

Introduction

Economy, Social Class and the Everyday in Polish Cinema

In this book I analyse Polish cinema from the perspective of the representation of political economy, social classes and the everyday. Given that from 1945 to 1989 in official ideology class took precedence over other markers of human identity, such as gender, age and ethnicity, one might expect that the existing histories of Polish cinema would also prioritize this aspect. However, this is not the case. The issue of class is present, but rarely given centre stage. The existing histories of Polish cinema privilege problems pertaining to Polish society as a whole, what can be described as the issue of Polishness in Polish cinema.¹ With the passage of time, class is losing rather than gaining in prominence in such studies, reflecting global trends and some specifically Polish factors. While in the 1960s and 1970s western academics had privileged class and ignored other categories, affecting human social position and identity, in the subsequent decades sociologists and historians have become wary of class as a category of analysis (Meiksins Wood 1986; Jameson 1992: 48; Rowbotham and Beynon 2001: 3; Mazierska 2015a). Ellen Meiksins Wood, who was among the first thinkers to observe this ‘retreat from class’, explains this phenomenon by the disappointment caused by the defeat of the western working class in the struggle with capital, which took place in the late 1970s (Meiksins Wood 1986: 3–24) as well as a ‘certain fastidious middle-class distaste for – not to say fear of – the working class’ (ibid.: 10–11). I will risk a statement that a ‘certain fastidious middle-class distaste for the working class’ can also be identified in the existing histories of Polish cinema, as demonstrated by their scornful attitude to socialist realism and neglect of popular cinema. Yet, it does not mean that class differences, namely differences which determine our place in the social hierarchy, ceased to matter. On the contrary, under neoliberal capitalism class matters more than ever, because the development of capitalism renders other differences between humans, for example those pertaining to religion, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, less important than under earlier

systems. For David Harvey the rejection of this category in current debates is a means of obfuscating the class character of neoliberal politics: ‘Class is the foundational inequality necessary to the reproduction of capitalism. So the answer of existing political power is either to deny that class exists, or to say that the category is so confusing and complicated (as if the other categories like race and gender are not) as to be analytically useless’ (Harvey 2010b: 231–232). Harvey’s argument espouses a wider idea, eloquently presented by Pierre Bourdieu: ‘The struggle of classification is a fundamental division of class struggle’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 138).

The Polish postwar hostility to class as a category of social inquiry might be attributed in part to the cause Harvey identifies, especially if we modify his statement, adding that class is the foundational inequality necessary to the reproduction of any system based on inequality, which also includes state socialism. Another reason is linked to the specificity of Polish history. In the nineteenth century, which in Europe gave birth to the nation states, Poland did not exist as a state, but was partitioned among Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire. And even later, when it regained independence, its existence was fragile and not quite independent. Poles thus saw their country as always at risk of being swallowed by their more powerful neighbours. They also believed that to survive, they had to keep together, rather than struggle among each other to advance the position of a specific class or modernize their social structure. As Adam Bromke argues, in Poland national independence took precedence over social reforms, and social reform was often advocated less as an end in itself than as a means of strengthening Poland against external enemies (Bromke 1962). The conviction that national unity is of paramount importance was particularly strong after Poland regained statehood in 1918. The most important Polish politician of the interwar period, Józef Piłsudski, famously said ‘I have left the streetcar called “socialism” at the stop called “independence”’ (quoted in Starski 1982: 6).

Although during the period of state socialism Marxism became the official ideology of the state, at the time the authorities and historians were again reluctant to tackle the issue of class. The official line was that Polish people were on the way to create one class: the working class. The other classes, such as peasants and small capitalists, were left over from the interwar system, and in due course would disappear. Such an approach was meant to obscure the fact that this system in fact bred a new ruling class, the nomenklatura, made up of the higher echelons of the Party, confirming the rule identified by Harvey that the best way of preserving

class inequalities is to pretend that they do not exist. Even those historians (and by extension filmmakers) who recognized and criticized the existence of the nomenklatura adopted a somewhat myopic vision of Polish society as that of (almost) the whole nation united in its opposition against the ruling elite. The divisions between workers and peasants, workers and the intelligentsia or within different categories of workers were played down. The Marxist terminology, increasingly used by the ruling elites as free-wheeling signifiers, awoke in society hostility to phrases such as the ‘working class’ or ‘class struggle’. This hostility has not been eradicated even a quarter of a century after state socialism fell in Poland, putting the researchers willing to engage with such concepts on the defensive, as they risk being seen as followers of a disgraced tradition. My ambition in this book is to demonstrate that these categories can be used productively in the study of Polish cinema and Polish history at large; the challenge is not to take them for granted, not to see them as essential and static, but dynamic. Rather than asking what is the working class and ‘class struggle’, I will describe what characters depicted in Polish films do for their living and how their advancement or demotion affects other class structures.

Polish filmmakers and film critics also eschew the everyday. The most critically acclaimed Polish films show Poles fighting against external enemies, rather than dealing with everyday problems and enjoying the small pleasures of life. Examples include the patriotic films of the interwar period, such as *Cud nad Wisłą* (*The Miracle on the Vistula*, 1921) by Ryszard Bolesławski, the films belonging to the Polish School of the late 1950s and early 1960s, or heritage films, based on Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novels, produced by Jerzy Hoffman from the late 1960s onwards. While Polish films about fighting are usually serious and are met with critics’ appreciation, work and the everyday is the stuff of genre films, which until recently have been brushed aside by historians as low quality entertainment. There are tens of dozens of book-length studies and hundreds of articles devoted to the films about the Second World War, which constitute the canon of Polish cinema (on the Polish canon, see Mazierska 2014a; Zwierzchowski and Kornacki 2014), while studies about the ‘everyday’ are rare. In part, this reflects how art or even history is created by most nations. Georges Perec observes, ‘What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front-page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist’ (Perec

2002: 177). However, this also testifies to the Polish preference to see themselves as martyrs, always suffering at the hands of others.

