IT’S TIME TO DIE

by Krzysztof Zanussi

translated by Anna Piwowarska // Stephen Davies
INTRODUCTION

The grim title of this book originates from an anecdote and I ask you to treat it as a joke. I don’t intend to die soon or persuade anyone to relocate to the afterworld. But a certain era is dying before our very eyes and if someone is very attached to it, they should take my words to heart. This is what this book is to be about. But first, about that anecdote.

It comes from a great actor, Jerzy Leszczynski. For me, a fifty-something-year-old, this surname is still very much alive. I saw Jerzy in a few roles in the ‘Polish Theatre’ just after the war; I also saw him in many pre-war films (after the war I think he only acted in ‘Street Boundary’). He was an actor from those pre-war years: handsome, endowed with a wonderful appearance and a beautiful voice. He played kings, military commanders, warlords and this is how the audiences loved him. After the war, he acted in radio plays – he had beautiful pre-war diction and of course he pronounced the letter ‘ł’ and he didn't swallow his vowels. Apart from this, he was known for his excellent manners, which befitted an actor who played kings and military commanders.

When the time of the People’s Republic came, the nature of the main character that was played out on stage changed. The recruitment of actors also changed: plebeian types were sought after - ‘bricklaying teams' and 'girls on tractors who conquered the spring’. And once in a radio studio, before a recording, one such young, plebeian character came up to Jerzy Leszczynski. The legend goes that he went on to become a famous comic. I can easily imagine the contrast between Leszczynski, who sometimes wore a monocle, and a corpulent youth with a round face and turned-up nose. The young man introduced himself to the master:

“I’m your colleague, a fellow actor.”

Jerzy Leszczynski looked at him, shook his head and said:

“You’re my colleague, a fellow actor? That means it’s time to die.”

This scene must have occurred at the beginning of the fifties, perhaps even towards the end of the forties. Today, in the nineties, one can also spitefully say that it’s time to die for the era that began then. It’s time to die for the characters of the Polish People’s Republic romance. We’re returning to the pre-war years. Except that Jerzy Leszczynski will not return. The style or the culture of that time will not return. On the contrary, what is coming is different in quality and is often closer to the Polish People’s Republic than the pre-war era.

Throughout my adult life (more precisely, from the second half of high school) I have made notes and I make them to this day. So, I’ve accumulated a few dozen notebooks which I’ve never attempted to read – I’m leaving that till I retire. Then, if I find the
time and desire, and if my sight still allows for it, I will return to what I noted down in that moment (and which I usually never read again). When I’ve broken this rule a few times, I’ve noticed that thirty years ago I often wrote exactly the same thing as I write today. They were therapeutic notes written to relieve tension, offload grievances and provide relief from failures. At other times, I had the feeling they were written by someone else entirely with whom I was not connected in any way, particularly when I expressed feelings that were long gone. So, that side of my writing – my diaries – are behind me or ahead of me. The world is not ending so radically that I would want to study the road that I’ve travelled from its beginnings. However, something has changed today on the very surface of life. Therefore, I would like to consider what can be saved and what should be buried and be freed even from its memory.

What I’ve written up till this point sounds rather vague. Vague, in other words Polish – is what one of our greatest film critics, Bolesław Michalek (who was spirited away into the diplomatic service), would say with irony. The fact that a great film critic becomes an ambassador is also a sign that it’s time to die – something’s finished, something’s changed.

I have behind me a few dozen films which in their time gained audiences and were recognisable to a certain group of intelligentsia in the seventies. Today this group doesn’t watch films but are the most threatened generation on the cusp of history and during these changing times. For forty and fifty-year-olds it is most difficult to fathom what happened and it’s hardest for them to be themselves again during these changes. A system has collapsed. People, who had already determined their attitude to the world and their way of living, have found themselves once again in the situation of teenagers except that they don’t have energy, health or delusions, without which it’s impossible to cross the threshold into adulthood. And it has to be crossed a second time because the first time no longer counts. And we had to somehow manoeuvre in a world of real socialism, in its final form. Today, the art of manoeuvring is changing. We have to function differently if we want to make ends meet. And we have no choice as it’s still a long time till retirement and we don’t know who is going to pay our pensions because, for now, PZU (the leading insurance company in Poland) is not covered for its obligations.

A fairly long time ago, I found myself in the West and I had a relatively large amount of time to familiarise myself with the artist’s position in the free market. Thanks to that experience I hope that to some extent I know what awaits us and I try to stay optimistic and not to become disheartened. This is not a popular stance, nor is it an expression of solidarity. If everyone around me is complaining, then in keeping with our national ethos I should join them and complain even more. If someone has a headache and I say that I feel as right as rain, I’m acting antisocially. On the other hand, if even through sheer politeness I say that I also have a migraine, that helps. Meanwhile, I want to propose that it’s possible to free oneself from the migraine (at least to some extent) and try to explain how I do that.
I sit down to write for many reasons, one of which I mentioned above. I look for my past audience - those who once went to the cinema to see ‘The Structure of Crystal’, ‘Illumination’, The Constant Factor’. I write for those who went to see ‘The Spiral’ and who watched ‘Behind the Wall’ on the television. I have deliberately omitted from this list the film which had the most viewers in Poland and, more importantly, the largest number of visible signs of being liked. This was ‘Camouflage’. I will not be able to catch up with the viewers of this film. There were many of them and I think that they were partly the ones who organised strikes and formed ‘Solidarity’. It was a wonderful but I think a one-off meeting. I achieved political success by hitting on the atmosphere of a specific time. The success not only took me by surprise but was also to a greater degree accidental, so I can’t use it as a point of reference. But where today are those viewers who liked my other films – my thinking audience? Perhaps they’re at least reading books? Perhaps I’ll reach them through writing?

I keep writing as if the end of a certain world was playing out only in Poland and Central Europe and that it was the unequivocal end of the Marxist era. Of course, this is our nearest perspective. The old power system broke down, our persecutors broke down, the Iron Curtain fell and we’re returning to Europe – these are the slogans from our side. But what happened in Europe? After all, a certain world has ended there too, a certain stage of culture’s development and we can’t fail to notice that next to us a structure has collapsed that’s even bigger than the one we’re trying to arduously get out from under the rubble of.

European cinema is over. I don’t state this without justification. I look at the statistics and it turns out that in the last few years the share of European films on the screens of our continent amounts to a few, sometimes a dozen or so, per cent. In the United States all the European films together don’t even amount to one per cent of the cinema repertoire. In television it’s a similar situation. Yet I remember my childhood, in the late forties. At home we had a maid, who was later renamed a home help, and a caretaker, who was renamed the landlord and who from then on stopped cleaning. So, in my parent’s house the maid would invariably go to the cinema to watch American films and it was rightly considered that this was the appropriate repertoire for her. An American film was regarded as easy, cheerful and stupid. The intelligentsia went to see French films (‘The Comedian’ or ‘Les Enfants du Paradis’), Italian films (‘Bicycle Thieves’, ‘Rome, Open City’) or English films (‘Odd Man Out’, for example). Later, in the sixties, Europe gave us a film feast of the works of Antonioni, Fellini, Visconti, Resnais, Truffaut, Bunuel and, in my view, the greatest of them all, Bergman. How on earth could the Americans match those geniuses? Today it’s the opposite. When sometimes one comes across a serious film like ‘Dead Poet’s Society’, it turns out to be American (admittedly, made by an Australian). Films coming out of Europe are sour or bitter (for example Greenaway or Almodovar). Times have changed. There’s almost no way of making a film that’s not in English (and I have a feud with that language). Therefore, “it’s time to die” in a broader,
European dimension.

I could go on to describe the opera, theatre, the publishing industry, everything to note that with the end of the century and the millennium, the world is ending and at the same time it is being born. It’s time for the larva to die so that the butterfly may be born.

I’ll add a personal motif. Practically every creative person in the prime of their life suffers some sort of crisis. Mine coincided with the end of a system which I was against but in which I functioned well enough. I entered the new world carrying the baggage of various failures – rejected by my country’s audience following films that had been positively received in the rest of the world. And precisely at the moment of doubt, with thoughts of how to start life anew and become someone else, I found myself caught in the trap of my dreams. One night the phone rang and I received the proposition of taking part in the first democratic cabinet, which was headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki. I was to be the head of the Committee of Radio and Television. For a few days I torn between a feeling of responsibility and a rebelliousness at the necessity of parting with my profession. To add to this, there was the threat that I would not be able to return to it. That wonderful opportunity seemed to me a cruel punishment for ever having thoughts of starting anew. In the end, life chose for me. I had signed international contracts, two of them in the States and there was no way that I could enter public service whilst having other responsibilities. The government could not wait and when I was finally available, the Prime Minister had already concluded talks with another candidate.

Later, during that turbulent and pressured year, I agonised over temptations to enter diplomacy. In the amateur meaning of the word, I was always regarded as someone who had a talent for mediation, and for an amateur I was quite familiar with international politics. Afterwards, I was sounded out about a nice job proposition in Hanna Suchocka’s government – as Minister of Culture. I shamelessly mention these opportunities as I didn’t think of any of them as a realistic career for the rest of my life. And if I write in the title that “it’s a time to die”, then it's as a warning to others and to myself. One has to die to be reborn, as the Gospel says in the parable about the grain. And even though that concerns the greatest dimension, one that reaches self-denial, it’s not off the point to think that the times that we live in are a spiritual opportunity for us. Let’s think of what a misery in life is any sort of stagnation, how easily a man dies spiritually by not realising that. The turbulence of history has a healing power. To close the paraphrase in the title – when one world ends and passes, for those of us who have survived to see new times, “it’s time to die, so that we may live”.


CONQUERING THE WORLD

You don't necessarily need to read Freud to perceive that childhood weighs on our minds for our whole lives. What is more, with the passing of the years it becomes more and more present in our thoughts. At least in mine it becomes clearer as what I'm doing loses its novelty factor. I'm constantly under the impression that I'm reliving something a second or third time, that the problems that I'm facing I’ve already solved once. I start writing new screenplays, I look for actors or locations and immediately in front of my eyes I see the close to thirty previous films in which I did almost the same thing. The word ‘almost’ is important. Without it I would be writing a great falsehood. Creativity is wonderful because it's essence is eternal discovering – this happens for as long as we believe in the magic of art. When this belief is missing, everything that we do becomes frivolous. When one of my female colleagues from the industry was taking on an important government position, she said to me that she'd had enough of telling actors to stand in the light and not to block each other out. How many times can you repeat that? This was a sign of hesitation which befalls us as regularly as a seasonal cold.

My father, seeing me once filming in a street with a crowd of extras, said:

“Ten years of studying and every policeman does it better than you.”

In my heart I wanted to admit that he was right because, for a moment, the problem of moving the extras displaced the idea of what the film was about.

With the passing of the years it gets harder to believe in what you're doing, it gets harder to believe that you're doing it better and in the end it gets harder to believe that it's worth it. Edward Zebrowski and I co-wrote the screenplay 'Touch of a Hand' about this very matter. An old composer stops composing because he no longer believes that music has any meaning in the face of the world's monstrosity. In the last scene of the film we say that he was wrong – that everything that we can do in our life, that all our completely unimportant creativity, that sprinkling of beauty which we sometimes are able to evoke, that is that small drop that tips the scale of goodness in the world. It took ten years until finally the funds were found to make such a film. During those ten years, this problem became even more acute for me. But I want to believe that ‘The Touch of a Hand’s’ happy end will come true, not just in the film but also in my life - that I won't doubt any more, that I won't lose faith in what I'm doing.

PHOTOS

with my mother, 1946

Mother Wanda
I took my First Communion on the floorboards of the Contemporary Theatre as the parish hall of the Saviour Church was located there.

When my thoughts return to my childhood, I see the war. I was born three months before that fateful September and I know that my childhood was stolen from me. At just a few years old I was already an old child. I learnt to talk about this in the West, shocking journalists who were eager to listen to exotic stories from an artist's life. After all, a colourful biography always makes the artist's work more credible in the eyes of the recipients. Apart from 'Gallop', I've never touched upon my childhood in my films – I still feel like it's too early. Although I did once write a screenplay on the subject of my oldest memories, so far the production hasn't gone ahead. As usual, they ran out of money – the person who commissioned the screenplay went bankrupt. I decided to publish it and I suppose that I won't ever return to it. It's entitled ‘Dark Glasses’. My mother always wore them during the war, for obvious reasons. She put them on when she entered the room in which she hid escapees from the ghetto.

Today one just has to utter such a sentence to be written onto the honours list, whereas then it was a much more ordinary fact of life than we think. My mother is not keen to return to those memories. Whereas I have one memory from that time which made me want to make the film. That memory is the first injustice that I consciously experienced, which I remember to this day. I must have been no older than four. In 1943, the year that the ghetto was liquidated, the Germans tortured my grandfather to death and my mother had to take over his small furniture manufacturing business on Elektorala Street, right next to the ghetto. During the war, very few people bought expensive, stylish furniture and the warehouse was full of stock and became a fairytale wonderland for me. From the perspective of a child, I remember all the furniture as enormous buildings – I climbed easily into small cabinets or desks and a double-doored, mirrored wardrobe seemed like a fortress. Once, while I was playing, I heard hushed voices coming from behind a wooden wall which separated off a windowless room from which I was barred. Quick as a flash, I understood that I'd uncovered burglars and I burst screaming into the back room. My mother didn't even allow me to say what had happened – she was with clients. I was called a fantasist and barred from playing in the warehouse. Beside myself with outrage (how outraged we can be at the age of four!), I screamed that I'd show her where the voices were coming from. With unusual strictness, my mother punished me by telling me to go to the bathroom and locked me in there, threatening to keep me there until I calmed down. Many years later, I reminded her of the incident and that's when she explained to me that she was hiding some people behind the wall and I had burst in shouting about it at the most inappropriate moment – in front of clients.

As an adult I realized that this was a great story and from then on it has been a part of my regular repertoire. I even risk telling it in languages that I don't speak well, for example in Spanish. I say “risk” because there's nothing worse than realizing that
you're missing a crucial word in the middle of a story, without which there will be no punchline. Fortunately, in this case, one just has to know how to translate the word “injustice” and the story is understandable. It's more difficult in the case of another story which is also real and also happened during that time. I angrily threw a carbide lamp out of the window at the moment when the Germans were looking for someone in our building. The lamp exploded like a grenade and we could all have been lined up against the wall and shot for that, but the German didn't notice where it had fallen from. Or maybe it didn't really explode and the story doesn't have a punchline. It just proves that I was a difficult child. Because of the lamp, my mum told me to leave the house. She packed my clothes, took me out onto the stairs and slammed the door on me, after which, she recalls now, she cried hearing me crying on the other side.

The story of how for the first time I experienced injustice seems to me a good point of departure for making a film about the duality of any truth. My memory serves only as a bridge for the beginning and end of the film (I dreamed of creating unnaturally large furniture as in Kafka's 'The Trial’, filmed by Orson Welles). The real subject matter seemed to me to be contrast between the external truth experienced by my mother, who was risking her own life by hiding strangers, and the truth of those people for whom the outside world must have been repugnant and hostile. It was with great difficulty that the underground movement tried to find a different hiding place for them (they had to wait for one until a gravely ill mute gardener died in some convent outside Warsaw). I guess that from that room where the Jews were hiding all this seemed suspicious, bringing to mind bribery and wartime Polish blackmailers. I can identify with both these fully justifiable truths and that's why I think it's worth containing them in a film. Perhaps it would be a sort of 'Rashomon' dealing with how war memories must divide Poles and Jews.

Whilst returning to childhood memories, I evoked Sigmund Freud – it's an inevitable effect of my studies in the philosophy department. My memory does not back up the theory which I had to learn. No symbols or mysterious signs, no sleighs or roses like in 'Citizen Kane'. At most, the realism of Salvador Dali. During the march which, after the Rising of 44, led us from Warsaw to the camp in Pruszkow, I saw somewhere in the district of Wola horses being burnt alive. Napalm had been poured over them and they galloped around a square which seemed enormous to me as I was only five. And also a dog howling on the balcony of a burning house. I remember this more clearly than the corpses over which I tripped – once I even fell onto a man whose head had been blown off by a shell. And nothing. I don't dream of the horses or the corpses. In my dreams the fear found its expression through obvious images. Most often in cemeteries, which in my dreams I'm terribly afraid of and in waking life I like to visit, following Albert Camus' advice, who claimed that to get to know the life of other nationalities you have to know how they eat, how they love and how they are buried.

From the early Stalinist years, I have one story about how I got kicked out of school because during the May 1 parade, on the podium, I had an ironic look on my face.
Like every anecdote which is often repeated, this one has been honed and slightly deviates from the truth. Only slightly. I wasn't kicked out but was transferred to the regional school. What's important is that very quickly, after some energetic interventions, I returned to my school on Smolna Street. However, the allegation about my ironic expression is true. It was pointed out by my rival for the title of best pupil (today he's a university professor, back then he was the son of an important civil servant). The director pointed out my wrong class lineage – working intelligentsia but who were once exploiters – and as a punishment I was indeed transferred to an exclusive regional school.

I returned but I'd learnt my lesson. I understood that when I was lost in thought I sometimes have an ironic expression and there was no way of getting over it. Many times has this expression done me a disservice. I suffered because of it during military service. The 1st May parade was obligatory back then, so a year later I needed to find some sort of solution - and I did. What is more, I harbour a suspicion that this solution weighed on my whole life. I knew that the whole school would be observing my expression so I devised a satirical group. Instead of carrying ordinary slogans of the type: “Hands off Korea!”, my group of friends and I were to represent negative characters from our life so a lazy worker, a 'bumelant' or a Polish 'beatnik'. I don't know if today's young generation know that a 'bumelant' (which I think comes from the German word 'bummeln') is someone who doesn't apply himself to work and a Polish beatnik was in the fifties a copycat of a spoilt Western youth. The school agreed to my idea. Dressed up as satirical characters, we stopped being ourselves and our expressions could no longer be subject to judgement. The irony of the 'bumelant' was an artistic expression of my contempt for this unworthy figure. And it was then, on the 1st May, 1951 or 1952, that for the first time in my life I felt the opportunity that distancing from myself gave to me. I discovered what I describe today as artistic immunity – speaking about myself, I hide behind characters who exist only in my imagination.

Do I owe my artistic profession to my snitching classmate? I don't know. In the same way as I don't know to whom and what I owe in every important matter in life. It is a question of one's outlook on life, of the philosophical principles that we half-consciously embrace. Sometimes we want to appear to ourselves as architects of our own fortune, whereas sometimes we feel like this fortune has been discreetly steered by someone from above, and our own free will at the most allows us to surrender to it or to resist it. I'm very interested in this subject in art – my leading character in 'The Constant Factor' is constantly asking what is destiny and where does his own will fit into it. For me that 1st May parade, the satirical group and the 'bumelant' who I played functions as the tried and tested answer to the public's favourite question: “As a child did you want to become an artist?”

The years that I gained during school, I lost during my studies. Wandering through physics and philosophy to film, I gained my master’s degree after ten years of continuous study. The exam syndrome has remained with me for the rest of my life. I
constantly have the impression that I'm overcoming a hurdle and harbouring the delusion that when I pass the exam, it'll be easy. The first hurdle was my diploma. I gained it with a theoretical thesis on the subject of acting in the light of information theory (I tried to consolidate the element of science with something which is so fluid to evaluate, as is the work of an actor) and for the film 'The Death of a Provincial'. This was a desperate film. My greatest artistic failure was already behind me – after my third year of drama school, I was kept back a year because of the lack of progress in my learning. To this day the very memory of this fact grips me with a feeling of injustice.

PHOTOS

The film-school years – halfway through my studies, 1963 or 1964

Army camp 1963

Photo from my student ID for the Jagiellonian University (1960, I think)

I made a short film which the committee didn't like. I was accused of leaning inappropriately towards amateur film-making because I used a handheld, hidden camera, non-professional actors and a story which I staged amidst a street crowd during the Cracow student carnival. Humiliated by being kept back a year, I got down to my graduation work, convinced that the worst part of my studies was behind me and that in every artistic university the diploma is gained without any problem. My rejected film was let down by its sound. I couldn't film in synch and my improvised dialogues, later played back in the auditorium, sounded exceptionally awkward. Wanting to avoid a similar debacle in my graduation film, I devised that it would take place in a monastery, where silence is obligatory. In this way I could tell a story in which not one word is spoken. The old prior is slowly approaching death. The vitality of a young person is confronted with the tragedy of dying in a series of small scenes built on looks, fragments of gestures, insignificant grimaces and varying rhythms of movements. I filmed it in Tyniec, a place where a few years earlier I'd experienced the difficult dilemmas of youth. The film opens and closes with a ferry passing along the river, behind which the mountain with the monastery rises. The old monk dies, the art historian returns to his secular life, leaving behind his pointless rebellion against death.

