhauser contained in a book of collected essays from 1974, *The Unrepresented World* (*Świat nieprzedstawiony*). While the poets took pains to point out that "diagnosing reality is not the only, nor even the main, task facing culture," in film historian Tadeusz Lubelski's words, it was seen as "'degree zero', the precondition of its effective functioning as a whole."[26]

The evolution of Kieślowski's 1970s fiction work fulfilled this diagnostic directive of Young Culture as well as the implicit

suggestion of the Kraków Group manifesto to see documentary film as research; indeed, political developments continued to supply the director with raw material. In the summer of 1976, the shipyard strikes and ruthless repression on the Baltic Coast at the beginning of the decade[27] seemed to be replaying itself like a bad dream. Yet this seeming return held promise, in how previous divisions among those engaged in struggle were overcome, both geographically and along class lines.
On June 25th, in response to the Party again suddenly announcing food price increases, an estimated 130 factories (75% of Poland's largest) went on strike.[28] In the face of this scale of opposition, the government almost immediately capitulated, calling off the price hike, but repression was severe, both in terms of direct state violence in the streets and also in the form of fines or imprisonment and mass purges of alleged radicals from industrial jobs.[29] In the wake of these reprisals and the subsequent cover-up,[30] Warsaw intellectuals and students formed the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (Workers' Defense Committee),[31] or KOR, which first showed up during the July trials in Ursus (then a suburb of Warsaw) to offer financial support.[32] This was to be the beginning of a breakthrough in terms of bridging the organizing gap between workers and the intelligentsia. Although a certain division persisted, many of the young labor activists in the Baltic coast's "Tri-City" (*Trójmiasto* –Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) who built Solidarity in 1980 were indeed also KOR members.[33] The class and cultural divisions that had historically kept Polish citizens separated were slowly being eroded through a common struggle.[34]

KOR member; later seen visiting worker's home in *Short Working Day* (*Krótki Dzień Pracy*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1981, unreleased)

These long-standing societal and class divisions, which predated state socialism and persisted under it, bear mentioning at this point – why did the gulf tentatively bridged via the union of workers and intellectuals after June 1976 hold such significance? And what does it have to do with the cinematic output of Kieślowski's contemporaries? General cultural attitudes towards the role of the intelligentsia, governance and the production of art in Poland had long set it somewhat apart from its neighbors. A closer look immediately reveals the deep historical chasm between urban intellectuals and the rural population (and later, of course, the proletariat), relative to their class conflict with the rural landed gentry, the *szlachta* – the ruling class that, while allowing cities relative freedom, exploited the peasantry ruthlessly and helped extend feudalism in the Polish lands well into the 19th century. This distrust was most famously dramatized in influential Kraków fin-de-siecle artist Stanisław Wyspiański's best-known play, *The Wedding* (*Wesele,* 1901).

This historical anxiety in Polish letters is also apparent throughout Polish cinema history, insofar as "dissident" auteurs, to reconnect with Kazimierz Kutz's sentiment, have been allowed to speak as voices of universal conscience, though they evince highly selective, class-based perspectives. As Iwona Kurz has trenchantly analyzed, the lack of understanding (between intellectuals and the working class or peasantry)

that characterizes Polish culture is manifest in the inability of Polish cinema, by and large, to successfully portray "ordinariness" — a far more useful word here than "realism." Kurz demonstrates this through a reading of Krzysztof Zanussi's (1939-) New Wave-influenced *The Structure of Crystal* (Struktura kryształu, 1969). Along with Kieślowski's documentaries, Zanussi's "intellectual cinema" was one of the key influences on late 1970s Polish filmmaking. However, unlike films of the Czech New Wave (i.e., Kurz's contrastive model),

> Zanussi's characters are not so ordinary, but represent two possible modes of intelligentsia: an academic career (in the West, nonetheless) and the option for a quiet, provincial life…The ordinary people are the *others* [author's emphasis], for example Jan's wife, the people who come for simple conversation (and, as sensible Marek observes, don't understand anything), or those who drink their daily glass of vodka and/or beer…There is a long sequence in Zanussi's movie, when the two main characters are in a local joint and Marek asks Jan how he can live being constantly surrounded by "such faces." Jan replies that it depends on the way one looks. Then "these faces" are carefully presented in a long shot – faces covered with wrinkles and lines, silent and seemingly indifferent; their owners wear tattered hats and clothes, enjoy their banal talks and jokes, and chase their drinks with boiled egg. Zanussi simply displays them – leaving it up to the viewer, how to look at them. However, the film leaves no space for identification with (them).[35]

Zanussi's cinema, then, is symptomatically content to leave certain hierarchies undisturbed, to put it kindly; at worst, it contributed to the outright *othering* of rural Poles, as Kurz suggests (an attitude that unhelpfully persists in Poland today). This is to say that a class divide is portrayed unproblematically in *Structure of Crystal* — as something *natural,* or a given.

In contrast to his friend Zanussi, Kieślowski's work at this time sought to remove rather than reinforce cultural and class barriers, seeking the commonality of public interest *negatively* through examining a dysfunction that impacted everyone, however inequitably. By 1976, his work as a director had definitively shifted: documentaries had come to function in part as ways of "charging the battery" for features, he conceded.[36] Expanding, rather than reducing, the sense of close observation he had always worked with,[37] he also found creative, hybrid ways to articulate the movement of class in terms of story construction. A dialogue of sorts began between his short works and the full features he would soon make. One of the more compelling ways in which this can be felt is Kieślowski's use of a recurring character, Antoni Gralak, based upon a real person who was a Party functionary. This "Gralak" travels as it were from short films to his features and back again. Different incarnations see him as a disgraced Party member, in the fascinating docu-fiction *Curriculum Vitae* (*Życiorys*, 1975); as an apolitical, ex-con itinerant laborer, of the type scapegoated as a 'hooligan' by the Party during times of unrest, in *The Calm* (*Spokój*, 1976; released 1980), discussed later; and as a young insurrectionist worker in *Short Working Day* (*Krótki dzień pracy*, 1981; unreleased), a curious TV film about the 1976 uprising in Radom.[38] Such volatility of identity is a more novel and compelling approach to the notion of an 'everyman' than was typically seen in Polish cinema, inviting possibility rather than stasis.

The first of these films, *Curriculum Vitae,* requires discussing at more length in order to tease out the sense in which communication occurs across varying institutions, platforms and layers of reality; that is to say, the relation of the filmic to the pro-filmic, as well as the director's connection not only to his material but also to the wider community, of which even the Party

(Kieślowski always insisted implicitly with other documentarian colleagues)[39] was part. In *Curriculum Vitae*'s hybrid approach, Kieślowski allowed an actor with a similar background to the wholly fictional character he was portraying, "Gralak," to go before a very real mid-level Party Control Committee. He then filmed this body berating Gralak for his character flaws and questioning if he was fit to be a member of the Party, and by extension to enjoy a more comfortable future,[40] underlining the state-sanctioned reality of class difference. Surprisingly enough, the end result was screened not only at the Kraków Film Festival, but also within Party circles.[41] The questions that these fallible, not wholly intimidating Party members – similar to others from his documentaries – pose and re-pose to Gralak as they go over his personal history with a fine-tooth comb, seem to be a further elaboration of the unsettling bureaucratic mantra heard in Kieślowski's influential early documentary *Office* (*Urząd*, 1966): "What have you been doing throughout your lifetime?" This obfuscating question, it seems, would go on to be answered definitively by the worker organized uprising a decade later. While no one would confuse Polish cinema of this era with the Third Cinema of Latin America, which sought to directly engage with insurgency and revolution in its manifestos and films, Kieślowski's filmic and production activity with his colleagues indicates an understanding of this notion of dialogism.[42]

He would eventually directly dramatize this struggle as it resided in ordinary Poles who sought access to culture and political life – and arguably, true socialist community – all of which was denied to them by the elites.

