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**How Does Cinema  
Become Lost?  
The Spectral Power  
of Socialism**





(Fig. 1)  
*East Side*, Łódź, Poland, 2004.  
 © Kamil Turowski.

## SOCIALIST SHIVERS

I remember an old movie theatre, the Kino Popularne, in my hometown, Łódź, Poland—a dilapidated building on Ogrodowa Street. During the brief period of Solidarity, in the early 1980s, this place was known for showing politically risky Polish films, as well as foreign productions deemed by the socialist censors to be unsuitable for Polish audiences. In front of a screen made of a thick linen bed sheet, moviegoers sat on small, uncomfortable, hardwood folding chairs to watch films, many of which would soon be completely banned from public viewing. Among them were Andrzej Chodakowski and Andrzej Żajczkowski's 1981 *Workers '80* (*Robotnicy '80*), and Andrzej Wajda's 1981 *Man of Iron* (*Człowiek z żelaza*), a sequel to his 1977 *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z marmuru*) concerning the Gdańsk shipyard strike of 1980 and the beginnings of the Solidarity movement.

This short-lived flare of artistic dissidence ended with the abrupt and brutal imposition of Martial Law on the night of December 12, 1981. On the morning of December 13, citizens woke up to dead phones and radio and TV broadcasts of General Wojciech Jaruzelski's sombre voice and his mannequin-like body in a military uniform, a hauntingly grotesque transmission one can now easily find on YouTube. Using the fuzzy rhetoric of national catastrophe, of unspecified chaos and demoralisation, Jaruzelski claimed that this was a 'dramatic moment in Polish history' when 'our motherland has been brought to

the precipice'. He then announced the formation of a Military Council of National Salvation (Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego), in order to 'rescue' the Polish nation from subversive and harmful activities of undefined dissidents. This military coup was performed, per Jaruzelski's assurance, in accordance with the Polish Constitution.

Such was the formal initiation to Martial Law, which translates directly from the Polish as 'A State of War', and rhetorically reveals the paradox of this historical moment: while there was no actual war, the Military Council of National Salvation and Jaruzelski, the General of the Army, appropriated the top national power and authority reserved for wartime. This was the beginning of the period which for many Solidarity activists meant political round-ups, bans on professional work, dispossession, and imprisonment in internment camps; for 'ordinary' citizens it meant the austere era of military curfew, prohibition on mobility, tightened surveillance via officially tapped phones, and absurdly real ration coupons for butter, sugar, meat and almost every other necessity, such as gas, shoes and laundry detergents. On the eve of Martial Law—and, symbolically, it was one of the most persistently cold and harsh winters—Wojciech Marczewski's *Shivers* (*Dreszcze*) premiered, a film considered today in Poland a cult classic. *Shivers* acquired this status not only because it offered a compelling critique of institutionalised indoctrination, featuring a coming-of-age story of a teenage boy who is enticed to inform on his parents, but also because, having been screened right before the imposition of Martial Law, it was a powerful foretelling of what was to come. Martial Law was indeed a time of cultural and social shivering—tanks and armoured vehicles in the snowy streets, armed troops everywhere—which only slowly eased into the next stage, the 'period of normalisation' (1983–1986), an officially used term ironically acknowledging that the nation was finally emerging from the abyss of abnormality.

Mindful of this historical background, my essay discusses various pre- and post-1989 Polish motion picture and TV productions and considers different meanings and registers of 'lost cinema'. The notion of the loss of cinema

invites complex reflections: which films have been lost and for whom? What are the ideological issues that motivated deliberate instances of ‘shelving’ a particular piece of art in the socialist era? What specifically were the reasons that rendered some films ‘risky’ for the well-being of the nation? Focusing my analysis on socialist censorship but also, perhaps surprisingly, on the still unexamined post-socialist censoring tactics, I will probe how socialism, once officially celebrated and now repudiated, continues to haunt the nation, imprinting its spectral power on the New European cultural imaginary. Such an argument brings me back to Jacques Derrida’s discussion of spectrology, or the history of ghosts and hauntings, in *Specters of Marx*, and his famous line: ‘It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost* and *with it* ... [out] of respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born.’ He speaks of spectres in the context of an ethical responsibility toward the ghosts, ‘be they victims of war, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of ... any of the forms of totalitarianism’ (Derrida 1994: xix).<sup>1</sup>

