

The Interrogation interrogated: the fate of a Polish film

Poland produces about thirty-five feature films a year. Its motion picture industry is owned by the state, which finances production and distribution. It is supervised by the Polish Ministry of Culture and the central Party apparatus and organized into several studio units, usually headed by prominent film directors. Groups of writers and film-makers are more or less permanently associated with these units.

Ryszard Bugajski's new film, *The Interrogation*, was made in Andrzej Wajda's famous film studio "X" and finished early this year, after a state of war had been imposed in Poland. Its subject is the Stalinist terror in Poland in the early Fifties. *The Interrogation* shows the plight of an innocent woman— played by Krystyna Janda (the leading actress in Wajda's *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*)— caught in the wheels of the secret-police machine. It contains several drastic scenes of torture. These are unprecedented in East European cinema, which has, until now, treated this subject mostly by indirection.

In Poland the decision to release a film for public showing formally belongs to the deputy minister of culture in charge of the film industry. Controversial works like *The Interrogation* are often referred to higher authorities, primarily the Cultural Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In some cases even the Politburo may become involved. Nevertheless, customary forms and officially prescribed procedures are almost always observed.

In Poland, when a film has reached its final form it is presented to the deputy minister of culture, who convenes a so-called "co-laudation commission" for a closed screening. The deputy minister appoints the members of the commission—usually twenty to

twenty-five people—from among a prepared list of professional and ideological experts. Other individuals connected with the film industry—artistic and literary directors from other studios, for instance—may be present at the meeting in an unofficial capacity. Immediately following the screening, the commission sits down for a couple of hours to discuss the film. The meeting ends with the group's recommendations concerning the film's future. The commission functions as an advisory group; its voice is rarely decisive.

The discussion of the co-laudation commission for *The Interrogation* was surreptitiously recorded by one of the participants. The excerpts of the transcript presented below clearly show that everyone present was aware that the decision about *The Interrogation's* future would be made by others. The importance of the meeting lies elsewhere—in the light it sheds on the making of "cultural policy" in a Communist country and in the glimpse it provides of the cultural backstage of the political crisis that has wracked Poland in the last few years.

The ideological positions represented by various participants in the meeting are not, in and of themselves, remarkable. On the contrary, they are predictable. It is the flavor of the arguments and the language employed that deserve our close attention.

The comments of the participants show a certain abstract quality; they are oblique, allusive, almost Aesopian. They avoid naming the issues directly; everyone relies on a mutual, unspoken understanding of what the fundamental questions are really about. In the central, unnamed void around which the whole discussion revolves, "Stalinism" is barely mentioned, "torture" exactly twice, "dictatorship" never. The speakers resort instead to indirection: "certain methods," "those times,"¹¹ "painful period," "certain wounds"—phrases intended to spare the sensibilities of those who might experience some discomfort if more direct terms were used.

The partisans of the film feel compelled to adopt an "objective" posture, arguing for

the film's "historical truth" or even for the social benefits that might derive from showing a moral tale to the public. They deny that the story has any contemporary implications, even though, as Wajda points out in the letter that is read at the beginning of the meeting, *The Interrogations* screenplay originally contained a "contemporary theme" which was later eliminated.

The advocates of a dogmatic, strong-handed line find themselves in an easier position, bolstered by the martial-law regime. They can afford a more revealing frankness about the film's implied parallels between the Stalinist Fifties and the present day. Thus, the journalist Kazimierz Kozniewski, a supporter of the regime, states clearly that an attack on the people who issued the orders to shoot at the demonstrating workers in Poznan twenty-six years ago puts in doubt the legitimacy of their successors. Of course, he needn't have bothered. Everyone in the room could have drawn the parallel for himself: General Wojciech Jaruzelski, whose only claim to legitimacy had been an alleged statement in 1976 that "Polish soldiers would never again fire on Polish workers," was responsible for the massacre of seven colliery miners in Katowice on December 16, 1981, three days after a state of war had been declared.

In a Communist system, "cultural policy" is a self-cannibalizing expression: in this case, the political half swallows up the cultural and artistic. Indeed, "culture" and "art" are not pretty words when they become inextricably bound up with the politics of a Communist-military junta that must rely on tanks and guns to remain in control. Above all, such a regime must be on guard against anything that shows the truth about its mechanisms of power. Thus, it is not far-fetched to assume that the decision about the release of Bugajski's film had been made long before the co-laudation commission met last April. The only print of the film is now kept in the Central Cinematographic Administration in Warsaw. It will probably never be shown to the public; it may be

physically destroyed.

Ironically, the frightened professor Golebiowski, whose comments close the discussion of the film, may be right. The issue is not whether the young director made an historical film or a contemporary one, or an abstract moral tale. Bugajski's intentions, in any case, are irrelevant. What counts is how a mass audience would receive *The Interrogation*— whether such an audience can be trusted to make the fine distinction between "Stalinist non-socialism" and "the socialism of the state of war." Apparently, it cannot.

According to Golebiowski and others at the meeting, Bugajski has made a "propagandistic" film. There is a kind of bitter justice in this epithet. The transcript of the meeting in Warsaw provides one more proof that a Communist regime, for whom "propaganda" was once the proudest weapon in its ideological arsenal, has in the end come to fear it too.

—Jerzy Warman, 1982

Transcript of the meeting of the co-laudation commission for
Ryszard Bugajski's film *The Interrogation*— Ministry of Arts and
Culture, Warsaw, April 23, 1982

Janusz Zaorski [*filmmaker, deputy to Andrzej Wajda, the artistic director of the film studio "X"*] reads a letter from Andrzej Wajda, who was directing a film in Paris at the time:

I wanted very much to participate in the co-laudation of Ryszard Bugajski's film *The Interrogation*. After the film had already been submitted to the Ministry for approval I returned to Warsaw especially to take part in the discussion, thinking that the co-laudation would take place then.

Unfortunately, it turned out otherwise. I wanted to be present because the film is a debut. A debut always carries a risk with it, but in this case I believe that Ryszard Bugajski has realized all the hopes that have been set on him. I regard *The Interrogation* as an outstanding work, produced with a great maturity of the director's craft, with excellent performances, employing modest means but at the same time deeply moving. We have had few such debuts in recent years. We have gained a new, mature talent.