Personel and Moral Anxiety

This new approach was reflected in the filmmaking and central conflict of Kieślowski's first feature for television, *Personel* (1975). While there was plenty of the personal life of its director in his previous choices, here Kieślowski drew quite directly on his own

experience. In *Personel,* a young man, Romek, played by Juliusz Machulski (future director of various popular 1980s comedies), gets his first proper job in a theater, just as the young Kieślowski did.[43] Over the course of the story, in which he is initiated into the hard work, intricacies, and ultimately the dysfunction of a theater company, Romek finds his idealism about art and labor severely challenged. Stylistically, this is captured through careful attention to small revelations buried in mundane activity and repetitive work, using a cast made up of real theater workers as well as many of Kieślowski's film school director friends who imitated them when acting their parts.[44] The central conflict, slowly steeping in *Personnel*'s accretion of detail, simmers between the performers, who receive adulation on the stage, and the artists and craftspeople who toil behind the scenes, quite literally forced to use a separate entrance to the theater. A tailor, Sowa (Michał Tarkowski), is one of the latter, and as the protagonist's friend is a large influence on young Romek. He battles with the actors, who scorn his talents, as well as those who maladroitly run the company, turning a blind eye to the theater's woes. Sowa's final stance is summed up in his climactic speech before an assembled, hostile company, with the unequivocal words: "This theater is rotten". He uses the word *spróchniały* – emphasizing decrepitude.

While Kieślowski ends his film on an ambiguous note, with a long shot, as the protagonist hesitates over where he should place his loyalty – with the now-fired Sowa or the theater administration and its supporters – it was the film's negative, allegorical diagnosis of seemingly irreparable societal rifts that was to be the hallmark of Poland's Cinema of Moral Anxiety, of which *Personel* can be seen as a blueprint. At their best, these features portray, like the earlier '70s documentaries, the complexity of everyday experience and the negotiation of competing interests.

Unfortunately, most lack the evenness of approach (the documentarian's generosity of detail) and openness of narrative (plots end decisively) of the earlier nonfiction material. At worst, they come off as blinkered and schematic: good and evil are very broadly painted. As director Agnieszka Holland puts it, "We were delighted that we could code the message in a film that 'evil is linked with communism.' It seems that this is the basic weakness of these films."[45] These film artists genuinely felt they were responding to a social need, as Holland and others have indicated, using their work within the resurgent, now-celebrated *zespoły filmowe,* or autonomous filmmaking units, to make a kind of intervention within a socialist public sphere.[46] However, to put this in 21st-century media terms, providing *content* to salve discontent surely limits what cinema is capable of in such situations. In Krzysztof Zanussi's lonely, existentialist "last honest man" portraits (such as *Constant Factor/Konstans,* 1980), or Andrzej Wajda's impressive collaborations with younger artists (*Without Anaesthesia/Bez znieczulenia,* 1979, screenplay by Holland) individuals come up hard against the immovable force of an apathetic or vindictive system. The plot machinery and unhappy endings that convey this message seem to confirm dissident myths about "totalitarianism" in the PRL state, leaving no thinking space for the viewer – and by extension the citizen. This is to say, they forego Kieślowski's "partnership," which would imply participation and an assembling of meaning not decided upon in advance. Engagement and the careful accretion of reality and situational truth that Kieślowski had gleaned from the Karabasz tradition is foreclosed upon. In other words, we see the limits of documentary realism when made to serve fictional narrative arcs.

However, to recall *Personel,* there was a tentative third choice, beyond either the theater administration's intent to blithely carry on or Sowa's desire to tear it all down. In the third act, Romek

proposes something positive and concrete alongside Sowa's negative diagnosis – the formation of a new sort of community: a people's cabaret. Not only does this make Romek a perfect representative of the Young Culture movement, as well as mirroring attempts by Kieślowski and his fellow directors at the same,[47] it hints at what would go on to drive the filmmaker's future protagonists.

The Representation of Failure: Community in *The Scar*

Kieślowski's experiments in hybrid and collaborative forms initially provided a way to remove him from the bitter minefields of documentary ethics amid state censorship, pointing to a possible way forward. Even so, the move into fiction filmmaking was not to be a smooth one. Whereas his favorite filmmaker, Ken Loach, could draw on a sharply defined British tradition of left-wing class politics railing against ruling class capitalist interests, the upcoming Moral Anxiety features were made against the background of a political situation in which the portrayal of working class militancy against the "workers' state" was officially nonsensical, and therefore forbidden. As such, the narrative representation of delineated competing interests and roiling class antagonism, as opposed to mere hatred for the Party, proved difficult to achieve within the bounds of official state culture. This was despite the extent to which state socialism was yoked to the world-system of capitalism, to use Wallerstein's well-known term,[48] particularly in the 1970s when Western credit loomed large in the Polish economy. The reliance on credit, initiated by First Secretary Edward Gierek after taking power in 1970, further muddied the waters by attempting to equalize unequal interests through collective consumption,[49]

the optimism for which had largely evaporated by the middle of the decade amidst a global economic downturn.

In recognizing the economic – not merely political – nature of the crises that buffeted Poland, both then and now, David Ost homes in on the category of *interest*, defining it not in absolute terms (as does capitalism) but pragmatically.

> People obviously do have wants, such as a better life, prosperity, happiness. But interest is used here in an economic sense, in its modern usage associated with the rise of market liberalism and the complex composition of industrial society. To say a group of people has an "interest" in a policy or political program is to say it believes this policy or program will enhance the socioeconomic position of its members. To say a group does not know what is in its interest means that its members do not know what program or policy can best advance its position.[50]

This argues against an understanding of interest as some kind of essential, transhistorical category, one that could be (self-) betrayed, e.g., due to some "false consciousness" among workers, etc. The explanation, instead, is structural:

> (I)nterests do not simply exist "out there," waiting for the chance to articulate politically their own visions. Rather, interests are decisively shaped by the state, by the political and economic environments in which they take shape.[51]

In capitalist liberal states, class organizations, such as those portrayed in Loach's films (e.g., a railway workers' union in *Navigators* (2001)), exist and negotiate their interests relative to a state that has ultimate power over them, but does not, Ost argues, guarantee their independent existence. However,

> In state socialist society…all social groups owe their existence to the state and all flourish or decline depending on the state's commitment to maintaining them.[52]

This commitment, of course, was a varied one relative to different social groups, as we have seen. Inequalities that contributed to persistent class differences in the PRL help explain, in retrospect, why it was not the emergence of "civil society" but the working class revolt of strikes in 1970, 1971,[53] 1976 and ultimately in 1980 that shook the state to its foundations.[54] In this sense, though, we should reject the notion that the PRL for this reason had effectively abolished classes, relative to how the state (mis)articulated *interest*. But with Ost we should recognize how interest in state socialist societies like the PRL defined itself in relation to a state in which all official organizations were *always already nationalized*.