Thinking about Derrida’s contention, I look at *East Side* (Fig. 1), a photograph that hangs above my desk, shot on Wschodnia Street, not far from where Kino Popularne used to be. I remember how many times, as a darkroom assistant, I helped develop it, trying to catch ‘just right’ the eerie hollowness of the mannequin’s gaze. That gaze needed to convey at once blindness, lack of vision, and a shiny, almost mesmerising emptiness. It was one of those impossibly difficult photographs to bring to life; it needed to perform its own ghostliness. The volatile angle of the shot aims at instigating a feeling of dizziness in the viewer. It is one of my favourite images; it tugs at my heart, unhinges me, always, evoking remnants of my socialist past, and it simultaneously sends shudders along my skin. Always, its eerie beauty fixes my gaze. I think of *East Side* as a visual metaphor for socialist shivers, an image which provokes me to ask: how can one deal with the socialist ghosts without either romanticised nostalgia or

disavowing amnesia? How can one acknowledge these ghosts without either a leftist lament that the socialist experiment is over, or an impulse to automatically demonise the era of totalitarian repression? How can one perform such ghostly speaking without simply offering, to use Charity Scribner’s words, a ‘requiem for communism’? As a relative of mine reminds me, wanting to defend our lives, no doubt, ‘After all, we all *lived through* this time, and look at us! We are fine, we have survived! Contrary to what the outside world may think, we managed to lead pretty normal lives!’

The many cases of banning politically charged films during socialism in Eastern Europe were well-known, at least to the local audiences. In Poland, the films that are most memorable and are often cited within the context of censorship include Jerzy Domaradzki’s *Great Race* (*Wielki bieg*, 1981), Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*, 1981), Janusz Zaorski’s *Mother of Kings* (*Matka Królów*, 1983), Jerzy Skolimowski’s *Hands Up!* (*Ręce do góry!*, 1981), Ryszard Bugajski’s *Interrogation* (*Przesłuchanie*, 1982), and Agnieszka Holland’s *A Woman Alone* (*Kobieta samotna*, 1981). Each of these ‘shelved films’ (*półkownicy*) was banned from release and distribution by the ruling Party authorities, who feared their ‘dangerous’ portrayal of socialist reality. Even though each film has, of course, its own complicated history, I am nevertheless interested in the discussion of the meta-narrative of censorship, which, as I would like to propose, might be productively apprehended through the concept of socialist schizophrenia. On the one hand, film production in socialist Poland, as in many other East European nations under the Soviet grip, was regarded as a particularly potent creative practice worthy of state support, following Lenin’s famous saying that ‘film is the most important of the arts’. Łódź, for example, is the home to the National Film School, an institution of national pride, which, unlike many other educational facilities, was allowed artistic autonomy and flourished during socialism, earning the city the name ‘HollyŁódź’. The school has an internationally recognised reputation and is often cited in the context of its

famous graduates: Krzysztof Kieślowski, Roman Polański, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Jerzy Skolimowski, Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Zanussi.

On the other hand, the unspoken mandate that the film-makers were obliged to respect had to do precisely with *not* showing what people knew intimately and experienced daily in various degrees, depending on their social and class status: economic misery, privation, surveillance, treachery, bribery. In other words, paradoxically, all experiential displeasure, all the socialist ‘shivers’, all shades of socialist violence, metaphorical and material, were off representational limits.<sup>2</sup> The website, *Censorship, or the World without Words* (*Cenzura, czyli świat bez słów*) (Fig. 2), devoted to the exploration of censorship in a global context and impressively created by first and second year high school students from Stalowa Wola in Poland, aptly summarises these tactics:

The goal of censorship was to make sure that the citizens of the People’s Republic of Poland were fed only contrived propaganda images of the social strata. And so, a farmer was supposed to be pictured driving a tractor, wearing sparkling clean clothes and a permanent smile on his face; a factory worker was also supposed to appear in his Sunday best, but preferably in a three-piece suit at the moment of his ceremonious acceptance of an honour bestowed on him for outstanding accomplishments at work; finally, higher-ranking representatives of the ruling party needed to project the look of a patriotic concern for the welfare of the entire nation; they also had to wear three-piece suits, accompanied by serious facial expressions. In fact, there are documented cases that reveal how censors prohibited public distribution of photographs merely because

they showed politicians laughing or giving speeches while wearing sweaters.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, a film such as Wajda’s *Man of Iron*, which, in its partly fictionalised narrative, includes, for example, actual newsreels showing scenes of brutal militia attacks on protesting workers, was an obvious candidate for shelving. Similarly, Skolimowski’s *Hands Up!*, a legendary film banned for over two decades, features a famously offensive scene in which students of the Union of Polish Youths (*Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP*) put up a huge poster with a picture of Stalin, evocatively giving the figure not one but two pairs of eyes (Fig. 3). In one of the interviews, Skolimowski describes *Hands Up!* as ‘a silent scream ... a provocation delivered to 32 million Poles about what is wrong’ (Hodson 2003).