Finally, although the bulk of studies acknowledge the fact that Polish films reflect Polish reality, including economic reality, this general opinion is rarely supported by a more detailed investigation into how specific economic situations or economic programmes of respective Polish governments affected what we see on screen. Finally, we barely see any studies analysing how the state of the country's economy and, especially, its transformation, affected representations, except for some general remarks.

It is not my intention here to criticize the aforementioned tendencies as I see them as productive ways of conducting the history of Polish cinema. Nevertheless, the results are histories in which Polish national interest takes precedence over other aspects, and leaves many issues unexplained. In particular, shunning the everyday equals neglecting the very core of human life. This point was made many times by the leading philosopher and cultural theorist researching this concept, Henri Lefebvre, who proposed to construe the everyday as fertile humus, which is a source of life-enhancing power as we walk over it unnoticed. As he puts it, 'A landscape without flowers or magnificent woods may be depressing for the passer-by, but flowers and trees should not make us forget the earth beneath, which has a secret life and a richness of its own' (Lefebvre 1991: 87). Similarly, as Ben Highmore observes, downplaying the everyday brings the risk of neglecting the voices from below, of the dominated, for the sake of listening to the dominating elites (Highmore 2002: 1). Indeed, this project has much to do with listening to the voices from below, or finding out why they are silenced or represented in one way rather than another. Yet, as noted by the same author, there is no 'everyday' as such, there is always 'somebody's everyday' (ibid.: 1–2); most importantly, it belongs to those who have power to represent it. One of my aims is to establish to whom this power belongs.

The fall of state socialism and with it the removal of direct censorship allowed for a re-examination of class politics and class identity as portrayed on the Polish screen during the state socialist period. Another factor conducive to such exploration is the changes in film studies, especially the growing interest in popular cinema, at the expense of the auteurist paradigm. The last two decades or so saw the publishing of several book-length studies devoted to Polish popular films, which touch on the problem of class and the everyday (for example Skotarczak 2004; Talarczyk-Gubała 2007; Zwierzchowski and Mazur 2011), and several others

are in production. Moreover, there is a growing interest in the economy in relation to film, but the focus of such studies is typically on the politics and economy of film production rather than its reflection in the film's text (Adamczak 2010). The continuous preoccupation with the country's history as national history in the official discourses in Poland, as reflected, for example, in the agenda of state television and the politics of commemoration,² in part used as a means to obscure and smooth over the real class divisions effected by the shift to neoliberalism and the global rise of identity politics, associated with postmodernism, means that the eyes of film historians still tend to be set on questions other than social class, economy and the everyday.

Capitalism, True Communism and State Socialism

My study is inspired by Marx's writings, because there we can find descriptions of two systems, which prevailed in Poland in the period covered by this book, as well as of the system to which Polish society (or at least some of its sections) aspired. The first is capitalism, whose analysis fills the bulk of Marx's most famous works, *Capital* (1965, 1967, 1974), *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 2008), *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844* (1977) and *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1947). This system dominated in Poland during the interwar period and returned, albeit in a modified form, after 1989. The second system is state socialism, which ruled in Poland after the Second World War until 1989. Marx presented such a system, albeit briefly, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Finally, the ideal system of 'true' communism is evoked in *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*. I will describe them briefly, as it will help in establishing how much the reality in Poland of different periods had in common with these models.

Capitalism develops thanks to the production of surplus value, which can be described schematically as the difference between what the capitalist invests in the production of specific goods, including the wages he (as it is usually him) pays to his workforce, and what he receives when selling these goods in the market. If the capitalist is successful, this difference is bigger than is necessary to sustain his lifestyle and he is able to expand his activities by investing the accumulated surplus value, known as capital, into new ventures. Because profit is the main objective of the capitalist, he tries to reduce his costs by increasing the productivity

of his workforce. In the past this led to such phenomena as building factories, because when accumulated in one place workers were more productive than when they were dispersed, forcing labourers to work in shifts, so that no hour of potential production is lost, prolonging the working day, as well as replacing more expensive workers by cheaper ones, for example men by women and children, and local workers by immigrants (Marx 1965; Harvey 2010a, especially 109–134). The affluence and comfort of the worker is never the capitalist's objective. On the contrary, it is in the capitalist's interest that the worker is poor, because his/her poverty and need to buy their daily bread forces the worker to get up in the morning and stand in front of the machine, producing surplus value for his employer. Marx put it in not unambiguous terms in *The Communist Manifesto*:

In proportion as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc. (Marx and Engels 2008: 43)

As the above quote indicates, the character of capitalism affects the social position and experience of the worker. The richer the capitalist is, the poorer the worker. Their interests are antagonistic and lead to struggle, as manifested by the creation of workers' unions and strikes. Moreover, capitalist work leads to the 'alienation' (estrangement) of the worker. The term conveys the fact that work under capitalism exhausts the worker and reduces him to an animal-like existence. Moreover, the worker becomes lonely in the world he created – this world is alien to him and the more he produces, the more alienated he becomes. Alienation has several dimensions, reflecting four types of relations of man: to his productive activity, to his product, to other men and to the species. Alienation towards one's labour is the most important as it is the root of other forms of alienation (Marx 1977: 71). The only limit to the exploitation of workers by the capitalist system is the need to renew the workforce: 'The cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race' (ibid.: 43). Marx writes, quoting Adam Smith, that the wage the labourer receives is always a minimum wage, 'the lowest compatible with common humanity, that is, with cattle-like existence' (ibid.: 21). In a situation where there is no limit to the workforce (which is usually

the case), the capitalist has no incentive even to ensure that his labourers, real and potential, will physically survive. Should supply greatly exceed demand, a section of the workers sinks into beggary or starvation (ibid.: 21).