That's all regarding the film. It seemed to be well put together and I presumed that it would get me my diploma without any trouble. Meanwhile, it caused the film-school professors in Lodz considerable consternation. In 1966 putting of monastery on screen seemed quite a challenge (characteristically, no one thought of this when approving the screenplay). For a moment the possibility of giving me a diploma on the basis of all my other previous works was considered. Yet common sense and political cunning outweighed this. According to the Chinese principle that the darkest place is under the lantern, the dean at the time, Professor Bossak, decided to send the
film to the Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) Festival in Moscow. The film was accepted, I received my diploma and a few days later I read in a newspaper that I’d received the Soviet Atheists Award. It was written that the reason for this was that the film shows the death of an old monk along with whom dies the era of religious superstition. Not long after, in Mannheim, the same film won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, which consisted of German Catholics and Protestants.

The juxtaposition of these awards seems grotesque, although as an artist I have to humbly accept the fact that different people are going to interpret my work in different ways. Characteristically, it seems to me that a film without words eludes simple categories of interpretation. The censors most often sought out words, and very rarely did they cut images. At one point in 'Camouflage', the associate professor says that everything is the fault of the staff selection. The censor told me to remove the word “staff”. In its place I put the word “personnel” and the line could remain.

After gaining my diploma, the next threshold was a television film. I made a thirty-minute film entitled 'Face to Face' in which one morning through his bathroom window a man sees a stranger climbing on the roof who knocks on his window whilst hanging over the shaft of the narrow courtyard. The main character pretends not to notice him and leaves the bathroom. When not long after he crosses the courtyard, he sees that the escapee is lying on an ambulance stretcher and looking at him reproachfully. The film waited till 1968 to have its pre-release screening. It was read as a political allusion and shelved although I was deemed innocent as I couldn't have foreseen the events that lent themselves to the relevance of the story. I got a chance to make amends; I asked the chairman of the Radio Committee at the time if he could advise me what I should make my next film about in order to avoid similar misinterpretations. Without hesitation, the chairman said:

“About anything you like as long as the film is of no concern to anyone.”

Today, I think that my question was just as unwise as the answer.

Finally, the time for my debut feature film arrived. I was twenty-nine years old – the right age, according to the annals of cinematography, to speak on such a public platform as back then the feature film was. I had made 'The Structure of Crystal', arguably the most heartfelt of my films. It’s the story of two friends, physicists, one of whom has withdrawn from public life and works in a village, operating a small meteorological station, while the other is achieving worldwide success. Both are envious of each other: one of worldwide success and an active life, the other – of purity of the spirit, tranquillity and concentration. During the hangover after March 1968, the film expressed the dilemma of those who wanted to participate in active life but were bothered by their own sin of keeping silent. I felt that sin myself – I hadn’t been beaten with a truncheon, I hadn't done any time, I was making films within state cinematography and at the time when the state had left the door ajar for the young.
It's true that I had no reason for affinity with those who had left. The cinematography ruled by Ford was no kinder than the one in which first fiddle was played by Petelski, Wionczek or Passendorfer.

I experienced the premiere of 'The Structure of Crystal' at the Moscow Cinema in Warsaw. I sat with my family in the first row of the balcony and for the whole screening I heard chairs creaking. To this very day, I remember feeling the fear that the projectionist would come up to me and ask whether it was worth screening the film to the end as I was the only one left in the cinema. Sure enough, more than half the viewers left during the screening. Those who remained were incredibly kind while I was thinking of just one thing – to survive it, to get to the so-called affirmation of my debut and for the rest of my life to have the right to make films – some better, some worse, whatever ones I was able to. This was what the ‘sorely-missed’ socialist permanent employment consisted of. Whoever gained a diploma and a permanent job had a recipe for creating art until retirement. One could be a successful or unsuccessful artist but no one took away one's right to work in his profession – once it was given, written in one's ID, it was an entitlement until one's obituary. Only a political scandal could change the nature of things. When receiving my permanent position in 1969, I was sure that I had been given this very right. My later experiences in the West knocked out of my head the delusion that I had any sort of right. The American saying states that “You're only as good as your last film”. The rest doesn't count. A film has the life span of a butterfly. Human memory is short. A renowned director who fails with even one film will already face difficulties when looking for new work.

I was convinced of this when I travelled to America after my second film - 'Family Life'. I had already had screenings at the festival in Cannes, in New York I'd achieved relative success and I was under the impression that Hollywood was just waiting for me with open arms. Of course, writing about this years later, I'm ridiculing my delusions but, in reality, it was one conversation that shattered them. I'll cite it to my own shame but as a warning to young people.

It happened in 1972, I think. The large Hollywood Studios were transferring their executives to New York. At a festival in New York I met a Polish millionairess whose American husband played golf with the president of Colombia. My compatriot was aware of the positive response to my film at the festival and decided to help me with my career. Her husband arranged for me to meet the president of a studio. I was allocated a short meeting at which I was to pitch a project in a few words and if the president liked it, then the studio would sign a contract with me for a screenplay. From that moment, the story could develop like a Hollywood film.

I practised a few pitches and, in the opinion of my American friends, the project about Helena Modrzejewska – a proud Pole who came to Poland to start a new life, stood the greatest chance. She refuses to perform even though American impresarios beg her on their knees to agree. She goes to a farm in California and, a year later,
because of financial difficulties, she finally decides to give a performance. The director of the theatre in San Francisco asks her to audition and, after watching her performance, asks: “Have you ever performed on the stage before?” The proud Pole is humiliated beyond belief but does not give up. She learns English and succeeds in becoming a big star again. I had to limit the pitch to five minutes and I practised it with my friends so my English sounded slick. I ironed my trousers, put on a new shirt and went to the assigned meeting. The president was waiting for me in an enormous office on Fifth Avenue. He welcomed me effusively, apologized that he didn't have much time and asked me to tell him about the film that I'd like to make. I told him the story of Modrzejewska with fire in my eyes and practically without making any mistakes. I finished deftly in the allocated time and fell silent as I waited for a reply.

“Is that all?” asked the president.

I nodded.

“How uninteresting!”

There was nothing else to do but to get up, say goodbye and leave. The president bid me farewell effusively and walked me to the door. Only a few years later did I understand the mechanism of my failure. I shouldn't have started with the president. In the big studios the power does not belong to them. They are the last ones to make a decision. I should have started at the lowest level of the company.

PHOTO

With Daniel Olbrychski at my assessment
FAMILY LIFE

My second film was called 'Family Life'. There's a slight misunderstanding attached to this title. I thought of it by imitating similar titles; someone had made 'Married Life', someone else 'This Sporting Life”. Initially, I thought about the title 'Private Life' but I stayed with 'Family Life'.

I was still a beginner and after the premiere of 'The Structure of Crystal' I was annoyed by certain opinions in my circle of filmmaker friends that I'd achieved success by showing a certain unverifiable sphere. The film had been unconventional enough that it was subject to criticism that deemed it an experimental piece. I was asked whether I would ever be able to make a film that simply tells a story. I felt the need to prove that I could. And that's how a screenplay which was a little similar to a theatre play came into being – one which retained a unity of time and place, something which is still unusual in Polish cinema to this day.

I'm reminiscing about this film in order to take advantage of the title and reveal, or rather to shield, my own family life. Since I've already referred to a past film, I'll pause over a few details related to it. The first is the title, which I already had when I met the director Ken Loach at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. His 'Kes' was in competition, I was in the jury and we had a nice chat. I told him about my project and he told me about what he was planning to film. Only we forgot to tell each other the titles of our films and, meanwhile, we'd thought of the same title. Later, in various countries, the film which was first distributed reserved the title and the other one had to be called something else.

The other detail is related to a scene in which my main character, played by Daniel Olbrychski, leaves his family home and at night looks through the window of a new block of flats at the life of an ordinary family. He experiences a sort of nostalgia for normality or maybe for not having such a complicated past and being like most people – without roots. I showed the film in Berkeley and Czeslaw Milosz came to the screening, which made me feel like at an exam. During a private conversation after the screening, Milosz made the accusation that the scene is a tribute to state ideology. No doubt, on hearing such words I turned red, particularly as earlier a befriended film critic warned me that one could interpret it in such a way. Fearful, during the Cannes Film Festival where the film was in competition, I decided to shorten the incriminating scene. It turned out that this was very difficult. To get access to one's copy, one needed the permission of the festival director and before taking out the scissors, one had to once again sign a document stating that it was done consciously and, more importantly, show one's passport. It turns out that once
someone had maliciously cut the most important scene out of someone else's film. Admittedly, the screening was repeated but who in Cannes goes to see the same film twice? Now, years later, I think that if I'm to be embarrassed by anything it's that I wanted to cut something out and that I turned red in front of Milosz. Looking back on it, I see clearly that what I'm saying in the film is universal: everyone can be weighed down by their previous life and everyone can be tempted to run away from their past. At the same time, we know that such an escape is firstly cowardice and secondly an illusion. One can't run away from one's past; one can reckon with it, even defeat it, but one can't eliminate it or rule it out. And that's the message of the film, which is a long way from Marxist ideology.

This message was written into a scene which was not in the screenplay at the start. My intention was much more filmic and was derived from real events. Someone's house outside of Warsaw burnt down from a candle that had been placed by the body of a father who had died after an argument with his son. This motif existed in the film from the beginning. Building the set outdoors, I had taken in consideration the possibility of a fire but I felt it would feel too much like ‘cinema’, that it would be too attractive visually to be realistic and there was a threat of shifting the meaning in the wrong direction. The past can't be metaphorically burnt down – it is within us. In view of this, an idea, taken from real life, came to me. My mother has a pronounced tic and I sometimes feel that a similar tic will affect me. I see in this a type of genetic message, that everything is continuous and that I carry in me a trace of generations past. And I ended 'Family Life' with such a scene. The house doesn't burn down and the father doesn't die. The main character leaves on a suburban train and during the train ride a speck of dust falls into his eye. He starts to blink. The blinking becomes a tic.

I'll describe a few other family events as material for possible scripts, without going into their historical accuracy. I have up my sleeve my mother's family history, on which one could base a beautiful motif of a multi-generational saga, culminating during the September Uprising when the heroic great-great-grandmother summons her son (my great-grandfather), who's studying abroad. He makes it in time to take part in the last battle of the Uprising, for which he's exiled to Siberia and the family fortune is confiscated. He is accompanied by his wife and it is in Siberia that my grandfather is born and orphaned a few years later as his parents both die of consumption. The child makes his way back on foot, along the train tracks to Europe. He stops in Saint Petersburg, where he starts work as a carpenter, makes a small fortune and opens a workshop in Warsaw. He loses everything during the Russian Revolution. He dies in the Second World War as an old man, tortured to death by the Germans for his participation in the resistance. This last part is unquestionably true – I wrote about it in the aforementioned screenplay 'Dark Glasses'. And the rest – is it a novel from the series of our family Apocrypha or is it true history? Did my grandfather not make it up? My mother is also unsure which part of this story is true – documents are easier to find in Italy than by the Vistula. Grandfather had no family,
he got married very late. Perhaps it's enough to remember that he was a courageous man and he spoiled me like all grandparents do. And he died when I was three years old.

What else would I like to say about my family life? I was an only child, engaged in a continual dispute with my father, who dominated me with his temperament. In the Italian manner he was uncontrollable and violent, and that's probably where my cold self-control comes from. My father wanted to see me as an architect. He suffered because he had more of an artist’s soul but became a civil engineer. He headed a business, which started to boom just before the war - my father's last construction in the old Republic of Poland was the main train station in Warsaw. In 1939 the still unfinished station was one of the first casualties of the bombings. Amidst the sound of bombs, my father courageously pushed some carriages containing ammunition into the depths of the central-line tunnel. Throughout my life I have wondered whether I could measure up to my father at such a moment. Sometimes I have a civil sort of courage but I don't know how it would be in a time of war. Heaven forbid, I will ever have to find out.

Reading books about other people, we usually search for signs of their love life. I really don't want to write about that. I think that I've conveyed many of my experiences in my films and those which happened in reality I have always guarded closely. Even my closest friends don’t know when I got married because for many years we kept it a secret. I was comfortable with this. I didn't take the risk that my wife would be responsible for me in case of some disgrace happening to me. On the other hand, my wife, who is a very active person and doesn't take into account the authorities, had greater freedom working without me. We had a discreet church wedding, surrounded by those closest to us, and only had a civil wedding after Communism collapsed.

Undoubtedly, my wife's family – one of those ancient clans which goes back close to a thousand years – plays an important role in my life. I dedicated a screenplay to it entitled “Howl”, which was also never made. The theme of impoverished aristocracy in today's society runs through it, in a humorous form. This aristocracy is faithful to certain values which are rare today. By this I mean a feeling of servitude, of subordinating one's own goals for some greater good. And alongside that one can observe various amusing peculiarities and displays of not being able to adapt to life in many small ways. There would be enough material for several screenplays. For example, the last family reunion took place in Western Europe in a small castle which is inhabited today by the doyen of the family and his wife. It was she who was dowered with the castle. The wife has a dog, a mongrel which looks wicked and whose character is not much better. The mongrel is permitted to lie around in the living room. Whereas the chauffeur has a prize-winning greyhound, in other words a canine aristocrat. However, due to the greyhound's haggard condition, he's not allowed in the living room and lives ‘a dog's life’. Another story: the castle's cook is a Polish woman and once one of the family cousins, who'd been democratized over the Atlantic, embraced her and sat her on the sofa in the living room. The shocked
hostess walked out and it was me, as the natural diplomat, who was assigned the mission of apologizing. The task was not easy, as I was on the side of the democratized cousin and not the hostess. And that's why with sincerity and conviction I used an argument which was a little along the lines of 'The Leopard' by Lampedusa. The cook has two sons, both of whom are studying in the West. In an aristocratic family the younger generation doesn't usually have a university education. So who will inherit the castle, after the owner's long life comes to an end, if there are no other worthy heirs? Most likely the cook's sons because they'll probably buy it. Isn't it better to anticipate these facts and to sit down now with the cook in the living room?

The passing of the landowning classes has been an accelerated process in Poland and it's hard to learn any lessons from it, apart from the fact when times change, so do the style and customs, whereas the values remain the same. They are courage, magnanimity and the ease of sacrificing less important things for things that are more important. Whoever has these values qualifies to the elite. One of our well-born cousins is a cleaner in Western Europe. She has earned her retirement through cleaning and now she only cleans in order to buy presents for her family back home. I often ask this question: if a taxi driver is studying philosophy, is he a studying taxi driver (this allows for optimism) or a student who's making ends meet (which usually bodes bitterness and frustration)? Yet the dilemma is solved in the subject itself. It's consciousness that predestines who we are. Not that which we do but rather how we do it and what for. How much for ourselves and how much for the world?

The departure of the old world reminds me again of the title that I've chosen. None of my wife's titled cousins have said that it's time to die. Some of them gallantly serve the new era (for example, a sociologist prince, a counsellor to labourers). Others declass themselves, not through a lack of fortune but precisely through a loss of class; in other words, through losing certain spiritual standards. Whereas those who will give birth to the elite of the new era grow elsewhere. I think that they can be found amongst the nouveaux riches, who will soon notice that there are other values apart from the need to possess and that through earning and managing one can serve and not just consume the fruits of one's labour. Looking at the 'Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity', I think that it is in Jurek Owsiak that a new class is being born which will have the entitlement to lead as it's doing something important in a selfless way.

Life has prompted me with another, more detailed observation. At the beginning of my career, I spoke of it many times and opened myself up to many unpleasant comments. It regards the practicality of taking action – without using the shameful word 'career'. It's our slightly pharisaic custom not to use the word 'career' to refer to oneself because a conscious career is made by a careerist, whereas as a real artist makes it in passing. Putting it in this way makes me angry. If a career in the arts means success, then the artist's actions make sense. The purpose is a full dialogue, reaching the public. We all want to 'make it'. If a person wants to be liked thanks to what he's honestly saying, he wants people to recognize what he perceives as
beautiful and good – the innocence of success is hidden in such desires. Whereas, if achieving success by any means is the overriding aim for someone, at the cost of oneself, we should think of him as a careerist whose value is his own ‘self’. But staying with the first, positive understanding of the notion of a career, one has to know that the belief that a career will come to us by itself is a hidden testimony of hubris. One has to work to make a career, in accordance with the instructive anecdote about the impoverished old Jew who begged God to let him win the lottery, and God said angrily, “Well at least buy a ticket”. In the semi-industrial discipline that is the art of film-making the rules are very strict. Millions of people want to make films or tell stories on television. Access to the media is a type of prerogative which often (most often) befalls troublemakers, charlatans, fraudsters and imposters, but for this prerogative to be attained by an artist one has to undertake a whole list of activities based on good sense and iron discipline. It's about actions that are so simple that they're almost absurd. One should not lose addresses, one should reply to letters, meet deadlines, not be late for meetings, and so on. The catalogue of these minor skills overlaps to a great extent with the Scout’s Law, but without it the chances for success are small. I'm driven to despair by talented and worthy people who for show pass up a chance just to be able to say in company that they don't care a jot about anything. As a producer I only take seriously people who don't hide the fact that they really care. For our chances are small anyway. And those sad remnants of aristocracy are a painful ball and chain for today's Poles. Unfortunately, many people mistake them for a romantic ethos, which amongst our artists often takes on a pitiful alcoholic form. I bridle when I see this manifestation of resignation, which during Communism gained much prestige. At a time when success was restricted by the authorities, real independence was expressed in this way. Yet as early as in the sixties people started to make it in the arts independent of the authorities and it turned out that one could achieve something without compromising. However, the “what do I care” attitude remained, giving an alibi to those who were scared of trying in the first place and preferred to accept their failure from the beginning, turning it into a proof of their sincerity. I think that a lot has changed in this matter in Poland today but when I meet young people from the East (and I often invite them to my home), I see that the classic archetypal 'homo sovieticus' assumes that it's not worth trying because everyone is burdened with the fatalism of history. Meanwhile, in the American play 'One Flew over The Cuckoo’s Nest', the most important line is that of the failed character who unsuccessfully tries to rip the fixture out of the floor so that he can break the bars on the window. The line is “But at least I tried!”.

From this quote comes a simple conclusion, which I direct to myself. Irrespective of the fact that the world of my activities is shrinking from hour to hour and the possibility of making the kind of films that I dream of is getting smaller, I'll try once again or even a few more times. Just to be able to say to God that at least I bought the lottery ticket.

My first choice of studies – physics – was a disappointment for my father, and my second – philosophy - he deemed as complete nonsense. Whereas film he treated with
disdain, describing it as “tomfoolery”, a sort of variety show, which as it happens he had a weakness for.

In my early films my father's sayings often came out of my characters’ mouths. These characters were violent patriarchs. The first one was the father in 'Family Life' and the last, so far, was Henryk in 'The Silent Touch’. My father didn't live to see my last film, but in the earlier ones he never recognized himself.

In contrast to my father, my mother was always on the side of her only child and inspired many mother figures in my films. I have already recounted the story of how, as a child, I nearly assisted the Germans in finding the Jews that had been hidden by my mother. However, she doesn't like it when I tell this story. She believes that her potential merits may be rewarded in heaven but on earth it's more dignified to remain silent. She never allowed me to appeal for her to plant a tree in Jerusalem. On one hand, it's a shame, on the other it's for this very reason that I'm extremely proud of her. And that's all about my family life, which I want to keep solely to myself.

Looking through these pages for the second edition, I get the impression that I haven't written enough about my mother. Today, in the last year of the century, my mother is a ninety-three-year-old who is in great shape. She sometimes accompanies us abroad, but on a day-to-day basis she helps us with countless minor household problems. The fact that she's kept her strength and zest for life is a gift but it's also due to her own merits: taking an interest in the world and turning one's attention to others (not oneself) helps retain youth. I'll never be able to describe what I owe to my mother, so I'll concentrate on two insubstantial yet tangible matters.

The first is her attitude to dentists. From my earliest years I heard that bravery consists of going to get a filling every time one has a cavity. Today, with my sixtieth year fast approaching, I proudly have all my own teeth with dozens of painfully inserted fillings.

The second of my mother's tangible merits was languages. The fact that she spoke average French was enough of an impulse for me, so when other children were playing football in the courtyard, I slogged over a notebook, copying out foreign vocabulary. I recalled this a few years ago when I was speaking in the name of The Federation of European Filmmakers in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg. Of course, as a rule no one listened to such speeches, particularly if they were given by some stranger from outside of the territory of the European Union. Because of this, I was advised to say something very powerful from the start. I understood that whatever I said would only reach those gathered with the help of a translator, so at the start I expressed regret at the injustice of the world that some can speak their mother tongue everywhere, whereas I have to constantly take advantage of an ability obtained through toiling away at the cost of not playing football.
Looking at it from this perspective, someone who acquires a foreign language without studying, due to the fact that he spent his childhood abroad or had a mixed parentage, should be doubly taxed. On hearing my proposition that they should pay higher taxes, the translators were immediately spurred into action and the rest of my speech reached the listeners.