(Fig. 3)  
*Hands Up!*, dir. Jerzy Skolimowski, 1967.

Against such obvious visual assaults, the case of, for example, Holland’s *A Woman Alone* in more subtle ways confirms the need to censor socialist displeasure because, unlike *Man of Iron*, it does not offer direct images of imprisonment or police cruelty, and, unlike *Hands Up!*, it does not evoke explicit metaphors for Stalinist surveillance. Instead, *A Woman Alone*



(Fig. 2)  
*Cenzura, czyli świat bez słów*  
(*Censorship, or the World without Words*).

1 I am indebted to my colleague, Amy Novak, for years of invigorating discussions about spectrality and its relation to the politics of memory, history and the socialist past; see Novak 2004.

2 For a brief history of Polish censorship in cinema, see, e.g., Misiak 2003.

3 See <http://www.cenzura.zyxist.com/index.php/prl>. Translation from the Polish is my own.

concentrates on representing the gendered horrors of being a single mother living in dire economic and social circumstances during a pivotal moment in Polish history—between the beginning of the Solidarity movement and the end of the socialist era.<sup>4</sup> The protagonist, Irena, a postal worker who delivers mail to people’s homes all day long and is constantly on her feet, is ironically depicted through images of enclosure, claustrophobia and liminality. When she befriends Jacek, an out-of-work miner on disability, his stiff, dragged leg, always on display for others to comment on and scorn, visually expresses his restrained movement as well.

The scene of their first encounter evocatively highlights the sense of suffocation they both experience, in different ways. When she walks into his apartment to deliver his disability check, she faints from fatigue, crashing under the heavy weight of her mailbag. Panicked, Jacek frantically attempts to open a window to let in the air and revive Irena. As he struggles with the stuck window that cannot, in fact, be opened, the protracted drama of this scene metaphorically speaks to the couple’s enclosure within small, stifling spaces. The film, poetically rendered in its nuanced brutality, comments on the theme of socialist entrapment and socialist exhaustion, revealing a landscape fully intolerable of any kind of difference. For Irena, the oppression she feels is intimately tied to her female aloneness: ‘I am a nobody. I didn’t fight in the war. I don’t have a car. I work for pennies. Nobody respects me.’ For Jacek, the experience of viscerally felt abjection is all about his injured body, his scarred leg, and thus about his wounded masculinity: ‘I don’t feel right here. People are so unfriendly when someone is a little different.’

## SOCIALIST SCREAMS

*Supposing truth is  
a woman, what then?*  
—Friedrich Nietzsche,  
*Beyond Good and Evil*, 1917

In this context, Bugajski’s *Interrogation* occupies a distinct place within the history of banning socialist shivers. The film, which circulated

on illegal video copies the way, for example, George Orwell’s book *1984* was passed from hand to hand back then, was officially released only in 1989. On the surface, the reasons for shelving Bugajski’s film seem self-evident, as the narrative offers painful images of imprisonment, torture, cruelty and political betrayal, delivering an uncompromising indictment of the Stalinist regime in Poland. Marek Haltof, a historian of Polish cinema, claims: ‘*Interrogation* is arguably the strongest work on the Stalinist past ever made in Central Europe. The film was a battering ram, revealing hidden taboos; like a bulldozer, it demolished existing images about the Stalinist period.’ (Haltof 2002: 213.)

Similarly, Western critics, while giving *Interrogation* very favourable reviews, firmly situate the film’s narrative in the Poland of the fifties. For example, Brian Johnson in ‘A Stalinist nightmare’ writes: ‘A devastating assault on Stalinism, *Interrogation*, is one of the most harrowing dramas of political repression ever filmed.’ (Johnson 1990: 80.) Expressing similar sentiments, Michael Calleri observes: ‘*Interrogation* is a terrifying look at the abuses carried out under a Stalinist system.’ (Calleri 1991: 47.) But what these reviewers fail to recognise is Bugajski’s subversive narrative shift, which locates the present political arena in the historical past, thus offering images of the brutality and absurdity of the Stalinist era, which, metaphorically, function as a vigorous critique of the present, implicitly marking the film as unsafe and particularly treacherous.

What the critics also overlook in their comments is yet another, hardly ever examined level: that is, the fact that too often critical discourses historicising socialist totalitarian practices in Eastern Europe leave out the discussion of how socialism was intricately interwoven with patriarchal and hetero-normative ideologies, thereby suggesting that cruelties suffered under the socialist regime were gender-neutral. By not addressing patriarchal dynamics that operated alongside the socialist discourses and practices, we risk neglecting the specifics of women’s privation and the universalisation of historically grounded oppression that is, in fact, gender-marked.

