

When Politics Tipped the Scales:
Locating Polish Documentary Films from the 1940s

Anna Misiak
Falmouth University

Abstract

This article introduces the reader to the 1940s history of the documentary film in post-war Poland when the tense relationship between the Communist government and the small community of documentarians determined the contents of factual cinema. The author argues that the formal and thematic choices made by the 1940s filmmakers fuelled the future growth of the Polish School of Documentary. Despite of repressive censorship and close political scrutiny, the 1940s directors produced numerous subjective film visions of the social reality around them. Some worked in line with the political propaganda; others capitalised on the available margins of creative freedom; however small the latter might appear from today's perspective.

Not only do the discussed films testify to an unprecedented early proliferation of authorial creativity among Polish documentary filmmakers, but they also form social and political chronicles of their time, a potentially valuable material for the history of everyday life under Communism. As micro-historical film records, they can complement the conventional macro-historical approaches, which with only some exceptions, tend to dominate the Western studies of the world once hidden behind the Iron Curtain.

This archive-based work aims at encouraging further research. The only copies of some of the examined titles are available at the National Film Archive in Warsaw. A few lesser known among them have not yet attracted international attention. Almost thirty years after the collapse of the Communist regime, it is the first time some of these films get a mention in the English language.

Word count: 245

Introduction

Over the first five years after World War Two, Polish documentary films emerged from newsreels as a creative medium reporting on everyday life and the politics of the country. The Soviet-backed government was happy to support its growth. Despite their frequently contradicting objectives, both the Communists in power and the small film community believed in the mission of factual filmmakers. They worked to disseminate information about the recent social and political changes and to chronicle them for future generations. If these filmmakers sometimes cheerfully reported on political events or engaged with propagandist persuasion, elsewhere they focused on individuals coping with the challenges of post-war recovery.

Although the ruling elite tipped the scales frequently offsetting authorial visions, in one way or another, Polish documentarians explored the thin margins of creative freedom and produced an original output that still impresses viewers with both richness of subjective outlooks and formal inventiveness. From observation to the reenactment, they developed distinct strategies of filming. Their diverse subject matters gave rise to a broad range of genres: from archive documentaries to contemporary social commentaries, from expository films to poetic contemplations. Several of those early tendencies laid the foundations for future documentary directions. In some ways, they sparked the remarkable international successes that reached their zenith between the late 1950s and 1970s with what the critics have dubbed the Polish School of Documentary/*Polska Szkoła Dokumentu*.²

From as early as 1944, when the East of the country was liberated, the Communist authorities began investing in numerous factual film initiatives that soon gave birth to critically acclaimed titles, some of which won international festival trophies. Gradually, the new government built a whole national infrastructure for producing documentaries. Like any other economic or cultural enterprise, owned by the state, all documentary film production fell under the control of the Communist Party, on whose behalf dedicated ministerial bodies managed and supervised its operations.

By the end of the 1940s, the Party officials authorised an opening of two separate studios dedicated to factual filmmaking. The Documentary Film Studio/*Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych* in Warsaw started operating in the autumn of 1949, and the Educational Film Studio/*Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych* in Łódź opened early in January 1950.³ Both outlived the Communist regime and still exist today. With the dedicated production facilities, factual film production gained recognition and status that almost matched that of the narrative cinema, whose makers had their studios in Łódź.

In spite of such positive developments, the documentary community often paid a high price for the Communist investment. Many a time, potentially successful documentary careers stalled because of censorship and political repressions. Sometimes creative visions underwent substantial modifications. The authorities also shelved a few inventive, original films because they fell short of projecting an optimistic outlook—one of the top priorities on the long list of Communist propaganda objectives.

Nevertheless, several filmmakers left a legacy of creatively compiled documentary evidence of the sprouting normalcy in the social life of the country that had been traumatised by both the Nazi and the front

lines. They recorded footage in cities and villages that had woken up to the Communist rule with people who welcomed the new regime with open arms, as well as those who just managed to survive under the new government. If read with an acknowledgement of dominant cultural and political discourses, these films—now stored in the National Film Archive/Filmoteka Narodowa in Warsaw—offer a valuable addition to the global history of documentary cinema, as well as audiovisual evidence for the history of the Eastern Bloc.

The following pages present the formation of Polish documentary culture from the final years of World War Two until 1949 when political pressures escalated after the Congress of Filmmakers/Zjazd Filmowców in Wisła and the film industry entered its darkest period of socialist realism.¹ However, even before that, propaganda and censorship affected Polish factual film to the same degree as the more frequently discussed but significantly fewer narrative productions from that era.² Here, institutional and political contextualisation complements some short film analyses, so that the authorities' alternations of content and form are not mistaken for facts or individual filmmakers' visions.

Marek Hendrykowski—one of the leading Polish specialists in documentary cinema—confirms that in the 1940s, Polish documentarians could not comment on their social reality as freely as, for example, the Italian neorealists. Yet, he also reminds that 'at the worst times ... there still existed a small margin for creative freedom, on which filmmakers ... tried to expand in many different ways.'³ Because factual cinema always uses social reality as either a reference point for its representation or as a source for its visuals, even the most politically manipulated films can provide credible, albeit often subjective, glimpses at both the dominant politics and the history of everyday life.

Filming the War: From Newsreels to Documentaries

Today most commentators agree that the documentary film in Poland stemmed from the activities of pre-war filmmakers who during the war worked in the Soviet Union. After liberation, their front line newsreels became the foundation of the *Polish Film Chronicle/Polska Kronika Filmowa*, which has been identified as 'the mother of all Polish documentary films.'⁴ Later in the 1940s, any formal distinction between the documentary film and the *Chronicle* appeared problematic, if not impossible. What further complicated any categorisations was the fact that the latter was often released as 'special editions', which looked like ten-minute documentaries.

From 22 July 1944 when the Communist government first officially claimed its right to rule the newly liberated Polish territories, the most active among army newsreel makers took charge of the organisation of the nationalised film industry and sanctioned the development of the infrastructure for documentary films. Because they managed film production and trained the new talent, they also dictated dominant documentary styles and subject matters. Chief among them was Aleksander Ford (1908-1981), who in 1943 enlisted in the Polish unit of the Red Army and followed the Soviet order to form the Polish Army Film Command *Czołówka*.⁵ Having just one camera at his disposition, he surrounded himself with other pre-war directors and cinematographers, including Stanisław Wohl (1912-1985), Władysław Forbert (1915-2001) and Ludwik Perski (1912-1993). Together they started recording the successes of the Polish Division of the Red Army.⁶

* All quotes from Polish originals (films and printed materials) have been translated by the author of this article.

Later Czołówka was joined by film producer Juliusz Turbowicz, cinematographer Adolf Forbert (1911-1992) and film writer Jerzy Bossak (1910-1989)—notably its only member with no previous practical experience in filmmaking.¹⁰ There were also a few Russians, including editor Ludmiła Niekrasowa and two cinematographers, Olgierd Samucewicz and Eugeniusz Jefimow. The last was officially redeployed from the Soviet Soyuzkino Chronicle. With no command of Polish, Jefimow appeared suspicious to the rest of the team, who saw him as a potential Soviet plant.¹¹ Even if Ford's crew willingly served the Communist army, they would rather do so without any such reinforcements, especially that their situation was hard enough due to wartime shortages of equipment.

Although, as Jadwiga Bocheńska mentions, 'only primitive spring-cameras [Eymo] were available,' Czołówka managed to complete quite a few shorts.¹² Under an overall heading, *The Fighting Poland/Polska walcząca*, their newsreels were divided into compact episodes. The first was completed in December 1943. *Our Oath to the Polish Soil/Przysięgamy ziemi polskiej*, edited by Ford, comprised of footage of Polish soldiers delivering a sworn statement in front of their commanders, which was followed by vivid shots from the Battle of Lenino. When making it, the members of Czołówka already exhibited a drive to provide their viewers with the best point of view, as well as with small visible details that captured the mood of any filmed moment.