My mother hammered it into my head that the most important thing was how much I managed to learn while I was young. My father sceptically added that knowing lots of languages would allow me to work in a hotel reception, whereas the rest all depended on what I would say in those languages. I'm not fluent in any foreign language but I manage in quite a few of them. A year ago I presented my own weekly programme on Italian television. In it I proposed what films were worth owning at home. Alongside me there was a literary critic who spoke of the most valuable books and a musician who spoke similarly to the viewers about records. I was the only foreigner in this threesome and during the recording I was always accompanied by a television journalist who would note down all the mistakes that I made in Italian. After each episode, I asked with trepidation if there had been a lot of mistakes. She usually answered that there had. However, when I proposed that we repeat the recording she said that it wasn't worth it as I made similar mistakes to the Pope, so the public were accustomed to them.

While still at school, due to pressure from my mother, I applied myself to Russian, exposing myself to slander that I'm not a good patriot. From that time, I speak Russian fluently but not without difficulty. I felt this most intensely when I met Andrei Tarkovsky abroad. Spending time in Italian exile, Tarkovsky was pleased to have the opportunity to speak in his mother tongue, whereas I, having at school learnt a rather 'Komsomol' vocabulary, found it difficult to find my way around spiritual matters. I was missing terms for “compensation” or “poverty of the soul”. With the help of Latin, we searched for words that I didn't know and Tarkovsky complimented me, assuring me that I speak excellent Russian. However, in Andrei’s diaries there was a note devoted to the fate of his son, Andriusz, who left Russia and it seemed that he would never be able to return. Thinking about his son, Tarkovsky felt sorrow and wrote that if he spends his whole life in exile, then in a few decades he'll speak Russian as terribly as Zanussi. Larisa, Andrei’s widow, cut these words out of his diaries but I understand what the author was trying to say and I don't feel offended. Russian and the other languages which I studied so laboriously, as well as many other incomparably important things in life, I owe to my beloved mother.

PHOTO: Illumination
GAMBLING AND CHANCE

In 'Illumination' my character studies the lines on the palms of his hand trying to guess his future from them, while professor Birula Bialynicki, speaking directly to the camera, presents an incredibly emotional view that perhaps the future is contained in the present in the same way as the past is contained in our memory. In the opinion of the great theoretical physicist (and poet), the present is the point that illuminates the darkness, while the past and the future can be understood in some way as existing simultaneously and only this one little point – this process of consciousness – gives the impression that time flows.

I studied physics for a few years and when at interviews I have to answer one of the hackneyed questions: “What did your studies give you?” I answer that I don't know and I would have to have a twin brother who hadn't studied physics to see what the difference was. It is with regret that I notice that very few of my interviewees notice that in this hypothesis lies the answer. The need for precise empirical comparisons is certainly the mark made in my mind by the study of science. Apart from that, it has given me many valuable friendships and contact with people, in fact a whole community, which I value very much. Amongst the friends with whom I studied were a number of brilliant, colourful and extraordinary figures. I regard meeting them as one of the most important benefits of that period.

A completely intangible benefit acquired during my time studying physics was a couple of observations which constitute a frequent motif in my films. Chance is something that preoccupies my thoughts constantly. In 'The Constant Factor' my main character throws darts into a board and reads the numbers in order to fill in his lottery ticket. In 'Hypothesis', which I wrote many years earlier, the professor of some hypothetical university goes for a walk and turns towards a bridge, or doesn't. If he turns, he'll see a woman drowning in a river and he will either jump in to help her and die himself as he can't swim or not jump in, and then for the rest of his life he'll be a man consumed by feelings of guilt because the woman drowns.

I have been left in a quandary, in a variety of ways, seeing that often a person's
honesty is just a case of not being tested. An extreme example that I came to study was Maximilian Kolbe. I came across this figure as many as three times. For the first time, when I was preparing 'From a far Country', I had the feeling that in describing the ordination of Karol Wojtyla I must refer to someone who “cherished us to the end” and gave his life for a stranger. At a time when in the West (and probably here too soon) we’re observing a general crisis of the priesthood, and clerics who are unable to find themselves in the new world, the heroic example of Father Kolbe could not be unimportant to Wojtyla, a man who during the war decided to give up literature and devote himself to the church. So, I included in the film an episode about Auschwitz, trying to recreate that landmark moment which was the decision to go to one's death for another person. Whilst doing the research, I was amazed at how few materials had been preserved from Auschwitz and how unreliable human memory is. The thoughts of the starving people on the square had been only to survive and practically no one noticed the incident with Kolbe. During the painstaking process of comparing memories, a version of events was developed and one can accept this to be the true or most probable version. It is contained in the records of Father Kolbe's beatification process. Thinking later about a film dedicated solely to him, I wanted to consider how an event becomes a legend, what an accident it seems that someone in those camp conditions noticed and remembered Kolbe's act. I was beaten in this thought by Ionesco. A few years after making a film about the Pope, I co-directed an opera in Rimini, along with Tadeusz Bradecki, in which the libretto was written by the father of Theatre of the Absurd. The accent in the text is placed on what Satan tempts the martyr with – he tempts him with a vision of the absurd. If Kolbe's gesture was not noticed and the world went back to its order, then what did he lose his life for – the saved man was unimportant. The act was one of stupidity, an absurdity which cannot be justified in the human scheme. Simply, it was not worth it. Working on the screenplay of my film with Jan Jozef Szczepanski, we took into consideration this motif and we spun a hypothesis as to who the saved man might have been. At a press conference for the occasion of staging the opera, Ionesco was asked what road had led him from the Theatre of the Absurd to religious creativity. Indignantly, he answered:

“I have never been an author of the Theatre of the Absurd. I practise realism. It's the godless world that is absurd and that's how I present it.”

I came into contact with Ionesco two more times: when I directed his play in Munich and when I was president of the jury at the Venice Film Festival. Part of the festival programme was the work of Manoel de Oliveira, based on Claudel's 'The Satin Slipper', which was over seven hours long and was quite monotonous, to say the least. One member of the jury was Lino Micciche – an Italian socialist critic who terrorized everyone by making them watch everything. None of the members of the jury could pop out even for a moment even though, in all honesty, a work could be judged after just watching half the film. Full knowledge of the work is not essential as the jury does not judge but awards a film, and from watching a fragment one can declare: this is not to my taste and I won't be voting for it. At such times we say that
you don't have to eat the whole dish to know what it tastes like. However, because the regulations required that the jurors watch the whole work, Micciche kept close tabs on us, until one day during 'The Silk Slipper' Ionesco fainted and we had to take him back to the hotel. As he was already of a ripe old age, the incident shook everyone up, and as president of the jury I felt particularly guilty of having tired out an elderly gentleman. An hour after the incident, when we continued watching Oliveira's film, the writer's wife appeared in the cinema. She asked me out of the screening and told me confidentially that her husband is whole-heartedly sorry but he couldn't sit through the film and pretended to collapse. Seeing how concerned I had been, he felt guilty and asked that I didn’t reveal the truth as the obstinate Italian would force him to watch the film a second time. During the premiere of 'Kolbe' in Rimini, Ionesco was a few years older and also fainted, but this time he kept repeating that it was for real.

Returning to the character of Maximilian Kolbe – a Catholic through and through – I admit that he always felt relatively unfamiliar to me, whereas the denomination which he was devoted to has obsessed me since my youth. Is our conviction of our own honesty not entirely the result of the fact that we have never faced a real ordeal? Can we ever say: I'm not capable of that or I would never do that if we don't empirically test how we buckle under pressure? When I examine my conscience regarding my public conduct during the seventies, I have the impression that I escaped that period unscathed. I did not give any interview of which I'm embarrassed today; I did not take part in any activities which today I would deem as unethical – all of this is something to be proud of. I'm not scared of any files on me as I avoided any collaboration with the secret services. While I was still at film school, when plied with questions about my foreign colleagues (and having been taught by those with more experience), I did not insist on the principle that I would never inform but I announced that I wouldn't keep a secret and I'd blab because that's my calling as an artist who is a storyteller by profession. If there's anything that I'm embarrassed about when taking stock of my seventy years, it’s my silence. I did not sign any collective protests even in such an evident a case as the deportation of Sakharov. In the case of the constitution, instead of rightfully signing the banned collective protest, with Jesuit cunning I wrote my own. I did not risk much but I informed the authorities that they couldn't count on me. Was this enough? I would have risked a lot more if I had openly joined the opposition movement. I would have had to forfeit my art – films cannot be made to be kept in a drawer. That's why I think I can apply for a certificate for good behaviour – in a social dimension, for sure. But in a metaphysical dimension? Would I ever be able to give up my life for another person? Or not my life but my health – at least an organ without which one could not live, a kidney at least? And my fortune? Or at least my comfort? What right do I have to believe that my art was more valuable than one gesture in defence of justice and truth?

There are no easy absolutions, nor easy answers. Man is an unknown and I don't believe that a conscience is enough to deserve eternal salvation, if speaking in Christian terms, or simply to be a good person. For this one needs Grace. How one
calls this in layman's terms I don't know but it's thanks to it that I have not yet been put to a test that is beyond my abilities. And that was the test faced by Father Kolbe.

My second religious film – 'Life for a Life' was commissioned and received the worst reaction in Poland. If it had been received as badly abroad, I would have come to terms with my defeat. I suppose I hit a bad moment in this country. In 1991 there was a wave of anticlericalism and irritation, which was connected to the intensive presence of the Church in public life. A year earlier, the same film would have pleased Poles, as it was against the atheist authorities. Now, in turn, the Church became the subject of irritation – was it not through their own fault? And I, submerged in those waves, got a mouthful of water. To be fair, it was the Catholic weekly, 'Tygodnik Powszechny', that wrote most contemptuously of the film.

What I describe as getting a mouthful of water is, thankfully, not fatal but it can be fatal artistically. An artist loses confidence in himself and in the belief that what he wanted to say is in some way useful to people. I believe that people that do not have such doubts usually belong to the category of talentless hacks. In the case of films, the turns of the wheel of fortune are particularly ominous as they are spread throughout our work. The making of a film is something extraordinary; the investments that accompany its realization are incomparable with the cost of putting on a play or publishing a book. That's why an artist who's not very sought after either must stop being an artist and make only commissioned films or must proudly fall silent, not giving people a chance to see what they're missing. That's why the fight for survival in this profession is particularly difficult and fierce and requires terrible resilience and what is called 'clout'. And above all other considerations in our work, the key role is played by the element of chance.

I have taken on the subject of chance in many films. In 'Imperative' the main character plays Russian roulette, inviting God to declare whether he's still necessary for anything. This is an obvious mental perversion but it is not without reason that someone has called chance an expression of God's activities when he wants to remain incognito. In the same film, I made a student who is asking whether God exists play heads or tails. In life, as opposed to film, I was never under the impression that my fate was determined by chance although many times I was close to this thought, most of all during my adventure in the United States.

I'm tempted to describe it in detail as the States are to all Europeans a symbol of unlimited possibilities and great opportunity which the most classic form of capitalism provides. Most of my American adventures took place in the mid-seventies but as a nation we Poles are only just entering capitalism, so I think it's worth sharing these memories.

I owe my first steps on the new continent to two friends: Adam Holender, with whom I studied at film school, and Bartel, an actor and director from the States who gave me a corner of his New York flat. I came to show my film 'Life for a Life' at the New
York Festival and out of the blue I was invited to San Francisco. As a child of socialism, I couldn't sleep the night before making the decision whether I would decide to take part in the festival without approval from Warsaw (the embassy in Warsaw, which I called in cowardice, washed their hands of this in the customary socialist manner). In the end, I thought through the pros and cons, including the good of Polish culture, planned how I would defend myself when I returned home and decided to start my journey across the continent. I remember that one of the problems was that I had to take the copy of the film with me and, guided by socialist experience, I went to the director of the New York festival and asked for the release of the appropriate document so that I could take the film from the projection room. The director was amazed by my request and asked:

“Did someone refuse to give you the film?”
I answered no, to which he replied:

“So why are you bothering me? Please go and ask for it and they'll give it to you.”

And they did. Today, a dozen or so years later, it's obvious to me, but observing my students from Russia, I see that they're currently in the same phase of discovery as we were then, that words mean something, that one should always try before one says “it's not possible” and finally that faith moves mountains. When I believe that I have the right to something, then more often than not people believe me, whereas if I ask timidly, then usually they start having doubts.

I collected my copy in New York, flew to San Francisco and travelled to the screening, then for a meeting with the audience. After New York, I was under no delusions that another festival would change anything in my life and at the audience conference in San Francisco I was relaxed. Nothing relaxes one as well as tiredness. The day afterwards I received a phone call at the hotel from a man who asked whether it was me who had said yesterday that I liked dogs and horses. I suppose I mentioned dogs as I once decided that in each of my films a dog would appear. I didn’t remember mentioning horses, but it's true that I like horses. As a matter of fact, I've ridden since childhood and it's the only sport in which I've achieved any sort of success (the first time I was mentioned in the press was when I came second in a hunt race while at high school). The voice on the phone spoke unclearly but I understood that he was keen to show me his horses. I agreed and he told me to wait downstairs. I had to wash and shave but the voice angrily hurried me along, and when I got downstairs, I noticed an inconspicuous-looking man of my age, so a little over thirty, wearing a torn jacket with a shabby-looking Volkswagen Beetle parked in front of the motel. I understood that he was a farmer, yet in a foreign country everything is interesting and since I was already up, I was ready to go to his farm. The strange man – George – spoke very unclearly, I understood only half of what he said. At the airport, to my surprise, he used a credit card (this was something completely unknown to me) and bought two first-class tickets for a flight to Salt Lake City, which was about two hours’ flying time, so the distance between London and
Warsaw. In Salt Lake City a light sports aircraft was waiting for us. It turned out that earlier it had taken George's wife, Theo, to the hairdresser’s in Los Angeles. George told me to sit next to the pilot and when we took off, he asked whether I would like to pilot it for a moment. Amazed, I answered that I didn’t know how to, to which George said:

“At last year's festival we had a Hungarian director. He knew how to.”

The noise of the engine made it difficult to talk. We flew to Nevada, where a jeep was waiting for us which took us to the ranch. On the way, I asked George how many horses he owned. He shrugged and said that it was always too hard to tell as some are born while others die – it was a few hundred, in any case less than a thousand. The rest of the day passed at the same crazy tempo. Theo returned from Los Angeles, straight from the hairdresser’s, we ate lunch, lit a campfire in the mountains and galloped around endlessly until it became dark. Clearly, George had taken to me and proposed that we should fly to Cleveland that evening. Another plane was to come and get us – this time a jet – and fly us four hours to Cleveland, where we would eat supper in some very good restaurant.

I was ready for every kind of adventure but it seemed to me that this would end in some sort of disaster. With no passport, nor a penny to my name, in the hands of a stranger, I expected to end up in a mental institution. I said thank you but that I wouldn't go. George was surprised.

“I'm a guest of the festival. It's not fitting after one day to disappear without a word and accept a more attractive proposition. After all, the festival paid for my ticket and that in itself obligates me.”

George brightened up on hearing my explanation.

“It's nice that you think that way,” he said patting my shoulder, “But there's no need to worry as I'm the one who sponsors the festival.”

It turned out that George was, as he said, a proletarian amongst bankers. His bank is in the top hundred American banks and his soul is torn between a love of film and a passion for hockey. And that's why he funds them alternately - a film festival and a hockey team.

That time I didn't fly to Cleveland. I did so many years later when George organized a screening of my film in his bank. I flew in with the film and a black limousine was waiting for me at the airport. I found out that George would be a little late because there were unfavourable winds over Alaska. An elegant supper had been prepared at the bank and during it I tried to answer the questions of various elegant gentlemen on the subject of banks in socialism. During dessert, one of them said that George had prepared a screening of a film for that evening. Timidly, I said that it was my film that
would be screened as the gentlemen started to talk about what films they make while on holiday by the Red Sea or somewhere on coral reefs. Seeing that they still didn't understand who I am, I told them that I make full-length feature films with actors, to which one of them shouted out:

“How do you find the time?”

The screening took place without George. However, I met him a year or two later in San Francisco and that's when he invited me on a little trip in his plane to San Simeon, where by the sea is Hearst Castle – named after the main character of 'Citizen Cane'. We visited the castle, which today is the property of the state and serves as a museum and George got me into a conversation about what is wealth and what isn't. Today, someone living like Hearst cannot have such a palace because even in liberal America he would be consumed by taxes. After all, distinction should motivate people to act, he persuaded. Will humanity be able to force itself to act when the differences in prosperity stop being visible? Or will it be followed by decadence and we'll be consumed by some other hungry civilisation?

I'm relating this conversation as I'm convinced that George was touching on some immensely important matter. An enlightened person who's conscious of his duties accumulates wealth not in order to shine but in order to serve others well. I can support this postulate with examples of many model capitalists (even Karol Wedel) who, thanks to their talents, were able to organize work for others yet themselves took advantage of the benefits to a small degree. They lived humbly, even ascetically. The protestant work ethic in particular displays these values, whilst the extravagant magnates, beloved of the tabloid press, throw their wealth away on their whims. If I'm scathing of idiotic television series such as 'Dynasty', it's because there is no choice between one attitude and another. The world of wealth is a world of moral decay which releases a conviction in the non-wealthy viewer that although he's poor and probably not quite honourable, he's not as bad as the rich. This is nearly a quote – a paraphrase of what the Evangelical Pharisees said: Lord, thank you that we are not like them. The pharisaism of the poor is just as harmful as the pharisaism of the rich.

And here, a few associations. The first one from my own experience. In 1980, I made two fiction films simultaneously: 'The Constant Factor' and 'The Contract'. I made them with one crew, thanks to which they both were very cheap to make. It was a time when every filmmaker wanted the proof of our freedom to be the fact that our work made a profit. We were not debtors to the state so the state could not demand anything of us. I think the person who deserves credit for propagating this thought is Andrzej Wajda, who after his experiences in the West was able to film 'The Promised Land' for a quarter of the money which would have been allocated for the project in the traditional Soviet style – slowly and with gravity.

My two record-breaking cheap films were released practically at the same time and I saw how differently they worked. The main character of 'The Constant Factor' rises
Beyond mediocrity - he refuses compromise there where everyone else agrees to it. In his intransigence he harms his friends and suffers their revenge – he loses his job and hopes of travelling to the Himalayas, yet he was the moral victor. The film did not receive the public's recognition. Even Jan Jozef Szczepanski in the Catholic weekly 'Tygodnik Powszechny' complained that my main character is irritating. Whereas in 'The Contract' it was the opposite – everyone was bad and rich. This film was more popular and brought sheer joy to people – it accused the nouveaux riches connected with the authorities at the time and gave the satisfaction that we're better than them.

George, the banker I met in America, was in my experience the first example of the American dream according to which everything is possible, as long as you want it and work hard. I have basked in the glow of George's legendary fortune, finding in him a benefactor friend. At my request, during Martial law, he funded a scholarship for one of my friends who found himself in the States without any work. However, he never wanted to get involved in film production. For me only that could have been something of my dreams. And here the States taught me a lesson.

From my physics studies I learnt the experience of healthy rivalry in work. In science it was fairly honest. I also remember the demands which the professors made of us. They thought that the very participation in scientific work was such an honour that one could not be mediocre. In the film 'Behind the Wall' I put some dialogue that I'd overheard between a professor and his assistant into the mouth of the associate professor character played by Zapasiewicz. It concerns the arrival of some foreign guests – the assistant tries to get out of collecting them from the airport, using his poor knowledge of the language as an excuse. The professor shrugs and says:

"You have a week to learn it."

Each time I meet Russian students these days I remember the strict, military tone of the professor who made us aware that there's only one chance in life and that one can't waste it through negligence (what a Slavic trait). When an opportunity arises in the West, young filmmakers do everything they can to take advantage of it. If someone who has the power to decide whether we make a film shows even the smallest amount of interest, we must mobilize all our strength. If he gives one impossible deadline, one should accept it and write day and night in order to submit the screenplay on time. Waiting for inspiration or long artistic dilemmas are out of the question. Making a film is such a distinction – one has to put everything on the line - it will either work or it won't. And then one can say, even after failure, but at least I tried.

In Poland pride doesn't allow one to try just in case one fails. Pride is one of the main sins committed by Christians.