Doubts accompanied the decision to make this film: Was it appropriate? Was the contemporary theme necessary? We decided, together with the director, that these doubts were justified. The contemporary theme was completely eliminated from the film in its final form. *The Interrogation* is

therefore an historical film, which deals with a dramatic subject that belongs to the past. A lot of attention has been devoted to it in the diaries [of the Stalinist period in Poland] that have appeared in the last few months. Therefore, I have worked very hard to have this film made, and, happily, I have not been disappointed. A very valuable and important film has been made, and we present it to you for your evaluation.

Andrzej Wajda, Artistic director, Film Studio "X"

Bohdan Poreba [*Filmmaker, head of the film studio "Profil" director of a highly nationalistic film, "Hubal," about a World War II partisan commander. Poreba has directed plays for the notorious "RF" theater, headed by Ryszard Filipiński, an anti-Semitic actor and director who has, in turn, directed films on historical themes—for example, "Coup d'Etat"—at the "Profil" studio. An ideological enemy of Wajda, Poreba is widely disliked in cinema circles. His father, a soldier in the Home Army underground during the war, was imprisoned during the Stalinist period. Poreba is also the chairman of the Grunwald Patriotic Association, a nationalistic and anti-semitic group created with the support of highly placed officials of the Communist Party in March 1981 to agitate against Jews in Solidarity and to counter liberal influences.*]: I would like to raise a point of order. Since this is a very special film and the discussion will surely be interesting, I have a question. Are only the members of the commission present in this room?

Minister S. Stefanski [*Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, in charge of the film industry since February 1982; former Deputy Chairman of the State Committee for Radio and, TV*]: No. But I think that even if outsiders are present, nobody will lack the courage to express his opinion, here as well as outside.

Kazimierz Kozniewski [*Writer, journalist at "Polityka," a weekly magazine edited by Deputy*

Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski. Strongly supportive of the martial law, Kozniowski published several articles in the main Party newspaper, "Trybuna Ludu," attacking the "hostile" attitudes of the intelligentsia. He was recently named editor-in-chief of a new magazine, "Odrodzenie" ("Rebirth").]: It seems to me that this group is probably not capable of making a decision about this film, or even of presenting recommendations concerning it, following a discussion that will probably last an hour or so, because, in my opinion, we are dealing here with a greatly moving film, the first Polish picture of this kind. For political reasons this is surely the first such film in the history of the post-war, Polish people's cinema.

I would like to treat it, if I could, from the artistic point of view. I am captivated by the artistic direction of the film. It is surely a very mature piece as a work of art. Possibly there is, in one place, a discontinuity. In my judgment the film would be seamless if it ended with the scene where the girl receives the branch of a spruce tree, as a symbol of some kind of moral victory. What goes on afterwards is a kind of melodrama, expressed in an entirely different mode. This is really a criticism of the screenplay, however, rather than of the direction, a criticism that really does not affect the fundamental moral, political, and ideological content of the film.

The weakness of this film, I think—and perhaps it is a very serious weakness—lies in the fact that there is nothing but passionate emotion in it. It evokes a deep response in the audience. If it stirred our emotions here, it must, if shown publicly, evoke a great reaction in every viewer. It will evoke a moral reaction, an indignation at certain matters that have already been dealt with in literature. I do not understand why Wajda addressed himself only to the artistic question; or maybe I know why. Never mind. He could of course cite General

Kuropieska's memoirs, which were published recently¹. This is not the first time that this theme has been dealt with in literature. But in film, where the emotional impact is much greater than in literature, this is probably the first time that it has been treated in such a way.

I miss one *very* important thing in this. If one shows certain ways and methods, and awakens such great feelings of hatred for them, one should also ask where they sprang from, for what cause these degenerate things were undertaken. There is one sentence about this at one point in the film, but it is far from sufficient. The woman in the film is facing a completely absurd charge, totally unjustified; it is the methods used that are the heart of the matter. The viewer has a right to ask: What if the accusation was justified, would the methods be justified as well? In short, perhaps yes, somewhat; perhaps no. Still, I greatly miss in this film some kind of background, some kind of knowledge about the other side, about those persecutors who are seen, parenthetically, only in one idiotic scene (not idiotic from the standpoint of the plot, but idiotic in its essence), a drunken feast which ends with a uniformed security policeman pouring alcohol down the girl's throat.

There is extremism in this film. It is a distillation of all the horrible stories. The accumulation of hate in this film is enormous. It lacks some kind of attempt to show certain justifications. Every revolution is accompanied by terrible things; the questions must refer to its various aspects: causes, consequences, methods, and so on.

But I wanted to talk about something else, something that puts me at a loss with regard to

¹ General Jozef Kuropieska was arrested in 1950 with several other high officers in the Polish armed forces. Falsely charged with treason and espionage, he was tried in 1952 and condemned to death. The sentence was commuted when Kuropieska finally agreed to confess, five days *after* the trial ended. He was rehabilitated in 1956.

this sheet of paper. [*He waves the evaluation form*]. I would prefer to write an article or an essay about this film rather than answer the three questions this form asks. They are absolutely inadequate to the film, because one cannot separate the ideological from the artistic aspect. What does such a dichotomy mean anyway? The real question is different, and I don't know whether this group will be able to answer it at all.

These things have already been shown, told, and lived through in this country. This story dates from thirty years ago—a whole generation has grown up since such methods were employed. At every stage during the last twenty-five years we have learned that passing over certain matters in silence does not produce good results, that maybe certain wounds must be shown to the end and burnt out—in an artistic sense of course—to the end. On the other hand, we must ask ourselves, by showing the film at this moment, today (well, I do not mean in April—the distribution would take some time—but let's say in three or four months, or half a year, or even a year), what kind of emotions would be stirred, and against whom would they be directed?

Take the monument in Poznan.² It's not as if it was erected only against those who had been shooting then; it was also erected against those who have held power until now, in continuous succession since those times. And this is the large question that we must answer—if not our group, then the people who decide about the political situation in our country. They will have to weigh the effect of silence, of leaving certain things unsaid. Not saying things to the end has always had fatal consequences. On the other hand, to release this film now, in the present situation, what consequences would that bring? Also fatal consequences!