Edward Zajiček cites an anecdote best exposing this ambition: To get the best camera angle during the Battle, cinematographer Wohl stood in no man's land and filmed the Polish division from the front, in a wide panoramic shot.¹³ However, the Soviet convention showing combat could not include the perspective of the enemy, and so Wohl's footage had to be discarded. Despite its unfortunate conclusion, this story highlights an attitude that would distinguish Polish documentary filmmakers for the years to come. The zealous Wohl was a symbolic harbinger of later dedication to pursue their however subjectively defined version of the truth.

If the making of the first newsreel revealed Czołówka's commitment to their mission, their second edition, *We are Coming to You, Our Motherland/Idziemy do Ciebie ziemio, matko nasza* (1943) foregrounded their interest in filming ordinary people. The latter part of this film showed soldiers helping wartime orphans. Shots of small meaningful objects matched with close-ups of expressive faces, if only slightly, heralded a tendency to represent individual human experiences that would later turn into one of the strengths of Polish documentaries. Such continuity comes as no surprise considering that it would be one particular member of Czołówka, Jerzy Bossak who, with some short breaks, not only would lead production but also training in documentary film for more than the two following decades. However, before Polish documentarians regularly started turning their attention to ordinary people, they went through a transitional period marked by two seemingly contradictory stages. The first could be best characterised as 'serving the system,' the latter as somewhat 'experimental.'

Immediately after the war Polish audiences could watch solidly crafted shorts to which the new Communist government gave both thumbs up because in one form or another they displayed an appreciation of the Polish-Soviet collaboration during the time of combat. Some of them were released as special editions of the *Chronicle*, others as separate documentary films. Their style was similar to American and British front line newsreels, comprising of silent observational shots with voice-over commentaries. Among them, there were

such popular productions as Jerzy Bossak's *The Battle of Kołobrzeg/Bitwa o Kołobrzeg* (1945) or *The Fall of Berlin/Zagłada Berlina* (1945).¹⁴

[INSERT FIG 6 HERE]

Next to front line newsreels, films documenting the atrocities committed by the Nazis were also what Bolesław Beirut's (1892-1956) government welcomed on the screen and, in fact, what people wanted to watch. As Czołówka marched west, on their way they gathered plenty of moving image evidence from liberated concentration camps and devastated cities. Such footage was either at once or a bit later transformed into newsreels or alarming documentaries reviving the traumas of the survivors and resurrecting the darkest nightmares of the war.

In the Devastated Country: Reviving the War Traumas

In 1944 and 1945, almost every newsreel and short documentary contained shots from the ruined cities, concentration camps, or other sites of torture that often appeared swamped with piles of corpses. The looming ghosts of the recent past overshadowed the liberation hype, which frequently evolved into demands for vengeance. This tendency escalated in the newsreels from 1945 that were still produced by the growing team of Czołówka, by then officially baptised the Polish Film Chronicle. In the first edition from that year, the optimism of the liberation fuelled an all-pervading call for retribution, particularly in its concluding report on tracking down war criminals, one with a telling title: *The Nation Seeks Justice/Naród wymierza sprawiedliwość*.

The fourth edition of the *Chronicle* from that year, *Free Warsaw!/Warszawa Wolna!* opened with disturbing screams: 'Warsaw has been annihilated!' This and other dramatic lines by the narrator played to a montage of soldiers and civilians marching through smouldering remnants of houses, trams and public squares. After that, the filmmakers invited their audience to watch footage depicting dead insurgents, partially burnt and dumped by the Germans in the city of Łódź. The commentator's assurance that the Nazis would pay for their crimes provided the only consolation for the surrounding crowds of crying women.¹⁵

What the members of Czołówka started to show in their liberation newsreels naturally found its continuation in the first documentaries after the combat had ended. Today, the chronology of when the first post-war Polish documentary film appeared and who made it may be rather difficult to establish. However, in line with earlier critical assumptions, Hendrykowski suggests that at that time films intentionally labelled as documentaries gave rise to the documentary film tradition in the Communist-ruled Poland.¹⁶ Indeed, in retrospect, it seems that they set some formal and creative parameters of the genre.

The first film officially marked as a documentary in its opening titles was *Majdanek: The Graveyard of Europe/Majdanek Cmentarzysko Europy*. Although made in 1944, critics have classified it as a post-war production because it was filmed in the liberated city of Lublin when for the local people the war had officially ended. Edited and directed by Ford with narration written by Bossak, in just over twenty minutes, the documentary captured the horrors of a concentration camp when it was first found by Czołówka's crew. It progressed from the celebratory aura of liberation in Lublin to the portrayal of the humanitarian cataclysm that had been engineered by the Nazis.

[INSERT FIG 1 HERE]

Majdanek started on 25 July 1944 with establishing shots showing a panorama of Lublin. The national flag was triumphantly waving in the air. The ensuing shots exposed a cheering crowd receiving Polish and Soviet soldiers in the city: smiling faces and bunches of flowers. Soon, however, the tears of joy gave way to those of grief. The camera paused on masses of corpses found at the castle in the town and on figures of women standing over the dead. The voice-over read witnesses' accounts: 'It was a pond of blood, up to your ankles.' The shots of the dead bodies and mourners played to the accompaniment of a philharmonic orchestra.

A few further shots of the women dramatically bowing over the cadavers faded out to reveal 'No trespassing and no photos' signs attached to shining barbed wires. The commentator shouted: 'Majdanek! ... There was no escape from the death camp!' The camera, as if to mimic the arrival of the soldiers on their rescue mission, moved from the fence inwards: people behind the wires, piles of dead bodies, heaps of hair and clothes. The voice-over carefully described the imagery until the film reached its most disturbing, climactic sequence from inside the crematorium.

Despite its elaborate dramatic structure, *Majdanek* followed the discourse of other early newsreels. Its explicit footage served to encourage calls for retribution. Nonetheless, it introduced a creative strategy of making documentary films that would later dominate the domestic market. Ford and Bossak directly manipulated their footage to construct a dramatic, focused story. They implemented their point of view in the editing room. Inspired by John Grierson's practice and his definition of the documentary film as 'a creative treatment of actuality,' in Poland such a tactic of working on documentaries was later heralded as an application of authorial vision.¹⁷ Although observational shots from authentic events and locations formed the core footage in many documentaries in the 1940s, after *Majdanek* no such film pretended to objectivity.

When in 1966, Bossak—by then one of the managers of the Documentary Film Studio in Warsaw and a film professor at the National Film School—was asked: 'What in your view is the most important aspect of a documentary film?' he answered:

We observe a crisis when we limit ourselves to exposing the surface truth of facts registered with the camera and the microphone. Creativity is the higher truth. ... It is the matter of not only mastering the language of film but most all of one's authorial gaze, conviction and individual imagination.¹⁸

Perhaps because the message and the story—or the authorial perspective—were always prioritised over formal or other content qualities, every year Polish documentarians produced a whole range of stylistically diverse films. By necessity, due to technical restrictions, most of their work in the 1940s could be classified as representative of what Bill Nichols defined as 'an expository mode', where the commentator provided interpretative tips for the audience.¹⁹ However, later, staged and dramatised documentaries would be produced next to observational titles, expository next participatory ones, and performative films next to poetic pieces. Although in certain periods some modes might have dominated over others, their prevalence was never absolute. Until the 1970s, the actual method of obtaining footage was rarely debated or seen as a distinctive feature of any documentary type.