The more advanced capitalism is, the more it is disembodied from national institutions and traditions. Cold calculation replaces any other motivation, such as ensuring national cohesiveness. This is a situation which especially characterizes neoliberal capitalism, which in the 1980s in the West began to replace ‘embedded liberalism’, understood as a system which attempted to combine capitalism with the protection of national interests and ensuring a degree of equality (Harvey 2005a: 11). Eastern Europe also adopted neoliberalism, with varying zeal, after the fall of state socialism, partly due to the conviction of its leaders that this was the best system to overcome the problems of an inefficient economy, inherited from the previous system, and partly through international pressure, exerted by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (see part 3).

Marx also envisaged two systems which are different from capitalism. They can be described as ‘true communism’ and ‘crude communism’. Under both surplus value is not collected by individual capitalists, but by a community or its representatives. In the first one, which was meant to be introduced under conditions of advanced capitalism, when everybody can enjoy affluence, division of work is abolished, alienation disappears and people, more or less, engage in activities which bring them personal fulfilment. This is presented in a fragment from *The German Ideology*, where, borrowing from the utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, Marx muses on a possible society of the future, where

nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic (Marx and Engels 1947: 22)

The examples used by Marx are obviously dated, but the message is not. Democracy and affluence are crucial features of true communism. In such circumstances people lose interest in having private property, because what belongs to the community fulfils their needs and the majority does not allow a

minority to accumulate excessive wealth at their expense. Under crude communism surplus value is collected by the state. The author of *Capital* pointed to the similarity of this system to (ordinary) capitalism:

(For crude communism) the community is simply a community of labor and equality of wages, which are paid out by the communal capital, the community as universal capitalist. Both sides of the relation are raised to an unimaginary universality – labor as the condition in which everyone is placed and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community... The first positive abolition of private property – crude communism – is therefore only a manifestation of the vileness of private property trying to establish itself as the positive community. (Marx 1977: 95)

This fragment points to Marx's distaste towards crude communism as a system burdened with the same problems as capitalism, including high levels of alienation and uniformization of the worker, and a danger (although it is only suggested by Marx) that a privileged minority will amass property and power at the expense of the majority. At the same time one can conjecture that crude communism might under some circumstances be a necessary step to achieve true communism. Such a view was adopted in Russia, following the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, which took place not under conditions of the abundance of consumer goods, but their scarcity, with the leader of the revolution, V.I. Lenin, being its chief espouser (Lenin 1989: 120–161).

The system introduced in Poland after the Second World War was also of a crude communism type, as it was introduced in the situation of scarcity rather than abundance, in a country devastated by war, whose social structure was practically feudal. Moreover, it was in part a consequence of Poland becoming subordinate to its Eastern neighbour, the Soviet Union. I describe its version as 'state socialism' to emphasize the role of the state in collecting the surplus value and deciding what to do with it; such a term is also favoured in the literature on Eastern Europe during the Cold War (for example Berend 1996). The fact that the ultimate guarantor of state socialism was the Soviet Union does not mean that Poles were intrinsically antisocialist or inegalitarian, far from it. Most likely, if they had had a choice to participate in free elections after the Second World War, in their majority they would have voted for the parties of socialist programme or those combining socialism with Catholicism. Although state socialism fell short of

the Marxist ideal of true communism, it included some of its elements, such as granting all citizens the right to welfare through the policy of full employment and a system of benefits, such as child support, incapacity benefit, as well as universal healthcare and free education (Narojek 1991; Szumlewicz 2010). The socialist state also went some way towards granting privileges to the groups which were previously disadvantaged. I shall mention here such policies as dividing the aristocratic estates among petty peasants, giving managerial positions to ordinary workers (Narojek 1991: 23–24), building in the centre of Warsaw a large estate for working class people (Crowley 2002) and special privileges for students from working class and peasant backgrounds (Narojek 1991: 24). They were moderate in comparison with some western democracies during a similar period, but significant in the context of the Polish devastation, backwardness and political marginality after the Second World War. One can ask the question of whether the standard of living of the underprivileged and especially of those at the bottom (as their situation should always be the measure of socialism of any system) would have been any better if the political system from the interwar period had persisted after the Second World War. In my opinion, it would not. Hence, one of the objectives of this book is to defend the socialist dimension of state socialism, while illuminating when and why it fell short of socialist values. It is also from such a leftist perspective that I will look at Polish cinema. I do not pretend that it is unbiased, but every study of cultural product is biased, either explicitly or implicitly.

Everyday Polish Style

Everyday life existed and was a topic of investigation through all periods of Polish history covered in this book, but it raised particularly interesting questions during the period of state socialism.

As Ben Highmore observes, ‘it would be impossible to understand fully the importance of everyday life in social and cultural thought in the twentieth century without taking into consideration the Russian Revolution of 1917’ (Highmore 2002: 85). There are two tendencies pertaining to the everyday under state socialism. One reflects a desire to turn everyday life into a work of art; the other to organize the everydayness of revolutionary society from the centre. Highmore singles out Leon Trotsky as holding a pivotal position in regards to ideas about reconfiguring everyday life in both of these ways (ibid.: 85). The famous revolutionary also

claimed that to achieve this goal the everyday had to become an object of legitimate research.

In his work, Trotsky draws attention to the invisibility of ordinary life and to the fact that people are more the products of accumulated experience than its creators. It is easier to transform these aspects of human life which are public and refer to industrial relations than those which concern private life. To demonstrate it, he uses the term 'Rasteryaevism', whose origin lies in the novel by Gleb Uspensky, *The Morals of Rasteryaev Street*, published in 1866, about the life of workers in Tula in the second half of the nineteenth century, which is very conservative. Trotsky writes:

The brutal treatment accorded to apprentices, the servility practiced before employers, the vicious drunkenness, and the street hooliganism has vanished. But in the relations of husband and wife, parents and children, in the domestic life of the family, fenced off from the whole world, Rasteryaevism is still firmly implanted. We need years and decades of economic growth and culture to banish Rasteryaevism from its last refuge – individual and family life – recreating it from top to bottom in the spirit of collectivism. (Trotsky 2002: 85)

Although Trotsky's words refer to a specific situation in post-revolutionary Russia, they have a wider resonance and can be applied both to Poland after its various political transformations, especially after the Second World War and to the fall of state socialism. On each occasion there was a sense that everyday life lags behind political and public life: the new cannot defeat the old. In the period post-1989 this view was conveyed by the widespread use of the term 'homo sovieticus' in the most pejorative way, referring to people whose morals and manners are frozen in the old, disgraced, state socialist system.