And this is precisely what *Interrogation* articulates so eloquently by chronicling the story of the physical and emotional abuse of Antonina Dziwisz (Tonia, portrayed by Krystyna Janda), who is imprisoned by the secret police on charges incomprehensible to her. She is a cabaret singer in 1950s Warsaw and, one night after her performance, having been approached by two men who introduce themselves as admirers of her talent, she goes with them to a restaurant where they entice her to drink, feigning camaraderie. While she thinks she is safely being taken home afterwards, in fact, while almost unconscious, she is driven to a state prison to undergo years of agonising interrogations and torture. She goes almost enthusiastically to the first encounter with her interrogator, thinking that the meeting with the officer will result in the authorities' realisation that she has been imprisoned by mistake. The unnerving questioning reveals to her that she is profoundly wrong:

Officer: Tell me about yourself.

Tonia: About what, specifically?

Officer: About everything.

Tonia: About how I made out with boys in the fourth grade?

Officer: Why not? Please proceed. Start at the beginning. Like a confession.

This is the moment which reveals the core of Tonia's interrogation: it is the history of her body, the territory of her sexuality and its past that are being uncovered and scrutinised. The command, 'The names of all the men you've slept with', is a haunting one, thrown at her over and over again.

Officer: When did you lose your virginity?

Tonia: Long ago. But what's that got to do with my arrest?

Officer: Who was it? You like doing those things, don't you?

Thus, the theme of disciplining the female subject, and punishing her for her supposedly flamboyant sexual practices, that is, teaching her to find her 'proper' place within the dominant social structures, and the failure of the dominant ideology marked by her modes of defiance function as the conceptual centre of the film.

Obsessively tied to the proximity of Tonia's body—we watch her bruises, her parched lips, her hollow gaze, her tortured limbs in close-ups—the narrative unfolds its argument, revealing that what Tonia and other women in her prison cell undergo is a process of colonising and commanding—a mastery over—female subjectivity. Within the incomprehensible realm of a Stalinist prison, marked by violated women's bodies, Tonia eventually realises that her interrogations have no other purpose than to render her abject through torture, especially when she finds out that one of her past lovers, about whom she has been persistently questioned, was executed by the police a long time ago. Her interrogations take place in dark, austere and 'raw' rooms; they are framed within the structure of long, murky hallways, secret doors, metal stairways and metal pipes enveloping the walls, all of which create the barren and frightening landscape of confinement. Off-screen voices and whispers fill the audio space and signify invisible, lurking horrors; constant shrieks of unseen women and their almost inhuman howling permeate the *mise-en-scène*.

Predictably, the rituals of interrogation aim to force Tonia to speak the 'Truth'—that she lacks class consciousness, that she is attracted to 'Right Wing' forces, that she has been engaged in espionage and betrayed her country, that she is sexually loose, and that, as a cabaret singer, she is a 'fascist slut' who refuses to be involved in the toil of working class people. This truth, of course, is firmly located within the dominant discourse of both patriarchy and socialism, and is marked by the masculine presence, dominance, and the masculine moral vision of the world, which rests on the subordination and abjection of female agency. The very medium of torture works to deny subjectivity in order to make the tortured speak the words of the law. Forcing Tonia to enunciate their words and making her sign false testimonies, her torturers kick her body with boots, hose her with cold water, pull her hair out, pour urine on

4 I developed this discussion in the context of transnational feminist cultural studies and the cinematic theory of suture; see Marciniak 2005. For an insightful reading of *A Woman Alone* in the historical context of Polish women film-makers, see Mazierska, Ostrowska 2006.

her face, undress her, put a gun to her head, and throw her into a 'bath', where she nearly drowns.

Examining the relationship between torture, truth and the body in Western philosophical tradition, Page DuBois theorises on the traditional notion of 'truth'—always posited as belonging elsewhere, a hidden revelation that escapes the subject, knowledge that must be unmasked, unveiled, and torn out in agony. Such an idea of a 'hidden truth' suggests that truth is 'located in the dark, in the irrational, in the unknown, in the other' (DuBois 1991: 147). In this paradigm, torture of the body to obtain the truth is deemed necessary, as the truth secured this way is considered more 'real', more reliable than a freely given testimony. The male subject, posited by these discourses as a philosophical agent, thus projects the truth onto the body of the other, and, in fact, the female body, its 'secret space', 'is still represented as a locus of truth' (DuBois 1991: 146). Paradoxically, however, as DuBois writes, torturers do not really torture to obtain truth from a victim; 'rather, torturers torture to punish, to offer examples of the pain to be suffered... They torture to send back out into the world people broken, destroyed, to serve as living warnings' (DuBois 1991: 148).