Between 1945 and 1949 documentaries gradually started departing from the style of the *Chronicle*, evolving into a separate, critically recognised type of film. What allowed for such an independence was not the method of filming, but the fact that any footage in a documentary was always shown from the point of view of an individual filmmaker, or, in Bossak's words, factual shots served a subjectively understood 'higher truth.' At the same time, the newsreels almost always spoke for the regime. The government remained their umbrella author.²⁰ Already in 1945, for some in the filmmaking community, as well as in the government circles, it was clear that documentary films and newsreels had two different functions. The first was a vehicle for creative commentary on social, cultural and political reality, whereas the second formed a tool of information and propaganda. Nevertheless, over the first two or three years after the war, both types of factual films shared not only certain subject matters but also some footage.

The war still proved to be among the most popular themes to which documentary filmmakers often returned, editing materials collected by Czołówka before, during and after the liberation. Again and again, compelling documentaries retold the stories of fighting against the Germans, as well as those of bringing war criminals to justice. For instance, next to the titles mentioned above, viewers could see Aleksander Świdziński's *The Gallows in Stutthoff/Szubienice w Stutthoffie* (1946) and Bossak's *Marching West/Na Zachód* (1945). The first film reported the trail of the Nazis in Gdańsk; the latter chronicled Polish soldiers' war journey along the coast of the Baltic Sea.

Slowly the immediacy of the early newsreels gave way to more complex storytelling that involved the viewer on an emotional level. One notable example in this last category came with a twenty-minute film, *The Last Parteitag in Nuremberg/Ostatni Parteitag w Norymberdze* (1946). It intercut footage from the early days of the Nazi trial, archival shots from the Third Reich, and glimpses at the devastation on both sides of the front line: that of the oppressors and that of the victims. Instead of providing a report from the court, director Antoni Bohdziewicz (1906-1970) and editor Wacław Kaźmierczak (1905-1981) offered a semi-poetic reflection on the rise and the fall of Nazi ideologies, albeit still narrated with the use of a voice-over. However, in 1946 this stylised, poetic documentary contemplation on the recent past was rather an exception than a norm on the increasingly populated landscape of Polish documentary film. Gradually, factual filmmakers turned their cameras to the ordinary people and their efforts to raise the country from the ashes.

Witnessing the Reconstruction: From Ruins to Life

New documentaries capturing the restoration of everyday life and the fate of the people in different locations started to outnumber the earlier chronicles of loss and devastation. The thematic transition between the war and the new era manifested in three early films: Andrzej Panufnik's (1914-1991) *Ballada f-moll* (1945), Tadeusz Makarczyński's (1918-1987) *Warsaw Suite/Suita Warszawska* (1946) and Stanisław Urbanowicz's (1907-1959) *Warsaw Rebuilds/Budujemy Warszawę* (1945). In his ten-minute documentary, music composer Panufnik edited pre-war shots and images of ruins in the capital city to Chopin's piano notes. However, his experimental elegy did not satisfy the taste of the officials. Without any commentary, the debris of houses over the Vistula River seemed to be refuting the Communists' objective of injecting confidence in the nation.

[INSERT FIG 2 HERE]

Although Panufnik's film was shelved, his style proved to be hugely inspirational. The following year, Makarczyński's *Warsaw Suite* recycled some of his footage. The twenty-minute, three-act poetic impression shared at least two characteristics with its banned, shorter predecessor. Firstly, it exhibited the same reliance on visuals and music. Its classical score came from Panufnik's professional partner, Witold Lutosławski.²¹ Secondly, except for inter-titles, Makarczyński decided against any verbal narration. His entire first act, 'The Disaster/Klęska' resonated with the same sense of a tragic loss that underscored Panufnik's film, echoing an artistic fashion to fetishise war devastation. Post-war Polish art often idolised the ruins as a symbolic epitome of the despair after the biggest humanitarian crisis in the European history. Warsaw became an inspiring ghost town whose melancholic reflections and recreations burgeoned in painting and photography. Marta Leśniakowska observes:

The post-war, Neo-romantic fascination with destruction as an aesthetic category obviously ha[d] its roots in the Romantic cult of ruins ... but [it also related] to the semantics of a fragmented form ... a metaphor for the broken world in pieces, the defeated graveyard of human history.²²

The expressive power of *Warsaw Suite* relied on its opening meditation on the dystopian landscape. The static shots of destroyed buildings slowly transformed into their reflections in the river. Unhurried fading pans of broken crosses and sculptures of Catholic saints verged on indulgence in pity for the wiped-out life. It was this particular imagery that aided the film's international acclaim. Screened during the first film festival in Cannes, it was also shown in a few cinemas in Paris and on television in France and the USA.²³

Despite some obvious similarities with Panufnik's work, censors voiced no objections. The impression made by Makarczyński's two later acts saved the documentary from the Communist dismissal. In these fittingly headed sections, 'The Return to Life/ Powrót do życia' and 'Spring in Warsaw/Wiosna Warszawska' the city became increasingly populated. At first, a few war veterans on crutches wandered in the darkness through the ruins. Soon, they were replaced with dancing crowds, children on merry-go-rounds, parks and fountains. The screen filled with smiles and rays of the sun. To the officials' delight, Makarczyński concluded with an image of the re-erected monument of the Mermaid of Warsaw proudly holding her sword against the skyline of the partially rebuilt city.

Bracketed with the pathos of the ruins and an ending as glaringly optimistic as the period's propaganda, today Makarczyński's shots of Warsaw's inhabitants offered invaluable film records of everyday life in post-war Poland.²⁴ Builders, florists, booksellers and shoe shiners worked for the homecoming crowds. Intended as a symbolic visualisation of the city's rebirth, the final observational footage from local festivals and amusement parks was a testimony to the fact that the war survivors were no strangers to leisure: men and women passed their time feeding pigeons in city squares; young girls played with skipping ropes.

Despite its similar 'resurrection' narrative, the third film, *Warsaw Rebuilds* (1945) was schematic in its social observations. Interestingly, it was also distributed in the USA.²⁵ Like Makarczyński, in his first act director Urbanowicz returned to the wartime to later contemplate the scale of the effort needed to rebuild the capital. Showing the construction sites in the Old Town, he focused on the collective hero. The voice-over—

announcing that '[t]he whole country is building Warsaw'—played to a series of shots that were rhythmically edited to a cheerful song. Despite skilful camera work that captured details of tools and machines, as well as hands and faces of dedicated workers, the director's attempt to provide a broad perspective came across as overwhelming. Concluded with images of *Życie Warszawy*—a newspaper whose title translates as *The Life of Warsaw*—and a brick wall growing to fill the entire frame, formally Urbanowicz's film was closer to the newsreels than to the more dramatic documentary stories that would soon come to Polish screens.

Similar attempts to realistically capture the scale of post-war restoration pervaded the same director's otherwise interesting documentary outlook at the ordinary folk in *The Railway Locomotive/Lokomotywa* (1946). The opening titles read: 'This film praises the efforts of Polish workers rebuilding the railways.' In his first sequence, Urbanowicz presented shots of railwaymen performing their job in trains and on tracks. These images were matched with glimpses at factories producing engines and coaches. An off-screen commentator dramatised the edit, calling to speed up the work: 'Our country and our society urge you to multiply the effort in streamlining the transport.' Just a few minutes later, the same narrator proudly announced: 'The Polish railwayman hasn't failed.' However, this energy withered later when the viewer learnt that only forty per cent of the pre-war rolling stock was in operation at the time the footage was gathered.