The important point made by Trotsky is that socialist politicians and ideologues should not leave everyday life 'in peace', but attempt to change it, to ensure liberation of the lower classes, including women trapped in patriarchal relations. The changes in industrial relations are a necessary step to change morals, but they are not sufficient. Popular culture, in common with high art, was given the task of assisting politicians in this respect by showing people what is wrong with their behaviour and how to change it. But it was difficult to fulfil because, as Trotsky observes, 'art, by nature, is conservative'. Artists often share the same prejudices as the 'backward masses' and, rather than advance new ideas, promote and

normalize the old ones. Hence the role of communist parties is to influence artists to produce art which advances socialist goals, most importantly the creation of a classless society.

Trotsky's arguments are examined by Raymond Williams in his essay 'Culture Is Ordinary', even though the British author does not refer specifically to Trotsky, only to Marxism at large. Williams shares with Trotsky the view that ordinary everyday life should be researched, because it equals culture. He also argues that this culture must be interpreted in relation to its underlying system of production. Where Williams parts with Trotsky (no doubt in part due to representing a different culture) is that 'the advocacy of a different system of production is in some way a cultural directive, indicating not only a different way of life, but new arts and learning' (Williams 2002: 96). Instead he claims that 'a culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people', therefore 'it is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings can in any way be prescribed; they are made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance' (ibid.: 96). Of course, by pronouncing that culture should not be prescribed, Williams indirectly opposes such projects as the Soviet avant-garde and socialist realism, which today are seen as utopian and naive (the former) and philistine and inhuman (the latter). My own position is somewhere between these two thinkers. On the one hand, I am against prescribing culture to the people, but at the same time I do not think it should be left entirely to natural forces. Again, popular culture plays a role in shaping everyday culture and it can be seen as progressive or regressive.

Here it is worth mentioning Michel de Certeau and his concepts of 'strategy' and 'tactics', with 'strategy' relating to forces coming from above. 'Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model' (de Certeau 2002: 69). By contrast, 'the place of the tactic belongs to the other... Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities"' (ibid.: 70). It can be argued that both the functioning of state socialism and its eventual collapse was to a large a result of the strength of the tactics used by the citizens to circumvent policies and rules coming from the top.

When discussing the everyday it is difficult to ignore probably the best known author of this topic, Henri Lefebvre. In common with Trotsky and Williams, but to a larger extent, Lefebvre equals culture with the everyday, with the mundane, and is an advocate of researching it, not only for the sake of pure knowledge but for its political transformation. With Trotsky and Williams he also observes that such

research is never neutral, but always conducted from a specific class position: ‘The criticism of everyday life was in fact a *criticism of other classes*, and for the most part found its expression in contempt for productive labour; at best it criticized the life of the dominant class in the name of a transcendental philosophy or dogma, which nevertheless belonged to that class’ (Lefebvre 2002: 226, emphasis in original). From this perspective Lefebvre criticizes one movement associated with socialism, surrealism, observing that ‘surrealism rendered triviality unbearable’ (ibid.: 226).

One part of Lefebvre’s investigation of the everyday concerns the value of work and the relationship between work and leisure. He writes that

Historically, in real individuality and its development, the ‘work-leisure’ relation has always presented itself in a contradictory way. Until the advent of bourgeois society, individuality, or rather personality could only really develop outside productive labour... Bourgeois society reasserted the value of labour, above all during the period of its ascendancy; but at the historical moment when the relation between labour and the concrete development of individuality was emerging, labour took on an increasingly fragmented character... Thus at the same time a distinction was made between man ‘as man’ on the one hand and the working man on the other... Family life became separate from productive activity. And so did leisure. (ibid.: 227, emphasis in original)

Lefebvre’s observations raise interesting questions in relation to society under state socialism. There is no doubt that the socialist ideology, following Marxist ideas about ‘amateurism’ as an ideal of human life, tried to bring unity between work and leisure. In reality, however, this unity was never achieved. Moreover, at the time when work felt like leisure, this was because of the perception that the socialist workers do not work hard enough or even use their working time for leisure. This opinion was typically voiced by the intelligentsia, resentful about various privileges enjoyed by manual workers and it is notable that while during the period of state socialism studies of everyday life in Poland were relatively rare, in the last two decades we have observed an upsurge (for example Szpakowska 2008; Kienzler 2015). Most likely, they reflect the growing distance from the state socialist past, its transformation into history and, to some extent, nostalgia for bygone days.

Polish Popular and Arthouse Films

The everyday is almost synonymous with ‘ordinary’: ordinary events and common people. By the same token it contrasts with ‘extraordinary’ and ‘elitist’. If we map these categories onto cinema, then we can conjecture that this book will be concerned largely with popular cinema, as this is a cinema addressed at the ‘masses’ or ‘common people’, as opposed to elites. This is indeed the case here. However, different national cultures in different periods project their ‘common people’ differently and thus the concept of popular cinema and its realization is culture- and time-specific.

In western literature, until recently, popular cinema was routinely equated with genre cinema, whose principal domain is Hollywood. Barry Keith Grant, in an often repeated definition, states that ‘genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar-stories with familiar characters in familiar situations’. Such films were ‘exceptionally significant in establishing the popular sense of cinema as a cultural and economic institution, particularly in the United States, where Hollywood studios early on adopted an industrial model based on mass production’ (Grant 2003: xv).