² The monument to the workers who were shot during protest demonstrations in Poznan in 1956, unveiled in June of 1981

We are choosing—well, maybe not us, because we are only advisors, but perhaps we too have the duty to say it—between two bad alternatives. A film of such passion will evoke great passions in return. Still, to pass over those things in silence. But one could say: Silence? There are Kuropieska's memoirs, novels, Machejek's book, many other books; they waited for years to be published but the censors finally let them through. There is no silence on this subject. But we know that such a film, made in such a way, calling forth such passions, would have a different impact than even the publication of Kuropieska's memoirs in one hundred thousand copies of *Literary Life*. The story of Mrs. Duracz, the story of many other cases, they have not been a secret for a long time.³ But showing this on the screen would be shocking, even more so since its effect would be so cumulative, compounded.

The beautiful aspect of the film is surely the victory of a certain moral stand over certain horrible methods. It is a beautiful victory that becomes apparent in that scene with the spruce-tree branch. I must say that it is a beautiful scene, and I must add that what happens later with the child—in that harrowing scene when the children are being taken away from their mothers—really puts everything together. For me that is another film altogether. It includes also the story of the father, who finally acknowledges his relationship with this woman although he had previously, in a way, abandoned her in that visiting room.

³ Anna Duracz, wife of a hero of the Communist People's Army underground during World War II, was a secretary to Jakub Berman, a member of the Polish Politburo and the right-hand man of Boleslaw Bierut, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party in the Stalinist years. Mrs. Duracz was arrested in 1949 in connection with the so-called Field Affair, in which two American Communists, together with high Communist officials in Hungary and Poland, were accused of involvement in an espionage ring. She was held in prison without trial for several years before being released.

For me this is a very good film from the point of view of the director's craft, and it is deeply moving. Any solution, however, any decision concerning its future, will have to take into account negative, not positive, considerations. That is, the distribution of this film will bring about certain dangers, because certain things should be shown to the end. Maybe just once? Maybe a film like this should not be made again? Still, people will be writing books, they will be doing certain things, because history goes on and history returns, history shapes people and it will keep returning.

So I admit that I feel helpless, because fifteen minutes after the screening I am not even able to give a definite opinion about what to do with this film. One thing is certain: the decision should not be made lightly. These matters have lasted for a long time in our national situation, and they may last a few months longer. The decision should not be made lightly, either "yes" or "no." Perhaps it should be discussed some more. I feel rather helpless. Perhaps you, gentlemen, will have better advice to offer.

Ernest Bryll [*Writer, poet, and playwright; artistic director of the Film Studio "Silesia"; artistic director of the Polski Theater in Warsaw. Bryll left the Communist Party in 1981, before the imposition of the state of war.*]: Straight out, I think this film should be released. I think it is very good. I have only small reservations. Here and there it could be better, but there is no point in talking about that right now. It is a very good film and should be released. Why? Simply for the sake of normal, common knowledge of our nation's history. It deals with a certain fragment of our history, and it is well and good that it deals with it from the perspective of a common woman, a woman facing a completely unbelievable charge, where no organizational or ideological issues are involved. We have read many things like that, in *The Mother of the Kings* for example. But this film concerns the fate of a common, entangled human being; because of that it is even more deeply moving.

This film concerns the history of our nation; it must be released even if it is painful, even if some people will regard it as an exaggeration. Because if this film is not released, even more exaggerated things will have to be done, and the matter will continue to fester in us to the point where normal relief will be impossible. Art means, among other things, to bring about a catharsis, to explain, to lead, to a certain discussion. We have just seen this being done in an excellent, artistic way. Yes, I am absolutely for releasing this film, the sooner the better.

Jerzy Jesionowski [*Writer, member of the Party, literary director of a film studio*]. I find myself in a very difficult situation because in order to express my judgment about this film I must violate a principle I believe in. I believe that when one judges a work of art one should not separate the form from the content, or, to express this another way, one should not separate the craft from the thought. I accept this principle, and yet in this case I must disregard it because I am not able to make a comprehensive judgment. Concerning the craft, I have the highest regard for what Mr. Bugajski has demonstrated here, as a test—since this is a debut—of his qualifications as a director. This film shows that we have here a man who knows how to make films. I will not expound on this subject any longer since the point is clear.

Concerning the thought, the content, however, I have serious objections. If this is an historical film (and we agreed with the point—even in Wajda's letter—that this is an historical film), then it is not an entertainment or adventure film, but a film with different aspirations. First of all, we should be making such a work in order to say something more, to add new elements to the knowledge we already have on this subject, not in order to stop at what others have already said, or even to regress.

On this point I must register certain objections in connection with this work. To express it brutally, this film is executed with the pedal pressed down to the floor. The plot demonstrates the knowledge of the period that we already possess and that is commonly known. It is commonly known that criminal investigations were undertaken according to pre-conceived charges, and that trials took place to prove those charges. We have here an example of this, executed in an overdrawn manner, in a way that does not aim to provide a deeper explanation of what has been written on this subject. The film's aspirations have been lowered. It doesn't go in that direction. Rather, it aims to awaken emotions, to affect feelings as much as possible by limiting intellectual content. In this regard, I think that the film does not measure up to its form; it does not equal the artistic craft of the director.

Now, concerning the co-laudation conclusions. I have no doubt that the film should be accepted. As a work, and as a debut. Concerning its public release, however, I agree with Kozniewski that that question should not be decided today. The matter ought to be suspended, and I do not agree with Bryll that we should push it to the screen. This requires serious thought. The film should reach the public some day, but I don't know whether or not now is the appropriate moment. I submit that the film be accepted and that the decision about distribution be put off.

Mieczyslaw Waskowski [*Film director, creator of "Seven Cardinal Sins" and "The Singing and Neighing of the Horses Can Still Be Heard"; first secretary of the Party organization for the film industry; sympathizer of Poreba's Grunwald Patriotic Association*]: I do not wish to enter into polemics, although I honestly feel like arguing with the preceding speakers. It seems to me that the point here is to listen to various voices, because we are an advisory body to the minister, and ultimately he alone, or with his closest advisors, will decide what to do with this film. I would like instead to return to the question of the artistic evaluation

of this film.

I would like to remind you that the artistic value of a work depends on the value of the truth told by the director, the truth about the times, about the situation. Material selected in a one-sided manner does not make a work of art. Such a tendentious selection of material serves, well, a certain manipulation by the director to make us look at a certain fragment of history in a particular way.

That the material in this film has been manipulated by the director is beyond doubt, but after hearing Andrzej Wajda's recommendation I see the matter more clearly.