The rest of the film exposed overcrowded trains and uncomfortable travel conditions. Camping on platforms, passengers waited endless hours. Their children slept on waiting rooms' floors. Elsewhere, women climbed through windows to board trains and men travelled on the roofs of freight vehicles or hanging from overflowing coaches. Even if in the final sequence people's legs were dangling from a packed moving waggon, the train headed towards the horizon, as if to meet the promised better future. References to the collective experience reinforced the government's message: 'You aren't alone. We're working on it.' In spite of their discomfort, all faces in *The Railway Locomotive* looked calm, as if to display people's capacity to tolerate poor transport conditions. After all, as we learn from the narrator, an improvement was just around the corner. If the reality on the screen looked grim, the Party could raise no objections to such a film. It promoted patience by showing the viewers their unfortunate partners in temporary discomfort against the background of centrally undertaken measures.

A matching promise of improvements in the quality of life also shone through films completed by directors who commented on the micro-realities of their contemporary fellow nationals. In *Brzozowa Street/Ulica Brzozowa* (1947), two debutants, Wojciech Jerzy Has (1925-2000) and Stanisław Różewicz (1924-2008) collected a series of shots of Warsaw inhabitants returning to their devastated pre-war homes—people who were known as 'Robinsons.' Initially, the filmmakers compiled their footage for the audience to pause and reflect on the wretched living conditions in ruins. The film highlighted an unusual strength and entrepreneurship of the poor community on just one street in Warsaw's Old Town. However, the censors decided that Has and Różewicz did not inject the viewer with enough optimism, and so, they advised to change the ending and add an uplifting commentary that was written by Jerzy Piórkowski.²⁶

The new version of *Brzozowa Street* vibrated with a striking energy of the young and the old carrying on with their lives against the background of extremely rough living conditions. It almost made an impression

that the overcrowded basements, makeshift shops and streets full of rubble fed on the support for the government's social initiatives. The commentary centred the story of the impoverished community around their yearning for the sun. In the final sequence of the film, both families with young children and their elderly neighbours turned their heads up to spot a panicle being installed on the roof of a rebuilt house during a traditional topping out ceremony. This celebration of the soon coming move to the bright flats played to elevated rhythmic tones of philharmonic orchestral score composed by Henryk Swolkień (1910-1990). The high roof—just as the lollipop visible earlier in the film—signified yearning for simple pleasures and the comfort of city life. When the narrator concluded: 'It is for them that the green light is lit, the first sign of revival in Brzozowa Street, the bravest and the most genuine street of the reborn Warsaw,' the audience felt invited to skip along the little girl who briefly appeared on the screen in the same final sequence. Life was good again.

Despite these modifications, *Brzozowa Street* with its portrayal of the harsh realities of everyday life still did not fully match the expectations of the Party officials.²⁷ As Różewicz recalled in 2000: 'For decades censors did not want to show the film.'²⁸ Today, it stands out as one of the most detailed documentary portrayals of the living conditions in the 1940s' Warsaw. Its ending and commentary aside, it reflects the social climate of the time, the gloom of the transitional stage, the era of determination.

Discovering Micro-realities: The International Recognition

Although the collective documentary outlook certainly prevailed over the first few post-war years, with time many filmmakers started to cut down the scope of their social portrayals. They moved from national to local settings, shifting towards a strategy that would later become the staple of the Polish Documentary School, where micro-worlds would stand for national or universal phenomena. Early examples of such an approach emerged in documentaries that were welcomed by the officials, as well as in those that faced the government's condemnation, either at once or later. Among the high fliers from the period, one can find such titles as Jarosław Brzozowski's (1911-1969) *Wieliczka* (1946), which received the first prize for a short educational film in Cannes and the acclaimed international festival winner, *The Flood/Powódź* (1947) directed by Bossak and Kaźmierczak. Both films dramatised small-scale events in non-central settings.

Brzozowski spent the war in Kowno working for the Soyuzkino Chronicle and secretly sharing film materials with the underground Home Army. In 1945 he settled in Cracow, where he contributed to newsreels and led a course at the Film Institute/Instytut Filmowy. There, he completed *Wieliczka*, a documentary on an ancient salt mine. Although narrated by a voice-over to educate the viewer about the filmed mineral deposits and the history of salt mining, the film defied the realism of the newsreels. Instead, it evoked a poetic atmosphere. Partially shot underground, it now seems reminiscent of German Expressionism. Brzozowski used chiaroscuro visuals. His camera paused on shadows of workers on the walls. It tracked and panned over natural rock formations and human-made salt sculptures. The viewers watched pictures from subterranean chapels that intercut with brief expressive close-ups of tourists' and miners' faces. *Wieliczka* was approved by the censors, but its experimental visuals never won the sympathy of the officials.

Although an internationally recognised filmmaker with many festival trophies to his name, neither did Brzozowski become a leading figure nor a trendsetter in Polish cinema. In the 1950s his interest in arts led him

to make documentaries on painters, musicians and adventurers, with possibly one exception of a contemporary factual film, *Warsaw 1956/Warszawa 1956*, which he co-directed with Bossak. The fact that by then he strayed away from portraying the social reality can be attributed to the events that took place in 1948. While working in the mountains on filming *Pastures/Wielki redyk* (1949), Brzozowski was arrested on allegations of spying for the British and spent the following six years in prison.²⁹

[INSERT FIG 3 HERE]

Presenting all-resisting traditions of growing sheep in the Tatra Mountains, *Pastures* was completed by Stanisław Możdżeński (1916-1980). With painterly shots of shepherds opposing the government's modernisation of their trade, the film was an international festival triumph. In 1949 it won a cinematography award in short film category at Cannes.³⁰ Two years later it received a special mention in Edinburgh.³¹ Brzozowski's name did not appear in the credits. Even though he later successfully returned to work in film, his position never matched that of Bossak. True, both directors gained similar critical recognition around the same time, however it was the author of *The Flood* that set the direction for the future development of factual cinema in Poland.

[INSERT FIG 4 HERE]

Dynamically edited from newsreel shots to the accompaniment of symphonic tunes, *The Flood* built its tension thanks to its rhythmic editing pace. Bossak and Kaźmierczak decided to opt out of using an off-screen commentator. The tragedy of spring deluge in the countryside seemed to speak for itself, especially that the story of peasants fighting for their lives and households became an almost prototypical people vs. nature narrative. The opening shots of snow-capped fields and villages crosscut with melting icicles to soon give way to footage of broken dams and foaming rivers. It was not until a few minutes into the film that the viewer encountered the people who suffered from the natural disaster. The vantage point of a participant was achieved thanks to shots that drew attention not to people but to material details of wet clothing, broken roofs, windows, puddles and damp potatoes. As Jan Kott noticed: '[*The Flood* was a] film with a collective hero [that] offered a vision of the world as seen from a perspective of an individual.'³² Observational shots from the rescue operation dominated the middle section of the documentary, which ended with sunrise over much drier fields. In a concluding edit of dissolving frames, a peasant with his horse-powered plough moves slowly away from the camera towards the horizon to symbolise human strength and resilience.

The Flood stands out in the history of Polish documentary for more than just its festival trophies. First of all, its makers ignored the potential of a voice-over. Returning to the risky purely visual method of storytelling that had previously been dismissed by the Communist officials, not only did Bossak and Kaźmierczak exhibit their trust in the power of images but significantly also their belief in active viewership. Secondly, for Bossak, *The Flood's* international success was an important stepping-stone in his career. Fundamentally, it strengthened his position among both Polish documentarians and the Communist officials. Finally, the triumphs of the film symbolically marked the recognition of everyday life subjects in Polish documentaries. However, *The Flood* should rather be considered as a symbolic film than a harbinger of a sudden, overnight change.