Art or arthouse films are usually perceived as ‘non-Hollywood’ through their attempt to avoid stereotypes, challenging the audience and being produced outside the film ‘factories’ in a more artisanal, individualized way. Steve Neale argues that

Art films tend to be marked by a stress on visual style (an engagement of the look in terms of a marked individual point of view rather than in terms of institutionalised spectacle), by a suppression of action in the Hollywood sense, by a consequent stress of character rather than plot and by interiorisation of dramatic conflict... It is also true that Art films are marked at the textural level by the inscription of features that function as marks of enunciation – and hence, as signifiers of an authorial voice (and look). The precise nature of these features has varied historically and geographically, as it were, since it derives in part from another, simultaneous function that these features perform: that of differentiating the text or texts in question from the texts produced in Hollywood. (Neale 2002: 103–104)

Neale also observes that 'the mark of the author is used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product' (ibid.: 105). We tend to go to the cinema to see Jean-Luc Godard's new film and the new Batman movie.

Can we map these categories onto Polish cinema? To some extent we can. In particular, the division of cinema into popular and arthouse existed throughout the whole of Polish film history, and Hollywood films were an important point of reference for filmmakers of different generations. However, these categories were also blurred and complicated by various factors. First, in the interwar period, the weakness of the Polish industry led to a great pressure to make commercial films according to the genre formulas. In such circumstances art film had little chance to develop and even those directors who had the talent and ambition to make arthouse films, such as Józef Lejtes or filmmakers linked to START (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego [Society for Devotees of Artistic Film]), had to conform to the demands to make genre films. After the Second World War we can notice a changing approach to the popular/art divide. Under Stalinism this divide seems to be almost obliterated thanks to the power of the state to decree what is popular and to demand that filmmakers follow the prescribed formula. After the end of Stalinism popular and art cinema took somewhat different paths; it is more or less the case, as in the scheme described by Neale, that Poles will go to see a comedy or a Has or Kieślowski film. However, there are certain specificities pertaining to the Polish situation. One concerns the unprecedented hostility of Polish critics to genre films, especially genres seen as un-Polish, such as science fiction, with the career of Marek Piestrak perfectly illustrating this approach (Näripea 2014).

The second was the expectation that Polish art films will be popular. It is worth mentioning here Aleksander Jackiewicz, the creator of the term 'Polish School' (Szkoła polska), referring to the critically most successful movement in Polish cinema. This very term equates a certain number of films with a strong authorial stamp with what is typically Polish, namely made for ordinary Poles (Jackiewicz 1954: 9). For Jackiewicz the problem was not how to make popular genre cinema à la Hollywood in Poland, but how to make art cinema popular (Mazierska 2015b: 98). This objective was, to some extent, achieved, as proven by the fact that some films by Wajda, Ford or Kawalerowicz reached mass audiences. This was in part thanks to the willingness of the most celebrated Polish filmmakers, such as Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polanski or Wojciech Has, to engage with genre, particularly war and heritage films. However, this popular bias of Polish arthouse

cinema is largely unrecognized. At the same time, some directors of popular films, especially comedies, were seen as auteurs. In Poland during the state socialism period, people often went to see not just a Polish comedy but Bareja, Piwowski or Kondratiuk's comedy. Their directors were seen as a brand in the same way that directors of art films are.

The fall of state socialism led to the combining of two tendencies in relation to art and popular cinema. On the one hand, the high status of the film director is preserved. On the other hand, the pressure to produce popular films increased. The result is a two-tier approach to genre cinema, with more established directors turning to genres which are seen as more prestigious, such as melodrama and heritage films (Ostrowska 2016) and the less established left to make comedies, horrors or criminal films. However, this situation is expected to change, with the pressure to produce 'popular arthouse cinema' growing, mirroring the situation in western European countries.

When critics talk about popular and art cinema, they normally exclude documentary films from such discussions; it is seen as beyond this divide. However, numerous Polish documentary films can be seen as both popular and art: popular, because many of them were shown in cinemas before the main programme, hence enjoyed mass audience (even if this audience did not choose to see them); and art, on account of the high status of their directors, such as Kazimierz Karabasz or Wojciech Wiszniewski.

Cinema, Ideology and the Artists' and Viewers' *Weltanschauung*

My book does not concern Polish economy, class system and the everyday as they exist objectively (if this can be established at all), but their filmic representations. I will treat films as historical documents, from which we can learn how people at a specific time looked, what they ate, where and how they lived and worked, and even what they thought.³ In many ways, films are more convincing documents than historical books or drawings, because they mechanically reproduce the world in front of our eyes, as André Bazin and his followers argued. They are particularly useful tools in capturing the everyday, the ordinary stuff of life, which historical books and statistical accounts tend to neglect. Throughout this book I will compare films with other types of documents, such as books and articles on the political and economic history of Poland.

Although films reproduce the world, they do not do so indiscriminately, but make specific choices and transform the material they use to send a message; hence they are a terrain of ideology. This view was put succinctly by Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, who wrote

Clearly, the cinema 'reproduces reality': this is what a camera and film stock are for – so says the ideology. But the tools and techniques of filmmaking are a part of 'reality' themselves, and furthermore 'reality' is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology. Seen in this light, the classic theory of cinema that the camera is an impartial instrument which grasps, or rather is impregnated by, the world in 'concrete reality' is an eminently reactionary one. What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology. Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology. (Comolli and Narboni 1992: 684–685)

I agree with Comolli and Narboni that the world offered to the cinemagoer is filtered through ideology, but so is the world proposed in other types of historical documents and ordinary speech. There is no escape from ideology, as there is no escape from language. The only thing we (the professional and amateur film historians) can do is to identify what values and opinions the films transmit and the reasons for that.