Hence, my first recommendation: I submit that a detailed analysis be undertaken to determine who is responsible for approving the screenplay and giving the go-ahead to the production. For this is my first objection: this film simply should never have been made, in the shape in which it was made, and paid for with the state's money. To make a comparison (and even I perhaps regard this comparison as too strong, a little exaggerated): if we showed the Nazi era to a young, contemporary viewer unfamiliar with those times, and we showed it solely through the prism of a concentration camp, then I would also regard that as a mistake. Because the Nazi system and its entire machinery cannot be reduced solely to that dimension, to such a narrow perspective as that of the concentration camps.

Nevertheless, I see here only that single dimension; I see only one track. This is the viewing of an epoch through the martyrdom of people accidentally snatched off the street and thrown in the torture chambers of the security police. Of course, such a theme quickly runs away on its own.

I attribute the fact that we were moved by this film not to the artistic skill of the director, but exclusively, I repeat, to a purposeful, very deft manipulation in a certain direction. This is

my first objection. I would like to develop it further. Namely, how did it happen that the work on this film was completed even after the state of war was introduced in our country? Who is responsible for allowing this film to be finished? I think that we should have a long talk about this film, but perhaps in somewhat different company.

Finally, I believe that this film is part of a greater whole. This is what caused the unusually sharp struggle in the cultural milieu that is taking place today. It's a trend, and this film, I would say, is a banner, a poster film pushing that struggle onto the screen in a very open, impudent, unheard-of manner. But all of us know about that period, so painful, so complex, so convoluted, because we are of an age where certain things are known from personal experience. In order to get to where the director arrives at on the screen, one would need to show that epoch in a very wide context, in the context of very complicated causes, interactions, and correlations. I am surprised that this film does not deal with the mechanisms, so to speak, and with the people who operated them. Why doesn't it point to those people? Obviously, here too we have a certain degree of manipulation. I am not even talking about such a spicy business as the casting of Agnieszka Holland, which has its own, clear meaning.⁴ In short, not only do I wholeheartedly protest against this film, but I downright demand that an inquiry be undertaken into everything we saw today, from the beginning, and that everything be thoroughly examined. This is my only motion. Thank you.

Jerzy Hoffman [*Director of the historical films "The Deluge" and "Sir Wolodyjowski," and of "To the Last Drop of Blood," which is about the formation of the Polish army in the USSR during*

⁴ Agnieszka Holland is a director and an actress, and a member of Solidarity. Holland's father, a prominent journalist and Party member in the Stalinist period, was arrested in 1961, when the Gomułka regime turned from liberalization to greater repression. He died in a fall from the window of his apartment while police agents were conducting a search there.

World War II. Hoffman is the head of the film studio "Zodiak."]: In the words of the last speaker there was. [*the Minister asks for brevity because he will have to leave*]. there sounded a kind of threat, the threat of, well, an investigation concerning the origins of this film. I would like to stay with the film. Indeed, that period was extremely complex, and the film performs an autopsy of a certain phenomenon that was an instance of absolute degeneration.

Unfortunately, I must separate two issues here. Comrade Waskowski spoke of pressing down the pedal—it was pressed down very skillfully here, which means that the director knows his craft. His abilities are, for me, beyond discussion. However, this film is boiling with emotions, with passionate hatred. We live in a country where passions have reached their peak, and where hate was late aroused to a fever pitch. I think about the future of this film with the deepest concern; that is, it doesn't seem to me that it could now be distributed in the theaters. The rest, of course, I leave to the minister.

Czeslaw Petelski [*Director of "Copernicus," "The Base of the Dead," and other films; author of several screenplays; former first secretary of the Party organization for the film industry; former head of the film studio "Iluzjon." Petelski attacked Wajda and Solidarity in an article in "Trybuna Ludu."*]: Let us first of all admit to ourselves that this is not an historical film. It is a contemporary film. We have had films that confronted the past; I am for such critical films. *Man of Marble* was a film that attempted such a settling of accounts. We could debate about that film, but it presented some arguments. There are no arguments here. Here we only have hatred. Hatred not toward what happened in the past, but hatred toward the present. Waskowski is absolutely right: this is a loathsome, disgusting film. We are not talking about an excellent work either. Listen to me: if a director making his debut stands up behind a camera, he must know how to cut and splice. And this

director knows how to do that. But even from the artistic point of view this film breaks into two parts. First it is propaganda, then suddenly it becomes melodramatic kitsch. That's the artistic truth about this film. Let's not deceive ourselves that we have been presented with a work of art that for some tactical reasons should not be shown for a while. This is an anti-socialist film, made solely for propagandistic reasons and growing out of an open hatred toward that which is happening today and will be happening tomorrow.

Bohdan Poreba: I would prefer that a myth is not born in this room. That is, a myth of courageous people who said a lot of truth and a myth of opportunists who took a stand against this film. Everything should be clear from the start. And I would like to say something concerning the "courage" of showing these matters, that is to say, torture, which is—so to speak—a method of forced confessions during investigation. (Frankly, when one reads *Kuropieska* one sees that more perfidious things were done, but that is not the issue.) I don't think all that much was shown here. There are twenty-seven known methods of interrogation. We know well about the freezing of prisoners, about pulling off fingernails; we know what Mrs. Bristiger did, what Rozanski did, what Romkowski and others did.⁵ These are not great discoveries, and my misgivings don't concern them. I simply think that the evil of this film consists in what Mr. Kozniewski expressed.

This film lies from the beginning to the end, and, regrettably, it is a premeditated lie. Young Polish viewers—especially in the last two years—have been cheated from beginning to end about those years. Almost the entire ideology setting Poland afire has been built upon ignorance about those years, upon the oblivion to which this subject has been consigned for the youth. The thing to remember about this film is the fact that Polish youth

⁵ Luna Bristiger, Jozef Rozanski, and Roman Romkowski were high Jewish officials at the Ministry of

would learn for the first time about the trials of Tatar, Mossor, Kirchmayer, and others from the lips of Agnieszka Holland. Gentlemen, this is an obscenity. Let her first take a stand with regard to the role her own father played in those times, and to the times themselves. That's number one.

Two. I think this is a fairy tale for well-behaved children. The relations in the Office of Security Police are an invention. If the author had only wanted to exert himself a little and had researched these things, he would have learned that the tragedy of that system lay in a certain puritan atmosphere, in a sort of Jesuitical attitude; it lay also in the situation. I don't know whether Bugajski ever heard of the existence of a special department that spied and checked on police functionaries. A functionary could not allow himself to do too much when his actions weren't directed against the enemy. That's one thing. I have read a lot on this subject. Maybe that's why I have such a reputation among some, because those times are a passion of mine, and the truth about those times is also a passion of mine.