Chronicling the Everyday Life: Between Propaganda and Political Repressions

From the first days of freedom some documentary filmmakers chronicled everyday routines and living conditions of average citizens. Dubbed by critics as ‘contemporary social reports,’ with time their explorations of ordinary social settings and events happening away from the pedestals of the ruling elite started to grow in numbers. Jolanta Lemman notes that directors of such films often drew their inspiration from the traditions of British documentaries.³³ They usually registered the real people but dramatised their stories like fictional narratives. Some included staged shots, scenes and sequences. These documentaries frequently progressed from ‘lack’ to ‘gain’ or from ‘loss’ to ‘recovery.’ The Communists at the top feasted their eyes on such films, especially those with happy endings.

At first glance, these documentaries’ confidence in people’s relatively rapid recovery from whatever shook their status quo appears to be no more than another version of optimistic propaganda. However, quite a few of them exposed common social problems and their impact on individual lives. In other words, they registered a whole array of unwitting, incidental evidence of daily living from a variety of personal perspectives, showing not only the benefits many initially drew from the new regime but sometimes also people in great distress, however short it might have appeared on the screen.

The first of such contemporary social reports was shot as early as the autumn of 1944. *Where is Our Home?/Gdzie jest nasz dom?* (1945) was directed by a pair of actors, Irena Byrska (1901-1997) and Tadeusz Byrski (1906-1987). Set in Stoczek Łukawski near Warsaw, the twenty-five-minute film presented a story of an orphanage, where after the war, under the care of their guardians, children waited for their parents. Narrated off-screen by a male voice that also summarised some dialogue lines, the film showed a group of youngsters of different ages as relatively independent human beings. Not only were they able to take care of themselves but also to support others. Several re-enacted scenes gave the viewer an opportunity to observe the kids preparing their meals, shopping at the local market, hanging out their washing and raising money for the orphanage by organising Christmas carol concerts. Brief snapshots from an outdoor play, cheerful singing and swimming in the river intercut with staged footage of children finding consolation in the arms of their peers after terrible news of their parents’ death had reached the orphanage.

Around a third into the film, close-ups of hands browsing through drawings of concentration camps announced the arrival of some mothers who desperately searched for their lost kids. After this, the film progressed to show a celebration when a woman picked up her offspring. As she walked away with her son and daughter, the remaining orphans learned that they had to leave their temporary countryside shelter. The concluding sequence of singing children, who walked up a path in the fields, played to the commentator’s words confirming the group’s hope that ‘the new country [would] provide a home for them.’

A unique portrayal of the youngest war survivors, the documentary owed its quality not only to the couple that directed it but also to the skill of its cinematographer, Stanisław Rodowicz (1910-1969). The imagery in the film vibrated with an idyllic aura of childhood innocence, somewhat mimicking the outlook of the young characters. These visuals’ contrast with the children’s terrifying perspective of growing up with no parents produced a chilling effect. As it turned out, the new regime did not prove as kind as expected and the

hope, so firmly expressed at the end of the film, for many evaporated just a few years down the road. Among the bitterly disappointed was also Rodowicz, who fell victim of Stalinist police repressions. Arrested in 1951, he never returned to his work in film.³⁴

Another victim of political repressions, Jadwiga Plucińska (1908-1999) began directing factual shorts on social developments in the country in 1946. Her film work testified that the Communists at the top had an influence on the lifestyles of ordinary people. Plucińska's first documentary, *We Went on Holiday/Byliśmy na wczasach* (1946) depicted factory workers spending their free time in three different holiday resorts. Later in the 1940s, she embarked on showing everyday life under the new regime in smaller localities but remained keen to register the successes of the new government. For instance, one of her documentaries, *In Palaces and Manor Houses/W dworkach i pałacach wiejskich* (1948) reported on the nationalisation of pre-war aristocratic mansions that were being converted into schools, nurseries and social centres.

On a few occasions, Plucińska also turned her camera to micro-realities of the youngest Poles. *Save Our Children/Ratujcie nasze dzieci* (1948) showed a touching portrayal of a home for kids convalescing after TB and *Our House/Nasz dom* (1949) offered a report from a countryside orphanage for boys. Full of joyous imagery with children working on a farm and enjoying their seaside holiday, the latter concluded with touching shots of an orphan in the arms of his guardian. The brief final sequence played to an exuberant off-screen praise for the new regime: 'Happy childhood and bright future ... This is what the People's Poland secured for our young generation.' Even though Plucińska frequently staged her scenes, her arguments and social observations are among the most insightful among the 1940s Polish documentaries. Although her directing career progressed well into the 1950s, by the end of that decade her employment at the Documentary Film Studio came to an unexpected end.

On 11 August 1959 the Polish Press Agency/Polska Agencja Prasowa announced that Plucińska was under investigation for being an American spy. According to the press release, upon her visit to West Germany earlier that year she had developed a relationship with a member of the American intelligence service.³⁵ By Christmas, she was already sentenced to seven years in prison.³⁶ Following the trail, Plucińska disappeared from the documentary scene, but till this day many of her films form rich chronicles of everyday life in post-war Poland.

However, it is worth noting, that in the 1940s Plucińska's subject choices were far from original. For instance, her *Wrocław the City of Students/Wrocław miasto studentów* (1947) offered glimpses of the living conditions and activities of men and women studying at a few recently opened universities in the city. But before she made this film, a year earlier Bossak had already reported on the difficulties among the young population entering higher education institutions. His ten-minute short, *New Poland: The Youth at the Universities/Nowa Polska: Młodzież na uniwersytetach* consisted of snapshots from students' activities, as they made every effort to get education despite shortages in food, accommodation and books. Typically for that era, Bossak's film concluded on a positive note with students enjoying sports on holiday. The commentator spoke on their behalf: 'We're making up for the time the war took away from us.' Similar high moods reverberated in *Gaudeamus* (1948), a special edition of the *Polish Film Chronicle*, which not only did praise students for their

character but also recycled some of Bossak's earlier footage to by comparison report on recent improvements in their living condition.

Furthermore, the nationalisation and transformation of former aristocratic sites into public spaces, which Plucińska exposed in her film *In Palaces and Manor Houses* was frequently shown in newsreels and documentaries. A few years before her, using different footage but narrating her story with equal enthusiasm, in a short titled *Palaces/Pałace* (1946), Natalia Brzozowska (1915-1988) also explored the new nurseries and open access cultural centres mushrooming in the lavish former properties of the pre-war aristocracy around Łódź.

Parallel portrayals of social improvements were also evident in several of Stanisław Możdżeński's titles. In the 1940s, this director routinely shot his films in provincial locations of the so-called Regained Territories/*Ziemie Odzyskane* in the west of Poland to spotlight the benefits of post-war modernisation. For example, his *Szczecin* (1948) started with sunny pictures of renovated houses, gardens, new roads, bridges and trains to then show the hustle and bustle of the streets, docks, and factories. The speedy recovery of the city from the Nazi devastation was attributed to the new government, as well as to the mobilised working class. At the end of the film, upon showing a sunset over the city skyline, the voice-over reminded the viewer that the glorious, rapid development of Szczecin had only been possible because of the national effort after liberation: 'And so the day comes to a close. One more day of hard work in the Polish city of Szczecin.'

Corresponding national pride matched by an admiration for the new regime's achievements underpinned other films by Możdżeński, including *On the Polish Baltic Sea/Nad polskim Bałtykiem* (1948) and *In the Docks/Stocznie pracują* (1948). Although just like Plucińska, Możdżeński propagated the change for the better, more interested in machines and mechanisation than in his fellow citizens, he only occasionally paused to show a human face. With one exception of *Pastures*, in the 1940s, he was happy to sing from the same industrialisation hymn sheet with the comrades from the Central Committee, which, by the way, opened the same year the director completed all the above titles.