I can write all this because I tried. I tried to forge an international career, in America too. I put out my hand to chance and I bought the lottery ticket. But to write about
how it got to that point and what chance I had, I have to go back earlier to the entrance exams for film school in 1960. There were a hundred candidates for one place. I tried. I got through because I wasn't too bothered – I had already made amateur films. It was my friend, Wicek Ronisz, who really wanted to get into film school. Wicek was the co-author of 'Tram to Heaven', an amateur success which garnered dozens of national and international awards. He was an art historian, a hanger-on of the Student Satirical Association and had a much better chance than me but he hesitated and in the end he didn't go, whereas I, having gained momentum, turned up at the exam. I passed and for three years I was a promising student, after which I was kept back a year because of lack of progress.

My failure in Lodz was a huge blow for me. I thought that my film made during the student holiday before the exams was quite interesting, but the professors didn't like it. I was tempted to slam the door shut and never see them again, to take my injustice and do something else. Something else, as in not make films. And then, suppressing my emotions, I decided that I'd get through it and endure the humiliation so I could one day prove to them that I was right and that I am cut out for this profession. Today I can safely say that I proved that.

I'll pause at those vengeful feelings which force me to mention the name of the rector at the time, Jerzy Toeplitz, who condemned me to repeat a year. I would be unjust if I didn't mention that later our score was settled. After the events of March 1968, Professor Toeplitz left the country and founded the national film school in Australia. In the mid-seventies I was its guest. I asked the rector if I should tell the students the truth about my memories from Lodz or whether that would not suit him. At that time, there were strong protests against Professor Toeplitz by Australian students but he authorized me to say truthfully how I remembered his reign. I said that to be honest I didn't remember it well. At the same time whilst saying this, I understood that despite being top of the class for the first three years, film school in Lodz exposed me to negative experiences and, through doing this, acted as a vaccination. It toughened me up and later it was easier to accept situations when someone who had power over me negated my self-worth. The experience of my student failures made me aware that as long as I'm condemned to one elite or one salon which pronounces whether I'm good or not, then I'll be its hostage and depend on its various whims and changeable circumstances. The peculiarity of the Lodz film school was the fact that the film industry’s elite also made up the elite of the lecturers, which was why you couldn’t appeal against them. However, when I shot my first film abroad, I knew that I was now taking part in a new competition in front of a different jury. Since that moment, as a player, I try to bet on different tables. I work in different countries, and in that way I try to retain some form of independence, thanks to which I can still work. And by the way, lecturing at various film schools, I know how easy it is to do damage – how often we promote the average and how often we wrong the talented.

With 'The Structure of Crystal' I felt free and I made a film in the way I wanted to, convinced that somehow at the end I would gather together the material into a whole.
That doesn't mean that I felt light and carefree. I had many sleepless nights – we shot most of the film in the Kampinos National Park and I recall the lonely struggle of writing the screenplay as a recurring nightmare. The problem was the final scene – for some reason I wanted to drag a ladder to the top of the dune and film the shot vertically from the very top. In order to lay the tracks for the ladder, a bulldozer spent all night flattening bushes and in the morning I realised that the shot was not needed. I didn't have the courage to tell the crew. I shot it although it didn't go into the film. And the ending was thought up by the literary director of our film production unit, Witold Zalewski, who required of me a simple ending: a scene showing the stranger leaving. I shot it only out of politeness, convinced that I would have a better, more ambitious ending. During the edit, the film fell apart – it was long, completely incoherent and lacking in form. Then, for a change, the artistic director, Stas Rozewicz gave me some commercial advice: if something has to be boring, then at least don't let it be long. I knew that this was a real threat so I decided to cut the film to a minimum, and that saved me. I obtained a full-time job as a director and what that brings with it – a chance to make films for the rest of my life. However, I understood how fragile and uncertain all this was and I immediately began to search for ways to go West.

EXOTIC JOURNEYS

I fantasized about them since childhood. At the same time, having been brought up in pre-war Poland, I couldn’t even imagine that I would ever find myself abroad.

Childhood memories distort both space and time. The objects or streets seen at that time are remembered as larger; seen in adult life, they seem smaller. Time stretches out in the same way. Everything seems eternal, days and years seem longer and the concept of ‘never’ in the eyes of a child loses its characteristics of relativity. During the years of Stalinism, I was convinced that the system was eternal and that nothing would ever change. I learnt languages, not supposing that I would ever get to use them. Thanks to them I could listen to the radio and understand what they were saying on the other side, which seemed to be my side. When the first signs of a ‘passport thaw’ appeared, I left on a trip around the Soviet Union and, straight after that, I went with an amateur club delegation to France, from where I was able to escape to Italy. Through friends of my parents, I ended up in Rome with the French ambassador, Gaston Palewski, thanks to whom I could visit the Farnese Villa and also attend a reception during which I filled the pockets of my jacket with shortbread. Back then, journeys took place on the verge of poverty which was made up of five dollars – that was all that one was permitted to take abroad. During many student trips I slept on gratings in underground stations and ate bread from restaurant tables. (An old method: one has to sit down at a table and tell the waiter that one is waiting for a certain lady. After half an hour the lady does not appear so one leaves filled with resignation without anyone usually demanding
payment for the obliviously eaten bread. The one important thing is to have a clean shirt and a tie).

My first big expedition outside of Europe led me to Japan. After ‘The Structure of Crystal’, I received a scholarship. I requested a trip to Italy, but someone at the Ministry recognized my surname and decided that I might wish to stay in the homeland of my ancestors, so instead I was sent to the Land of the Cherry Blossom.

My encounter with Japan was very fruitful because it broke my habit of thinking about my world as the only possible and universal one. Japan is simply different. It shows feelings differently and has different taste and customs. So, when my friend, after supper together with his wife, invited me for tea with his mistress and his wife supplied us with biscuits, knowing exactly where we were going, I understood that I don’t understand. And there was a certain progress in this. Later I became accustomed to the fact that they may have different codes of conduct and that which to me seems obvious may be reprehensible elsewhere. For example, one shouldn’t ask categorical questions nor answer immediately and decisively. On the surface of it, beating around the bush is a great waste of time, but in reality it helps in not hurting one another’s feelings and in expressing the meaning so subtly in a way that is impossible in Europe. For example, how to invite a guest to dinner, whilst making it clear that he should come without his uninteresting wife. In Japan such a conversation would take a quarter of an hour, but one can avoid any resentment and the guest will come alone without holding any grudge. My Japanese friend once wanted to park opposite the Imperial Palace on New Year’s Eve. It was raining in Kyoto and the car park was far away, while under the no-parking sign stood a policeman. My friend entered into a conversation with the policeman which lasted so long that I thought that he’d met a friend. However, he said that he hadn’t achieved anything. When I asked him what he’d been talking about for so long, he answered:

“I talked about what you in Europe would be able to take care of in just a few words. I asked him if he could turn a blind eye to the fact that I’m parking under a no-parking sign, to which he answered no. If our conversation had lasted a short time, my day would have been ruined, as a direct refusal is unbearable. However, we talked very politely. I wished him a Happy New Year and he wished me the same in return. Afterwards, I complained about the weather and about the fact that I had guests from Europe in the car and couldn’t park here but had to go to the car park. Then he stated that my guests were sure to appreciate a pleasant walk even in this weather – he’s been standing in the rain since morning and he finds it very pleasant.”

Then the gentlemen went their separate ways without any resentment that the stickler policeman turned out to be unaccommodating.

I could continue with such stories. In every country I learn dissimilarity, something which enriches me. I don’t want a world that’s identical although that’s where the
world is heading. And I don’t want a world in which we’re under the illusion that our culture is better than others. I now know for sure that that’s not the case and I believe that cultures can be compared to one another, that some are wealthier and others more primitive, some are sophisticated, others can be crude but that everything is based on attitudes to other people, to life, to ideals. A simple man in Africa often has an advantage over an American technocrat in that very spiritual dimension.

I was once in Benares, which is in Varanasi, in the holy place on the Ganges, where a man travelling on foot had to be either a pilgrim or a hippy to feel comfortable in that poor, ragged, often exalted crowd of worshippers, while an ordinary tourist travelled there by car. I too rented a car for the day at the hotel and inadvertently left my driver a tip ten times larger than I normally do. To be honest, the rupee is not a strong currency and it wasn’t a large tip – perhaps twenty or thirty dollars when it should have been two or three. The driver understood that I expected from him some sort of exceptional experiences, so for that reason he went above and beyond himself in thinking up various places to visit. Among other things, he showed me a beautiful place where sacred monkeys are worshipped. On the way, he explained that he was a very religious Hindu. His English was poor but understandable. I was very interested in how he viewed the cult of the monkeys. When we entered the temple, he bought some seeds which he was to place on the altar for the monkeys. We walked around the cloisters, with the monkeys jumping around over our heads, and the whole time the driver was holding a knotty stick. I asked him why he was walking around with the stick.

“If one of the monkeys wanted to scratch you, I’ll protect you.”

“Alright, but how is that?” I asked “After all, these are sacred monkeys. You bought food for them which you laid on the altar and, despite this, you brought a stick for them?”

He looked at me and said something wise.

“Those monkeys are sacred but if they scratch, I’ll whack their hands with the stick.”

I asked him what was sacred about them. He answered:

“It’s very simple: life. Life is sacred but scratching isn’t. The fact that they’re alive is wonderful.”

And he scattered some seeds on the altar. The monkeys ran over, grabbed the offering and ate it, after which they threw stones at me. They always do so joyfully and they scratch if you look them in the eye. They particularly like scratching people wearing glasses, so one has to be careful or have one’s own faithful driver who defends you from his deities.
Another time, I happened to take a fairly unexpected journey to possibly one of the least well-known festivals in the world in the Virgin Islands. The name itself sounds quite exciting although etymology indicates that they are not so appealing. They are not called ‘virgin’ in honour of their female inhabitants but simply because nothing wants to grow on them and it’s not possible to cultivate anything there as all the water flows down to the sea. These islands lie in the Caribbean Sea, not far from Puerto Rico. They belong to America, which accepted them from the Danish as part of a debt repayment for assistance during the First World War. This was quite an interesting discovery to me as I didn’t remember the Scandinavians as having ever been tarnished by the shame of colonialism.

For years the Virgin Islands were inhabited by natives, that is the descendants of slaves who had been brought there by traders. They spoke in a strange Danish-English dialect which was probably mixed with some African language. This lasted until the sixties, when there was a boom in everything and due to an excess of money the islands began to be colonised. Water was brought over and devices were constructed to filter it. It seems that in the era of cheap oil this was cost-effective. Therefore, a few hotels were built, including the wonderful ‘Hilton’ and ‘Sheraton’, and several dozen rich families settled in beautiful villas with cheap domestic help. The climate there is wonderful, very warm and beautiful. However, a crisis hit and once again water became expensive. The ‘Hilton’ went bankrupt and remains there like a ghost building with broken windows.

A festival was organised to revive the islands, during which, apart from watching films, one could also meet with quite a few of those five hundred resident families who had large bank accounts and usually did business with America. The festival was subsidised by the federal government, so it was fitting that the organisers made a gesture towards the local population - the former natives. These gestures were by all accounts advisable as that population had unexpectedly committed a few murders of their white co-inhabitants. It turned out that these murders were on religious grounds – they were an expression of some secret beliefs that no one had ever researched before. Their victims were innocent people who had made some gestures which were construed as blasphemous. A certain lady turned to her left shoulder, another cut a geranium flower, and because of this they were ritualistically murdered by their own servants.

Due to this, a campaign to raise awareness and culture on the island was started, part of which was the festival. In practical terms it meant that all the guests attended a few meetings in the local college with young people, who were to listen to stories about the distant world. I also took on such a role. While I was explaining to everyone who I was, I began to understand that this would be a difficult conversation. Those gathered tried to understand the fact that my country is part of a large continent, Eurasia, and that it’s completely unlike America. In the end someone asked whether I
was from America or not. Because their world basically ended with America and I was to speak in English, it was clear to them that I was the same as every other Yankee.

The teacher introduced me and asked me to explain to those gathered what is the difference between the political systems, what is this socialism. This task turned out to be difficult as the level of understanding of my listeners was not very high. I focused and tried to explain it very simply.

“In my country,” I said “a shop or a bank doesn’t belong to Mr Smith or Mr John. Everything is federal – airlines, banks, shops.”

Federal means to them, to a certain extent, state-owned. I spoke with great concentration and I saw the stares of people who very much wanted to understand me. When speaking publicly, one must always look someone in the eye so as to feel like one is making contact. At one point, when I was repeating for the umpteenth time that our taxis are federal, my chosen listener in the first row, who was looking at me particularly attentively, took a breath, closed his eyes and fell asleep. I became disconcerted and I didn’t attempt to explain anything anymore. After the meeting, I told the teacher that I didn’t know what language to speak to them in and that it was a hopeless case. He became indignant and said that I actually sound like a Yankee and that he was disappointed that I didn’t understand what effort I expect from my listeners who have to concentrate on comprehending such an utterly abstract concept as socialism. Their thinking is not linear like mine. They simply take a very wide view, they see everything at once, but are unable to focus on something abstract. I admit that I didn’t understand this fully and my eyes were only opened by an adventure that I had later in Africa.

I was once in Kenya, on safari. A safari consists of looking at wild animals in the company of a guide. My guide, an African hunter who knew a little English, took me on a trek in the savanna. When we returned to camp, the guide related to the safari manager what we’d seen. He named such a great number of different animals and natural attractions that I thought he was kidding me, so I protested.

“Indeed,” I said, “we did see giraffes but there was no snake’s nest nor hippopotamus. You’re exaggerating. We saw half of what you said.”

At this the guide burst out laughing and said.

“No, sir, we saw all of it.”

“I didn’t!”

“That’s your problem. You were talking the whole time and I asked questions. And when you were saying something about your country, we were standing over a nest
and we had snake's eggs beneath our feet, except that you didn’t look there. And when we passed that broken branch on the left, the wind blew and the branches parted and one could see a hippopotamus, except that you didn’t notice and I didn’t want to interrupt you.”

And, indeed, that was my linear or rather my European way of thinking. When I focused on one thing, I didn’t react to broken branches or the gust of wind and I didn’t look in the places where probably every hunter would look automatically. And that was the great difference between worlds that one has to understand to appreciate Africa and Africans. When applying our European criteria, we are quick to say that in many aspects they are backward compared to us, whereas they are simply different. One has to see this for oneself because it’s not so obvious at first sight.

The comparisons made above between us Europeans and black Africans still hide an air of superiority. With my linear view of the world I can set off on a journey into space while an African’s skills are only useful in a nature reserve. This is how it seems but it’s not true. A few times in Africa I was lucky enough to meet people whose way of viewing the world clearly towered over mine even though these were people who didn’t know how to use a typewriter or a telephone. That which gave them a spiritual advantage lay in those areas that are hardest to describe: in the feeling of one’s own destiny, therefore in that mystic sphere that cannot be put into words. Undoubtedly, linear thinking in this area is a sign of underdevelopment which the civilisation of white men has been suffering from for a few hundred years. I think that one of the reasons for this illness is Gutenberg’s invention.

Part of this travelling experience are my adventures with guests from the old Soviet Union who I’ve been receiving in Warsaw for years. I’m aware that for many of them post-Communist Poland is their first foreign experience. When I give lectures in Russia, I invite my students, writing my phone number on the board and saying:

“If you believe that I’m inviting you, then come. But organise everything yourselves. I want to see only those who believe and have initiative. The others will fall by the wayside anyhow, so why should I take the trouble.”

And they come. Once, in the Ukraine I put an advert in a newspaper. With help from the Lviv and Kiev consulate a paid advertisement appeared stating that I’m inviting young people working in the field of culture so that we may discuss how culture can function in the conditions of a free market. I received sixty applications, of which I chose twenty-two and an extremely interesting group came. In fact, everyone who’s been a guest at my house – there have been several hundred by now – turned out to be a very interesting person and I don’t regret these invitations even though it isn’t easy to host total strangers.

They often ask me why I do it, why I invite them. I ask myself that. For certain I’m
repaying a debt from my youth when I travelled the world and others helped me. The other reason is a complex that is important to Russians, that feeling that they were the occupants of my country and now I can stop thinking of them in that way. So, by inviting them I liberate myself, with their help.

On the other hand, I learn a great deal from guests. Once in Paris I entertained a few professors from Moscow on their first trip to the West. They were of a certain age and for years they had been refused passports because they had defended Sakharov. In Paris, straight from the train station they asked to be driven around. They said:

“We’re old, perhaps one of us won’t live until tomorrow. We have to see everything straight away.”

How they knew Paris! From Balzac and Remarque. We passed the Trocadero and one of them said:

“For you the Trocadero is an address, whereas for me it’s literature.”

I learn a great deal about the difference between East and West from the people that I entertain in Warsaw. I try to understand this difference theologically. If only the relationship between the material and the spiritual – for us, Aristotelian; for them, Platonic. My wife puts a vase of flowers on the table at dinnertime. My guests ask:

“Is that hedonism, or weakness, or the opposite – an expression of the spirit? Can beauty, which is not sacred, serve goodness or not?”

I don’t dare to think that Eastern thinking is worse. I admire the fact that it’s different. I like the Pope’s metaphor that Europe has two lungs and I don’t think they will ever unite, but perhaps they will work together as they did before the invasion of the Tatars. I’m worried by the mindless anti-Russian attitude of the Poles. I suspect it comes from an anxiety about our own cultural identity. After a vodka or two, Poles are often more Slavic than European. When they’re sober, it’s completely the other way around.

THE PROMISED LAND

I'm jealous of a few of my friends' films. I should have made them. I'm jealous of Wajda's 'The Promised Land', 'Gates to Paradise', perhaps a little of 'The Maids of Wilko' and 'A Chronicle of Amorous Accidents'. Characteristically, these are films which Andrzej values less. Perhaps with the exception of 'The Promised Land'. It's the title that I like the most. 'The Promised Land' is the dreamt of biblical homeland. The archetype of the unattainable destination which sometimes materializes for those who have lost hope but even without it remained hopeful, walking, but not believing
they would get there.

For years the West was my promised land. I didn't believe that I would ever set foot there. In my childhood I listened to my mother's stories about how she'd travelled before the war. I knew every detail of these journeys, I went on them, following the route with a pencil on the map, I kept wanting to relive them. In the fifties it was forbidden to listen to enemy imperialist radio stations and that's why I remember with what passion I listened to the sounds of a far-off promised land adjusted to a murmur, the sounds of foreign languages, the traces of life on another planet which was the West.

When the Khrushchev and Gomulka Thaws occurred, travel finally became possible for those who were able to obtain an invitation and to go through the procedure of obtaining a passport. The invitation was the first difficult hurdle to overcome. At a time when few people came to Poland, one had to have contacts to obtain the longed-for piece of paper. The piece of paper meant that some person who barely knew us guaranteed that when we entered his country, we would leave it without prolonging our trip, that we wouldn't try and get a job or earn anything on the side, and it went without saying that we were not to spy for the opposite side. It was not easy for us, young people, to obtain an invitation. One had to make a contact, gain trust and make a minimal impression so that after returning to his Western homeland, our pressing request didn't completely slip the mind of our potential benefactor.

The next hurdle in the journey was the inability to exchange our currency, which is why trips to the West were taken with a suitcase filled with provisions. Even on business trips we saved on per diems by secretly cooking instant soups with a pocket immersion heater in our hotels.

In this situation the Promised Land was not just inviting us for a visit but to be conquered. Years of humiliation roused in many of us a revolt against the undeserved injustice of the world in which those on the Western side, who worked the same amount in the same professions, earned a living while we were condemned to poverty. In the mid-seventies I convinced my father to go with me on a trip to Paris and after a few days he angrily decided that he was going home as travelling by underground had eaten up his monthly pension. So the absurd levels of our wages and their black market conversions in the West caused either an urge to retreat into the depths of the hearth and home or a desperate desire to make it in the West and conquer the Promised Land. From the earliest years of my conscious life I belonged to those who wanted to conquer. With this thought I learnt foreign languages when others played football outside. From my first steps in film school, I thought about how to make something that could also interest the West. Only from this perspective do other, higher motives have any sense. Since we felt worse due to our material poverty and spiritual enslavement, we wanted the product of our fantasy to prove our worth. The success of a film in the West eliminated all
insecurities. It proved that our experience also counted outside the borders of our camp, that we had something to say. Hence, the motivation to conquer the Promised Land.

In our way stood a desert. A young filmmaker was separated from the West by a strip of no-man's land. We had no contacts, we travelled rarely, no one knew us and we didn't know anyone. The authorities, as well as older colleagues who were friendly with them, jealously guarded contacts with the directors of festivals and the members of film selection committees. Whose film was shown or sold was decided by the authorities. The filmmaker didn't get the chance to present his work. There were no video cassettes, which are so easily carried in one’s pocket these days. Copies, screening rooms in film studios or even cinemas were strictly guarded and there was no way one could do something on one's own initiative. Few people from the West came over, less still was anyone willing to evade the authorities and attempt to infiltrate deeper into the film world.