I disagree with this film, with what it shows about the other side. For God's sake, that whore on the screen, what kind of a symbol for the generation of Home Army underground soldiers is she? Pardon me. Is she acceptable because in the end, someplace inside her, humanity awakens? This is a mite too little. I would like to congratulate Bugajski in some way for his ability to work with actors. If I mention Agnieszka Holland it does not mean that she played badly in this film. She acted very well, except that she is consciously lying, as she almost always does.

Really, dear friends, there must be a standard of truth in art's generalizations; it must bind

us somehow, especially when we touch on times about which the society, excepting the specialists, knows next to nothing. Let us make films one hundred times more trenchant: I will defend them in this room if a censor or anyone else says that the matter is too sharply depicted. Let's show it sharply, but let's show what was at stake in those times. There was a collision of two world-concepts, of life and of Poland, above all. It must not be a matter concerning just a few individuals who were accidentally entangled in this. In the film, it is black-and-white—for instance, that nicely done professional motif of the security policeman who falls in love with the girl who has shown some toughness. It's all very nice, but how does it relate to what actually took place there? It's really a fairy tale for well-behaved children, a love story from the times of security-police rule.

There's one more thing. It seems to me that this film bears the imprint of something that has been obligatory in our cinematography, something that has been promoted so hard by the critics (those of course who worked for the inflagation of the country): it is the scheme of one magnificent human being who is immersed in a sea of dirt, ugliness, sadism, hideousness. I simply think that this film should be the last burial of a certain style of thinking.

Jan Rybkowski [*Film director*]: Gentlemen, as I walked out after this film I was shaken. I am not young; I have seen various things. And, sitting there, I thought it through once again. Gentlemen, enormous things have accumulated, horrible things that we lived through in our lives, things that create a certain pathology. A whole course of pathological literature has been created, and nobody takes it seriously; but it exists in Germany. There are various sadistic things, pornographic. Didn't you see films in which the SS-men were, uh, entertaining themselves? An unhealthy reflex has been created, a pathology really. Although I appreciate the excellent acting, appreciate the direction, I

cannot help feeling that this is pathological. My first job was with Jakubowska on her movie about Auschwitz. I researched it very thoroughly; I was always very interested in that. But let us not include pathological things among Polish matters. This is a certain deviation, created by times of contempt.

Henryk Jankowski [*Professor of philosophy at Warsaw University*]: It seems to me that our commission will only be able to make a recommendation if we do not allow ourselves to be frightened, if everyone can express his opinion. Even the sharpest criticism should not be tied to administrative proposals, because we would soon start to quarrel, or grow afraid of each other, and we wouldn't be able to provide sensible advice to the minister.

There were two appraisals of this film: one that it is an historical film, another that it is contemporary. In my opinion neither one applies to the film we just saw. It is a kind of morality play, showing the state of a few moral attitudes—a pragmatic attitude and a principled attitude. The message of such a morality play considerably exceeds what we know about the period in question from other sources.

I want to say one more thing. This is also a huge piece of our history. Thirty years have passed. Nevertheless, it seems to me that films of this kind are always useful insofar as they influence people's motives, and not in the direction which some of the preceding speakers have indicated. This is not a film that arouses hatred towards socialism, unless we regard those practices that are shown in the film as an integral element of socialism. With such a notion of socialism this film is indeed anti-socialist. But I don't think that those practices were an integral part, that they were helpful to socialist ideas. In short, we condemned those practices. They were stamped out. A film artist cannot show everything in his film.

Andrzej Werner [*Film critic, activist in Solidarity; interned by the martial law authorities and later released*]: I'd like to... [*The Minister asks him to leave. He also asks another man to leave. A short argument ensues.*]

Maria Turlejska [*Professor of history*]: I would like to make some remarks as an historian, thus not judging this film as a work of art (although, independently, I regard it highly from an artistic point of view). It seems to me that the decisions of the .ninth Party Congress to examine the causes of Poland's crises, the debate around them, and even the attempts to begin analyzing those crises since 1948, heretofore neglected in history, provide a certain point of departure for having them illuminated not only in memoirs, but also in other kinds of works, namely works of art. One of my friends who was arrested in 1948 spent five years in prison without trial. Unfortunately, she could not be here today. She saw this film and was terribly shaken, taking it as a document of an era, a document of those times, historical testimony.

A lot has been said here about emotions, but the essence of the matter lies in the fact that those emotions were stirred by certain cognitive elements. That is, this film—based, incidentally, on consultations with people who had gone through this wringer, through certain methods of investigation, certain methods of forcing confessions, etc.—is an attempt to provide a reflection on that bygone period. I would refer back to Wajda's letter, which treats it as an historical film. I too regard it as an historical film. I think that young people, who know so little of Polish history, have been searching for answers about what history's blank spaces really looked like. Well, those young people should have received some information; they were receiving it in any case, so that they could answer the question: What happened?

I think that to break the silence of this kind is necessary and valuable, and it lends credibility to the thesis that today there is no return to those methods and means. I think that from such a point of view, irrespective of the film's artistic values and of the moral values professor Jankowski mentioned, this film has not only emotional worth but also cognitive value. It may defuse, it may provide a catharsis; it may give a proof, a kind of test, that certain things won't be repeated, that there is no return to them. Therefore, I think that the film should be released.

Jozef Lenart [*Writer; first secretary of the Party organization at the Polish Writers' Association, former member of the Central Committee; former editor-in-chief of the magazine^{fc} Wspolczesnosc"; deputy editor of "World Literature"*]: I would like to comment on the last sentence of Professor Turlejska, namely that this film may defuse something in the accumulation of society's emotions. I think that this film cannot defuse anything at this moment, it can only electrify further the atmosphere, which in any case is electrified enough already. Is this an historical film, as Mr. Andrzej Wajda claims in his message? It is not, nor is it a contemporary film. It is an abstract film, in relation to the state of knowledge and the social situation in which it was made. It is abstracted from all the historical and contemporary context, purposely, with a great artistic impact.