In line with the dominant political discourse, several other documentaries from the 1940s depicted endless opportunities in the new Communist country, where people on the screen seemed to be floating on the wave of confidence for a better tomorrow. It was particularly visible in films about the young generation. Among them, one particular short on a student sports camp attempted to persuade the viewer that the policies of the new government indeed promoted a sense of personal happiness. Both men and women in Brzozowski's *The Young on the Coast/Młodzi na Wybrzeżu* (1948) exhibited competitive attitudes as well as discipline in their daily routines. These qualities were matched by further traits of model socialist citizens, such as generosity and a strong desire for selfless service. The film vibrated with the same propaganda tones one could find in some of the newsreels and newspapers from the time. Although the setting was small, the hero was collective. Teamwork awarded every single participant in the camp with an individual sense of satisfaction. The young cherished no personal gains. They worked for the nation.

National sentiments that were to drive forward the new generations in Poland underscored Brzozowski's film from its very opening: 'When the Germans were withdrawing from this land, they sank all ships and destroyed all houses, as though they intended to poison this land with venom... Now our youth is

marching into these empty towns.’ The story followed just one day at the camp. The audience observed the young playing sports as well as helping at building sites, factories and in the fields. It was not enough that the boys and girls on the screen glowed with enthusiasm. To uplift the already positive mood, a few times the passionate voice-over narrator shouted out words like ‘an effort,’ ‘strong muscles,’ ‘competition.’ With such an accompaniment, the vigour bursting from the screen grew bigger than the actual camp.

Although from today’s perspective films such as *The Young on the Coast* may appear fake and manipulated, they did not necessarily always lie, even if they just showed one side of the coin and by tapping into the politically promoted discourse, skipped any mention of adversity, hesitation, or dissatisfaction. The belief in the socialist ideals in the immediate post-war period was not just fabricated by the ruling Communists. Given the pre-war experience with social inequalities and the suffering during the war, it comes as no surprise that many Poles supported the new regime. Because the quality of life had indeed significantly improved in comparison to pre-war times, just like the characters in *The Young on the Coast*, the majority willingly participated in the Communist society, where teamwork values replaced attachment to individual goals. Much to the ruling Party’s delight, also several factual filmmakers shared the faith in the socialist Poland. Therefore, at first without reluctance, people such as Bossak, Plucińska, Możdżeński and Brzozowski responded to calls for films that were to advance the development of the country.

Documentary Film Records of Positive Reinforcement: Fixing Social Problems

The Communist government most welcomed films propagating the new inclusive society where both work and leisure helped achieve shared goals. Next to workplace and school competition, voluntary charity acts and holiday activities, sport was to bring joy, build strength and teach discipline to the citizens of the ideal egalitarian nation. Its availability to the larger public was to intensify trust in the Communist rule. It was about much more than just getting active. The officials were giving the boon to those who had never had the privilege to participate in such a leisure time luxury. It was accessible to all willing to engage in it. The Party never underestimated the power of physical exercise. After all, it kept people busy so that they could perform their jobs with full dedication and forget about any political objections.

Already in 1946, two documentary film debutants, Natalia Brzozowska (1915-1988) and Konstanty Gordon (1917-1983) completed their persuasive short, *Sport for Everyone/Gimnastyka dla wszystkich* (1946) that offered snapshots of happy, fit workers from factories in Łódź as they performed physical exercises in local sports clubs. Footage of women working on gymnastic routines and dances intercut with fencing and boxing men, school children in physical education classes and families at swimming pools. As the voice-over narrator praised the admirable strength and flexibility of some of the people on the screen, he quickly situated the imagery in the context of the Communist ideology: ‘Not only does sport eliminate age differences, but also social differences... These are all working people whom physical fitness awards with a sense of strength and happiness.’ The authoritative tone of these lines sounded convincing; no space was left for any counterarguments, especially that the words were confidently articulated by Andrzej Łapicki (1924-2012), the same actor who from 1947 to 1956 provided government-approved commentaries for numerous editions of

the *Polish Film Chronicle*. Given that, today his encouragement to follow the example of the people from the screen seems to have been enunciated by the very voice of the ruling elite.

Having completed *Sport for Everyone*, Brzozowska and Gordon parted ways to pursue personal interests in quite divergent types of documentary. After a few years of making films that praised the regime, Brzozowska decided to emulate the style that was initially preferred by her husband, Jarosław. She engaged in making poetic documentary contemplations with no overt commentaries where images rhythmically played to the sound of music. However, in 1949 during the Congress of Filmmakers in Wisła—when the Party officially proclaimed socialist realism as the leading and only style of Polish cinema—Brzozowska’s most acclaimed film, *The Coal Mine/Kopalnia* (1948) was heavily criticised for its formalism and lack of political message. Humiliated and ostracised, the director never really recovered after Wisła, which essentially ended her directing career. Later in the 1950s, she reported problems with getting any support for her projects³⁷ and only managed to complete two shorts, *The Skiers/Narciarze* (1958) and *Climbing/Na Wspinaczce* (1958), both of which were just edits of pre-1949 footage.³⁸

Worth noting, Brzozowska was not the only director in Wisła whose work was singled out as a negative example of anti-regime work. Makarczyński’s idyllic portrayal of traditional village life in *Szlembar* (1948) was also attacked by the Party officials as deliberate criticism of the government’s modernisation project. In contrast, Gordon became the Party’s show pony in the field of documentary directing. As socialist realism dawned, he produced *The Wide Road/Szeroka droga* (1949), a monumental, almost fifty-minute propaganda film on the construction of a motorway in Warsaw.³⁹ Unlike, distressed Brzozowska and confused Makarczyński, who promised to incorporate socialist realism in his future work, in Wisła Gordon felt appreciated.

[INSERT FIG 5 HERE]

Before Wisła, in documentaries that endorsed the new regime, Bossak, Plucińska, Możdżeński, Gordon and Brzozowska typically reported on social developments using footage from real locations that served as illustrations for their authoritative voice-over commentaries. However, several other documentaries presented the lives of ordinary people in their micro-realities using storytelling strategies which—just like the wartime *Where is Our Home?*²—shared a striking resemblance with narrative cinema. Because in the second half of the 1940s staging was one of the standard methods in Polish documentary, both established directors and debutants with an ambition to work in fiction film often embarked on telling documentary stories with the use of re-enacted scenes.

Promoting social benefits of physical activity among children, Eugeniusz Cękański’s (1906-1952)—fictionalised documentary, *Bronek from Widzew/Bronek z Widzewa* (1948) exposed drab living conditions of a working class family in Łódź, whose little son, Broniek became a boxing enthusiast. The boy’s parents were busy with their factory jobs and his baby sibling, so left on his own, Broniek got involved with older hooligans who convinced him to start selling cigarettes on the black market. At the end of the film, the boy’s father saved him from the path of crime by signing him up with a local boxing section. Fully staged, *Bronek from Widzew* looked like a narrative film. Nonetheless, it revealed plenty of significant visual evidence from everyday

working class realities. Although the story ended on an optimistic note with sport becoming a lifesaver for the youngster, Cękański uniquely hinted to the darker side of the Communist society. His film distinctively exposed social problems, including the black market, hooliganism and unsupervised underage children. Elsewhere, such subjects had been shrouded by the curtain of hope or, in fact, silenced by crowds cheering to the opportunities that opened for them in the new political system.

Although it goes without saying that life did not run as smoothly as the government wished to project it, because of the strict control over film funding and distribution, it is rather rare to find any evidence of social problems in the documentaries from the 1940s. The Party did not want to convey any anxiety or fear among their new, dedicated followers. Crime, hardships, as well as social and political resistance were effectively erased from the official discourse. The only instance—and even here rather cautiously—when censorship would allow the darker side of life on the screen was when a minor social problem could be solved by educating the masses. Therefore, short documentaries known as ‘propaganda film posters’ could sometimes contain unique glimpses of cracks in the system. This is why Cękański was able to sneak the unwelcome portrayal of juvenile criminal activity onto the purged Communist screen. The affirmative tone of his story resolution justified the presence of the otherwise undesirable subject.