I had great luck because my diploma film entitled 'Death of a Provincial' was shown in Mannheim and Venice and won awards there. Later, my debut 'The Structure of Crystal' was awarded in Argentina and shown in Cannes. I travelled to those festivals and looked around for a producer who would want to establish contact with me. I met kind critics and enthusiastic viewers. But I couldn't produce a film with any of them. The people who broke this deadlock were those who came unexpectedly from a country with which sixties Poland maintained unfriendly relations and which just as much divided us culturally as united us. I'm referring to West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany as we were told to call the country across the Elbe). Being of Italian origin, I counted on the fact that I would take my first steps in the West by the Tiber, perhaps by the Seine or the Thames. Meanwhile, it happened differently.

The first meeting occurred by the Vistula. The harbinger of good fortune was a German from Berlin with the surname Durniok, which didn’t sound good to the Polish ear. After the festival in Cracow, where my hour-long film about Penderecki was awarded the main prize, a real producer approached me and proposed working together. This was Durniok. I didn't know whether to take it seriously as it was too good to be true. Manfred was my age, so in those years very young, and he looked very different from the stereotypical producer with a cigar between his teeth. Neither did he look like an archetypal German revenge-seeker, fighting for a change in the borders established in Yalta and Potsdam. He spoke charming English (to this day I don't use my mediocre German in front of him), had studied at Harvard, was friends with Penderecki, who back then was just on the brink of his great worldwide career, and loved the Far East, which gave him a truly Conrad-like romanticism. Years later should I admit that sitting in the Cracovia Hotel, I didn't believe a word that he said. Asked about my plans, I told him about the screenplay that I was just finishing. It was to be my second feature film. It was ready but when it came to presenting it at a table to a stranger, I felt like a schoolboy sitting an exam. It felt like I was telling it terribly
and that the idea was uninteresting, but Manfred listened carefully and without any hesitation said that he was ready to co-produce it.

PHOTOS

Cannes Film Festival, 1980

At one of the Moscow film festivals at the end of the seventies

I didn't believe him and, to this day, I don't believe it when someone says that they like my idea – it's an overdeveloped self-defence mechanism. Every story is a sort of opening, an outing towards another person. We take rejection as a spurning of ourselves because, after all, our story is a part of ourselves. That's what 'auteur cinema' consisted of and I think still consists of today. I don't know if the artisan who makes a chair suffers when his client doesn't want to buy it but I know that I experience every rejection as the biggest failure of my life. And that's what fate spared me from at the very beginning when collaborating with Manfred. His enthusiasm was sincere. Today, years later, I see that he is one of those romantics who is drawn to the unknown.

'Family Life' turned out to be a co-production – what is called today a 'pre-sale'. The German investment was undetectable in the budget – it went through the state-owned ‘Film Polski’ and did not shape the creative nature of the work (although one of the critics accused me of giving the main character a German name – Braun – as a concession to the foreign capital).

I collaborated with Durniok a few more times and his initiative was the basis of my American adventure.

My private conquest of the Promised Land, that is my first steps in the West, occurred at the beginning of the seventies. I was one of the first directors who set foot on the other side of the Iron Curtain. That's also why this pioneer experience was of a certain value to my friends both in Poland and in other countries of the Soviet bloc.

Amongst them, Hungary was always closest to us. We knew our peers well and we shared a scepticism, an animosity even, towards the system. After us, Hungary was comparatively well off. Kadar’s ‘goulash socialism’ was to dry their eyes after having their freedom taken. In the mid-seventies Istvan Szabo gained a scholarship to the Berlin Academy. Incidentally, even today I'm envious of friends who have ever been able to calmly survive thanks to scholarships – I was always too busy with my projects to apply for this luxury. Istvan polished his German, visited galleries and theatres and once, while having coffee at Cafe Kranzler, he asked how I manage it that, instead of arranging scholarships, I'm able to arrange the production of my films in the West. I answered him that it's simple – one has to know producers. And I
recommended Manfred. I had some projects in France or in Italy and after our semi-successful adventure on the other side of the ocean, I didn't believe that I would work again with Manfred. I magnanimously let him have Manfred, warning him that Manfred would certainly propose him the book that he proposed me – 'Mephisto' by Klaus Mann. I don't think Istvan knew that book yet. I knew it all too well. For many years I had been a fan of his father Thomas Mann's prose. Klaus' book, which was banned in Germany, was a testimony of the painful and embarrassing Mann family dispute. I was fresh from reading the memoirs of Thomas' wife, Katia Mann, which had been transcribed from tape. Flushed, I searched through the 'Walsung family' text for traces of Erica's relationship with her brother and it seemed to me that Klaus' shameless book was untouchable material for an outside foreign director.

When, a year later, I met Istvan again and found out that he was really planning to film 'Mephisto', I was utterly amazed. Istvan did not share my fears and I don't think he even understood what seemed to me to be the unsurpassable obstacle in the book.

"Why, it's not about Thomas or Erica Mann, not even about Grundgens. It's about us. I'm making a film about us."

And that's what he did. I watched 'Mephisto' when it had already won an Oscar and I understood that it was also about me. Manfred had sensed this while Istvan had understood it. To this day I regret that it was one of the films that I didn't make. Like Kieslowski's 'Amateur' or Wajda's 'The Promised Land'.

EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

I don't know why they say that proverbs are the wisdom of a nation when I can find most of the proverbs that I know in most of the languages that I know. To add to this, the wisdom that they encompass usually lies in the fact that they mean both a lot and very little. "Every cloud has a silver lining" is as powerful a consolation as the saying "truth will out". Always? Rather sometimes. And until it does, let's take comfort in the fact that there's a principle in which truth must prevail on this earth (characteristically, the Gospel doesn't make such promises!) Is it really true that every cloud has a silver lining?

My thoughts revolve around this proverb, remembering 1981. It was a year in which I made three films and experienced emigration as well as one of the greatest artistic adventures of my career. It was called 'Imperative'.

Where did the idea come from? While still studying physics (or just after) I heard the story of one of our friends who in broad daylight smashed a shop window – I can't remember whether it was an antique shop or a jeweller’s. I heard this story second or third hand. Anyway, he took something from the display, then took it to the police
station and turned himself in. Then he landed in a mental hospital under observation where he reputedly punished himself by putting his criminal hand under the wheel of a passing small-gauge train. *Se non e vero, e ben trovato.* Even if it's untrue, at least it's a good story. A story about justice administered to oneself – justice and punishment as an internal human need. Punishment as a liberation from a sense of guilt.

A few years earlier, whilst rewriting my American screenplay in the States, I took satisfaction in writing the following line for one of my American characters:

“'I'd like to finally be in jail – only then will I feel free.'”

It is spoken by a man who has committed the perfect crime and, apart from his conscience, nothing is forcing him to turn himself in to the authorities. My American film never came into being – it was too ambitious for a commercial film and too simple for an auteur film. The only thing that I appreciated in it was that thought about liberation through punishment.

This same thought becomes most clearly expressed in an overheard story. One just has to add a motif which will allow the guilt to be felt commensurate to the punishment. A violation of order or ownership seemed to me something trivial. The protagonist of 'Imperative' goes further because he attempts sacrilege. If he was committing it as a believer, it would be hard to defend but the character, a mathematician, doesn't believe in anything and that's why faith is just a temptation or a challenge to him. The story takes place at a small university somewhere on the border of Germany and France. My protagonist is an assistant, while his master, an old professor, is a very religious Orthodox Serb. I chose this faith, convinced that in a film addressed to a Western viewer it would serve me best to show what Western religion has relatively little of these days – a feeling of sanctity and mystery. My young protagonist commits sacrilege in an Orthodox Church by going through the Royal Doors and desecrating the altar, touching it with a profaner's hand. He treats it as a challenge so that sanctity will reveal itself to him and that's when he'll be ready to be punished for it. In the screenplay he cuts off his finger and, liberated, he leaves the psychiatric hospital, finding spiritual harmony.

The story which I told in 'Imperative' did not hold promise for mass cinema audiences. I told it to various producers without much hope that someone would allow me to film it while, in the meantime, something verging on a miracle occurred. The local television station in Saarbrücken intended to make a prestigious film in coproduction with France. My recent films, 'The Constant Factor' and 'The Contract', had achieved considerable commercial success, awards in Cannes and Venice and to add to this I was in the middle of filming a big budget film about the Pope, and after eight years of efforts I had a contract for 'The Temptation' in Germany. In short – the constellations were favourable and the producers took the project in hand, forming a mutual undertaking.
From the director’s point of view, the most important matter in this project was the casting of the main part. Without a credible actor who would convince the audience of his spiritual experiences, the whole story could turn out to be an unintentional piece of grotesque. It's possible that the reason why I didn't get down to this screenplay was because no one appropriate came to mind. And suddenly, by accident as always, in the mid-seventies at a festival in India I met an actor who had played the title role in Franco Zeffirelli's 'Jesus of Nazareth.' I'm a moderate enthusiast of this otherwise beautiful film but this actor simply seemed to be ‘my man’ - he combined spirituality with cool, sometimes derisive, intelligence which did not spare its subject (himself). Our meeting at the festival ended with an exchange of addresses, after which I sent several perfunctory greetings, until finally, as usual by chance, the thought came to me that this man could play in 'Imperative'.

The word ‘could’ has a purely artistic meaning. In production terms the matter was not easy. At the end of the seventies Robert Powell was a very sought after, therefore expensive, actor. He played Mahler in Ken Russell's film and starred in Cavani's film about Nietzsche, as well as achieving success in the theatre and appearing in a few Hollywood films. Due to this it was unlikely that he would want to appear in a cheap, artistic film. I summoned up the courage to make the phone call while shooting 'The Temptation' in Zurich – I always feel more confident while filming something. I thought that I should at least gain an initial promise before sitting down to write the screenplay. Robert’s voice on the phone sounded encouraging. He said that it wasn’t out of the question. What else can one achieve when there's no script yet?

I sat down to write. Six weeks before shooting, I sent the translated screenplay to London and anxiously waited for a reply. The production was already in progress. We were choosing locations, the producers were incurring costs and I knew that if Robert said “no”, I would have to pull out of the project. Robert phoned a few days later – immediately after reading the screenplay. First, he raised some reservations regarding the wording in some of the dialogue, after which he asked what further plans I had. “It depends what you say,” I stuttered into the receiver.

“But I just said all that I had to say. I don't have any other reservations. Do you think we'll make this film?”

The rest was in the hands of the agents and producers. Long negotiations followed on the subject of dividing costs and profits. The Germany and French mentality, despite centuries of living side by side, is not conducive to making an easy agreement with one another. Observing subsequent rounds of negotiations, I realized that the Polish-German proximity was historically a lot less bloody! Filming was dangerously close – we were to begin on a Monday in November, but on the preceding Friday, after another round of talks, something happened that I could not fathom. Negotiations were broken off. The French left, the Germans called me into their office and declared that as usual they had been let down by the frogs and they'd decided to make the film on their own, of course granting me only half the expected budget. The
difference in money was related to the casting of the two main parts. Robert's wage, which was relatively small compared to his market price at the time, was to amount to one hundred thousand dollars. The equivalent wage was foreseen for the French actress, Brigitte Fossey. The producers proposed that I take a German cast. I said that this was out of the question, to which the lawyer took my contract out of his briefcase and started to clearly quote the relevant paragraphs.

On signing the contract, I hadn't even give a thought to what the countless standard clauses meant. I have worked in Germany many times and there was never any reason to read into those pages of small print which the television station always puts in front of me to sign. This time the pact turned out to be murderous. The contract foresaw that at the end of the day it was the producer who decided on the cast. What's more, at some point during the initial talks I gave some names which could, theoretically, be taken into consideration. Suddenly, this theory was becoming a reality. The producers proposed a famous actor with whom I had already worked and who, in my opinion, was not right for the part. I protested that if he acted in it, the film would be a lot worse. They answered:

“We believe that it will be great anyway.”

I was sure that it wouldn't. It was the first time in my life I had felt such pressure. In Poland there were times when someone tried to persuade me to ‘cut’ an actor from a film (Mikolajska from ‘Camouflage’) but nobody ever tried to impose an actor on me. I phoned the agency in Munich through which I had entered into the contract. My agent, a venerable Hungarian aristocrat called Anne Marie, warned me not to risk a law suit.

“But I can't make this film at odds with myself,” I whined into the receiver.

“You can! Otherwise you'll risk being finished in Germany for a long time.”

“But can't I be ill?”

“They'll summon a panel of doctors who'll prove that you're feigning! The insurance company will see to that. If you were to really become ill, the insurers would pay the production company compensation. That's not good for a director's reputation. No one would insure you again.”

I found myself in a blind alley. In front of me, the producer sent a telegram summoning the German actor I didn't want from New York. Surreptitiously, I copied down the number and, distraught, went back to the hotel. I was faithfully accompanied by my cinematographer, Slawomir Idziak. On the way, we weighed up all the possibilities and Slawek gave me the idea to phone Robert and tell him openly what the situation was. I dialled the London number. Robert was unpacking, having just received the telegram from the producer. He asked why the film had fallen
through. I told him that, as usual, it was a question of money.

“In that case I can play for free. Such a role rarely comes up.”

I was lost for words and in my mind I immediately tried to analyze the situation. The female part was less important – as a last resort I could find a German actress. If Robert really was agreeing, then I was saved. But was he really going to keep to his promise? With a trembling voice, I spoke into the receiver.

“Think it through again. Speak to your wife and your agent. And if you really want to risk six weeks’ work with someone who you barely know on a small production, then please call me back in an hour.”

Robert laughed. I looked at my watch. Exactly an hour later, the phone rang. Robert said that he’d packed again and that he could get on a flight that afternoon. He asked me to send money for the ticket to the airport.

I’m rarely moved but at that moment I had tears in my eyes. I thanked him and started to look for the producer’s number. I told him that we were saved. There was a silence on the other end of the line, after which I heard an ironic question:

“Do you have a written assurance that Mr Powell agrees to act for the amount that we're able to offer him?”

“He agreed to do it for free.”

“For free means that we'll have no guarantee that he won't walk off the set or start blackmailing us. That's not a solution! Let’s stick with doing the film with a German cast. After all, if it's not a co-production, why should we hire an Englishman for the main part?”

I was lost for words for the second time that day. The producer hung up. I returned to the hotel. A moment later, the German actor called from New York wanting to speak to me before he went to the airport. He’d received the script, accepted the role and said that he was happy that we were going to work together. Gloomily, I told him that we wouldn’t be as I had written the role for someone else and if the production were to impose him on me, then I wouldn’t speak to him on set. Surprised, he apologized and rang off, only to ring back a moment later. He had just spoken to the producer who told him to ignore what I was saying and come over.

“It's a temporary depressive state,” the producer explained to him, “The director's tired out. He'll get over it once he gets some sleep.”

The actor recounted the conversation word for word. I answered, invoking our past collaboration:
“Do you remember me having depression during any of my previous films? I don't think so! So understand that if you accept this role against my wishes, you'll be a man without dignity.”

The actor promised not to come. I mustered the courage to call London and explained to Robert that some bureaucratic difficulty had occurred and that they wouldn't be able to transfer the money for the ticket in time but the production would reimburse him when he arrived. Robert accepted this fact without any comment. Following the example of my producer, I decided to act using the method of fait accompli. Someone had to pick Robert up from the airport in Frankfurt. I knew that the producer would not give me a car and none of the crew members who I was close to had one. I could not ask those I didn't know as they were loyal to the producer. I thought of a way out of this problem and remembered a quiet, shy trainee, Richard, who a few months earlier had approached me in some German town and told me that he wanted to work with me as he had completed his film studies and liked my films. I asked him about these studies. He said that they were poor and that he was not too well prepared but he counted on making up for his failings in practice. His presentation was not too encouraging and when, a few days before filming, Richard appeared in Saarbrucken, I told him that the most he could count on was being an unpaid trainee on set. Now, I realised that Richard could save me. I found him and very soon we were racing along the autobahn in the direction of Frankfurt. Robert's plane had already taken off from London.

If all of this which I'm writing about was to be a screenplay, I would not have added anything more to these tribulations. However, life can sometimes be more ingenious.

That day at the end of November 1981, the last great confrontation between revolutionaries and the establishment took place. The revolution evolved from that memorable spring in 1968 and, instead of red, it took on the colour green. Battles were taking place regarding Frankfurt airport - the pretext was the building of a third runway. Thousands of young people and armed policemen gathered from all over the country. If on those days I'd listened to the radio or read any newspapers, I would have been aware that demonstrations had been planned for the weekend before shooting began. Unfortunately, I was not aware of this – on television and in newspapers I searched only for news from Poland. The only thing that seemed important to me was whether the Russians would enter the country or not. Would there be a general strike or confrontation? From the perspective of our history a few acres of forest outside Frankfurt seemed meaningless; in the meantime, it was them that turned out to be the obstacle that couldn't be overcome. When we were nearing the vicinity of the airport, I saw the glow of fires – cars that had been left in the car park were burning. The motorway which leads to the airport was blocked. Behind rows of policemen loomed the silhouettes of water cannons and armoured vehicles. For a Pole in autumn 1981 this was a familiar sight, but I didn't expect it in Germany. Richard asked how we could get to the airport and the policeman on duty told us that
all road traffic was suspended and the only thing we could do was to take the roundabout route to Frankfurt and then take a commuter train which runs on the last stage of the journey to the airport through a tunnel, and that's how it bypassed the area of conflict.

I understood that this was our fate. The plane from London was just about to land. I could just imagine Robert getting out, seeing no one waiting for him and reconsidering his romantic gesture. Six weeks and an unknown production – with no money – is there any point to this if they don’t care? They didn't even come to the airport! I was sure that at that moment Robert would declare that he'd crossed the boundaries of sacrifice and risk and, with a sigh of relief, board the next available plane to London.

We were standing alone on the motorway. Richard seemed to read my mind. I asked him whether we could try to approach from the other side and I immediately understood the pointlessness of the question. The German police are able to form such an impenetrable roadblock that no one would be able to slip through it. We were urged to turn back on the motorway by the police. We drove onto the narrow roads that led in a roundabout way to Frankfurt. I understood that there was nothing more we could do. The commuter train could get me there in an hour, but Robert would already be on his way back to London. As dark thoughts went through my mind, Richard stopped for a moment at some car-rental office. He asked to borrow maybe twenty marks and a moment later he returned carrying two cloth caps from Hertz or some other car-rental company. We turned back in the direction of the airport. As we approached the police cordons, Richard jammed the cap on my head, put on the other one and shouted out to the policeman who stopped us:

“I'm taking a driver to evacuate our cars from the parking lot before the hooligans set fire to them.”

With understanding, the policeman lifted the barrier and let us through in the direction of the airport. I found Robert by the British Airways counter. He was studying the flight schedule. Just as I had predicted, he wanted to go home.

The next day in Saarbrucken my producer ineptly hid his surprise on seeing a different actor than the one he expected appear on set. A quarter of an hour later, Robert had signed a contract which included what the actor’s commitments were to the production. The salary was symbolic. When I found myself alone with the producer, I looked him reproachfully in the eyes while he smiled and said something which can be best summed up with the proverb:

“What cloud has a silver lining. We’re going to have a great actor for next to nothing!”

‘Imperative’ turned out to be one of my most important films, undoubtedly the most important of those which I shot abroad. Robert received an award in Venice for best
actor while the film received the special jury award. Tarkovsky and Gassman were members of the jury.

During the live transmission of the awards, Gassman declared that Robert was lucky that the director had written for him a role that fit like a custom-made suit while he himself had to play roles in assembly-line screenplays. As I collected the award I promised that I would write a role for Gassman. And two years later I approached him with the screenplay of 'The Power of Evil'.

“Custom made for you,” I said.

He read it and a few days later I received a telegram:

“I accept. It fits well.”

**SAYINGS**

Film is a public appearance and every such appearance creates an effect which resembles publicity. What we say in a film, on stage, in a novel or on television sounds like it's been said through a loudspeaker and has a certain magical power. That's why writers or, broadly speaking, authors, use this magical power which is the opportunity to present someone or something on the screen which will be watched by thousands of people.