It is also argued that different types of films have different relationships to the dominant ideology (which is almost always regarded by the authors as a bad thing). For example, the higher a film's budget and the more it is geared towards the mass audience, the more likely it is to accord with the dominant ideology. Such a view chimes with the opinions of many filmmakers who are credited with successfully breaking its chains, such as Jean-Luc Godard and Raul Ruiz. The latter said:

I gradually came to understand that every spectator of the movies today is really a 'connoisseur', that is, the opposite of a spectator. I take the expression of 'connoisseur' in Benjamin's sense: in cinema as in sports, the spectators understand what's going on, to the point where they can anticipate what happens next, because they know the rules, by learning or by intuition... That's

why commercial cinema presupposes an international community of connoisseurs and a shared set of rules for the game of social life. In that sense, commercial cinema is the ‘totalitarian social space par excellence’... The spectator/connoisseur compares the scenes less with his private life than with other scenes watched in other movies. (Ruiz 2005: 58–59)

The opinion that commercial and non-commercial cinema have different relationships to the dominant ideology also prevails among historians of Eastern European cinema. The latter, arthouse, auteurist films are typically regarded as being more critical of the state and hence granted more attention than popular and genre films. However, not all critics agree with the view that mainstream cinema is conformist while non-mainstream is not. In their discussion of ideology Comolli and Narboni do not differentiate between ‘commercial’ and ‘mainstream’ films on the one hand and ‘arthouse’ and ‘auteurist’ films on the other in respect to ideology, claiming:

The majority of films in all categories are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them. Whether the film is ‘commercial’ or ‘ambitious’, ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’, whether it is the type that gets shown in art houses, or in smart cinemas, whether it belongs to the ‘old’ cinema or the ‘young’ cinema, it is most likely to be a re-hash of the same old ideology. (Comolli and Narboni 1992: 685)

This category is contrasted by Comolli and Narboni with films which attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts: either by direct political action, on the level of the ‘signified’, that is, when they deal with a directly political subject; or on the level of form, on the ‘signifiers’, when they break down of the traditional way of depicting reality. They also stress that ‘only action on both fronts, “signified” and “signifiers”, has any hope of operating against the prevailing ideology. Economic/political and formal action have to be indissolubly wedded’ (ibid.: 686).

In this context it is also worth mentioning Jacques Rancière, who in his essay ‘The Paradoxes of Political Art’ recognizes that there are different types of political art or types of pedagogy attributed to critical art, which he describes as representational mediation, ethical immediacy and aesthetic distance. Rather than arguing in favour of any of them as most efficient in challenging the dominant ideology, Rancière singles out that which disrupts the consensus (introducing

dissensus) by ‘breaking with the sensory self-evidence of the “natural” order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific “bodies”, that is to specific ways of being, seeing and saying’ (Rancière 2013: 139). Politics, including political art, is that which breaks with the existing order (which Rancière describes as the order of police) by inventing new subjects, most importantly bringing into visibility those who remained hidden.

If we use such rigid criteria, then we shall conclude that the vast majority of films produced in Poland complied with the dominant ideology, not least because the films conveying oppositional political messages tended to use traditional form and films engaging in formal experiments tended to contain little political content. However, the majority of films, produced in Poland and elsewhere, are not in a simple relation to dominant ideology. They pick and mix elements from different ideologies, often in an incoherent fashion. Or, to put it differently, the meaning of a film, as that of other media, results from the juxtaposition of different discursive codes. Ideological ambiguity might be a consequence of a film being a product of the collaboration of people with different political agendas, such as scriptwriters, directors and actors, as well as censors, who might neutralize each other in the course of film production. Films also end up being ambiguous for other reasons, such as the conscious desire of their makers to render them less obvious and more interesting for the audience and to appeal to a wider pool of viewers than those following a specific political agenda. In Poland, where mainstream films made in the interwar period and under state socialism had a particularly bad press largely due to their ideological transparency, the urge to make ideologically ambiguous films was particularly strong. We shall also add that interpretations of films are not passive, but active. The spectator not only decodes what is put in the film, but often transforms the message intended by the film’s author, drawing on her/his knowledge and adjusting the film’s messages to his/her opinions. Interpretations by the same viewer might also change with the passage of time. In summary, although I agree that the dominant ideology leaves its distinct mark on films and there exists an ‘international community of connoisseurs’ able to decipher some of the film’s messages, as Ruiz claims, there are also messages which can be picked up or created only by a narrower pool of viewers.

Claiming that films reflect the dominant ideology raises the question of what ideology is and when a specific ideology becomes dominant. Ideology is typically

defined as a system of ideas governing the behaviour of a specific group of people in a specific area. We encounter terms such as ‘feudal’, ‘capitalist’, ‘socialist’, ‘religious’, ‘patriarchal’ or ‘feminist’ ideology. When the majority of people accept a given ideology, then it becomes dominant. In the Marxist discourse, dominant ideology is linked to the issue of power, which arises from possessing material things: slaves in the times of slavery, feudal estates in medieval times, money under capitalism:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels 1947: 89)

Stuart Hall adds:

The concept ideology... entails the proposition that ideas are not self-sufficient, that their roots lie elsewhere, that something central about ideas will be revealed if we can discover the nature of the determinacy which non-ideas exert over ideas. The study of ‘ideology’ thus also holds out the promise of a critique of idealism, as a way of explaining how ideas arise. (Hall 1978: 10–11)

The domination of a particular ideology is reflected in the parameters of discourse, in what appears to be a natural subject of discussion and what an unfashionable or taboo topic. This affects, for example, the way histories are written; each epoch has a predilection to certain perspectives and ‘buzzwords’ expressing them. Again, Marx identified this rule, claiming that:

during the time that the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc., were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. ... For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, put it in an ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality, and

represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (Marx and Engels 1947: 40–1)

Ideology also speaks (metaphorically) through silences. This aspect of ideology was discussed at length by Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton. In his introduction to Macherey's seminal works, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Eagleton observes that, according to Macherey, literature represents ideology, but it does not mean that it passively reflects it, but rather that it 'stages' or 'produces' it. In doing so, 'it highlights those limits, absences and contradictions in the ideology which are not so visible to us in everyday life, where ideology is, so to speak, too close to the eyeball to be objectified' (Eagleton 2006: ix). In order to establish what the text says, we have to find out what it does not say, capture the text's 'symptomatic repressions, evasions, slippages, self-contradictions and eloquent silences' (ibid.: viii). Eagleton refers to the silences, repressions and absences in the individual art works, but we can also talk about them in relation to movements and periods.