Wohl’s entirely staged *What Are You Doing Here?/Co ty tu robisz?* (1948) was yet another example of a fictionalised documentary, which pointed to unresolved social issues while openly praising the benefits of the Communist social care. Narrated by a famous actor, Kazimierz Rudzki (1911-1976), the film told a story of three homeless children who lived in the ruins of Warsaw. Rescued from their misery by the national militia, to their delight, the kids were sent to a well-furnished orphanage. The state-run home for children provided the first comforts they had ever experienced in their lives. With such a conclusion, just like the already mentioned titles, Wohl’s film fell into a larger category of documentaries that commended what the new regime supplied for the ordinary people while eliminating homelessness, poverty and other social problems. When the government saw social equality as its main magnetic power to win the support of the masses, documentaries that promoted similar ideals served as positive reinforcement.

Sometimes, however, the promise of equal status was not enough for people to make every effort to contribute to the new system. When the ideal socialist citizen failed to show up to work, the government could commission short factual films to propagate the right attitude. Probably, the most interesting example of such a propaganda film comes with a tongue-in-cheek, imaginative short, *The Value of One Minute/Wartość jednej minuty* (1948) by Joanna Rojewska and Tadeusz Kowalski. In just over three minutes, the filmmakers dramatically exaggerated the potential social consequences of individual tardiness. Targeted at people who repeatedly came late to work, the film warned against the lack of punctuality, not by threatening with a loss of pay, but through appealing to the citizens’s sense of social responsibility.

After a brief animated opening sequence of calendars and clocks, Rojewska and Kowalski cut to a train crash. The voice-over commented: ‘One minute seems to be a very small fraction of time, doesn’t it ? ... The crossing guard here was just one minute late.’ The rest of the film illustrated different examples of what might be lost when people were just one minute late: missed buses, closed classroom doors, customers at public

offices who could not be served. All small delays were accumulated and translated onto the national scale at the end of the film: 'One minute... means hundreds of coal waggons, thousands of tons of wasted grain, several houses that cannot be built, millions of meters of fabric. ... Always work four hundred and eighty minutes a day.' Although a mere propaganda film, *The Value of One Minute* brought together some detailed imagery of everyday life, even if many of its scenes were staged. Most importantly, however, it uncovered a serious problem hindering the Communist plan of industrial progress: simple laziness and lack of dedication to work. It was probably the first and the most basic, however small, symptom of an inefficacy of socialist ideals in real social life, something that was urgent enough to break the rule of positivity in Polish documentary film.

Conclusion

Although between 1944 and 1949 out of necessity many Polish documentarians cooperated with the Communist authorities, they made thematically and stylistically diverse short films. Under strict discursive requirements of the government, many still explored their small margins of freedom. The genres and formal tendencies from the first five post-war years laid foundations for further development of Polish factual cinema. Most importantly, during that time, documentary production expanded well enough to receive recognition as a separate type of film, a valuable contribution to the national culture. In the spring of 1949, Bohdan Węsierski from *Film* magazine commanded short documentaries: 'As far as artistic values, they are of world-class quality.'⁴⁰

This recognition was also a personal success of Jerzy Bossak, who for a few years had been campaigning to establish a dedicated documentary institution. When the Documentary Film Studio opened at the end of 1949, on the one hand, Polish documentarians had a reason to celebrate. Not only did they have a home but they also officially divorced from the team of the *Polish Film Chronicle*, which from then on had its separate department within the Studio's structure. On the other hand, the joyous occasion was overcast by the dark clouds of socialist realism and its fortified system of control, which the same year was officially announced during the Congress in Wisła. The margins of freedom started shrinking. Creative authorial visions had to wait another five years before some of the immediate post-war styles and thematic tendencies could return in the mid-1950s to build the future international reputation of the Polish School of Documentary.

If the government acknowledgement and the international successes were among the most prominent immediate achievements of the documentarians working in the 1940s, from today's perspective it is more significant that their films contain some, albeit limited, extraordinary evidence of the living conditions and the mindsets that resurfaced in the Polish culture after the Communists came from the East in 1944. Next to glimpses showing the material culture, many directors either registered or re-enacted social changes, work routines, leisure activities, educational institutions, as well as common social problems of their time. Gradually, rather than the grand politics, the everyday life started attracting their attention. And so, they recorded the experiences of the ordinary folk who would never make to the pages of history books, depicting lifestyles and modes of behaviour that otherwise would disappear.

When the official discourse of social unity and equality best manifested in some newsreels, intentionally or not, these documentarians exposed hints of developing heterogeneity in attitudes and interests,

as well as in social statuses in different locations across the country. Together their footage looks like a social kaleidoscope whose existence was perhaps the first sign of the volatility of the Communist project, an early crack on the polished social surface, which the censorship tried to keep at the bay for the next forty years. Diverse aspirations, career choices and social problems divided the society already in the wake of the Communist rule. The multitude of documentary styles, thematic choices and fates of individual directors also indicated that the government failed to secure their active support for the regime. Oppositional discourses started cropping up. The proclamation of socialist realism in Wisła in 1949 was intended to bring filmmaking back to serve the government objectives with no exception. It, however, proved to be yet another short-lived Communist illusion.

Word count: 9874

Acknowledgements:

The archive research for this article was conducted thanks to the Leverhulme Trust, who in 2015 awarded me with one of their fellowships. I also would like to express my gratitude to Justyna Turczynowicz, Danuta Pawłowska, Anna Pawłowska, Adam Wyżyński and Krzysztof Berłowicz from the National Film Archive in Warsaw. Thank you for your expert help and friendly chats.

About the Author:

Former Fulbright Scholar at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, Anna Misiak is Senior Lecturer in Film and MA Film Course Coordinator at Falmouth University. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 2015, she was awarded the Leverhulme Trust Fellowship to develop her archive documentary research project. Between 2013-2016, she was one of the investigators on an international research project, *Documentary in V4 Countries before and after 1989*, which was supported by the Visegrad University Studies Grant. Anna had her research articles and book reviews published in many European, American, and Canadian peer-reviewed journals. She wrote one monograph, *Kinematograf kontrolowany* (Kraków 2006) and contributed to a few edited collections on documentary films. She is an author of *Women & Film under Communism: A Report from the Archive* (<http://womenundercommunism.com/>)—a resource website on documentary films made by Polish women between 1945 and 1989.

Word count: 147

Notes:

¹ Jadwiga Bocheńska, 'Rozwój polskiego filmu dokumentalnego w latach 1944-1958', *Kwartalnik filmowy*, no. 2 (58), 1965, p. 5 (5-13).

² The Polish School of Documentary has been both defined and dated differently by various specialists in the field. Here, the term is employed in its most common understanding. In her chapter 'Polska Szkoła Dokumentu: Żywa tradycja polskiego kina,' Katarzyna Mąka-Malatyńska states: 'today the term 'Polish School of Documentary' has been most frequently used to refer to documentary films from the 1960s and 1970s'. In Małgorzata Hendrykowska (ed.), *Historia filmu dokumentalnego*, vol. 2, 1945-2014 (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015), p. 679 (677-691). However, Mikołaj Jazdon mentions that it is practically impossible to develop a strict definition of the Polish School of Documentary and thus some critics and scholars use the term to cover all acclaimed documentaries made in post-war Poland: Mikołaj Jazdon, 'Filmowa sztuka faktu', *Znak*, no.11. 2012, <<http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6902012mikolaj-jazdonfilmowa-sztuka-faktu/>> (last accessed 10 July 2016).