This volatility of negative interests vis-à-vis the state eventually came together spectacularly, of course, in August of 1980 with *Solidarność* (Solidarity). As universal as such an organization must have felt by 1981, when Solidarity had transformed into a seemingly unstoppable social movement, it was first born of something highly specific: the initial, public demand for free and independent trade unions in Gdańsk,[55] which grew into a larger program articulating the self-management and economic well-being of the Polish working class. Despite the historical precedents of 1970 and 1976, this signal demand of labor activists and workers on the Baltic Coast had since those years been developed and transmitted locally, not nationally, and it was therefore seen by the KOR opposition intellectuals in Warsaw as a dead end, including key 1960s radical Jacek Kuroń.[56] However, this demand was a critical pivot, as Michael Bernhard puts it:

> Although the opposition of the 1970s had secured de facto toleration of an alternative public space and the organizations therein, and had improvised ways to pressure the party-state, it had not yet obtained de jure recognition of its right to exist or its institutional autonomy.[57]

What was developing in the Tri-City was thus an example of something more defined than “interest” and different than the “alternative public space” of civil society that treasured and closely-guarded its separation from the state. It was instead closer to what Raymond Williams called a *militant particularism,* or the way in which “ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get generalized and universalized as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity.”[58] The free trade union demand, as well as its key enabling structure, what later became the Interfactory Strike Committee (*Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy*, or MKS), and finally, its lead tactic, the sit-down strike, all were present in 1970 and hovered at the edges in 1976,[59] but their time, and its recognition, was still to come.

How, then, to portray such politics in a visual narrative, in this moment of profound transition, when it all seemed such a jumble mid-decade? How could one avoid the reification of the problem of *really existing power differentials* – men versus women, or industrial workers or rural farmers versus the urban intelligentsia, who despite their criticism of the *nomenklatura* (Party elites) remained in a more comfortable class position? Any attempt to deny the mitigating, fundamental category of the state, as opposition intellectuals increasingly tended to do when speaking of “(post-) totalitarianism,”[60] or as Moral Anxiety did through the “communism is evil” coding, only further confused the issue – effectively fighting abstraction with more abstraction, however “cathartic” this may have felt to read or experience on screen.

Kieślowski and Zygadło had succeeded in portraying ostensible class differences or differing political interests, in the intercutting between workers and managers in films like *Factory* and *Workers '71,* as well as calling for and emphasizing organizational and institutional aspects in their manifesto. How could longer fiction films, relying on characters with whom viewers are to identify, cinematically speaking, address this problem?

Kieślowski's first feature film, *The Scar* (Blizna, 1976), arguably the first proper feature of Moral Anxiety, restages and seeks to advance the situations previously observed in Kieślowski's documentaries. It contains a typically tough-minded, or perhaps perverse, problematic that uses a setting and what we might call a professional-managerial class[61] protagonist commonly associated in fiction with a number of television series of the 1970s,[62] but typically eschewed by directors of mainstream cinema for its perceived unpopularity and association with vestiges of socialist realism.[63] The plot follows the construction of a massive chemical factory in a small town in northeastern Poland, a town whose citizens view the project with skepticism and outright resistance. This story is organized around sympathetic building director Stefan Bednarz (versatile veteran actor Franciszek Pieczka) and his doomed fight to bring the chemical works to life, while constantly attending to the various interests in play among the intransigent townsfolk, enthusiastic university researchers, implacable Party officials, a crusading journalist, and Bednarz's own unhappy family.

On the one hand, *The Scar* is a straightforward, documentary-informed work, examining a small community through the eyes of an insider-outsider – arguably a surrogate for Kieślowski himself. Yet it is at once both dense and elusive as a text: full of outrage and specific details, but also aporia, underdeveloped characters, and mysterious yearnings. What it adds up to is a vivid and humane portrait of failure; what differentiates this emphasis on failure from other Moral Anxiety works is that the film depicts the

failure not merely of a political system, but failure in *representation*. This failure is on the one hand political and concrete – the protagonist as a failed representative of "the people;" but it is also artistic,[64] as Kieślowski, through the clash of documentary form and fiction narrative, evidently concedes that the cinema cannot represent community and the real, in all its complexity.[65] However, this pessimism, or negation, of community in film narrative, need not rule out the possibility of positive developments in the real world. That is to say our inability to point to extant examples of human community does not mean it is not *becoming*, even if only in a negative sense. This idea is developed formally as an interesting absence in the text, very much like what Klaus Scherpe means when speaking of the work of Peter Weiss as

> a sign of this historical work of liberation that has not yet become history. The empty space in the frieze, at the spot where the lion's paw of Heracles would hang, designates precisely something absent, unrealized. Literature cannot and should not fill this space by way of compensation, but rather render its contours sharp and visible.[66]

Scherpe argues that literature should indicate, through *signs,* our capacity to alter the course of history and emancipate human potential; it cannot however show us the way ("fill this space") through representation. I shall argue in what follows that *The Scar* allows viewers, through their involvement in the film, to render the "contours" of reality "sharp and visible." This is the gathering of *negative community* – the other side, as it were, of s/Solidarity.

In the first place, *The Scar* develops the examination of "negative phenomena," as the 1971 manifesto had it, seeking through viewer involvement to transform this material.

We witness the failure of a city to serve its citizens through a fleshed out, decade-long portrait of the protagonist, Bednarz, a professional project manager hired by cynical local Party leaders, and yet he is a "full-blooded humanist," as a citizen at a town-hall meeting says while praising him. Despite some private brooding, Bednarz is, for a time, good-naturedly convinced about his paternal capacity to represent the townspeople and their conflicting concerns through his work. At this he is consistently thwarted from all sides, and *The Scar* shows Bednarz's failure to *assemble* the militant particularist interests of the town – the local/personal within the national/collective – into what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. often referred to as "beloved community," or that which blooms after waging a successful struggle.[67]

The various strands Bednarz attempts to pull together, to reconcile, register vividly for the spectator in Kieślowski's patient, documentary-like long takes and occasional non-eyeline matches, in a series of encounters with a myriad of townspeople, and a few supporting characters. These realistic scenes, reminiscent of the earlier documentaries in which grievances are vented or institutional decrepitude exposed, surely made the state censor squirm and the average Pole perhaps cheer, and yet what is most interesting about the citizens' heartfelt speeches and protests is that they ultimately fall on deaf or unyielding ears – not suppressed, just passed over. We see how, in a way not dissimilar to Western liberal democracies, one need not necessarily bar free discourse – the concept of it may even be a boon to power – to keep a citizenry in thrall to, in this case, a parasitic bureaucratic stratum.

Moreover, just as Ost says, the waters of "interest" here are quite slippery. As townspeople vent their anger at the environment being destroyed as well as many of their homes and existing infrastructure, the language used tells of shifting goals and the inability to communicate.