Although the dominant class attempts to impose its worldview on the rest of the society, there is no direct translation between the interests of the dominant class and the ruling ideas. The concept of the dominant ideology is particularly thorny in relation to state socialism. This is because state socialism was meant to be based on the principles of Marxism, most importantly egalitarianism and abolishing alienation of labour. Polish society under this system was indeed more egalitarian than in the interwar period and after the fall of state socialism. However, it fell short of these ideals. As a result, the ruling elite were reluctant to discuss them, fearing that they risked exposing their hypocrisy or incompetence. I will also argue that they were too weak politically and intellectually to create an ideology which would effectively keep hold of people's minds and defend their class interests. This 'ideological void' 'at the top' was increasingly covered with the 'communist speak' of the sort George Orwell mocked. At the bottom, it was filled, to a large extent, by the anti-communist messages promulgated by the Catholic Church. The overall result was the co-existence of a plethora of competing ideologies circulating in Poland at the time, some unofficially, but many officially, including in films.

Paradoxically, although Poland during the state socialism period, in common with other countries belonging to the Soviet bloc, is often described as 'totalitarian' (for example Świda-Ziemia 1998; on the criticism of this approach, see Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009; Majmurek and Szumlewicz 2010), which implies that the state

tightly controlled all aspects of citizens' lives and their artistic production, the films produced in this period, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, reveal a critical attitude to state socialism, to the extent that some critics use the term 'dissident cinema' to describe part of the official film production of this period. The existence of such cinema was also explained by factors such as the porous character of socialist censorship, with some censors being 'liberal', the ability of some directors to write 'innocuous scripts', into which subversive messages were smuggled during the shooting (Adamczak 2012), and a desire on the part of the authorities to project to the West an image of Poland as a country which allows or even encourages ideological pluralism (Ostrowska 2012). Such factors have to be considered when accounting for the representation of the everyday.

The Content and Structure of This Book

The purpose of this book is twofold. First, I want to find out what we can learn about the Polish economy, class structure and its everyday experience by studying Polish films. I treat films as historical documents; the better we use them, the more we are able to compare them with other historical documents, most importantly those related to Polish politics and economy. Second, I will try to identify whether Polish films reveal a specific class bias by, for example, privileging the representation of specific classes and under-representing others, and assessing their members in certain ways, as victors or victims, people who contribute to the country's wealth or who act as parasites on other classes. I will thus treat Polish films as political works which I will compare with other political works. Of specific interest for me is the relationship between the ruling class and the subordinate classes. I want to find out how it changed over the decades and what were the main factors precipitating these changes.

Talking about class cannot be separated from discussing other aspects of human identity, most importantly gender, because the division of labour, practically as long as humankind has existed, has been organized along gender lines, with some positions reserved for men and some for women. This results in part from the differences in human biology. Women give birth and hence are attributed the task of looking after children to a greater extent than men. Men are physically stronger, therefore have traditionally been expected to engage in heavy work, such as hunting and later working in the mines and on construction sites.

However, throughout the course of history, this simple division of labour has been complicated. For example, following the end of the Second World War, which resulted in Poland losing a large chunk of its menfolk and the country embarking on an ambitious programme of industrialization, women were encouraged to take upon themselves masculine tasks. In my study I will show how the changing position of women as workers was depicted in Polish films. Another aspect of identity affecting class position is age. It is assumed that with age comes authority, as during their lifetime people are expected to climb the social ladder. However, during times of political transformation, this rule tends to be reversed: the older people are thrown from their pedestals to make space for the young ones. I will investigate whether the films chosen for my analysis follow this pattern. Class structure is not static. It is affected by major political events and itself affects the course of history. This rule is reflected in the Marxist saying that human history is the history of class struggle. On the smaller scale of Polish history, we also have to take into account other factors whose class character is less obvious, such as the two world wars.

I decided to divide my book into three parts, each reflecting on a different economic and political system which ruled in Poland in a specific time. The first part is devoted to the interwar period, when Poland became an independent country after over one hundred years of partition, and which was accompanied by the suppression and censorship of indigenous culture. During this period Poland also built its own film industry. Poland of the interbellum was a capitalist country, dominated by small industry, and the Polish film industry also fits this description. Its main objective was to attract as large an audience as possible, which explains the fact that the majority of films produced during this period is genre cinema. Although film production and distribution were at this time in private hands, the state played a significant role in stimulating film production and distribution by a system of subsidies and tax regulation, as well as in direct censorship. The films of this period both flattered its audience and attempted to respond to a certain 'call from above' by helping to build a cohesive, harmonious and modern society.

The second and longest part of my book deals with the postwar period, up to the fall of state socialism in 1989. During this period the largest chunk of the economy, including cinema, was nationalized. The state directly affected the production and exhibition of films and took advantage of its monopolist position. However, politics and the economy changed significantly during this period and cinema engaged with these transformations. The overall trend, although applied

unevenly, was towards increased liberalization and leaving important decisions in the hands of filmmakers. In the last period of the existence of People's Poland, we can observe a tendency towards a capitalist mode of producing and exhibiting films and an important reduction of the state's censoring function. The relatively weak requirement that the films should be profitable and the strong expectation that they would play a cultural and educational role led to the domination of a certain version of auteurist paradigm in the cinema of state socialism. The privileging of auteurist cinema is even more noticeable in film criticism and film history concerning this period, with historians treating popular cinema with neglect and contempt. It should be added that a similar phenomenon pertains also to the European West, reflecting the fact that state socialism and embedded liberalism have much in common, in particular a strong state which is willing and able to shape the country's culture.