³ Edward Zajiček, 'Produkcja filmów (Organizacja i rozwój)', in Jerzy Wittek, Waclaw Świerzyński, Wanda Wertenstein and Jerzy Trafisz (eds), *Kinematografia Polska w XXV-leciu PRL* (Warszawa, Wydanie Specjalne Filmowego Serwisu Prasowego, 1969), p. 80 (34-85) & Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska, 'Film Oświatowy', in Edward Zajiček (ed.) *Film, Kinematografia: Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku: Studia i materiały* (Warszawa, Instytut Kultury, Komitet Kinematografii, 1994), p. 268 (265-282).

⁴ Alina Madej, 'Zjazd Filmowy w Wiśle, czyli dla każdego coś przykrego', *Kwartalnik filmowy*, 18, 1997, pp. 207-214; Anna Misiak, 'Cenzura filmowa po Zjeździe w Wiśle', *Kwartalnik filmowy* 43, 2003, pp. 93-102.

- ⁵ Anna Misiak, *Kinematograf kontrolowany: Cenzura filmowa w kraju socjalistycznym i demokratycznym (PRL i USA): Analiza socjologiczna* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), p.72-91.
- ⁶ Marek Hendrykowski, 'Dokument po wojnie: Lata 1945-1955', in Małgorzata Hendrykowska (ed.), *Historia filmu dokumentalnego (1945-2014)* (Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015), p. 28 (15-86).
- ⁷ Marek Hendrykowski, 'Dokument po wojnie: Lata 1945-1955', p. 62 (15-86).
- ⁸ Anna Misiak, 'Aleksander Ford and Film Censorship in Poland after 1945', *Kinema*, Fall 2003, pp. 19-31. Available at: <<http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=114&>> (last accessed 24 March 2016).
- ⁹ Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii polskiej 1895-1997* (Poznań, Ars Nova, 1999), p.158.
- ¹⁰ The dates of birth and death of filmmakers are always cited the first time their name is mentioned in the text. However, in certain cases such dates have not been found in available sources.
- ¹¹ Jolanta Lemann-Zajček, *Kino i polityka: Polski film dokumentalny* (Łódź, Dział Wydawniczy PWSFTViT, 2003), pp. 16-25.
- ¹² Jadwiga Bocheńska, 'Documentary Films', in Stefan Berdak (ed.), *Polski Film Krótkometrażowy w XXV PRL/Polish Short Film During 25 Years of Polish People's Republic* (Warszawa: Redakcja Wydawnictw Filmowych Centrali Wynajmu Filmów, 1969), p.60 (60-67).
- ¹³ Edward Zajček, *Poza ekranem: Kinematografia polska 1918-1991* (Warszawa: FilMOTEKA Narodowa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992), p. 39.
- ¹⁴ Z. Sośnicki, 'Stare i nowe WFD', *Ekran*, no. 6, 14 kwietnia 1957, p. 10.
- ¹⁵ Polska Kronika Filmowa 4/1945, available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOxxCYhKLjA>> (last accessed 23 June 2016).
- ¹⁶ Marek Hendrykowski, 'Dokument po wojnie: Lata 1945-1955', p. 63 (15-86).
- ¹⁷ John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary', in Forsythe Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (London, Faber & Faber, 1966), 147 (145-156).
- ¹⁸ 'Z ankiety rola i specyfika filmu dokumentalnego: Wypowiedź Jerzego Bossaka', *Kwartalnik filmowy*, 2, 1965, p. 25 (23-29).
- ¹⁹ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 33-34.
- ²⁰ 'Notatka z posiedzenia Komisji Prasowej KC w dniu 13.X.1959 r. poświęconego ocenie Polskiej Kroniki Filmowej, Biuro Prasy KC PZPR', in Marek Cieśliński, *Piękniej niż w życiu: Polska Kronika Filmowa 1944-1994* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Trio, 2006), p. 159 (157-161).
- ²¹ Jan Topolski, 'Suita warszawska', no date, Ninatka, available at <<http://ninateka.pl/film/suita-warszawska>> (last accessed 2 July 2016).
- ²² Marta Leśniakowska, 'Przed obrazem ruin: Widmowość i melancholia', in Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk (eds), *Zaraz po wojnie* (Warszawa: Zachęta-Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2015), p. 81 (72-81).
- ²³ Wacław Świerzyński, 'Film dokumentalny (1944-1949)', in Jerzy Toeplitz (ed.), *Historia filmu polskiego 1939-1956*, vol. 3 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1974), p. 139 (101-143).
- ²⁴ Barbara Mruklik, 'Zupełnie zwyczajna biografia: Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Makarczyńskim', *Kino*, no. 217, July 1985, p. 3 (1-6 and 18-19).
- ²⁵ 'Warsaw Rebuilds', Film Polski PL: Internetowa Baza Filmu Polskiego, <<http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=4212657>> (last accessed 23 June 2016).
- ²⁶ Marek Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz* (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1999), pp. 15-18.
- ²⁷ Wacław Świerzyński, 'Film dokumentalny (1944-1949)', p. 136 (101-143).
- ²⁸ 'Za dużo hałasu: Rozmowa ze Stanisławem Różewiczem-przewodniczącym jury Ogólnopolskiego Festiwalu Filmów Krótkometrażowych i Dokumentalnych w Krakowie,' *Reżyser: Dodatek do miesięcznika Kino*, no. 7-8, 2000, p. 1 (1-2).
- ²⁹ Marek Hendrykowski, 'Dokument po wojnie: Lata 1945-1955', p. 50 (15-86).
- ³⁰ 'Sukces krótkiego metrażu', *Film*, no. 19, 1949, p. 11.
- ³¹ Bożena Janicka and Andrzej Kołodyński (eds), *Chełmska 21: 50 lat Wytwórnii Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych w Warszawie* (Warszawa, WFDiF, 2001), p. 317.
- ³² Jan Kott and Kazimierz Rogowski, 'Powódź', *Film*, no. 28, 1947, p. 3.
- ³³ Jolanta Lemann, 'Film dokumentalny', in Edward Zajček (ed.) *Film, Kinematografia: Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku: Studia i materiały* (Warszawa, Instytut Kultury, Komitet Kinematografii, 1994), p. 222 (199-242).
- ³⁴ Marek Hendrykowski, 'Dokument po wojnie: Lata 1945-1955', p. 38 (15-86).
- ³⁵ 'Aresztowanie reż. Jadwigi Plucińskiej', *Film*, no. 35, 31 August 1959, p. 2.
- ³⁶ 'Wyrok w sprawie Jadwigi Plucińskiej', *Film*, no. 51-52, 20-27 December 1959, p. 2.
- ³⁷ Janina Zdanowicz, 'Co nowego Pani Natalio?', *Ekran*, no.10, 16 June 1957, p. 4.
- ³⁸ Giż., 'Co nowego w krótkim metrażu? Biała Etiuda. W góry, w góry miły bracie', *Film*, no.7, 15 February 1959, p. 5.
- ³⁹ Bohdan Węsierski, 'Kronika bohaterstwa pracy', *Film*, no. 22, 5 December 1949, p. 5.
- ⁴⁰ Bohdan Węsierski, 'Krótkometrażówki na ekranach,' *Film*, no. 7, 15 April 1949, p.10.

All images come from the National Film Archive in Warsaw, Poland. They have been reprinted thanks to the funding from The Leverhulme Trust.

Captions:

Fig. 1. *Majdanek: The Graveyard of Europe/Majdanek Cmentarzysko Europy* (1944)

Fig. 2. *Warsaw Suite/Suita Warszawska* (1946)

Fig. 3 *Pastures/Wielki redyk* (1949)

Fig. 4 *The Flood/Powódź* (1947)

Fig. 5 *The Wide Road/Szeroka droga* (1949)

Fig. 6 Jerzy Bossak