I agree with some of the points raised by Poreba, that the film is an extension of a certain scene from *Man of Marble*. You will remember in that movie when a man called in by the police enters a room, and afterward it turns out that he is not there anymore. There is a trap-door, isn't there? Bugajski's film shows what happens to a person who walks into that trap. Its intellectual content goes only as far as the lieutenants and soldiers doing service in prison, however; it stops with the props of the uniform and the prison. For this reason it is cognitively sterile. It is very exciting, because it shows the most spectacular part

of the process, well, actually the residue of the processes of apolitical struggle that was waged then. But it does not relate to the mechanism of that political struggle, to the reasons for it. Rather, it does relate to it in a certain way. In what way? There are two issues here that give intellectual direction to the film, and it seems to me that it is a false direction. The scene in which one of the heroines—it was probably an accident that that prisoner was played by Agnieszka Holland—says, "Yes, again it will turn out that the Communists are to blame for everything" is very strong, much stronger than that beautiful scene with the giving of the fir branch.

Nevertheless, this is the emphasis that defines the direction of the film. The same with the meaning-laden, uh, reaction to. well, it's a diverse reaction, and interestingly shown, in a way that provides a chance for a deepened perspective on the matter: namely, the reaction in that cell to the news of Stalin's death. Even if this film makes an impression, I think that the means used here, the poverty of the means, is closely related to the intellectual poverty, the poster-like quality of this film, with its emotionally agitating character.

Minister Stefanski: Ladies and gentlemen, if I can request the following. I would like to say a few words, and then ask you to chair the meeting. Everything we say is for the purpose of documentation, in order to make a decision. As usual, the notes being taken are not very detailed. [*A voice from the side: "It's being written down in shorthand."*]

Ultimately, following the discussion, and after I familiarize myself with the rest of the material, obviously, final decisions will be made. This decision formally belongs to me. I think that substantively, to a degree, it also belongs to me. So, just a few sentences for the moment. I know the screenplay; I read it in *The Dialogue*.

Of course the events depicted in the film present a certain truth. The film was made in

specific political times, but even not going into anything, because the intentions of the authors are hard to read, it was made on the wave of certain political needs still very strongly promoted by certain political milieus in this country, and it follows undoubtedly—although maybe not directly—from certain inspirations. It would have served those inspirations perfectly—it would have served their political realization—had it appeared before December 13.

Fortunately, the film did not make it. Some people were able to finish their works in time; they manifested their political outlook. They took a very political stand on one side. I shall not conceal anything. I trust that I speak here in a gathering of people who are not politically illiterate, who understand well. A morality play was not what was needed then. I wish it were. If there were enough morality in Poland we would probably not have this situation, this state of December 13, and these decisions, right? Unfortunately we did not achieve what was necessary: morality. Political obstinacy, and the ensuing attempts to play various games, to use means that caused social tensions, they were eagerly reached for. This was a grave mistake, starting with those posters with slogans in the shipyard.

This film, I'd like to emphasize, is not a morality play and it is not an historical work. I disagree with professor Turlejska. Why isn't it historical? We simply know that there is a political struggle, what its rules are, what methods are being employed in that struggle. The crux of the matter is, what cause does it serve? If the film truly aimed for that. I am not talking about subjective intentions of the authors, for they may be just and honest; I have no right to ascribe anything to them.

This is not an objective film. It clearly makes the image of those times vague, and not just vague but outright false and mendacious, because one can always place a well-chosen

fragment of reality under a magnifying glass and make use of such truly cancerous tissue, tissue which should be rejected, of course. It must be rejected. We know those methods and those times; none of us wishes their return. Of course, nothing will ever be explained on the basis of such a monstrous blow-up, without any attempt to justify or prove, as it has been rightly said here, the sources of this phenomenon. One demands that from an historian, and to some degree one demands that from an artist as well, because a film is not an abstraction, it is a realistic work, a veristic work, a concrete work. It speaks in a clear language, enhanced by a captivating vision, and added to that is talent.

We have here a work of art, then, positively judged, but it works against the intentions; that is to say, in its reception it evokes, in director Hoffman's apt description, hatred, even if unintentionally. Its presence was particularly felt in the period before December, because we lived through such intensified hatred then. Should we follow that track? I think this would not serve those social goals which I think all of us consider worthy, including the authors, whom I do not accuse of wanting to achieve other purposes. Although I would say that if the wave of certain political tendencies suggested to them the necessity of making such a work, then that was their conscious political decision. Such choices must be unequivocally judged. If not, if this was just a temporary tide of inspiration, it would be quite characteristic. One must say that it has been rather widespread.

Why, then, were the Fifties so eagerly dealt with in the period before December 13? So eagerly! This is an astounding phenomenon! One day psychologists, sociologists, historians will decide this question. Today it is politicians who think about it; others will get their say later. That period, and so monstrously presented, was to be used in a political struggle. One just had to show it in a certain light: Look how the youth were being depraved then! Look at it and see what values the then Union of Polish Youth transmitted!

Were we living in a police state in those times? Were the Seventies, or the years after 1956, the years of police terror? I am not talking about the trials, really. Maybe some are nostalgic for that, but I think that none of us here are. There was no police state but, nevertheless, that image was being recalled, wasn't it? Attempts were made to prove that this system is by its very nature a police system, a depraved system. It was forgotten in that frenzy that it is not, because it was so suggestively presented to us in some works. This is the essence of tragedy, now that we are speaking of artistic truth, of a morality play.

These are perhaps rhetorical questions. I pose them here for the sake of artistic responsibility, a pure responsibility one would like to achieve and to shape in society.

These are just my questions. I would be willing to discuss this film further. I am asking them because it would be worthwhile to think them over, although not at this very moment. There is no use deceiving oneself or avoiding clear words. I do not see a possibility, not only of distributing this film, but also of accepting the ideas contained in it. In any case, I personally cannot accept such an offer because, in principle, I do not agree with looking at those times in such a way—simplified, monstrously shown. I am not talking about the details but about a certain style, a subjective perspective on certain things: the way this film expresses itself.

Does this film serve to learn about certain phenomena in such a way as to rationally and emotionally deter the potential repeaters from going back to those times and mobilizing society around such a stand? Is mobilization in this regard socially justified? I would rather not give a future-oriented answer to this question. But I think not. This film does not serve social peace or knowledge, that is, the lessons that one should draw from history. I do not want to employ circumlocutions. Please write down what is being said.