Indeed, in *Interrogation*, it is the *inside* of the female body that is diegetically marked as housing the truth, and, in fact, when Tonia is finally allowed to leave the prison, there is no doubt that she 'serves as a living warning' to others. The opening sequence featuring a singing and dancing Tonia, emphasises her seductive movements: 'Tell me, my bee, what is inside of me.' The lines of the song foreshadow a narrative focus on 'what is inside of her', and prepare the spectators for the first interrogation of her body right after she is brought in, barely conscious from intoxication. She is thrown onto a male officer's desk, undressed, and brutally 'examined'. Her body, powerful when she is a performer, within the prison walls becomes the site of intense vulnerability. As she lies naked on a desk, one officer looks into her mouth and ears, as if inspecting an animal for sale, while another opens her legs wide and puts his fingers into her vagina. While her body is being violated, the officers' casual postures—one of them is

eating a sandwich—suggest that such a 'bodily interrogation' is routine. The poignancy of this scene also lies in the fact that intoxicated Tonia 'cooperates' in performing the insulting acts upon her body. The upsetting visual dynamics of the scene is constructed through a rapid montage rendering Tonia's rape almost invisible. This begs a question: what is the significance of this invisibility of rape and how does it function within the ideological structure of the film?

The iconography of Tonia's initiation to the prison unveils the spatial dynamism of an interrogation and thus, metonymically, of the socialist colonising practices. As with all the other interrogations, the place is dark, and we do not really see the faces of the perpetrators, only fragments of their bodies in uniforms. The officers' hands busily work at penetrating her body, while her face is illuminated by a desk lamp, an indispensable element of interrogation. The way she is positioned on the table creates the ambience of a medical examination: she is the object of scrutiny in the hands of men who are visually inscrutable and therefore invulnerable. They are not fully revealed or named, suggesting the difficulty in locating the basis of Tonia's incarceration. There is yet another powerful implication: in the world where Tonia lives, there is no punishment for violence done to women's bodies.

The film's evocation of the brutal policing of the female subject becomes apparent when Tonia wakes up and begins to realise her circumstances. When she wants to run forward during the morning inspection, her attempt to draw attention to herself is crushed by other female prisoners who do not want Tonia to put *them* in danger. In a moment of visceral anguish and rage, she screams, a critical moment in the narrative signifying her coming-to-knowledge. The scream—not quite language and not quite non-language—hovers on the border of intelligibility and points to representational complexities of abjection.<sup>5</sup> It also signifies the body in pain, the body which wants to protest. Such bodily protest is unforgettably staged again toward the close of the narrative, when Tonia performs an unsuccessful suicide attempt: opening her veins with her teeth, tearing her skin open, sucking her own blood.



## SOCIALIST SPECTRES

In the era of post-socialism, all these censored films, once shelved because of the presumed ideological dangers they introduced, have already been de-shelved and, in many instances, celebrated, awarded and canonised. Bugajski's *Interrogation*, for example, won many Polish honours, as well as international ones;<sup>6</sup> Krystyna Janda, who portrayed Tonia, in 1990, won in the Best Actress Category, both at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia and in the Cannes Film Festival. In 1988, also at the Polish Film Festival, Holland's *A Woman Alone* won in the category of Best Actress and Best Actor, and the director was awarded the Special Jury Prize. Similarly, Marczewski's *Shivers* earned multiple honours at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1982. In 2000, Andrzej Wajda received an Honorary Award at the Academy Awards 'for five decades of extraordinary film direction'.

The awards showered on Polish banned films confirm, of course, the bitter paradoxes of socialist censorship, which, without a doubt, 'punished' a group of the most compelling films in the history of Polish cinema. However, one could also perceive these multiple honours earned in national and international cinema circles as an overcompensation, or perhaps even as an eager Western consumption of 'socialist exotica', available to audiences which could finally indulge in safe voyeurism of behind-the-Wall otherness. Kazimierz Kutz, a Polish director, comments:

Polish cinema in years past, propelled by anticommunism of the West, benefited from the permanent discrediting, because the theme has 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. (Quoted in Haltof 2002: xii.)

Developing this thought, one might be tempted to consider the recent infatuation with and celebration of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2006 *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*) as acknowledging an ongoing interest

in these all-consuming, fetishising tendencies, hailing the film as offering Western audiences a powerful glimpse of the supposedly still hidden 'truth' of the ruthless tactics of surveillance practised in East Germany. The tag-line for the film promises a suspenseful seduction: 'Before the Fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germany's Secret Police Listened to Your Secrets.'