The town is told to think of the “big picture” – the Factory plan *could* actually work, it is true – but when the women and men move from a militant particularism (“the home we built for our old age has been destroyed”) to draw a universal conclusion (“caring for the elderly requires a hospital, not a factory”), Bednarz and his slick, ladder-climbing assistant (Kieślowski protégé Jerzy Stuhr) retreat to their professional specialization and protest that this is outside their purview. When the assistant haughtily appeals to them to put aside petty personal concerns, to speak as *citizens*, he then balks when they talk about *socialism* and accuses them of “bringing out the big guns.” Meanwhile, while well-intentioned Bednarz meets with the citizens personally, rather than speaking *at* them (as the pompous local Party head does), in the end they adopt the same language, in a bureaucratic boilerplate reduction of actual socialist goals: “a wider view is called for.”

At stake in these arguments is the entire notion of community. Bednarz is expected to preside over the varied, fluid interests at play, as though they constituted a whole merely by placing someone in charge. In other words, he is inserted at the head of a *false* community, an impossible situation, in which reification removes the necessary dialectic of community and absence – that is to say, the work of organizing. As Georges Bataille puts it, articulating a radical conception of communication that conveys a sense of bodily risk, and therefore implicitly, spatiality (Polish gets closer to this sense of movement, in the word *komunikacja*),

> "Communication" cannot take place between one full and intact being and another: it wants beings who question being in themselves, who place their being at the limit of death, of nothingness. The moral summit is the moment of risk, of the suspension of the being beyond itself, at the limit of nothingness.[68]

Against the Habermasian model of the public sphere, an influential one for liberal champions of "civil society" discourse,[69] this conception of communication cannot be reduced to mere language. At the same time, community, though embodied, cannot be reduced to numbered physical groupings, as it is an unfolding process of communication. It becomes a relation that forces us to face up to this constitutive element of the *outside* and the other, rather than trying to suppress it. We accept our insufficiency and share our lack – this above all is community. Kieślowski accepts the limitations of representation when it comes to filling this lack. If he is building community at all, it is *extra-cinematic*, with the spectator mobilized as a partner in the negation of falseness within the mise-en-scene and diegesis. He unites interests *negatively* while working within the rules set by narrative film art.

With this in mind, Bednarz, the protagonist, remains our filmic point of identification, as Kieślowski places him at the center of nearly every scene, including in the sense of *suture* – the standard combination of objective and subjective shooting through which viewers come to "identify" with the camera and its representation of reality. This capacity to represent is also a spatial relationship, which filming "on location" is able to throw into sharp relief. The Director walks about the town, holding meetings and visiting residents. In this way we are asked as viewers to feel the militant particularisms of the town's residents – how place is connected to grievance – yet we rarely get such glimpses as a whole; they remain incomplete. In this manner, an early, strangely beautiful scene that references Kieślowski's documentaries but also evokes the vivid post-Neorealist cinema he loved – one thinks of Ermanno Olmi, at once naturalistic and dream-like – makes us come to understand how deceptively Bednarz, though decades ago a resident of the town, is out of his element. As he strolls through the town, images of dilapidated housing and indigent residents are intercut with Bednarz gazing

around, seemingly happy to see the town again and noticing the people, though only gradually noticing the years of neglect.

Then, in a long tracking shot in which Bednarz walks against the wind towards an apartment block, the non-diegetic minimalist electronic music/noise accompanying him is gradually replaced by reverberating diegetic *chanson*, emanating, we presume, from an undisclosed apartment window. He approaches a residence as if by chance and is shocked to be seemingly recognized by someone his age scrubbing the outdoor stairs, a woman who had already appeared in the background behind him. In a deft bit of work, the tracking camera catches up with and swings around Bednarz, excluding him from the frame after he has noticed the woman. She addresses him (and the viewer – "*To Pan?/*Mr., it's you?"); he re-enters the frame and says "*Co?/*What?" She: "*Pan?/*You, Mr.?" There is confusion in our minds over the nature of his relationship with the neighborhood–did he live here in the past? Is he going to live here now?

Bednarz wanders in *The Scar* (*Blizna,* dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1976)

Finally, one of the flunkies for the local authorities rushes down the stairs to meet him; apparently Bednarz was expected right there in the building, which will be his residence and is somewhat familiar, as perhaps the man has guessed ("Old memories?").

Though this way of shooting is not particularly destabilizing for the viewer in and of itself, in the strange temporal confusion vis-à-vis characterization it is an example of something that Slavoj Žižek once noticed in Kieślowski's later work but which was already present here – his subtle ability to corrupt filmic suture. If Hitchcock was a master of the subjectivization of a seemingly objective shot, says Žižek, with Kieślowski it is the reverse, granting us access to a different feeling for reality through a sudden objectivization of what we thought was a character's gaze,[70] as in the scene with Bednarz described above. Further,

> Kieślowski was the great master in making the spectator perceive this dimension…in an ordinary scene–a part of drab reality all of a sudden starts to function as the 'door to perception', the screen through which another, purely fantasmatic dimension becomes perceptible. What distinguishes Kieślowski is that, in his films, these magic moments of interface are not staged by means of standard Gothic elements (apparitions in the fog, magic mirrors), but as part of an ordinary, everyday reality.[71]

This toying with perception and reality – including, most explicitly, a scene in which Bednarz mechanically switches on and off the lights in his apartment, repeatedly obliterating and refocusing our view, in and out of the 'intimate sphere' – has the effect of dislodging Bednarz, a sympathetic character throughout, as our point of identification. He is dislocated spatially and temporally from the diegetic here and now, at the center of which he is expected to be a man of action. Viewers are granted something more than the sense of agency

that accompanies psychological characterization, the standard for Moral Anxiety filmmaking with its faux-everyman protagonists.

This, instead, is Kieślowski's evolving "partnership." The relation we have as viewers to the (dilapidated) infrastructure and barely making-ends-meet residents on display is effectively transformed. In a more didactic film, they might have been captured – fixed, as it were – in their deprivation. Here, though, we are invited to look differently, an anti-consumptive impulse, so to speak, against the prime directive of First Secretary Edward Gierek's 1970s.[72] Indeed, in one of the final scenes, Bednarz has his own Gierek-like moment. On his way out as Director, he learns of the workers' insurrection and its repression in the Tri-City (taking us up to the year 1970). Shown peeking through a veiled curtain that again resembles Žižek's "interface," Bednarz then leaves his office in an attempt to charismatically dissolve the "us and them" of representation. He wades into the gathering crowd to speak to the agitated workers directly: "*Ja jestem z wami…* (I am with you)." However, honest to a fault, like perhaps *The Scar's* director, he immediately follows this with the word *"but…"*

Calm, or Something More?

The 1979 film *Amator* (*Camera Buff,* 1979)[73] is Kieślowski's most tender and heartbreaking depiction of this struggle to represent the trouble of of the world, ultimately arguing that this impulse must turn inwards to find any honesty. In so doing, it makes an argument for the importance of ensuring access to culture for "ordinary Poles," remembering Kurz's critique of Zanussi, and one which also has powerful implications for political organizing, as I will show. *Amator* takes for its title a word originally from Latin that denotes one who loves (something). The more common meaning of the English *amateur,* of course, is that which is defined *negatively* against the

professional, as in “one who lacks professional finish”; both connotations hold in Polish. Here we can observe something of an antinomy at work, between emptiness/innocence and creativity/worldliness that is rallied not just in language but in the world of the film, and in the dialectic Kieślowski assembles.