I took advantage of this possibility in my first films. Most often to settle disputes with my father, who was a fairly vehement man who didn't like my profession. It's hard to conceal that 'Family Life' was a polemic with my father, of course clothed in an overheard and entirely different anecdote but full of allusions to our various clashes. My father's family had experienced ups and downs, mainly the latter, which was why the industrial background of the father from ‘Family Life’ was artistic staffage. My father's pre-war business was quite modest, while he himself could not aspire to the financial elite. However, the filmic relationship with the son itself was, as it were, taken from real life. Jan Kreczmar, who played old Braun, utters the following sentence in the film:

“‘My son is wasting himself.”
I heard this sentence from my father's lips many times and with pleasure waited for the premiere but I met with miserable disappointment. My father did not catch that piece of dialogue, just as he didn't catch many others. He didn't like the film, just as he didn't like any of my films, and he didn't notice the analogy with old Braun. Even the character of the son played by Daniel Olbrychski didn't seem familiar to him and he didn't associate it with me. He only showed an ambivalent attitude to the character played by Maja Komorowska.

“Such a pretty young lady,” he said “but why is she making a fool of herself?”

Of course, he was referring to the provocative behaviour behind which Bella hides her tragedy. He was particularly struck by a detail contained in the dialogue when the father says that Bella was in prison for indecent acts.

“Is it worth saying such things?” asked my father, at the same time teaching me that rather than the truth about life, the cinema audience searches for the truth about its dreams. I don't have any siblings and I imagine that it must have passed through my father's mind that if he had a daughter, she could have been Maja.

PHOTOS:

With Maja after 'Spiral'

I suffered a more scathing defeat many years later when I included a real-life figure in 'Imperative' – the Swiss theologian Hans Kung. I knew him from his television appearances and an article in which he mercilessly criticized Pope John Paul II. I could agree with the criticism – the Pope can be the subject of criticism but Kung's articles had the unbearable tone of calling for order and preaching ex cathedra. In them John Paul II appeared as a provincial curate who was disturbing the council edifice which was built by the hands of masters, including those of the article's author. I read them during the making of the film 'From a Far Country' when as a Pole I most strongly identified with the Pope's conflict with the Western world and, in part, with the Western Church. I wrote many articles trying to defend the Pope from the perspective of a person who shared his experiences of that part of the world, where values are expressed as John Paul II presents them. Writing to the Italian press, I wanted to introduce a differentiation between what in Karol Wojtyla’s personality is individual and that which is a result of experiences unknown to the Western world which look upon life from a completely different perspective. I had no doubt that our experiences have a greater value because they are treated as a test of life. War and Communism have taught us to see all values, as it were, under pressure (my first screenplay was entitled ‘Pressure Test’ and included this metaphor). Friendship really meant friendship because when a person was scared to call someone whose phone was being tapped and the newspapers listed him as a black sheep, then that friendship really meant something and had a real price. I remember how it was not without fear that I dialled Halina Mikolajksa's number after unknown perpetrators cut the brake
cables of her car and only a miracle saved her life. In this context, one can list every virtue – loyalty, devotion, generosity, magnanimity and so on. Our dramatic existence carried with it such a test of these values, which the inhabitants of Western Europe never experienced. Hence my reaction to Kung, who in practising theology from the comfort of his office, seemed to understand the world through his own speculations. He accused the Pope of hostility towards advocates of liberation theology, a reactionary social attitude – this of course angered me the most – and finally authoritarianism instead of dialogue, where I had the impression that dialogue began to mean an open pact with the devil (particularly in Italy, Germany and France, where various progressive Catholics fell into the arms of Marxism.)

Aware of all these feelings, I wrote the role of the theologian in 'Imperative' based mainly on quotes from Kung's articles. The theologian was to be a negative character, one unable to help a person in need, who searches for faith but at the same time is insensitive to what is sacred and Mystery. I found the biggest support for my stance towards the celluloid theologian later whilst showing my film in Russia when someone from the audience crudely joked that theologians are not worth listening to and it would be best if they were thrown alive into a dark hole.

The Eastern Orthodox Church went the furthest in the subject of reason and faith and it's certainly not what draws someone to that faith. However, on the other hand, Eastern Christianity has retained a lot more understanding towards what is holy than the West. I became convinced of this during filming. My producer searched all of Germany and eastern France for a small Orthodox church in which we could film. The action in 'Imperative' takes place in a small, German university town. One of the main characters, an old mathematics professor, is a follower of the Orthodox Church and it is through him that the main character, an English professor who is also a mathematician, discovers his agnosticism as a dramatic defect of his soul. He tries to find faith, resorting to profanation. If something is holy, then profanation is possible; therefore, one has to attempt profanation in order to become convinced of holiness. The profanation is entering through the Royal Doors and touching the Eucharistic objects and the altar. Having committed this act, the protagonist succumbs to a state of madness and submits himself to psychoanalytical treatment to free him from a feeling of guilt. In the end, it turns out that liberation is, in fact, the admission of guilt and the recognizing of the sacred as the reality of the Mystery.

'Imperative' is no doubt one of my most important films and I'm reluctantly summarising it here in a cursory manner. However, I'll gladly recount an experience which I had during filming. First and foremost, the Orthodox Bishop of Munich announced that he couldn’t designate a church for us as in none of them would we be able to disturb the sanctity of the church by filming scenes with actors. I won't pretend that I wasn't delighted with his response. According to the bishop, a temple is holy independently of his will and independently of our intentions whilst making the film, we would profane a place that is meant for prayer and devoted to that purpose.
He proposed that we build the interior in an atelier or, if need be, use some church that serves as a museum.

As it turned out, a completely unexpected solution was found. In Baden-Baden there's an Orthodox church which was built by a tsar, which is now managed in turn by two different Orthodox groups: one under the control of the Moscow patriarch, the other an emigrant group. They had excommunicated each other; therefore, the church is under the administration of the city and each week the keys travel from one congregation to the other. Before each service, the church is consecrated anew, so filming would not constitute any theological obstacle. Whereas my producer could leave part of the set for the use of both groups.

Earlier I often filmed various scenes in utilitarian Catholic temples and, although I was always convinced that the message of my film would epitomize the appropriateness of my actions, I often had to insist (particularly in Western Europe) that for the duration of filming the priests might want to remove the consecrated host. From the point of view of a Catholic, I treat the sacred a lot more casually, but when I see how in an empty church a young progressive priest doesn't kneel in front of the altar because he sees it as a waste of time, it seems to me that some erosion of sanctity has occurred, that something has become too relative. And that's why it feels more appropriate when I'm conscious that the altar is empty while filming.

Time to return to Hans Kung. His caricature registered in the film 'Imperative' had little chance of meeting its original – theologians are not usually enthusiastic about going to the cinema. I didn't know Hans Kung personally and it was only a few years ago that a friend met on a walk mentioned that he'd be playing host to him in Poland. Our Pope's attacker had decided to come to Wroclaw, I think, for some PAX Association event. It turned out that he was to fly via Warsaw, so I made a hurried invitation, which was accepted. Whilst entertaining my distinguished guest, I asked him whether he wouldn't like to watch a film dealing with the sacred. I sat through the screening with a flushed face. I waited to see whether and when Kung would recognize himself on screen. And once again I was met with disappointment. At length and in great detail, Kung discussed the principle of the film – he was against my predilection for the sacred in which there is an element of magic. In his understanding, the sacred was to be sheer abstraction. No object or place should replace a person's communing with the absolute, in other words with God (Kung avoided using the word “mystery”).

I harbour a different belief. I think that if one reconciles oneself with the bodily, material character of our existence, then matter can be helpful for getting in touch with what is incomprehensible. I don't believe in the power of humanity as strongly as a confident Western theologian and I think that's where the difference between our existential experiences lies. Before our eyes, a person who experienced history showed his weakness. The West did not live through concentration camps or gulags and is under the delusion that if you want something, you can have it and that the
word ‘human’ sounds noble (what an irony that the author of the phrase himself experienced so much degradation). That is also why I could not agree with Hans Kung, but at the end of the conversation I asked him what he thought of the theologian character.

“Excellent,” he said without hesitating. “Many times in my life I have met such conceited dimwits.”

He clearly didn't realize that the dimwit used a few of his own expressions – perhaps they had been a little lost in translation or perhaps it’s a rule that a person does not recognize himself on the screen. A stranger's face and the actor's character distance the character from the original. The Pope mentioned this when he told me about the impression he had watching his own likeness portrayed by an actor on screen. Judging the effect as a dramatist, which he had been for a while in his life, he stated that he interpreted all the subjective shots as his own, whereas when an actor looked out of the screen, he saw him as a complete stranger.

However, I think that this association is completely beside the point. The Pope knew that my film was about him, whereas Hans Kung didn't even suppose that I could have had him in mind when creating the fictional character of the theologian in 'Imperative'. As I mentioned earlier, my father also didn't recognize his film self. I could make generalizations about the fact that people usually don't but I have also experienced the opposite. I still feel troubled when I recall this as the person is still very much alive and well and fairly recently had a very negative impact on my life, recognizing himself where I had no intention of portraying him. I am speaking of my film 'The Year of the Quiet Sun', which was my greatest artistic success. It received the Golden Lion Award in Venice and it travelled the world gaining a fairly large audience, particularly in the States. The film was made in co-production with America and included in its cast the outstanding actor Scott Wilson, who's known for his roles in 'The Great Gatsby' and 'In Cold Blood', and more recently 'Our God's Brother'.

'The Year of the Quiet Sun' was made just after Martial law. The story which I tell in the film really happened. I heard it at a meeting of authors in Silesia.

Right after the war, a Polish repatriate from beyond the Bug river fell in love with a Western officer. I can't remember whether he was American or English. Her mother was too weak to cope with the difficulties of escaping over the green boundary (to Germany) and wanting to ease her daughter's departure she caught a cold and, as they say, she willed herself to death. I carried this story in my mind for many years and during Martial law I thought that perhaps it was time to return to it. It seemed to me that we were living in a time somewhat similar to that immediately after the war. Sometimes we have to find comfort in the fact that failure can be a victory and that some meaning can be found even in suffering. My female protagonist says outright that one can even be happy in suffering and this expression of martyrdom found a fair
amount of appreciation in the West.

In Poland the film did not fare well. By portraying the post-war years as years of failure rather than happiness, I infringed on one of the canons of communist propaganda. On the other hand, the film was made at a time when so much had already been said that no objections were raised with the screenplay and even the so-called pre-release screening, that is the acceptance of the film by the censors and the film authorities, occurred without event. I suspect that, as usual, conflict was a substitute for something else.

When I returned home during Martial law, one of the first people from the authorities, apart from Minister Kiszczak, who wanted to see me personally was Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski, who was earlier known to me from STS, then later from the first meetings of 'Experience and the Future' (DiP), which he initially took part in, being the editor-in-chief of 'Polityka' magazine. The DiP seminar was an excellent initiative for a moderate dissident. His resistance resided in the fact that it was self-appointed. I remember the first tirade against the fact that we wanted to give advice unasked! So, Mieczyslaw Rakowski received me in the prime minister's office, the same office in which I was later received by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and led a conversation about the perspectives for the system's evolution. I presume that it's thanks to him that immediately after Martial law I received a State Prize at a time when for the preceding few years I had been making films abroad, and 'The Year of the Quiet Sun' was only just being finished. The award made me very uncomfortable and I thought hard about what to do. To reject it would practically mean that I was deciding to leave the country again. To accept it was just as inappropriate as accepting the award for 'Camouflage' when Wajda had been so ostentatiously bypassed. As usual, I decided to sidestep the issue by leaving for a moment under the pretext of urgent matters abroad and donating the money from the prize to a Catholic hospice for the terminally ill in Cracow, announcing this in the 'Tygodnik Powszechny' newspaper so the news would appear along with the information about the prize.

Did this evasion irritate the authorities or were other battles being fought out in their ranks (I suspect the latter)? Cultural politics were being governed at the time by Swirgon, a young party activist who had been put into power at Rakowski's initiative as proof that not only 'Solidarity' could open perspectives to the young. Apparently, Mr Swirgon very quickly escaped the influence of his protector and became the general’s evil spirit, straining the authorities’ relationship everywhere it was possible. This contrasted with the actions of Mr Rakowski who, although he had been rejected by his own circle, gave the impression of a potential intermediary between the intelligentsia and the elite of the authorities at the time. Was I caught in the crossfire with my film? I don't know but that's what I suppose. I met with condemnation by Mr Swirgon – the young secretary of the Central Committee announced that he would instruct the press what to write about the film and he kept his word. With sadness, I noticed that there were more people eager to carry out the order than I'd expected, particularly in the provincial press, which presented a perfect list of denunciations.
made to order. They were joined by people who had the reputation of being fairly moderate and not completely being at someone's disposal; for example, a lady who lectured in Lagow and published in the magazine 'Kino' a report elaborating on all of Comrade Swirgon's theories. I already knew these theories because he had laid them out for me, which is why to this day it's difficult to believe that these objections reflected her own feelings. I was only worried by the fact that the public did not go and see the film, even though it had stood up well in more difficult markets.

'The Year of Quiet Sun' was officially submitted by Poland for the Oscars. This was already after its success in New York and, what's more, it happened in a year when the competition from other foreign films was fairly weak and I, like never before, was backed by an American distributor. Without doubt, I had a chance at least for a nomination. And just before the copy was to be sent out, the Central Committee decided to withdraw the film. I know from various sources, as they say, that the day before the ultimate decision, General Jaruzelski took a cassette with the film home with him. Someone who I tend to believe told me in secret, which I don’t feel bound by, that Comrade Swirgon suggested to the general that there was a small episode in the film with an officer and translator, a fierce fanatical communist, which was a parody of him. The part of the officer was played by Tadeusz Bradecki, a man of similar age to the general, and in addition to this an intellectual who spoke languages.

Apparently, the tape with my film returned from the general rewound to that particular scene where a stupid translation by the officer prevents the lovers from talking. I met the general in person earlier when he was still the minister of defence and on a number of occasions he received filmmakers, very convincingly emphasizing his intelligence and at the same time defending the most absurd principles which were enforced when portraying the army in films. I also knew him from a few pre-release screenings of documentary films at the 'Czolowka' studio where, as the political chief of the army, he fought any deviation from the doctrine so fiercely that he gave the impression of a man who was acting “holier than the Pope”. These days I meet the general sporadically at various receptions but I have no intention of asking him whether he remembers the incident from 'The Year of the Quiet Sun'. I suspect that he doesn't. In his life it was an unimportant incident. Whereas it probably had an impact on my life – I did not take part in the lottery, I was deprived of a ticket, although perhaps I wouldn't have won anyway.

PHOTO:

_Cannes 1980, after the screening of 'The Constant Factor' with Bradecki and Idziak. At that time, I received the award for best director._
THE MULETA AND OTHER MANOEUVRES

The burial of the past in my memory takes place like an avalanche of free associations. However, sometimes it is arranged in a structure which I try to observe with the eye of a professional dramatist who expresses himself precisely with the help of narrative structures.

The sentence which I wrote above is suitable for the opening of a lecture, particularly as the word ‘structure’ brings to mind structuralism, which has been the menace of film criticism for the last dozen or so years.

However, let’s return to narrative structures. Indeed, I mention them during lectures when I try to make my students aware what the art of storytelling consists of. Let’s, for instance, take short stories with a punchline, that is jokes. We know that usually one joke triggers another and it turns into a joke-telling session. Often the same joke returns in a new form, with different scenery and characters, but retaining the same structure. Like those famous American ‘Polish jokes’, which came to Poland in the seventies in the guise of policeman jokes and are returning today as jokes about blondes. The principle of these jokes was the invariable utter stupidity of the characters. How many policemen does it take to change a light bulb? Two, one to
hold the light bulb and the other to turn the ladder until it's screwed in. In American jokes, this was done by two Poles.

I'll leave aside American ‘Polish jokes’ and my hurt feelings of national pride. Reflections on the subject of structures came to mind when I was remembering the trials and tribulations of 'The Constant Factor' and the moment when I was threatened with the fact that the authorities would not allow my film to go to Cannes and my response was that that suited me fine. Earlier, when 'Camouflage' was shown in Gdansk, the situation was identical. They wanted to give me an award and, defying all logic, I didn't want it. The structure of that manoeuvre lies simply in the fact that one acts unpredictably and proclaims not to want what one desires. In every contest in life this manoeuvre has great power.

Someone who is able to renounce money, fame or sex is free – he is not under control. I remember that Minister Wilhelmi praised Marxist determinism, proclaiming that are no people that can't be bought – everything depends on the price. The expression itself, out of context, sounds like a quote from an American series such as ‘Dynasty’. However, when it is said by an experienced and clear-sighted politician, many people start to believe that it's true. And this is where we are faced with a worldview issue. No experiences can bring us answers to the question to what extent people can be bought and to what extent they can't be. The most elementary honesty comes from the fact that the one who is being tempted doesn't have enough imagination to feel the temptation. Sometimes its fear and most often disbelief - the rarest of inner restraints are principles. Belief in ideals and views on human nature are purely a matter of one’s worldview. One can believe that everyone has their price and one can believe that a person will allow himself to be thrown to the lions before he renounces his faith.

When I think about how many revolutionaries died in the name of a better future for humanity, I can't agree with the views of Minister Wilhelmi. And on the occasion of the Gdansk festival I employed a manoeuvre that knocked the weapon out of his hand but did not prove that I was free. Essentially, more than the prize, I cared about the opinion of people whose views I valued more than those of the authorities. Viewing people as a mob, Wilhelmi repeated that he who has power over the media is able to convince the public of everything. He also said that by taking away access to mass media one can gag any artist. He tried this method towards such dissidents as Halina Mikolajska but he ran out of time to find out if he'd been successful.

A positive example that defies Wilhelmi's statements is the story of the American press magnate who, having power over the American press, tried to impose on the public an opinion about his wife, an operatic singer. His power turned out to be insufficient - the critics resisted the temptation of vast amounts of money. This story resembles Welles' classic film 'Citizen Kane'.
However, I also have darker examples. A few years ago in Basel I directed a completely unknown opera by the similarly unknown Austrian composer Zemlinski. Zemlinski was Mahler's friend and Alma Mahler's teacher. He composed beautiful, decadent music but as a Jew, under pressure from Goebbels, he was forced to emigrate to the States. There he was forgotten and today, forty years after his death, he is sometimes discovered anew but this recognition came too late, when fashions had already changed. Zemlinski will no longer influence his contemporaries. What's more, he won't write what he would have written if he'd had the chance during his lifetime. In a word, Goebbels won. Staying on the subject of music, Soviet socialist realism hindered Szostakowicz, whereas it promoted the mediocrity of the type of Szczedrin, Plisiecka's husband. Apparently, whilst drawing up contracts with Western record labels, the Soviet monopolist 'Melodia' label enforced the release of the authorities' favourites at the time. So, alongside the recordings of Richter and Rostropovich, those who had merit for political reasons were also promoted. Did this make them great? Certainly not, but they became wealthy and well-known to some extent and so they crossed a certain threshold of success, which they wouldn't have merely with their mediocre talent. The moral of these deliberations is quite simple – I suspect that a genius cannot be broken by any adversity but the whole life of art takes place somewhere in the middle and concerns talented people who are not geniuses. For them, the theory that everyone can be bought is dangerous.

When I think of Polish cinema, I invariably think of Piwowski – a man who should have had a great international career but he stopped somewhere halfway there because his way of working and his actions meant that the authorities constantly hindered him.

The figure of Marek Piwowski is to me ominous proof that an artist's development can be hindered without doing any obvious harm. Consistent undermining of his faith in himself is all that is needed. Film is a particularly cruel arena as it favours people with violent temperaments to the disadvantage of those who are reflective and humble. Once Andrzej Wajda said that to make films one must have the temperament of a corporal and the soul of a poet, and we know how rarely these two contradictory temperaments can be found in one artist. There isn't time to deliberate about who has a chance of success in this profession at a time when everything around us is changing, but there's no way of escaping from one reflection which is born from a change of system and in which art functions.

PHOTO:

'The Quarterly Balance' – Marek Piwowski and Maja Komorowska

Socialist patronage was fairly kindly to artists. It created an effective shield, allowing one to forget about material worries and concentrate on that which is beautiful and
The ‘socialist world’ was filled with various poetic films which invariably won awards at festivals but usually had little success with the wider public. The authorities took them under their wing, protecting art from the pressure of the market. Those were the films of the poets. When I think of the requirements set by today's cinematography, I suspect that those who get a chance to be heard are mainly corporals – efficient, communicative artisans that tell stories devoid of any personal character. Except suddenly, some sort of Jarmusch sneaks in out of nowhere.

I have already talked about acting contrary to obvious motivations. An example of this was my own uneasy refusal of a compromise at the price of an award which I could not accept. The compromise was not painful – I received the award. Thanks to that, a few years later I could repeat a similar manoeuvre. It was with 'The Constant Factor', during the time of the last real Marxist vice-minister of culture, Juniewicz. 'The Constant Factor' raised some objections at the screenplay stage and I'll happily mention them as essentially they grew out of serious ideological reasons. My protagonist, played by Bracki, is an uncompromising man and as the action develops he strengthens his stance, not agreeing to the widespread corruption. It always seemed to me that the discomfort of life during socialism mainly lay in the fact that from day to day, in every relationship, a small moral compromise was necessary. Commuting to Lodz while studying, we would bribe conductors so as not to pay for a ticket. Many bureaucratic matters were connected with bribery; for example, the meter reader from the power station lowered the bill for electricity. All of this had its roots in the occupation (or maybe in the partitions, or at least in the old Congress Kingdom of Poland) but it created astonishing discomfort in everyday life. As he matures, my protagonist becomes increasingly uncompromising – he refuses to take part in dishonesty, clearly following the example of his religious mother.