In post-Wall times, as secrets of the past are being vigorously uncovered (I am thinking here, for example, of allowing public access to the records of the secret police, an opportunity that caused quite a tumult in all post-Soviet bloc countries), the official mechanisms of censorship are thought to belong to the by-gone era of socialism. Surprisingly, however, the practice of shelving films has developed in the post-socialist era as well. The present day mechanisms are less centralised, more subtle and nuanced, more elusive, and remain less well known and theorised about than those employed by the socialist censors. In a twist of historical irony, today's targets are, for instance, overtly pro-socialist TV series, such as *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* (*Cztery pancerni i pies*, 1966–1970), or *More Than Life at Stake* (*Stawka większa niż życie*, 1967–1968), which used to be widely popular before the 1980s. An examination of this 'reversed', or 'transversed' censorship, a driving force behind the contemporary attempts to erase specific visual media, needs to accompany the analysis of the already well-documented socialist censorship, so as not to relegate those practices to a past that is already supposedly closed.

*A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* (Fig. 4) tells the World War II story of four soldiers from the tank 'Redhead' ('Rudy') and their German shepherd, Szarik, 'documenting' their combat trail from Siberia to Berlin, and thus conveying an ideological investment in the Polish-Soviet alliance in fighting the Germans. The importance of the multi-local and multi-national

<sup>5</sup> In a different context, that of Roman Polański's *The Tenant* (*Le Locataire*, 1976), I further discuss the dynamics of screaming and its relation to abjection *vis-à-vis* an immigrant identity; see Marciniak 2000.

<sup>6</sup> *Interrogation* received awards at the Chicago International Film Festival (1990) and the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia (1990).

alliance is also expressed through the multi-ethnic make-up of the crew: Janek from Gdańsk, Gustlik from Silesia, Grigori from Georgia, and the Russian Olgierd, whose roots are ambivalent (at one point, he learns that he might be a descendant of those Poles who were sent to Siberia by the Tsar in the 1860s). Most of the soldiers have a love interest, but the narrative focuses on the romance between Polish Janek and the Russian nurse Marusia, symbolically signifying Polish enchantment with the Soviet power and, yet again, stressing the vitality of Polish-Russian relations.



(Fig. 4)  
*A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog,*  
DVD cover.

The TV series, also released as a feature film, was avidly watched week after week, and, as a child, I distinctly remember participating in playground and kindergarten enactments of the stories from *A Tank Crew of Four*; in my memory, all the girls wanted to play Russian Marusia. On the website Virtual Poland (Wirtualna Polska)<sup>7</sup> the section devoted to film history describes the popularity of the series and confirms, in fact, that my experiences were not uncommon: ‘On almost every playground, one could see children act out the new game of ‘A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog’. The name ‘Szarik’ was now routinely given both to German shepherds and miniature pinschers. And young girls began to braid their hair in the Marusia-style plaits.’ On institutional levels, the series was vigorously used as a propaganda tool: schools sponsored theatrical plays, skits and competitions modelled

on the war adventures of the crew; there were fan clubs of the series, which served as pedagogical schooling in patriotism.

The overwhelming success of the series was undoubtedly due to its unusual representation of the war. World War II films, in general, were expected to adhere to the tonality of patriotic righteousness, martyrdom and utmost seriousness, emphasising courage and honour—and the models from the Soviet cinema, such as *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Летят журавли*, 1957), or *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (*А зорь здесь тихие*, 1972), were shown on Polish television over and over again. In contrast, as an example of socialist pop culture, *A Tank Crew of Four* boldly mixed scenes of seriousness with ones of lighter tonality infused with humour, conveying entertaining value. Additionally, the narrative focuses on well-intentioned but also headstrong protagonists who routinely disobey the orders of their army leaders, engage in their own encounters with the Germans, and time and again emerge triumphant from the battlefield. Considering *A Tank Crew of Four* in the context of, for example, contemporary US TV shows, such as the currently well-known *24*, one is struck by similarities between the highly efficient but persistently disobedient CTU agent, Jack Bauer, and the defiant and also undefeated soldiers of the ‘Redhead’.



(Fig. 5)  
*More Than Life at Stake,*  
DVD cover.

Like *A Tank Crew of Four*, *More Than Life at Stake*, or ‘Captain Kloss’ as viewers

often called the series, evoking the name of the main character, was a black and white TV series adored by Polish audiences. Additionally, *Kapitan Kloss* was also distributed in Poland as a comic-book, specifically marketed to adolescent boys (Fig. 6). From a contemporary perspective, the war-spy series can be thought of as a socialist James Bond, as its protagonist is the suave and indomitable Hans Kloss, or J-23, a double agent posing as a high-ranking German officer who actually works for the Polish-Russian underground during World War II in occupied Poland. Directed by Janusz Morgenstern and Andrzej Konic, the series is made up of eighteen episodes of Kloss's subversive operations inside the Abwehr, always dangerously brushing up against the possibility of being discovered as a secret agent. Each episode also incorporates Kloss's newest romantic interest and features him as both a highly skilled spy and an enticing lover. The line, 'J-23 transmits again!' is a motif meant to emphasise, after each dramatic action, that Kloss is operating successfully again, transmitting secrets of the highest importance to the Germans. His charm, uncanny intelligence, intuition and cleverness always allow him to fulfil his spying missions flawlessly, without compromising his integrity and true loyalty to the underground.