While *The Scar* includes a reflexive element in miniature, in the important character of a skeptical journalist (the same actor who played the rebellious Sowa in *Personel*), here it is inscribed, in a very personal way, within *Amator*'s principal narrative. The film concerns Filip Mosz, an average thirty-year old factory supplies officer, who has his life transformed through the use of cinema. In the opening scenes, Filip and his wife welcome their first child to the world. We soon learn that, in anticipation, he has saved up money and purchased an 8mm camera to document these important moments, the culmination of their dreams of a life of *spokój* (peace, calm).[74] However, it is the camera, not the child, that is to alter his existence, revealing a “*coś wiecej* (something more),” as fumbles to name it to his bewildered spouse. This *something more,* accessed through cinema, allows him to experience the world in ways he previously could not, and enables him to radically communicate with others, both within his village and without. It is a dramatization of the purpose of the Kraków Group manifesto and his previous career as a documentarian, but also, we will see, of the capacity to organize. In other words, *Amator* interrogates how personal creativity relates to political activity.

In some ways, Kieślowski's film feels like a response to Andrzej Wajda's great *Citizen Kane*-like *Man of Marble/Człowiek z marmuru* (1976), which was itself reportedly inspired by Wajda first seeing *The Scar.*[75] But where Wajda's filmmaker heroine Agnieszka is something of a tenacious lone wolf (i.e., a would-be auteur), Filip, the titular amateur, is more tentative. Where Agnieszka is an aspiring artist-intellectual, who benefits from the privilege that class confers, Filip is part of a provincial and

working class environment that, while relatively comfortable under state socialism, restricts him to a particular social milieu and community, which he eventually seeks to lift up through his work (whereas Agnieszka is looking for Truth). Kieślowski here represents cinema in the diegesis as uniting the townspeople in their presumed interest —their well-being— though Filip does not entirely know what that entails, nor quite how to secure it, in a situation in which, remembering Ost, all interests are tied to the state, despite the cultural and economic inequity experienced by Filip's working class community. In the end, the results are decidedly mixed, in keeping with Kieślowski's understanding that film cannot by itself effect change, as Agnieszka is poised to do in *Man of Marble*'s final shot; it can only negotiate the complexities of the reality it uncovers.

Kieślowski makes the stakes clear in an early scene, in which the camera helps Filip gain access to his newborn thanks to an intrigued young doctor, who asks to borrow his new camera (after which he lets him pass). Receiving it, the doctor makes an abrupt about-face, puts the camera to his eye, and tears back a blue curtain to reveal the hospital's tangle of floors, rooms and patients. The non-diegetic camera pushes slowly past the doctor filming and adopts the POV of the diegetic camera, reframing the hospital as objectivized, unmediated reality, newly uncovered.

The affect of revelation in *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1979

This long take, ultimately excluding the character already seen to be looking out from the frame, as opposed to the more standard way of cutting to *reveal a look* (i.e., an eyeline match), is similar to the scene in the courtyard described above in *The Scar*. Kieślowski seems less interested here in the POV perspective of the doctor than in effecting an uncanny irruption of pro-filmic reality, no longer restrained, as it were, through mise-en-scene. The evidence of human failings on display here must somehow be reckoned with, Filip comes to feel. But in the somewhat humorous jolt of this sudden "reveal," we are perhaps also to detect not only the revelatory ability of the camera but also a kind of fakeness regarding its power, foreshadowing the plot ahead.

We see how Filip, as a budding activist with a camera, is only effective as insofar as he remains linked to the small community of which he is part, no easy task in the wider world. The more confident Filip grows, the more he is able to rally this community around him, but in achieving a greater platform of expression and gaining cultural capital through the study of film,[76] his capacity to lose what he already has also grows.

Filip's filmmaking crew (made up of his co-workers), as the narrative driver, initially go from triumph to triumph. They document the town's less-visible citizenry (e.g., a veteran worker who happens to be a little person), the back-room dealings of Party politics, crumbling building facades, etc., as Filip becomes increasingly involved in larger sociopolitical and, potentially, national matters. Through photography and being broadcast (on state television in Warsaw), the films alter the relationship of the townspeople to their everyday experience, again dramatizing the fulfillment of the call of Young Culture and The Kraków Group.

Through the activity of his group, he meets Anna, a representative of a national amateur filmmaking club ("there is a beautiful woman waiting for you in the lobby," Filip is informed upon her arrival). At this point in his career, Kieślowski had struggled to portray three-dimensional female characters – Bednarz's wife and daughter in *The Scar,* for example, as well as in earlier documentaries.[77] Anna herself is something of an enigma, only the beginning perhaps of the complex female characters he would successfully bring to the screen in his late French-language films. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, she is pivotal to what Kieślowski wants to say, representing the allure and also the danger, at least in terms of loneliness, of Filip's pursuit of his *coś więcej* that threatens to destroy his family unit (and eventually does, when his wife Irena leaves him due to his all too frequent absences from home). Yet Anna is more than just a *femme fatale*[78]: "Do you know what they call me?" she says to Filip in an intimate moment at a cafe, "*Amatorka.*" Explaining that, as an amateur, she dabbles in a little of everything,

Camera Buff (*Amator*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1979)

and has never been able to settle down, she reveals herself to be a kind of organizer, connecting the local (Filip's amateur films and their small-town setting) with the national (a producer at Warsaw Television played by Kieślowski's colleague Andrej Jurga), and perhaps even the universal (art that touches people enables them to reach one another). As such, despite her precarity (linked to patriarchy), she is not only a symbol of class difference (i.e., the mobility of the intelligentsia), but also of that which Filip comes to hope to achieve through cinema: organizing his local militant interests into something larger for all. As his protagonist grows into this realization, Kieślowski draws attention to how his filmmaking prowess draws strength from his community – in how it raises them up, and vice versa.

Emphasized throughout is what we might call the *supportive visuality* of the community assembled around Filip, including his filmmaking unit, office workers and other workers and families from his town, Wielice, learning to "see" as he does. We can see how this visuality is mapped *spatially* within the frame and the diegesis generally, corresponding to the building of collective power in the non-diegetic real world. A typical shot in *Amator* is a two-shot close-up with Filip foregrounded and a supporting character (representing, literally, community support) slightly out of focus behind him.

Filip's power to critique, as indicated, is lessened as he begins to move farther away from his class position, increasingly gaining professional knowledge and elevated connections, as well as cultural capital. When he runs into trouble, the tenuousness of his position is exposed. We see his support undercut with visual literalness, as his portly boss maneuvers to curtail the filmmaking unit's plans to air the town's grievances on state television.