The third part discusses the postcommunist period, which coincides with the introduction of western-style parliamentary democracy and neoliberal rules into the Polish economy. This shift means, primarily, privatization, financialization and commodification of all spheres of the economy, including culture. In line with this general rule, many film institutions which belonged to the state, including film studios and cinemas, were privatized. However, cinema has remained a protected good in Poland, especially since the setting up of the Polish Film Institute in 2005, which heavily subsidizes film production and has a significant influence on the type of films produced and distributed in Poland.

Of course, it is impossible to cover all Polish films engaging with the problems of economy, class and the everyday in a book of a standard length. Therefore, in my selection I privilege films which I suspect of representing mainstream views, chiefly full-length fiction films produced for a cinema audience, which attracted popular and critical attention. One could describe them as canonical films if not for the previously mentioned fact that Polish canon is dominated by historical films. I also consider a number of documentary films. This is because in Poland, especially during the period of socialist rule, documentary films enjoyed a high status, exceeding that in the West, and at times also a large audience. Hence they cannot be seen as occupying the margin of national film production.⁴ At the same time, the format of documentaries, namely short films – less expensive and quicker to produce than their feature film counterparts – make them an ideal medium for capturing the everyday (for example the specificity of different professions) and reacting quickly to changes in the country's politics and economy. A documentary

can be seen as a corrective of the fiction film, by offering the viewer less manicured images of reality and focusing on characters whom fiction films are unwilling to represent, such as victims of adverse circumstances (Winston 2008: 46–54) or ‘others’ (Nichols 2001: 3–13), as well as simply ordinary people, as opposed to heroes. While fiction films tend to have individual protagonists, documentary films more often focus on group protagonists. This aspect is taken up by Harun Farocki, who observes in relation to the film by the Lumiere Brothers: ‘Immediately after the workers hurry past the gate, they disperse to become individual persons, and it is this aspect of their existence which is taken up by most narrative films. If, after leaving the factory the workers don’t remain together for a rally, their image as workers disintegrates’ (Farocki 2002). This is important to me because, whenever possible, I would like to capture the moments when a class is presented as a class, namely as a group of people.

Although in my work I try to detect wider tendencies, I do so through in-depth analysis of selected examples rather than offering a broad survey, focusing on the film’s characters and narratives. In each chapter I also briefly present the state of Polish cinema at the time, so that the reader can locate my examples in a larger framework. Following Eagleton’s and Macherey’s advice, I devote some attention to what is un- or under-represented, such as peasants, who constituted the largest class in the interwar period but hardly feature in the cinema of this period, and try to account for specific omissions and silences. I account for what was specific in a cinema in a given decade, drawing attention to the motif of shock workers in the 1950s, strikes in the cinema of the 1980s and unemployment in the films made in the interwar period and after 1989. Simultaneously, I organize my material in a way which allows the reader to compare the decades. For this reason, in each chapter I not only consider economy, class, work, consumption and leisure but, as much as available material allows, I also look at the same types of characters, such as miners, peasants and sex workers. Throughout I also attempt to identify how the role and self-perception of filmmakers has changed over the course of Polish history.

Each part of the book and each chapter also includes a discussion of the political and economic situation of Poland in a given period, presented against some wider trends. This is more extensive than in other histories of Polish cinema known to me, amounting to about 30 per cent of the entire book. The reason is that this part serves me not only as a context, but as a principal hypotext, with which I compare my hypertext⁵ – the chosen examples of films. I am interested in

whether these texts match each other. To put it differently, I want to find out where, to use Marxist categories, there is a fit between the base and the superstructure or rather a fit between a certain discourse about the base and that of the superstructure.

Throughout this book, openly or implicitly, I employ Marxist categories. This is because I regard them as useful in analysing the topics which interest me, including that of class. Moreover, during a large chunk of twentieth-century history the Polish state was officially Marxist; the state was meant to implement Marxist principles and the artists to convey Marxist ideology. In contrast, after 1989 the authorities rejected the previous period *tout court* on the grounds that the system was forced upon Poles by the Soviets, its economic principles were irrational, and it precluded personal freedom. The new system was meant to eradicate the economic and social pathologies, and purging it of its Marxist bias was one way to achieve this. Writing this book is for me an opportunity to assess the tangled relationship between Poland and Marxism during the period of People's Poland, as well as before the Second World War and after the fall of state socialism. By the same token, I want to engage in a debate about the viability of communism as a political and economic system, or what Alain Badiou names the 'communist hypothesis' (Badiou 2010) and about the immorality and irrationality of capitalism. Inevitably, to achieve this goal, I will focus on some historical processes and neglect others that might be regarded by some readers as more important. But, as I already mentioned, there is no way to write an unbiased history of cinema; we can only acknowledge this bias or try to hide it.

Notes

1. The interest in how Poles see themselves as Poles is conveyed by the titles of the histories of Polish cinema, published in Poland and abroad: Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj's *The Modern Cinema of Poland* (1988), Marek Haltof's *Polish National Cinema* (2002), Paul Coates's *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (2005) and Tadeusz Lubelski's *Historia kina polskiego: Twórcy, filmy, konteksty* (2009a).
2. A poignant example of this preoccupation is the lavish commemorations of the Warsaw Uprising, usually presented as the fight of the united nation against its foreign enemies, as opposed to the event in which the Polish intelligentsia played a crucial role.
3. I omit from my discussion the problem of film as a historical document, because I deal with it at length in one of my earlier books, *European Cinema and Intertextuality: History, Memory and Politics* (Mazierska 2011).

4. A testimony of the importance of the documentary genre in Poland is the large number of publications devoted to this genre (for example Janicka and Kołodyński 2000; Jazdon 2009; Hendrykowska 2015).
5. In my understanding of the terms 'hypotext' and 'hypertext' I follow Robert Stam (Stam 2000: 65–66).