(Fig. 6)  
*Kapitan Kloss*,  
comic book cover.

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that both series, *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* and *More Than Life at Stake*, 'raised' several generations of Poles, allowing audiences to participate in the fantasy of poking fun at the Germans and romanticising the strength of Polish resistance. The amazing popularity of these series also needs to be seen in the historical context of viewership, as these were among the first TV series that were deliberately family-oriented, gathering several generations together in front of the TV. At my home, my grandmother, who lived through the war, my parents, who were born during the war, and myself, raised on my grandmother's war stories, were avid viewers. Furthermore, the fact that, under socialism, television was strictly regulated is of crucial importance in the discussion of the power of media pedagogy: for many years, the single existing TV channel broadcast in the late afternoon for a few hours only, and when the second channel of Polish Television (Telewizja Polska, TVP) was initiated in 1970, it was a momentous event in the visual media life of the nation.

Stanisław Mikulski, the actor who so charismatically portrayed Hans Kloss, also occupies an interesting place in the artistic and political 'censoring' history of the nation that I am discussing here. When Martial Law was imposed in 1981, in defiance of the regime Polish artists—actors, singers and performers of various kinds—declared a boycott, refusing to work and thus protesting the imposed 'state of war'. Mikulski was one of the actors, 'regime actors' as they were called, who declined to participate in the boycott. During one of his theatre performances, the audience clapped so hard and for so long that he actually could not continue his performance. Mikulski, forever associated in the public imagination with the bravado and loyalty of Hans Kloss, could not be easily forgiven for such an act of betrayal.

The present day controversies<sup>8</sup> that surround both of these TV series, predictably, have

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.wp.pl>.

<sup>8</sup> I use the material gathered on the Polish-language website devoted to the history and popularity of *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* as well as to the controversies surrounding the series; see <http://pancerni.twojeseriale.info>.

to do with the issues of socialist propaganda and the debate over ‘historical distortions’. As documented by the media, after 1989, the protests started by Jerzy Bukowski, a vice-president of the Alliance of War Veterans, finally became effective in July 2006, when Bronisław Wildestein, representing the ultra conservative party Law and Justice, became the new head of Polish Television. In response to Bukowski’s letter, Wildestein announced that, during his command, Polish Television would not broadcast films which falsified Polish history. This meant that programming for the entire fall season of 2006, which had already been put in place, had to be scratched, and that the two TV series *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* and *More Than Life at Stake* were shelved and locked away in the TV archives.

Thus, the publicly owned Polish Television, being the sole custodian of the Film Archives of Poland, which it inherited from the dissolved Communist Committee of Radio and Television, has been successfully preventing new privately owned television stations from having access to these two TV series and, until very recently, effectively blocked the broadcasting of these series. This situation created a demand for VHS and DVD copies of the previously distributed versions of the series, which sold out practically overnight. Thus, just like Marczewski’s *Shivers*, *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* and *More Than Life at Stake* have acquired a cult status, though obviously for very different reasons, which can only be sensibly explained through what I have called transversed censorship.

In the end, how does one reflect critically upon the fact that, despite the dissolution of the socialist regime, the mentality that governed the past shelving of films lingers on? Isn’t the current transversed censorship underpinned by the belief in the state’s authority and right to regulate the visual pleasures of the nation for the protection of the ‘average citizen’?

Ultimately, I would locate these perplexing tensions within the contemporary cultural and political scene in Poland. The current climate, favouring the euphoric rhetoric of ‘entering’ Europe and uncritically embracing an access to a ‘true’ and ‘legitimate’ West European identity,

prompts the nation to detach from its troubled and ‘shameful’ socialist past. Contrary to Derrida’s point that ‘being-with specters would also be ... a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations’ (Derrida 1994: xix), the dominant public rhetoric in Poland demands that the nation should bury its ghosts. As the case of *A Tank Crew of Four and a Dog* and *More Than Life at Stake* demonstrates, the old, once officially esteemed and honoured socialist productions are now among such ghosts, seen by the authorities as dangerous propaganda disfiguring history and ‘wrongly’ influencing the new generation that is already experientially at a distance from life under socialist shivers.