Camera Buff (*Amator*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1979)

Yet even this superior is not the philistine apparatchik he initially seems to be, it turns out—again, *interest* relative to the state remains murky. The money Filip's film succeeds in getting allocated to repair housing had apparently been earmarked by local officials, he is told, for another project, which would have benefited the town elsewhere. During this process, Filip's supervisor Osuch, something of a mentor, is made a scapegoat and fired. Filip himself falls into despair, destroying the film his crew have just made which exposes neglect of the local bricksworks, rather than see the effect this film will have when it is likewise exhibited on state television. The dust that Filip and his comrades have kicked up along the way despite their failure is a powerful articulation, whether under state socialism or liberal democracy, of what is possible when ordinary, working class citizens are able not only to access culture, but make it themselves as it were.[79]

Conclusions

As with Agnieszka Holland's Solidarity-era, feminist masterpiece *A Lonely Woman*, (*Kobieta samotna*, 1981), which shows the atomization of community and its consequences for its single mother protagonist, the failure depicted in *Amator* is rooted in material reality yet cannot easily be blamed on any single person or group. It refuses a reified separation between "the people" and the socialist state; its politics are deeper. Although Filip destroys the film rather than accept

ownership of the work following his conversation with his boss, it is the kindly Osuch who has the final say for viewers, when he urges Filip to continue his filmmaking activity:

> You'll never know who you're helping or who you're hurting, just as you didn't know now. But you must obey your instincts. Something good has awoken in you. Take care of it. I've grown very fond of you, and I'm proud of you. We've all come to believe in you.

There are few such solemn and warm speeches in Kieślowski's work. I would like to close by arguing that the tenor of these words is present elsewhere, but as a difference inscribed formally, and strangely, in his otherwise documentary-like settings. One often hears Kieślowski's late films characterized as "metaphysical," referring to something non-materialist in an apparently agnostic filmmaker. I prefer a word with greater political thrust: such moments are the intrusion of *utopia* into a relentless negativity, an aspect of the transformation of "drab reality" that, as we have seen, was with Kieślowski throughout the 1970s.

It is in *Personel* that we first get a glimpse in fiction of one of Kieślowski's favorite recurrent, and indeed utopian, affective images: horses. As he states in the portrait-of-the-artist documentary *I'm So-So* (1995), horses symbolize perfect freedom and serenity – something similar to, but more than, *spokój*. On his first day at his new place of work, Romek enters the building and pauses to look outside. What he sees is a giant prop being lifted on a rope – a horse. He is somewhat transfixed by this odd moment, which nonetheless comes literally crashing back to reality as the prop slips, swings down and nearly smashes into the workers below. It is as though a reverie or dream is threatening to become nightmare: death. These horses are, I would suggest, the dream of a synthesis between *spokój* and *coś więcej* – the personal and the collective – and one

that Kieślowski longs for, but has profound ambivalence about (as also seen in the future trajectory of his films).

Horses appear next, and most significantly, in his second feature of 1976 made for television, *The Calm* (*Spokój*, 1976, released 1980). When Jerzy Stuhr's ex-con protagonist —another Gralak— is paroled and arrives at his posted work lodgings, he finds the innkeeper fretting over a broken TV that, in between the color bars, intermittently shows a program about wild horses, broadcast from an unknown source. The innkeeper puts his face up against the television and audibly thrills when he sees the horses, caressing the screen and asking in disbelief if Gralak has seen them too.

Utopian longing in *The Calm* (*Spokój*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1976)

Gralak attempts to ignore the man, but later we see how this image has stayed with him. At the film's conclusion, our hero has fallen off the fine line he has been trying to walk in his vulnerable position as an ex-con, between the labor agitation of his new workmates and a manipulative management trying to lean on and mine him for information about them. The workers, seeing the naïve protagonist as a scab and a snitch, as he indeed becomes, turn on him. In the film's closing moments Gralak lies beaten and bloody in the grass, friendless. Intercut with his muttering "spokój, spokój" in an attempt to soothe himself, he sees horses in his mind's eye, running and thundering under the cover of darkness. The hooves of these galloping horses continue

to resound even as the credits play.

I would suggest that this image also played a surprising role in the later reception of the film. Having had its initial release suppressed, *The Calm* was not seen by the public until 1980, at which point it was celebrated, it has been said, for the same reason it was censored in the first place: for its depiction of a strike.[80] With Solidarity's own labor triumph in the Polish August of 1980, this makes sense. However, unlike in the Gdańsk shipyards, the strike fails in *The Calm;* what remains is this utopian image of the horse in the mind's eye. Like Kieślowski himself, Solidarity initially had self-professed, modest aims – merely the bread and freedom that had always been promised by socialism, and was now demanded by a trade union. As time unfolded, it became something far bigger, and indeed, there were intimations of radically utopian community in the final months of the "First" Solidarity's initial existence in 1981,[81] which could be felt by those whose class interests had been rallied so spectacularly by the movement.[82] Given the origins of the horses in Kieślowski's previous film, set in the world of the theater, it also is significant that this utopian image, a personal one for its director, originates in the realm of art. What Gralak sees on the TV screen in *The Calm* refers us to the *something more* that Filip was trying to achieve through his fascination with cinema.

This, too, is what his deeply melancholy 1983 feature *No End* (*Bez końca*) is about. As in Bataille, the film concerns the nature of what one risks in communicating to others that which is inside, and its necessary proximity to death. Suffice it to mention the opening sequences of *No End.*

The Calm (*Spokój,* dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1976)

In the dark, barely visible first shot, we hear Zbigniew Preisner's choral-like music and gradually see, in a crane shot, a Polish graveyard, full of candles. We soon enter a small apartment, as the music continues; we see a man, Antoni (not Gralak this time, but a ghost, we soon realize) on the edge of a bed where his wife sleeps. He recounts, out of the darkness of this beginning, and looking directly at the camera, the circumstances that led to his death by heart attack (as Kieślowski himself was to prematurely succumb in 1995). Very similar to this opening is *Amator*'s well-known final scene, as Filip, having alienated colleagues, friends and family, and fighting self-pity and perhaps despair, turns the now 16mm camera on himself for once. Self-interrogated on the circumstances that have brought him to the present situation, Filip gulps as the camera clicks on as if weaponized, as a shift to countershot assumes the POV of the diegetic camera. Much like Antoni, he recounts, matter-of-factly, the circumstances of a particular day, but in this case it is a story of life, not death – the day his child was born, which began the film. "I got up at 6am. It was cold…" This is life risking death through determined communication, the community Maurice Blanchot sees when he reads Georges Bataille – notes written out of love, but for no friends to read, "for that would mean personal reading by personal friends." Instead, "Through its relation to the unknown… (it) initiates 'the negative community: the community of those who have no community.'"[83] Here is the radical communication that seeks to transform our divided interest, using cinema in partnership with the viewer. Kieślowski's negative community would become too painfully real after the dissolution of the positive community of Solidarity, with the imposition of martial law. But his filmmaking practice nevertheless exists in its darkness, as that which heralds the coming dawn.

My deep thanks to Masha Salazkina and Mikołaj Kunicki, who believed in this work at a very early stage, to Kamila Kuc for her perceptive comments on an initial draft, and to my editor Magda Szcześniak for her support and rigor in helping me bring this to its final form.

1 Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (New York, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988), 15.

2 Robert Esposito, "Community and Nihilism," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 29.

3 A minority of Polish critics even viewed his breakthrough feature, *Amator* (1979, discussed below), as a renunciation of politics, though its director saw it differently. See Marek Haltof's discussion in his *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 45.

4 For a summary of vehement objections to this effect from previously supportive Polish critics, see Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 125. In addition, similar critiques (though for far different reasons) came from some US critics in the 1990s, disciples of Pauline Kael. Kieślowski became a *bête noire* – an obtuse European arthouse director in the age of Tarantino. Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 51-52.