In 1980 I had to refer to faith fairly cautiously because, despite a Polish Pope and the relative ‘Gierek thaw’, religion was not allowed into the mass media and the new minister was a guardian of ideological discipline. In my film the dying mother of the protagonist refuses morphine, saying that she would like to offer her suffering for her son’s spiritual wellbeing. It was one sentence but friction arose from it. The minister had no grievances that there was a believer in the film but he insisted that the overtone of the film should confirm Marxist theory in that although we all dream of some absolute system, morality is relative. That's why he wanted the protagonist to suffer a defeat, whereas I wanted to put him to a final test but I didn't want him to fail, to lose faith in his rightness and relinquish his dreams. The film was edited in Warsaw and some envoys of the Cannes Film Festival turned up. I gave them a screening and found out that the film would be invited to take part in the competition.

The festival in Cannes was the only international film festival which maintained a certain amount of autonomy towards countries from the Eastern bloc. It didn't accept films that were proposed by those countries but chose itself what it wanted to show. Every year, disputes took place between the envoys from Cannes and the
representatives of the authorities. This had started when Tarkovsky's 'The Mirror' was shown against the will of the Soviet Union. Admittedly, it was shown outside of competition but at a special screening. In the case of 'The Constant Factor' the authorities were keen, as they always were, that the film should take part in the competition. This proved that our culture was blossoming and each subsequent minister gained a claim to fame. Although it is true that there were comments made that the West praised that which is anti-Socialist in our art, these were usually made by those colleagues that were never invited anywhere apart from Moscow and Karlovy Vary.

After being invited to Cannes, before the pre-release screening, there were suggestions in the ministry that a few words should be cut out of 'The Constant Factor' precisely in order to impart a meaning to the film that the minister regarded as in accordance with Marxist ideology. I, in turn, used the same manoeuvre that I had used a few years earlier in Gdansk. I didn't agree to any changes, explaining that it wasn't about the ideology but about the fact that essentially I would prefer it if my film was not released as this would present me to the West in a far better light. My film really didn't have a chance in Cannes, so sending it would be pointless. The year 1980 permitted that in insolence one could go so far without punishment. Appealing to pragmatism, the motive of self-interest was infinitely more believable than ideological resistance, which as a matter of fact fuelled the fanaticism of the other side. However, it was possible to meet on the ground of cynically worded interests. So, I gave up the screening of my film in Cannes, while the authorities turned out to be more cunning as they sent it against my will. Without any cuts, of course, because in 1980 that was already out of the question – the film could be left on the shelf but it would not be screened in a version that was not approved by the director. The episode with 'The Constant Factor' is a repetition of what I experienced fighting for 'Camouflage'.

The mention of pragmatic arguments reminds me, in turn, of my return to Poland after the introduction of Martial law. I suppose that for all generations of Poles who consciously lived through 13th December 1981, this day remains a subject of personal memories. I was in Berlin, at the Schweizerhoff Hotel, where I was on a one-day reconnaissance for the television film 'The Unapproachable, during a break in filming 'Imperative' in Saarbrucken. The bearer of bad news was the set designer, Jan Schlubach, who came to have breakfast with Sławek Idziak and me and on seeing our carefree expressions, asked us whether we already knew. That's what one asks at a moment when something terrible has happened – when someone dies, something breaks down or war breaks out. We didn't ask – it was clear: it was the end. They had invaded or something like that. For the first few days we didn't know exactly what was happening - how fierce were the persecutions, how strong was the opposition, whether there was a civil war or not. Foreign news channels broadcast snatches of information and showed footage of Gdansk burning. Hour after hour we listened to the radio which broadcast mainly unverified rumours. The reconnaissance proceeded in a dream-like haze – it was difficult to force oneself to think about the next film
although, on the other hand, its existence gave some chance of survival. The work on ‘Imperative’ was coming to an end – all that was left were the most important scenes, which we shot from Monday in Saarbrucken and Metz, listening to the news on the radio in the breaks between takes.

I went to Rome for Christmas at the invitation of the producer of my film about the Pope. The well-wishing Italian media informed me that they would be broadcasting Christmas Mass to many countries, probably to Poland, too. Because of this, I begged the Vatican for a seat in the front row by the altar and I received a promise from the cameramen that they'd do at least one close-up of me so in this way I could inform my family of my whereabouts. Just before the broadcast, it turned out that the information was untrue. Polish television withdrew from the broadcast and although during the Mass there were a few close-ups of me, none of them reached Poland. I felt dejected about all of this and I remember the impression made on me by a short conversation after the Mass with Cardinal Agostin Casaroli (at that time still the ‘prime minister’ of the Vatican). The Cardinal is a textbook example of a Vatican bureaucrat – smiling mysteriously, reticent, weighing each word and at the same time insightful and so intelligent that, as rumours have it, he made many mistakes because he understood too much. After Mass, he said to me.

“Don't worry. There won't be a tragedy in Poland and all of this won't last long.”

Knowing the Vatican's measure of time, which usually related to eternity, I asked naively.

“How long?”

“A few years. No more than ten.”

I wonder how Cardinal Casaroli knew, and whether he knew, or perhaps I invented that line (although I wrote it down in my diary with that date). Did he just throw out a hypothesis or did he give an accurate calculation? I believed him and I always counted on the fact that Jaruzelski’s dictatorship wouldn't last longer than ten years – this was the rhythm with which governments usually changed during the old system. So, simply on practical terms, I settled on such a calculation when, after returning to Poland, I took part in the dramatic deliberations of our filmmakers’ union, which could be revived on the condition that we changed the board of directors. The decision was difficult because at the head of the board sat Wajda. Kieslowski and I were chosen as vice-presidents and in the 'Solidarity' era we resigned from our positions under fairly perverse circumstances.

It was a time of violent clashes with the authorities. As the chairman, Wajda acted in the spirit of romanticism characteristic for him, which was effective at that time. We were generous with our words of admiration and encouragement. At the same time,
both Krzysztof and I felt that we were not very useful in these battles. For example, I knew that I couldn't take part in the occupation of the minister of culture's office. My disposition did not allow me to take seriously an occupation in which we would have to use vases as urinals alongside our female comrades-in-arms. Agnieszka Holland was, after all, one of the front-line fighters! At the same time, I had to admit that the very idea of an occupation was good and no doubt it should go ahead, but as a participant I would only have been a hindrance. That's also why I yielded, considering it a sign of support for my colleagues' activities during the difficult first period of 'Solidarity'. Then we had to decide what to do at the moment when a chance arose for our association to be able to function as a buffer between the film community and the ‘Jaruzelski’ authorities. We found a chance to save face. The mandate of the association's management expired if we acknowledged that, despite the ban, it ran during the Martial law ‘suspension’. In these conditions, the resignation of the board with Wajda at its head was not a flagrant bending under the pressure and a violation of our regulations but a statutory act. On the other hand, we asked ourselves whether it was worth agreeing to a compromise or whether taking an uncompromising stance would be more beneficial for our culture.

During these calculations the issue was how long the regime would last. Opinions varied greatly. The example of Czechoslovakia proved that we could be talking about two decades. Andrzej Wajda and many other friends suspected that the regime would come to an end in two to three years. If we accepted this measure of time, it was decidedly not worth searching for a compromise. However, if we were faced with ten years, then it was best not to allow some neo-association of filmmakers to be formed by the party because the loss to our so-called cultural substance could be greater. For three years one could completely abandon making films. Similarly, one could do without theatres and books. Czechoslovakia's example taught us that during ten or twenty years one could turn the fertile soil of culture into something resembling the steppe and that's when it was worth rescuing at least the minimum of autonomy. In the end, my opinion, supported by the authority of the Vatican, prevailed. I don't think that Cardinal Casaroli realized that with one sentence spoken after the Christmas Mass in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, he influenced the fate of the filmmakers’ association, but that's what happened. And I think it's good that it happened because the era of the 'Jaruzelski' government lasted quite a long time and if we had left our party colleagues with an open field, then I suspect that today we would have to build cinematography from scratch.

I recall these dilemmas not just to hark back to Martial law. I think that out of this model dilemma, that is whether to collaborate or to compromise, whether to make a gesture and allow ourselves to be disbanded, a particular experience occurred which is worth generalizing about. Although our dilemma had moral consequences, it was of a political character. The reasons for one or the other option were purely political: if we're counting on a long night, we'll act differently, if it's a short night, we can make a sudden move. This meant that the participants in the dispute had different expectations. However, there were no moral differences between us – no one
suspected anyone of acting out of fear or hope of reward. Our calculations differed, but in the end we chose one variant and we remained friends. During Communism we got out of the habit of having political differences, which should resemble the difference between, say, mathematicians who defend two different theorems, convinced that each of them is correct but nobody accuses anyone else of defending his theorem due to their own base impulses. During the strike by medical students in Cracow, whilst making 'From a Far Country' about John Paul II, I allowed myself to deliver a simple truism whilst speaking publicly for the first time. That is that no one has a monopoly on honesty and what goes with it – one has to accept in principle the fact that both the left wing and the right wing are striving for the good of humanity, the same thing only with a different order of priorities. So from a theoretical point of view, this issue has a pragmatic character: in given conditions, in a given country sometimes there's more use to be made of the left and sometimes of the right. It may seem that such a banal statement is not worth recalling. Whereas at the time it was for many of us a real discovery because many years of propaganda beat it into our heads that only the left cares about people and the right is morally worse because it cares only for the interests of the rich. Today, after a few years of democracy, I look through the abridged version of my improvised speech, which was printed on the front page by the honourable 'Tygodnik Powszechny' newspaper under the title 'An artist's dialogue with the world', and I'm surprised that such a simple discovery came to me so late. Did my short experience of democracy challenge any of these judgements? I don't think so. I'm non-party and by following the example of the tradition of northern democracy I want to retain the right to vote in all elections depending on how, at that moment, I judge the needs of the country, the values of various programmes and the personnel who would be carrying these programmes out. In a word, the left and the right – just like medicines in the bathroom cabinet – one used when the stomach hurts, the other when the heart or the liver is the problem.

All that is left is to finish the story of my return to the country after Martial law, after we had filmed the television version of 'The Unapproachable' in Berlin. So, thanks to the astonishing energy of my wife, who had remained in the country, I quickly regained contact with my family and friends in Poland. At first, they were letters brought over by various random people who my wife would accost at the airport or at train stations. Later there were even phone calls, although officially there was no contact with Poland. On the basis of these contacts, I understood that the second part of Cardinal Casaroli's statement was true – the terror was not bloody. I had no reason for any greater fears and I didn't have to remain abroad. Already in January I had met in Berlin with Penderecki and his evaluation of the situation was not alarming. From inside Poland, I was convinced by the voice of Krzysztof Kieslowski, who I trusted greatly. Whilst intervening in the case of a few of our imprisoned friends, Krzysztof took the opportunity to ask General Kiszczak about me. He sent me assurances that I could return and carry on using my passport. Later, someone called me from the embassy in Cologne and passed on a similar message. Hearing the assurance that I could come back without any risk, I asked the embassy official whether he had this in writing. The official laughed into the receiver and I understood how stupid my
question was. What would a written assurance be worth if the authorities were treacherous from the ground up? It's as if I'd completely forgotten the cautionary scene from 'Satan from the 7th Grade' when the wrongdoer gives his word and then when he breaks it says:

“Who said I was an honest person?”

I returned to Poland without any written assurances. To this day I can picture the face of the friendly border guard who, on taking my passport, asked whether I was aware that he would annul it. The Lufthansa plane was still standing on the airstrip and I had a last chance to go back to Germany. But, of course, I stayed.

Among the warnings that I was sent in secret by my friends there was one from Krzysztof Kieslowski which I particularly took to heart. Beware of television. I was aware of the boycott of the mass media. I knew that Penderecki, who did not respect the boycott, met with a great wave of public hostility. That's why I was sure that I must refuse every request for an interview in front of a camera or for a government newspaper. However, under the conditions of Martial law this was no guarantee. The television station had recordings of me from the 'Solidarity' year when I often appeared before the cameras. I knew that all it took would be to film a few metres of tape showing me getting off the plane and then show on the news a fragment of an old interview. For people that would be a signal that the director had returned from abroad and immediately started to collaborate: simply put, he acted like a swine. Wanting to avoid such a situation, I grew a beard when I was getting ready to return. In this way my credibility was guaranteed – I had never given Polish television an interview with a beard, so the old material could not be used.

It's difficult to determine to what extent suspecting television of manipulation was correct. A television crew was waiting for me at the airport – they knew the date of my return even though Lufthansa does not provide a list of passengers before the flight. Evidently, they had detected some sign of my contact with my family. After all, I didn't make use of the post and on the phone to the Italian Embassy, which my wife and mother made polite use of a few times, I did not give an exact date of my return. Of course, I refused an interview. A few days later I was summoned by Kiszczak, the minister of internal affairs, for a meeting, during which he asked:

“Since you returned why have you refused to have any contact with Polish television?”

From experience I knew that one should avoid ideological discussions which out of necessity would be pointless and quite dangerous, which is why I used the basest of pragmatic arguments.

“Polish television is unpopular and for me popularity is the greatest capital for which I have worked many years. When your television regains its past popularity, then I'll
be asking for an interview myself.”

The minister understood and didn't try to convince me.

In the title of this chapter I used the word “muleta”. The word is taken from bullfighting and it’s the red cloth which averts the attention of the bull, or rather attracts it. Instead of attacking the bullfighter, it attacks the red cloth.

At film school, I heard that whilst directing 'Innocent Sorcerers', Andrzej Wajda deliberately shot a scene at the cemetery where a gravedigger describes how the new authorities had changed the wording on the graves of the 'Home Army' soldiers so they would say 'People's Army'. They did this in an attempt to try to increase the number of combatants on their side. Then on All Souls Day the Home Army combatants came shouting “Give us back our graves!”

Of course, the censors furiously attacked the scene and ordered it be cut. Thanks to this a few other scenes were probably saved because the censors’ energy went into the muleta. Is it true? I must ask Andrzej but, even if it isn't, it's a good idea. I regret that I never used such a manoeuvre in my films. However, one has to admit that it's not completely risk-free, just like in a real bullfight.

MEMORIES AND MASQUERADE

A hackneyed quote from Fellini says that the filmmaker could not make a film in a country in which he didn't know what type of shoes a baker there wears. Faithful to this principle, Fellini never made a film abroad, yet he conquered the world with what he filmed in Italy.

I often think that Fellini is an example of how film controls the imagination. One time, after filming 'From a Far Country', the producer paid for us to go skiing in Cervino, which is the Swiss Matterhorn. We went with our families – my cinematographer, the main actors and me. In the elegant hotel a casino functioned in the evenings. Invited by the producer, we went to take a closer look at the counterpart to Monte Carlo. In the dimmed lights, in the radiance of diamonds, we saw a dream world: men with powdered faces, older ladies in heavy make-up. Standing at the entrance we all exclaimed: Fellini! Thanks to him this reality was immediately recognisable to us – he discovered them and was the first to represent them. We recognize them like friends, just as thanks to Coppola's film we all know the silhouettes of Mafiosi or the figures of Protestant phantoms from Bergman's films.

According to this principle, the archetype of a Pole with the soul of a cavalryman exists in the world thanks to Wajda, for whom this was embodied by Cybulski and then Olbrychski.
Film populates our imagination but, whilst creating films, we can only draw from the reality that we know. And that's the simple answer to the question why it's so hard for filmmakers to work abroad.

It's particularly hard for me to work there as a screenwriter. If I was adapting works rather than writing them, then it would be a lot easier for me to find such details as a baker's shoes. There are many books and, if need be, assistants are able to find the answer to a question. A few times I've watched directors (usually from America) working abroad create a false image of foreign countries without any embarrassment. They knew that in America they would be believed. I can't allow myself this luxury. What's more, Americans don't believe me even when I present an issue that I know well. They'd more likely believe one of their own directors telling them about an unknown reality: it's more difficult to believe someone who thinks differently. Significantly, no films made about America by Europeans have had any success in America, beginning with Antonioni's 'Zabriskie Point', Wenders' 'Paris Texas', or 'Atlantic City' by Malle. Perhaps one exception is Percy Aldon’s 'Bagdad Cafe', in which America is a camouflage for German history. For many years I've wanted to make a film about Poles who conquered the West. I have an outline of a screenplay based on compilations of various, real-life stories of Polish women who won the hearts of American millionaires.

Of course, I can only make this film under the condition that I obtain European money. Knowing America, I can't count on them because they obviously won't agree to their image seen through my eyes.

By the way, I've been carrying this subject in my heart for a while and now that I'm writing these words it seems to me relevant again. Ten years ago, a young Polish couple leaves Poland for the West. They're determined, amoral, focused only on their careers, without scruples. The woman marries an older man in order to obtain a passport, the young man pretends to be her brother. The older man reveals an attraction to young men – this opens the door for a passport for both of them. With a European passport, it's a lot easier to go to the States. There, again, they play for the highest stakes. In the end, the protagonists, a dozen years older, return home to set up a foundation and take part in charity drives, at the same time trying to overcome their internal emptiness. Meanwhile, an army of young Poles sets out to follow in their footsteps, ready to sell themselves in the West to anyone who will pay. How to convince them that it's not worth it, that in life harmony is a value, that it's worth making money but for some goal? Not for oneself, because an individual is never able to fritter away or squander financial success unless he's so weak that he's not worth talking about. Apart from success in business, to achieve harmony you also need success in the sphere of emotions, intellect and health (because of what use is money if you're in pain?). In a word, without disregarding material values as real values, we need to intertwave them with other values which are relatively independent of money.
For many years I've been interested in the Orthodox religion and, unlike most Poles, I don't hold anti-Russian grudges. I enjoy speaking in Russian and I suppose that I'm enough of a Westerner (in both a good and bad sense) that I don't feel the threat of Russianness. I suspect that many Poles have in their heads – particularly after vodka, which they drink in the Russian manner – a little Muscovite, and it's this that they most hate in themselves. But that's only a saying. I refer to the Eastern way of thinking because what I wrote above is no longer acceptable to people who have been brought up in the spirit of the Russian Orthodox Church. For them the spirit and matter are in such opposition to one another that a compromise is impossible (at least that's how I understand the Manichaean legacy of the Orthodox religion). And so the saying which should sound topical to us – that there is potential goodness in material values if they are used for a good purpose and if you sacrifice part of your life for them – sounds in Russia like combining water with fire. I allow myself such an amateurish interpretation of a theological dilemma which divides Christianity because I think it's a subject matter which we have to deal with by ourselves. If there's no new hero figure in Poland today, that's because no one's sure who they like. In the previous system, a hero of the intellectual tradition was poor but honest. Now there's no reason why by retaining his honesty he should remain poor – he may but he doesn't have to. If intelligence as a psychological trait means the ability to adapt, then an intelligent person should be able to adapt to a situation in which a possibility of earnings appears- that is useful service. The model of a command economy ideally assumes that money is an expression of a person's usefulness to the general public. If someone is good at making shoes, then he makes good money from that. Of course, reality differs from the ideal, but an intellectual who does not fight but immediately surrenders turns out to be a person who can't find a use for his intelligence.

All this talk is a commentary to a film that I'd like to make but haven't found enough money for yet (although not much is needed). Today, material values are the number one subject in deliberations regarding morality. Until now we easily passed judgement on what is openly immoral; when one isn't allowed to sacrifice one's spiritual values for cash. Here a saying comes to mind from the other side of the argument: in that case is it moral to remain in poverty? If we have commitments, if somewhere in our vicinity is someone in need, is one allowed to cultivate one's own laziness or helplessness? If the country is poor and there's not enough money for hospitals, then is it moral to lag behind instead of helping others to earn money, multiplying what we all own. Only on this level do I understand patriotism. In today's Europe there are no borders and capital is not national, but members of the community who are not coping well subordinate their community to others. Whereas I would very much want my community to be at the head of Europe rather than dragging behind, in the same way that I'd want my house to be one of those nice, well-maintained buildings on my street. In a word, free market morality does not free one from concern about material goods and, as a moralist, I don't want to join the lamenting that for money people lose their souls. I know that one can also lose one's soul when one disregards money. However, now that I've mentioned the Orthodox
church, I'll recall a fairly recent memory when in the Moscow Art Theatre I directed 'Women's Games' which I'd co-written with Edward Zebrowski. The rehearsals were fascinating for me because every word of the text became an opportunity for discussion, mostly on the subject of cultural differences, that which limits us most when we're working in film abroad.