I also wouldn't want to close the discussion with my remarks, because I think it should continue. Not only here. It can even be moved beyond this room. It is necessary. It is needed not just to evaluate this film, but maybe also to evaluate what we should be doing, including films at the stage of screenplay and literary development. That is, these discussions should aim at that wider opinion. It is easy to deal with it by administrative means, but that's not the point. I have in mind, rather, the elimination of screenplays—the point being that these things should be more mature, wiser, deeper, and, of course, more morally responsible. I would end on that. I'd like you to chair the meeting. I must, unfortunately, as I said, leave.

Marian Kuszewski [*Director of the Central Administration of Cinematography, that is, second in command after Minister Stefanski; former president of the Higher Film School in Lodz*]: Undoubtedly, art is a field of human activity in which errors occur. Even with the best of intentions, a person does not always succeed in attaining a set goal in a proper way, so that it will bring satisfaction later on. Therefore, let us say, we should have some kind of considerable tolerance toward errors and mistakes. Errors are unavoidable.

Nevertheless, if from such a point of view I would tend to absolve this film, still, I was greatly surprised by Mr. Wajda's letter; he is a prominent artist, after all, a head of a studio, who enjoys great authority, who actually attempts to justify this mistake. Here I agree with the Minister. Any talk about morality play is here an exaggeration. The film is one sided to the point of offending artistic dignity. It seems to me that the artist has no right to operate this way if he pretends to the prestige of his calling. And the film is so simplified and tendentious.

In conclusion, we were talking about the conditions of distributing this film. A few days

ago a young man was knifed to death in Warsaw. Most likely political motives were involved. I am talking about the young Ladosz, the son of professor Ladosz, whom I knew personally. A nice young man. He was an activist in the Communist Union of Polish Youth. Not long ago we talked about the Karos affair.⁶ There was a priest involved there. There is the matter of moral responsibility for stirring hatred which leads to murder.

Janusz Zaorski: What I know of one artist has scared me terribly here. Those cannons, those culverins that have been rolled out against this film. I understand that the film had an emotional effect and maybe that is why we started to feel as if we were, well, not in the building of the Ministry of Culture.

I think that our task here is to talk. Horrible accusations were made concerning one-sidedness, poster-like qualities, etc. From a story of a woman who gets into a wringer by accident, into this machinery, suddenly generalizations have been made. They are, in my judgment, far from the target, and I think harmful, because this is already forcing things to a "no."

Concerning what Minister Stefanski said toward the end, that all these discussions serve a purpose, namely that new screenplays and new films should be made, one should perhaps ponder the fact that only in normal conditions is it possible to convince anyone, to move a conscience. This here immediately causes that atavistic reflex for a "no."

Ryszard Bugajski [*Director of "The Interrogation"*]: Ladies and gentlemen, in the end the director has his say. I feel I have a duty to speak, but it would be hard for me to enter into polemics with what I have heard here. I have a heavy heart because I can't resign myself to

⁶ A policeman shot to death in a Warsaw streetcar in February 1982. Seven youths and a priest accused of helping them were tried for the murder and sentenced to long prison terms in September.

so many baseless arguments. I have never heard such things before and would have to contest them sentence by sentence, and such discussion would last too long. I don't know, but I suppose that those gentlemen who used so many epithets today, "anti-socialist" and so on, should justify themselves. Why, in their opinion, is it anti-socialist? What does it mean anyway? But that's precisely the point I do not wish to discuss. I wanted to express surprise. How can one talk so much about politics, educational impact, etc., in a place—as Janusz Zaorski rightly noted—such as the Ministry of Culture, not the propaganda ministry or a center of political decision-making? You said that somebody was murdered with a knife. We, however, are not sitting now in a police station in order to listen to reports of accidents, or some kind of a criminal blotter.

I am also surprised that when Professor Jankowski, who is an authority on ethics, and has been for many years—in old times I used to be his student and remember his lectures and his books—says that this is a morality play then somebody else says: "No, this is not a morality play." It seems to me that the discussion, this bidding up of the terminology, is absurd. If for an expert on ethics this is a morality play, one should, in my opinion, believe him. One should also believe the historians who say, for example, that for them this film is historically true. To deny that it is an historical film, or that it is true, well, in that case, what do we know anything for, why do we have certain knowledge, why are we experts in our fields, if anyone can deny it?

You emphasized all this time—I mean the people who criticized the film—that this is not a film that should be shown because it could stir some inappropriate emotions. You claimed that this is a film—there were some epithets here—that is "loathsome" and at the same time contemporary, "anti-socialist," "propagandistic," "manipulative," etc. Mr. Jankowski said the security-police practices do not constitute an integral part of socialism. But it's as if you

emphasized at the same time that security-police practices do constitute an integral part of socialism. Because if they do not, for God's sake, let's condemn them! Let's see whether this is true or not, but let's not relate it to the present!

Of course, every country has its history that lives on. We can talk today about the January uprising of 1863, the November uprising of 1830: their strong traditions survive until today. But to make a film about the November uprising does not mean that one is making a contemporary film. Never. And showing General Zajaczek, or, let's say, General Krasinski does not mean that the attitudes they represented exist today, and that we should be disputing them today. Really, the discussion with people who stuck various ideological labels on the film is rather funny.

If the film—and most people admitted it— is moving, if it has caused people to walk out after the screening shocked and moved, and even crying (and I saw it myself here), then why don't we look at this film as a certain kind of artistic event, to be judged by the public? After all, the public usually decides whether a film is appropriate or not. The public can evaluate because it will buy a ticket or it won't. Let's not be wiser than the public; let's not pretend that we know better than they whether to show it or not because they are small powerless people who do not know anything, who can't judge what's good.

I think it is grossly presumptuous to say that I, Ryszard Bugajski, or somebody else, say, Mr. X, may decide, for example, that five million people, or even five thousand people, are in error, and that those five thousand should not be seeing this film. Let's present this film to the public to evaluate it. I would like to propose here a trial run that would help us decide; let's show this film to people from various walks of life: workers, intelligentsia, clerks, the young and the old. Let's try it! That would be some kind of an evaluation I

could accept. If these people reject the film, then I would say, indeed, I was mistaken.

Making a decision *a priori*—some thirty years of history should have taught us that making the decision *today*, that not showing it because it might cause some kind of incalculable social consequences—well, we have condemned that many times. There was breast-beating on this account, again and again. That is all. Rather, I do not know whether I should add anything.