5 I allude here to Poland's most celebrated writer, and a model for many Polish artists who followed, the Romantic poet and freedom fighter Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855).

6 For what it is worth, Kieślowski never saw himself as a political filmmaker, undercutting the notion of any "shift." As he remarked, "Even the short documentary films were always about people, about what they're like. They weren't political films. Politics were never the subject." *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, ed. Danusia Stok (London: Faber, 1995), 144.

7 First formulated in his MA thesis, he continued to use this word, "partnership," despite the significant changes in his filmmaking, as late as 1995, the year before his death. ""The Inner Life is the Only Thing That Interests Me": An Interview with Krzysztof Kieślowski," Paul Coates, *Lucid Dreams*, 162.

8 Related to this is his sentiment, "I want to have a conversation (with the films I make)…a conversation is about finding in someone else what you don't have in you." Kieślowski, quoted in Tadeusz Sobolewski's *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews,* 75

9 This commonly used term was coined by East German Marxist dissident theorist Rudolf Bahro, in *The Alternative in Eastern Europe,* trans. David Fernbach (London: NLB, 1978), 7.

10 From post-war Polish film all the way back to what one might call the ur-text, Adam Mickiewicz's series of dramas known as *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve, 1822-1860).

11 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 24.

12 Bataille scorned the "Icarian" tendencies of his nemesis André Breton and Surrealism, but his attempt to weaponize affect and baseness for the Left was also rejected by unorthodox Marxists like Walter Benjamin, with whom he was friendly. For more on Bataille's project in these years see Harry Weeks, "'The Weapons of Our Adversaries.'" *Third Text* 33, no. 3 (2019): 337–53. And Gavin Grindon, "Alchemist of the Revolution: The Affective Materialism of Georges Bataille," *Third Text* 24, no. 3 (2010): 314-316.

13 Kristin Ross calls this a "crisis of functionalism." *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 25.

14 Importantly, theory met praxis in Blanchot's case. His devotion to the cause, unusual for a notable intellectual, saw him disappear, authorially speaking, into the collective, producing much copy for the Student-Writers Action Committee. These ephemeral texts sought to bring a new community into being. Maurice Blanchot, *Political Writings, 1953-1993,* trans. Zakir Paul (NYC: Fordham University Press, 2010).

15 Dominic Leppla, "Marxist Biopolitics? The Avant-Docs of Grzegorz Królikiewicz and Piotr Szulkin in People's Poland." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 11, no. 1 (2019): 22–41.

16 It is also worth mentioning that a more virulent strain of this has gained ground in the anticommunism of Poland's hard-right turn over the past decade, which implicitly or explicitly discusses the PRL as a kind of Soviet occupation of Poland.

17 Revisionists sought intraparty reform of state socialism following Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 "secret" speech denouncing Stalinism, initiating the period known as the "Thaw," and after the Hungarian Revolution and its Soviet repression later that year. See the definition by Adam Michnik in a key essay, "The New Evolutionism," Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 135.

18 Kieślowski occasionally got into hot water with colleagues for this reason. His close friend and script editor, the director Agnieszka Holland, says he was deeply wounded by an insult going around that he was "the balladeer of Communist tears." Agnieszka Holland interview, *The Scar,* DVD, Kino Video.

19 The most prominent representative figures here, respectively, are Andrzej Wajda and the younger Adam Michnik. Michnik, a key theorist among 1970s Polish dissidents, even wrote an essay on Wajda that noted their similarities. See "The Wajda Question," *Salmagundi*, No. 128/129 (Fall-Winter 2000 - Winter 2001): 137-179.

20 1929-2018. Best known for his "Silesian trilogy" of the 1970s, he also made strikingly modernist works in the "Polish Film School" era like *Nikt Nie Woła* (*Nobody's Calling,* 1960).

21 Quoted in Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema: A History* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 4.

22 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 78.

23 1947-2011. Best known for short doc *Primary School* (*Szkoła Podstawowa,* 1971) and feature *The Moth* (*Ćma,* 1980)

24 1930-2018. Early work in the didactic, Party-critical "Black Series" documentaries of the late 1950s evolved into something far more poetic and observational. His key film, for Kieślowski, was *The Musicians* (*Muzykanci*, 1960).

25 "Documentary Filmmakers Make Their Case (Poland, 1971)," Kosiński, Kieślowski, and Zygadło (First published in Polish as "Dokumentarzyści o dokumencie," in Polityka 28 (1971))," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 467.

26 Tadeusz Lubelski, "From *Personnel* to *No End*: Kieślowski's Political Feature Films," in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski* (Townbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 56. See also Clare Cavanagh, "Lyrical Ethics: The Poetry of Adam Zagajewski," *Slavic Review*, 59, 1 (Spring, 2000): 1-15.

27 For the best account of 1970 in English, see Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15-82. Kieślowski had attempted to portray the aftermath of these changes, including the promises of a regime headed by new First Secretary Edward Gierek, in the collectively made documentary *Workers '71: Nothing About us Without Us* (1971, Kieślowski, Zygadło, et al.), which was censored and re-edited to create a version more friendly to the Party. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 242.

28 Michael H. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976-1980.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 46-47.

29 Ibid, 47.

30 See David Morgan, "'We Don't Make Heroes From the Lumpenproletariat:' Remembering the 1976 Protest in Radom," *Polish Sociological Review*, No. 118 (1997): 133-147.

31 For a comprehensive (if somewhat triumphalist) history of this pivotal group, see (co-founder) Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

32 Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization, 79*.

33 Some of the most notable included Alina Pieńkowska and Bogdan Borusiewicz, a couple who were the model for Wajda's protagonists in *Man of Iron* (1981).

34 For more on how this revolutionary consciousness functioned on the granular, individuated level, see the excellent oral history of Solidarity by Jack Bloom, *Seeing through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

35 Iwona Kurz, "'Our Folks': Ordinary People in Czechoslovak and Polish Cinema around 1968," in *Visegrad Cinema: Points of Contact from the New Wave to the Present* (Prague 2010), 6.

36 *Krzysztof Kieślowski: Interviews,* Bernard and Woodward, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 27.

37 He saw how the seemingly trivial, extra material often cut from his documentaries for not serving to drive home the point, could accomplish a great deal more if used, counterintuitively, as a dramatic device. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 97.

38 In these three examples, we also have the plot of Kieślowski's masterful *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*, 1981; released 1987) in piecemeal. It contains three segments about how a young man's life changes irrevocably based on whether or not/how close he gets to catching a train to Warsaw following the death of his father.

39 Kieślowski's gifted colleague, the documentarian Marcel Łoziński, also argued along these lines, as late as 1981. Kieślowski's mentor Karabasz and his contemporary Krystyna Gryczełowska also conceded this point. Piotr Zwierzchowski, "Party in Krzysztof Kieślowski's Films," *Images: the International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication,* 24, No 33 (2018).

40 Kieślowski quoted in *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 59.

41 Ibid, 58.

42 Fernando Solanas (1936-2020), arguably the most important Third Cinema theorist, was fond of speaking of film as "research into communication." This fits Kieślowski's approach to documentary like a glove. For a classic summary of Third Cinema as conceived by Solanas, et al. as dialogic to revolutionary praxis, see Paul Willemen, "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds. Pines and Willemen (London: BFI Pub., 1994), 1-29.