#### CODA: SPECTRAL UTILITY

In *Requiem for Communism*, Scribner argues: ‘These remnants [of the socialist past—*K. M.*] might be consigned to oblivion, but, for the time being, they persist as an important component of European collective memory... Before we can move forward, we must take stock of what remains.’ (Scribner 2003: 6.) I experience a range of conflicting emotions in reading this quote: can one really accept such a sweeping claim about socialism-communism as persisting in ‘European collective memory’? How ‘collective’ is this ‘collective memory’? Even though I know that I ask this with a sense of protectiveness (which I would like to immediately deny but cannot) of the past actually experienced by those who lived under socialism, it seems crucial to at least pause over such romantic homogenisation.



(Fig. 7)  
Crazy Guides Communism Tours.

While I have argued that the freshly acquired New European identity in a country such as Poland encourages the burial of socialist ghosts, there is an addendum to my claim, not within the realm of cinema and TV, but in

the arena of new audiovisual media. Thanks to the proliferation of digital culture, the ghosts now resurface through a different media register and thus have a more complex circuit of representation and an international scope. On the Internet, one finds CrazyGuides.com, a site created by a group of young male Poles advertising Communist Tours in Kraków (Fig. 7). The group vigorously ‘takes stock of what remains’ by uncovering selected socialist ghosts and promoting the marketability of the socialist past. CrazyGuides.com is produced in English, with an arresting visual layout that might be described as an aesthetic mixture of Chris Marker’s 1962 *La Jetée* and Soviet social realism, complete with images of socialist *bloki*, buildings with claustrophobically small apartments, and a centrally placed red star. The site playfully advertises itself as ‘Krakow’s Alternative Tours Leader’:

You may think that your trip to Krakow is condemned to tourist traps, but don’t worry, we’re here to help you. At CRAZY GUIDES, we offer personalized and communist oriented tours of Krakow that will get you off the beaten path and help you see the true sights of this amazing city. *Forget about boring tour guides with western cars that are the same you have at home* [my emphasis—K. M.]. We’ll take you around the old communist district of Nowa Huta in genuine communist automobiles. [---]  
Try our young and energetic crazy guides and our really funky vehicles! Experience Krakow while being driven by English speaking locals in genuine Eastern Bloc Trabants or Polski Fiat 125 automobiles.

The primary audience for these energetic and enthusiastic invitations is, of course, Western. The attractions are constructed in a particularly enticing and alluring way. On the one hand, the tourists are promised ‘socialist authenticity’ via tours in ‘genuine Eastern Bloc Trabants’,<sup>9</sup> with access to the ‘true’ remnants of socialist exotica—the unfamiliar and bizarre. On the other hand, the appeal is highly seductive because it promises a vicarious experience of the socialist

ghosts without any harm—just funky objects and devoted locals: ‘Experience Krakow in First-Class Communist ‘Comfort and Style!’

The site also features comments from grateful tourists: ‘Crazy Guides made our vacation to Krakow our best trip to Europe yet. It made us wonder what we had missed at all the other cities we visited,’ says a woman from Orange County, California. Peter Aspden, a *Financial Times* arts writer, claims: ‘The west has long felt able to make jokes about East European ghastliness ... but this was different. Here was a locally organised tour guide with a sassy attitude: this is part of our past too, it said: come and share it with us, and you’re allowed to smirk.’<sup>10</sup> Thus, the originality of the socialist tours and the pleasures they offer are certainly dictated also by the fact that the guides, while claiming ‘authenticity’, poke fun at the past, inviting tourists to share the ‘smirks’ and partake in this ‘sassy attitude’. As one of the guides evocatively says, explaining that he wants to use his mother’s apartment as part of the tour: ‘I’ll buy an old Russian TV and some 80s furniture, put them in there, and people can pay to sit and drink coffee with her... People love real things—if you sell them right.’ He thus unabashedly reveals that the socialist authenticity that the Crazy Guides pride themselves on is, in fact, not that authentic after all, being reconstructed for the sake of Westerners who are tempted by ghostly tours of a kind they could never find at home.

9 Trabants, made in East Germany, were a common sight on Polish streets. They were called ‘cardboard cars’, or simply ‘soap holders’ to indicate the material they were made of, their miniature size and clunkiness.

10 Quoted from ‘References’ at [www.crazyguides.com](http://www.crazyguides.com).

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*Great Race (Wielki bieg)*, dir. Jerzy Domaradzki. Poland, 1981

*Hands Up! (Ręce do góry!)*, dir. Jerzy Skolimowski. Poland, 1981

*Interrogation (Przesłuchanie)*, dir. Ryszard Bugajski. Poland, 1982

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