Bohdan Poreba: I have one request to make. In general I would like to explain something to Mr. Bugajski. Simply, it seems to me that this point of view which you present to us is nothing but an expression of vanity and irresponsibility with regard to a work of art, and that's all. However, I'd like to tell you that we, here, are simply people who constitute an advisory body; we do not pre-judge anything here. Every one of us makes comments according to our conscience, our point of view, our understanding of the world and of art. I do not see any reason for having to listen to your insulting epithets when I come here for socially motivated purposes. Straight out, in the name of everyone here, we won't stand for this. So, either you take this under advisement or you don't. Besides, your arguments are also very manipulative. You invoke one historian who is sitting here, and who by the way surprised me *very* much, because she told us only, on the subject of one of the most painful chapters in Polish history, that she had a friend, correct? That is not the most authoritative remark on the subject for me. [*A voice from the side: "There are books, there are books."*] Because I could invite ten other historians here who will have an absolutely different point of view, and only then could we discuss it somehow. Maybe we should have invited the historians of contemporary Poland, huh?

Ryszard Bugajski: I agree entirely. [*From the side: "Mr. Bohdan, why don't you first arrange*

that Mrs. Turlejska's books are allowed to be published?"]

Bohdan Poreba: We demonstrated this on film. You may accept it or not, but do not adopt this tone of voice when you address people working voluntarily. [*A voice: "Well, you do get a few zlotys for this, don't you?"*] Thank you.

Minister Stefanski: Thank you very much, I would like to propose...

Czeslaw Petelski: Wait! Wait a moment! This is not the end already, is it? Why are you taking my turn away?

Minister Stefanski: Please don't shout. We did not come here to shout at each other but to discuss. Please go on.

Czeslaw Petelski: Well, very well, I will answer. I am not surprised by Mr. Bugajski's arrogance. However, I am very surprised by the remarks of Mr. Zaorski, the director of the studio, who started to instruct us where we are not. That we are not in the propaganda bureau, that we are not at the police station. Neither are we in the offices of Solidarity's Mazowsze Region Headquarters. Fellows, I won't stand for that.

Ryszard Bugajski: I said that, not Mr. Zaorski. You direct your remarks to me.

Czeslaw Petelski: You both said that.

Golebiowski [*University professor, former official of the Central Committee's Youth Department*]: If I can. I am sorry, I wasn't supposed to say anything, but I am here for the first time. With permission of the Minister, my name's Golebiowski, from the University of Warsaw. I would like to say one thing, address one point, in order to calm the emotions. It

seems to me that Mr. Bugajski, when he talked about how the film should be tested among various publics, is largely right. We are aware of this, and that is also my opinion as a sociologist of culture.

Well, we had an obvious example of art today, cinematic art, that cannot, in this situation, be released right away, as it was proposed here. This film is *so* shocking, and the context is *so* strong, so strongly tied to the present, independent of the intentions of its creators. I will remind you of one thing: a mass audience, even though. Please, do not misunderstand me. Not that I do not appreciate its level of education, its knowledge of history, independent of certain mistakes that were committed — a mass audience will react to this film unequivocally as, how shall I say, the breaking of human beings by people in Polish uniforms. That's how it will be received! Unfortunately, that's how it will be received, irrespective of intentions, independent of them. The breaking of human beings that took place in the context of history, which is incomprehensible to the masses. But we can understand it, provided that we are deeply convinced that this was happening in the name of socialism. They would not make distinctions between Stalinist non-socialism and the socialism of the state of war. Of course they won't! As a sociologist I can responsibly say this without sticking any labels on the film, even though it seems to me that these voices that spoke of historicism, moral tales, etc., were somewhat one-sided, and that my esteemed fellow scientists—I am sorry if this sounds bad—look at it too much from their professional point of view. If I were to look at the picture from my point of view, as a sociologist, a film that has emotional effect, that contains certain emotions, is a propaganda film. Independent of the intentions. Unfortunately. Thank you.

*[The tape recording stops at this point. *

Postscript: "Solidarnosc—Tygodnik Mazowsze," the underground weekly published by the Warsaw chapter of Solidarity, printed in its June 23, 1982 issue the following excerpts from an open letter, dated May 12, to Deputy Minister of Culture S. Stefanski from Andrzej Wajda in response to the April 23 co-laudation commission meeting.

I have read the transcript of co-laudation and I must say that we have not encountered anything as dangerous [as this] in a long time. The majority of the participants in the discussion have proved that they have no qualifications to sit on a commission of this kind. They do not possess the necessary competence to judge a film from an artistic point of view, hence they are exclusively occupied with its political evaluation.

I shall deal only with three voices: the directors Waskowski, Petelski, and Poreba. Waskowski says, among other things: "This film should have never been made and paid for with our money." Mr. Waskowski, surely this was not your money since it was precisely my films that earned money for [Polish] cinematography. You forget that you and your friends shoot films on the stock bought with dollars from the sales of my films, films which you attack today. You call for a public prosecutor. I submit that the prosecutor should inquire into the matter often screen-plays of yours (I participated in the hearings of the Cultural Commission of the Sejm [Parliament] when an official of the Supreme Control Chamber spoke about this matter), for which you took the money, but have never made the films.

Mr. Petelski denigrates the value of Bugajski's film by saying that it consists in the fact that the director knows how to cut and splice. If Mr. Petelski could

"cut and splice" as well as debutant Bugajski, probably most of his complexes would not have haunted the film-makers' milieu for so many years.

Like Poreba, I am of the opinion that dramatic moments in our history ought to be shown through to the end.

When I was accidentally stopped and interrogated in Cracow's Freedom Square in 1945, the language heard in that building was indeed foreign, but it wasn't Yiddish. If this fact had found true reflection in Poreba's film about those times, we would be truly grateful

to him for such a film.

Anybody who can't see in *The Interrogation* an astounding film debut has no right to judge films at all, or to be a member of a commission whose purpose it is to issue such judgments.

I am afraid that all the evil which exists in the present co-laudation commission will be multiplied in another body which you have created: the screenplay commission. I regard the creation of a commission of this kind as a retreat to the dismal Fifties.

So long as the suspension of the Association of Polish Filmmakers is not lifted, the creation of new advisory bodies without any consultations with filmmakers should not take place. Such a body cannot represent anyone, or be accepted by the film world.