43 *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, ed. Danusia Stok (London: Faber, 1995), 96-97.

44 Ibid.

45 Holland from a 1993 interview, quoted in Marek Haltof, "'Screening the Unrepresented World', Kieślowski's Early Film-Essays (*Personnel, The Scar,* and *The Calm*)," *The Polish Review* 48, no. 4 (2003): 465.

46 There is an argument to be made that the protection the units afforded film artists (a "mother's womb," Holland called them) was a double-edged sword, dislocating them, ideologically, from the average citizens they wished to represent. Perhaps Kieślowski, with his unheroic, documentarian outlook, was able better than most to sidestep this trap for artists. A typical, revealing anecdote goes: Getting the "make-up woman's child to school was more important than beginning shooting on time. We were always made

aware that film is less important than life." Interview with cinematographer Jacek Petrycki, supplement to *The Scar* (*Blizna*, 1976, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski), DVD, Kino Video (2004).

47 In the early 1970s, they attempted to found an independent studio in light of the persistent state interference that occurred after 1968. It was to have been a haven for young filmmakers keen on new ways of saying and doing things. This project, The Irzykowski Studio, was ultimately unsuccessful, but inspired the next generation of young filmmakers, who founded a studio of the same name a decade later during the ten months of greater political and cultural freedom known as the Carnival of Solidarity. See *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 43.

48 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-system* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

49 For more on this, see *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism*, ed. Janine Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), as well as a collection expanding on its insights, *Communism Unwrapped*: *Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe,* eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

50 David Ost, "The Politics of Interest in Post-Communist East Europe," *Theory and Society* 22, 4 (1993): 457.

51 Ibid, 459.

52 Ibid.

53 This is an important year in particular, in which women textile workers did what the male shipyard workers (whose heads were turned by Gierek's patriarchal discourse) could not – get him to rescind the price hike. See Padraic Kenney's excellent "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland," *American Historical Review* Vol. 104, Issue 2 (April 1999).

54 The post-1989 "minor skirmish" among political scientists and historians over who was more responsible for Solidarity, workers or intellectuals, is summarized well by Padraic Kenney, "A Solidarity Still Unexamined," "Review of Shana Penn, Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland." Habsburg, 2007.

55 The initial call is usually attributed to Krzysztof Wyszkowski, a Gdańsk carpenter, who was then put in touch with veteran workers and leaders like Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa, all of whom faced immediate reprisals. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 141.

56 Kuroń: "I was afraid of trade unions because I thought to myself, it's a bureaucratic machine that we won't be able to handle, it'll destroy us. Who will we use to run it? What resources do we have for this? I felt dizzy when I heard." Without the historical experience of those on the Baltic Coast throughout the 1970s, and limited by their class position as intelligentsia, KOR in Warsaw rejected the idea out of hand. Jacek Kuroń, Video Interview, Web of Stories, "Independent Trade Unions," 1987, filmed by Marcel Łoziński and Jacek Petrycki. https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/116.

57 Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland*, 151.

58 David Harvey, "Militant Particularism and Global Ambition," in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publ., 2010), 83.

59 Laba, 173.

60 Two widely read, influential essays speak of "totalitarianism" and "post-totalitarianism," respectively: Leszek Kołakowski, "In Stalin's Countries: Theses on Hope and Despair," trans. Kevin Devlin, *Kultura*, Vol. 5-6 (Paris, 1971). And Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

61 In Barbara and John Ehrenreich's influential formulation, this in-between "new class" is neither proletarian nor bourgeois. Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* (March-April, 1977). On how these categories developed more particularly under state socialism, see Maciej Gdula's "Kłopot z klasą średnią."

62 Notably, Jerzy Gruza, who did manage to adapt his series *Czterdziestolatek* (*The Forty-year Old*, 1974-1976) into a feature film. Marek Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 37.

63 Ibid.

64 See also Gayrati Spivak's discussion of Marx's two senses of representation, *vertreten* and *darstellan* in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Nelson, Grossberg (Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, 1988): 275-278.

65 For his part, Kieślowski stated that he felt the film itself was a failure. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, 99.

66 Klaus R. Scherpe, "Reading the Aesthetics of Resistance: Ten Working Theses," trans. James Gussen, *New German Critique* 30 (Autumn, 1983), 104.

67 For example, "Address at the Thirty-sixth Annual Dinner of the War Resisters League," 1959, found in Martin Luther King Jr. and Lewis Baldwin, *"In a Single Garment of Destiny": a Global Vision of Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

68 Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 33.

69 For an excellent study of this concept's use in Eastern Europe, see Slovenian political scientist Tomaz Mastnak, "The Reinvention of Civil Society: Through the Looking Glass of Democracy." *Archives europeennes de sociologie* 46, no. 2 (2005).

70 In *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek,* 1981), this is indeed a consistent technique. Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears,* 38.

71 Ibid, 39.

72 See note 58.

73 I will use the Polish original here, as the English title does not adequately convey what the film is about.

74 In *Amator*, "spokój" takes on a more conservative, and arguably sexist dimension, since it is Filip's wife, positioned as keeper of the 'intimate sphere,' who is deeply opposed to anything that would disturb domestic tranquility.

75 As dissimilar as the films are, *The Scar* purportedly showed Wajda, master of the historical film, how he could engage with present-day Polish reality. Frank Bren, *World Cinema 1: Poland* (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 1990), 137.

76 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 27.

77 See also Elżbieta Ostrowska's critique of his portrayal of women in his urban documentaries, contrasted with films by his female colleagues. Ostrowska, "Vanishing Women. Łódź Women Textile Workers in Polish Documentary Cinema." *Studies in Documentary Film* 11, no. 2 (2017): 121-40.

78 A scene in which Filip and Anna consummate this relationship was wisely cut from the final film.

79 For a profound example drawn from history, see the worker filmmaking activities during a factory occupation in Besanc�on, France, anticipating 1968 by a year,

discussed in Trevor Stark, ""Cinema in the Hands of the People": Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film," *October* 139 (2012): 117-150.

80 One critic actually entitled his review, "*The Calm*, or a film about Solidarity" (Winiarczyk, "*Spokój* czyli o Solidarności," 11). Haltof, *Variations on Destiny and Chance*, 157.

81 Most promising was the movement for worker self-management (*samorząd*) which swept Poland in the final months of 1981. It has been underexamined as a phenomenon, but see Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski, "Give us back our factories! Between resisting exploitation and the struggle for workers' power in Poland, 1944-1981." In *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*, eds. Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011). And Henry Norr, "Self-Management and the Politics of Solidarity," in *Worker Participation and the Politics of Reform*, ed. Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

82 A new generation of Polish sociologists and philosophers is doing exciting theoretical/historical work on Solidarity's radical aims and potential. For example, Kuba Majmurek, Kuba Mikurda, Jan Sowa, "Event in the Icebox: The Carnival of Solidarity (1980-1981) as an Outburst of Political Imagination," in *Garden Of Everyday Errors,* eds. Aneta Szylak & Karolina Sikorska (Gdańsk: Fundacja Wyspa Progress, 2015). Ewa Majewska, "The Utopia of "Solidarity" between Public Sphere and Counterpublics: Institutions of the Common Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 29 (2), 2018: 229–247.

83 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community,* 24.

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