The first act takes place somewhere in Western Europe. A young boy from a poor family by accident finds himself in the house of a millionaire female film star. The residence is filled with precious works of art. The boy comes in to use the phone and then tries to use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the lady of the house, discretely trying to chat her up.

From the very first scene the Russian actor chooses one method - pity. He introduces himself as someone who's poor and unhappy. He accentuates every sentence of the text which bears testimony to his failure in life. In the television version the same role was played by a young Englishman who accentuates that he's courageous, a go-getter and that he has achieved quite a bit in life. The Russian did exactly the opposite. When we spoke about this, all the Russian actors supported him – he's so poor, women will like that. Another detail - When the protagonist first enters the interior, the Englishman shows his admiration. Firstly, he's truly in enchanted because he's never seen such a house. Secondly, wanting to flatter the owner, he demonstrates his appreciation and wants to emphasize what impression her wealth has made on him. He's aware of the fact that someone who dazzles enters into a relationship with someone who at that moment is dazzled; that someone who makes an impression connects with their public. In Moscow, right from the first rehearsal in the interior, Misha Efremov stares down at his shoes and, as the text forces him to be enchanted, he interprets it monosyllabically, making offhand compliments. When we start a discussion on this subject, Katia Wasiljeva searches for justification in the Orthodox Church, for his opposition of the material to the spiritual. A young man cannot show himself as someone who can be seduced by wealth – he must pretend that it does not make an impression on him. Otherwise he'll go down in the estimation of the woman who's observing him (of course, they both know that this is a game because it's mainly about money for him, spirituality is just a front.) As a man of the West I argued the point that perhaps it's better to compromise with one's own nature and admit the fact that in our earthly existence we're imprisoned in material fetters and we can't completely escape them. The Russians listened unconvinced. And a few days later an episode occurs that illustrates this dilemma once again.

Coming from rehearsals in Rome, I bring all the participants of the play clothes gathered from the homes of my Italian friends. I'm aware that the financial situation of Russian actors is terrible, just as ours was recently. I remember all the gifts that we received from the West, so I try to do the same. I hand out the packages during rehearsals and see that they don't make an impression. I hear offhand words, gratitude towards their unknown benefactors from Rome, and the rehearsal continues – no one takes a look to see what I've brought. At the same time, even though it's just before
the premiere, I see that everyone's forgetting their lines and every now and again someone goes to the toilet. Only after a while do I start to suspect that they're trying on outfits – however, everyone's doing it separately so as not to admit that such a mundane matter is preoccupying them. Which it is. I would prefer to admit to this because then I'd have better control over myself. However, in the Orthodox tradition the gap between reality and spirituality is so radical that if a person cannot achieve holiness, then he must defend himself with hypocrisy.

I now know that I won't portray a Russian character well, just as I'm unable to depict a real American. I simply don't know what shoes a baker wears. What's more, I don't know what he's thinking about while he bakes.

Filming 'The Year of the Quiet Sun', I had heated discussions with Scott Wilson, who could not reconcile himself with the role that I'd written for him. I must admit that in general he was right and his resistance made me realize how much I don't understand reactions that have their roots in different cultures or other experiences. I'll explain this using the example of a trivial scene which takes place right after the war when the protagonist arrives at Emilia's at the moment when she hands the cakes that she's baked over to a shop. Emilia is a Polish repatriate from the East (played by Maja Komorowska) and she lives off her baking. The American who's in love with her is a chauffeur to the American mission, which is searching for traces of allied pilots who went missing during the war. The American can't communicate with her so he brings along a translator and there's a scene in front of the shop where a crowd is waiting in a queue for cakes. Scott announces that he won't take part in the scene because it'll ruin his character in the eyes of the viewer.

"You're crazy!" I say, not understanding what had got into him.

The scene seems obvious to me and I'm sure that the American is simply being a pain. Scott explains to me his reasons:

"I'm playing a soldier who's fallen in love with a Polish woman. This feeling should be deeply unselfish. Meanwhile, if right from the beginning, at the second or third meeting, he sees such a crowd waiting for her cakes, the viewer begins to suspect that he's caught wind of her business. That woman is achieving commercial success. Today she's making cakes on commission, tomorrow she'll be selling them herself and the day after she'll build a factory. The post-war years are conducive to such careers. And now there's a shadow of doubt cast on the protagonist's feelings – that he's interested in her money.

We know from our history that the American was wrong and it's today, not in the forties, that it's theoretically possible to build a fortune thanks to baking cakes. Although it's difficult not to notice that very soon the market will be filled with companies that bake cakes more cheaply than a hardworking one-woman retailer. The scene was shot how I wanted it – I convinced the actor that the later plot would reveal
how people’s fortunes developed in this country. It was important to me that the film included an incident which displayed a certain model of behaviour of women from landowning circles. After they lost their fortune, despite not having a profession, they did not lose heart but tried to save themselves any way they could.

The film was made in the mid-eighties and back then I couldn't yet imagine that this marginal theme would become so relevant at the moment that we regained our freedom, also in the economic sphere. How much devastation has been caused by forty years of statism? How many people today helplessly throw up their hands, saying that which constitutes the most dangerous legacy of socialism: “It's not worth trying. Nothing can be done.” The Marxist utopia tried to convince us that society designates a task to everyone and that a centrally controlled system will lead to better solutions to these difficulties which in a market system are overcome with a chaotic maze of isolated actions. The failure of Marxism and Leninism is, after all, the great failure of simple reason in its nineteenth-century arrogance. And that's why today we must humbly accept that a million chaotic ants better solve their problems when each one tries to be useful (that is to do something which someone agrees to pay for). And despite the visible wastage, which Lenin rightly lamented, the sum of the diminished minds is greater than the genius of a leader.

A free man is responsible for everything that happens around him and most of all for himself. A lack of initiative is essentially a lack of responsibility. My American actor for 'The Year of the Quiet Sun' argued with me that in the screenplay he isn't able to help his fiancée with her escape from Poland over the green border. He said that the American public would lose respect for him seeing that he allows the whole matter to be left in a woman's hands – not because she's a woman but because he should play an active role in it. I admitted that he was right but said there was one problem: the fact that in the film he's a foreigner and in such a delicate matter, and in this specific situation, he would do more harm than good. Irrepressible over-activity is typical for Americans and that's what we admire them for but sometimes, in specific cases, it can be the cause of failure. Sometimes one has to act with restraint so as not to harm the business in question. Of course, speaking to Poles today, I should say something completely different: let’s learn Scott Wilson's principles that everything is possible, that with a will one can do anything and let's learn from Mickiewicz not to bite off more than we can chew. These days, if I hear someone complaining about the lack of urban greenery in Warsaw, I ask:

“Could you not plant some flowers or even a tree yourself?”

In a strange way what I write today intertwines into an illogical but connected entity. The leitmotif was to be bakers' shoes, whereas thoughts regarding different mentalities immediately led me to deliberations on the subject of values – that is what I do and don't value. If it were possible to collect together all the positive human traits, no chosen people would be created because all positives have negatives that complement them. A moment ago, I complained of the extreme consequences of
dualism in the Eastern soul and I'm immediately reminded of the criticism that we, Western people, were subjected to by my friend Andrei Tarkovsky. Whilst living in Italy, he mocked Catholics and Catholic fasting in which fish with bechamel sauce, prawns and crayfish is permitted. In the Orthodox religion fasting is a renunciation, which in today’s world is very difficult. It's very hard for someone to understand that freedom consists precisely of that – that we're able to renounce something. In a traditional upbringing, a person was supposed to work on his character, to learn how to control himself. Over the last twenty years the West has tried to erase this notion, replacing it with a whole repertoire of notions that were not born from ethics but rather from psychology. So there is talk of adaptation, of spontaneity, of space. Meanwhile, such a trivial issue as stopping oneself from eating is today a medical problem rather than one of the conscience – people diet for health rather than spiritual benefits. Tarkovsky, with his Orthodox perspective, aptly mocked our Catholic hypocrisy. He went even further in his mocking. In his opinion, when during confession a Catholic confesses that he can't stop stealing, for example, or that he hits his wife and doesn't know how to deal with it, the confessor (maliciously viewed from the radical Orthodox point of view) advises him to steal less often or not to hit his wife so hard. As in every caricature there's an element of truth. The radical Orthodox soul allows one to kill one's wife but then spend one's whole life doing penance for the crime. The Mediterranean soul proffers a certain compromise, and one has to admit that you can't win either way – there is no simple solution to anything.

As an artist, I have to judge everything that I encounter. At the same time, these judgements don't concern people but my own feelings. I want to and I should state what I like, what I don't like, what appeals to me and what doesn't. In my country it is the sum of my experiences; abroad imposed on this is the sum of my ignorance. That's why it's so hard for me to write or even just direct outside my country.

Sometime at the beginning of the eighties I received a proposition that I should film a screen version of Graeme Greene's book 'Doctor Fisher from Geneva'. The book may not have been one of his best but every work of a classic author is worth at least a try. The proposition came from the English – there was already a screenplay written by another great writer, Mortimer, and I was just to make some revisions. As a result, I rewrote quite a few scenes and with my heart in my mouth I went to the French Riviera to meet the aged author of the book. I visited him in his house in Antibes, right next to the harbour. We had a long conversation and it turned out that all my changes met with his approval. I was most proud that in a few pieces of dialogue I was able to imitate the original to such an extent that the author was not sure whether they were taken from the book or added (and translated by a translator – at the end of the day I can write an article in English but not film dialogue). So there was no reason to worry. I never made that film – I was outmanoeuvred by a young English director who cast the same actor with whom I'd held talks (James Mason). All I was left with was the memory of that day in Antibes in the company of the writer. After resolving the issues in the screenplay, our conversation turned to politics – throughout
his life Graham Greene was heavily involved in various public issues. He was interested in Poland, and of course Russia, and unexpectedly told me about his collaboration with the Soviet super-spy Kim Philby. During the war, they worked together in the English intelligence service. Kim Philby was responsible for the Spanish department, while Graham Greene for Portugal. I fondly remember Greene's opinion that he was pleased, so to speak, when he found out that Philby had been a Soviet spy for a long time.

Understanding this, I could not hold it against him that sometimes he behaved like a careerist. If he did it in the name of an idealistic reason, even a false one, it's better than if he was driven by egotistical ones.

The subject developed further and took us to areas in which I felt the wind of history. In the hallway of his harbour-side home the elderly writer held his archives, from which he pulled out a few letters written by Kim Philby right after his escape to Moscow. The letters were covered with crossings-out and my host pointed out the subject of these.

“If an ex-spy writes a letter from Moscow using the ordinary post,” explained Graham Greene, “then you understand that one can smell some sort of disinformation. And sure enough that was the case. Take a look, this was written eighteen months ago. In the middle of the Afghan war, a member of the KGB writes: ‘In our circle this war is considered madness.’ What does this mean?” The writer was testing my ability to put two and two together. Well, certainly ‘our circle’ is the head of the KGB, Andropov. What does it mean? Andropov is sending signals to the West that, as Brezhnev's potential successor, he's distancing himself from the whole Afghan affair which, by the way, he prepared and which suits him as much as in the case of failure it discredits his boss. And I'm supposed to pass this on to the influential spheres of the Intelligence Service which, of course, I do.

A few years later I met Graham Greene in Moscow at a strange peace congress organized, by now in Gorbachev's time, with the participation of Sakharov, Max Frisch, Durrenmatt and many others who believed in the chance of a real conversation about peace (as it turned they were correct). Remembering our meeting in Antibes, I asked Greene whether he planned on seeing Kim Philby.

“Of course,” he said “That's mainly why I came.”

I know from stories that one is a member of the Intelligence Service for life, until you die. Amongst Englishmen, it's a great honour, something like belonging to a Masonic Lodge.

Recently, the producer of my documentary film for the BBC about Witold Lutoslawski admitted to me that he had spent most of his life working in the Intelligence Service. I asked him whether today, as a film producer, he derives any
advantages from this. Of course, he answered. He had just returned from Russia (although he was a native Englishman, he spoke Russian perfectly) where he'd conducted a long interview with Beria's widow. He had arranged this interview through Khrushchev's son-in-law, Adzubej, who he'd met thanks to the intercession of one of the residents of the Russian intelligence service in Stanford. I'm retelling this because in this, too, I sense a hint of exoticism. Spy stories seem to us completely abstract because they take place on different planes. To see a man who says ‘I'm a spy by profession’ is like seeing a ghost in a cemetery. I've never seen a ghost but, as you can see, I've met a spy or two.

Greene was very familiar with Polish affairs, he published his books in PAX and knew personally Boleslaw Piasecki and many other people who have an air of mystery around them. I asked him why he didn't write about the dramas which take place in our part of the world. Surely, ‘Our Man in Havana’ is a drop in the ocean compared to what could happen in Moscow or even in Warsaw. Graham Greene fully agreed with me:

“Your part of the world has such a specific reality and customs that it's impossible to recreate them from one's imagination. I can easily write the dialogue between a French and British spy. But I can't describe scenes in the headquarters of the KGB.”

What conclusion does this lead us to? When proposing subjects outside of Poland, I have to choose areas well known to me – I can describe the academic world as I did in 'Imperative' (even there my university had more in common with a Thomas Mann book than with a German university province after the dissent of the sixties).

Another direction of escape is history. When I reach back into the past, my memory evokes the unknown – as a Pole I have an advantage over my non-Polish viewer, who thinks more about the present. For ten years in Poland I made contemporary films. Abroad, 'Roads in the Night' (Wege in der Nacht) was set during the time of occupation, then 'Paradigm' took place in the thirties, while all my projects which have not yet been made – ‘Queen Christina’, ‘The Lackey of Schonbrunn’ and ‘Satan's Eye’ – are period pieces. Unfortunately, costume is always expensive and in today’s Western Europe, history is no longer in demand, so the aforementioned screenplays remain only to be read.

SOMETHING FROM REAL LIFE

In nearly every screenplay, apart from the structure of the story, appear some details – situations, sometimes scenes, most often sayings, as we say “taken from real life”, which remain in the memory or in notebooks, waiting to be used. They don't usually have to wait long because whenever we're writing, we search for clever sayings or punchlines, and whatever life prompts us with is later valuable material for screenplays. I remember a story which I heard in the mountains about someone
sewing currency into someone else’s jacket, then anonymously informing border control, pointing out this person and the plane which the unaware victim was to fly out of Poland on. As far as I can remember the intrigue was motivated by sport – it concerned the elimination of someone from the team. The poor wretch, caught by a customs official, tried to explain that he knew nothing about the dollars hidden in his clothes, but to no avail. Of course, the consequence was that he lost his passport.

I took this story and used it in 'The Constant Factor'. It was particularly close to my heart as often in the seventies I would cross the border and be terribly afraid that someone, most likely the secret service, would put something in my luggage for which later they would take my passport away. I shot the scene for 'The Constant Factor' at Okecie airport late at night, after it was closed, with the help of the customs officials. I remember that they accepted this incident from the screenplay as realistic and showed me the places where people usually sewed money.

At the same time as 'The Constant factor', I made the 'The Contract', into which another detail from ‘real life’ found its way.

I was once at a reception, I think it was on 14th July, given by the French Embassy in a place of refined society gatherings in Saską Kępa in Warsaw. The reception took place on a lawn and I remember that I spent a moment talking to the vice-minister of foreign affairs at the time who I'd met earlier in one of the Polish embassies in the West. We exchanged a few words and a moment later a very beautiful girl came up to me and asked if I could introduce her to the vice-minister as she wanted to talk to him about a small matter. I gladly granted her request. The vice-minister was susceptible to female beauty, so I was sure that he'd be happy to make her acquaintance, and that's what happened. Without any delay, the girl said that her passport had been revoked and that she'd like to ask for help. The vice-minister gave her his visiting card and promised to see what could be done. In any case he asked the young lady to come to his office. I was just about to leave when an incident occurred which I later included in the film. The beautiful girl was accompanied by a boy, a playboy type, good-looking, well dressed and relaxed in company (a dozen years ago hardly anyone felt relaxed in embassies, which is why I noticed him). I introduced him to the vice-minister as the beautiful lady's companion. Towards the end of the conversation, just before saying goodbye, she once again repeated the question:

“So, can I come and see you at the ministry tomorrow?”

“Of course,” answered the dignitary in a velvety voice with a beaming smile. Encouraged, the companion of the beautiful girl asked with a charming smile:

“And could I come too?”

With the same lightness with which he had invited the lady, the minister looked into the eyes of the young man and said:
“You? No.”

This story, in real life, has another punchline. A few days later, on a plane, I was telling it to a friend whose wife had left him. The subtext was the generalization that beautiful girls are self-seeking and abuse the good impression that they make on men. The story caught my friend's interest – he asked a few more questions and declared to my embarrassment:

“It must have been her. My ex-wife. She's with some young architect now and they're trying to figure out how to vanish abroad.”

My chivalrous friend thanked me that I'd helped them and I put this scene in 'The Contract'. At the wedding reception the minister (Ignacy Machowski) meets a beautiful ballet dancer (Liliana Głąbczyńska) who is trying to get a passport, while her friend (Eugeniusz Przewieczew) is unceremoniously rejected.

I wonder what exactly is funny in this story. I think it is the breaking of social conventions and the unexpected show of power, which has the right to have whims. A beautiful woman is entitled to something from it but the boy shouldn't count on anything.

The list of incidents from life which I've included in my films could almost be endless because all my films are reflections of some observation from life. Hence, probably my distance to those tendencies in cinema, which get worked up about the dismantling of already fossilized clichés or conventions. I can watch with amusement the work of Tarantino or von Trier, but basically I don't care much for them, both when the director ridicules conventions, as well as when he tries, using an extravaganza of bad taste to break out in the direction of modernity (that's von Trier).

Now that I've used that phrase I must explain myself. I believe that taste is sometimes better or worse and that there are events in bad taste which can probably be transformed into good art, although it's not an easy task. As in my work I draw on my life rather than on other people's art, I recall an incident which happened to me many years ago when I was in Australia at some reception. There I met a well-known author who was known for his uncompromising Stalinism. Along with this, he was a bard who wrote of the workers' fate; his autobiographical saga was translated into the languages of developed countries, including Polish. Later, in Australia, it was adapted into a series. At the Australian reception, the not very tactful hosts thought that confronting a Polish director with openly dissident sympathies with a true Stalinist, who was also a famous artist, would result in an interesting spectacle. Sensing these intentions, I felt that I'd been forced into the role of a cockerel which has been thrown into a fighting ring, and I dug in my heels in resistance. I listened to the provocative taunts of the well-know author, who claimed that Molotov was right in calling Poland a bastard of the Treaty of Trianon, and turned the conversation to deliberations on the
health of Molotov, who was still alive. The author quickly drowned his useless aggression in the good drink available and at the end we exchanged visiting cards, going our separate ways without any evident grudges.

A few years later, in the mid-seventies, I received a call from the author, who had come to Poland to collect his author’s fees for books published here and to promote a series. Out of necessity I met with him again in, what was then, the newly-opened Hotel Victoria. Amongst various stupidities, I listened to his complaints that Polish communists were selling out to the West, proof of which was the building of a luxury hotel with foreign money. This time I did not engage in any polemics and, as quickly as possible, I bid goodbye to the guest, who was just on his way to a social meeting of the Central Committee.

Two days later the Australian phoned me again, getting through to my film set (at the time I was filming ‘Camouflage’ at a youth centre in Rozalin). The author was phoning from the hotel reception – in a moment he had a plane to London, and in the meantime the transfer of money for his copyrights was stalled somewhere in the bank's bureaucratic machine and, as he was leaving, he had to find someone who would be a guarantor for him as the hotel was being difficult about issuing his luggage. Naively, I asked why he didn’t ask one of his friends from the Central Committee for help. He answered that it was already after working hours and that he had to quickly go to the airport. After he said this, he handed the receiver back to the receptionist, who with exceptional politeness asked whether I could pay for the gentlemen, otherwise there could be unpleasant consequences. Meanwhile, the weekend was before us – the hotel knew that the author was a VIP but the bill had not been paid because the transfer had not come in time. In an outburst of late chivalry, I agreed to pay the required sum over the weekend, which was equal to my monthly salary (thank goodness the author had the right to pay the hotel in zloty!)

Late at night, after filming, equipped with the required amount, I went to settle the matter. The whole management of the hotel came out to meet me. I automatically asked whether there was any other detail that I wasn’t aware of. The receptionist said that the deposit which they have to ask for is somewhat larger than what we agreed to on the phone. I thought this a triviality but the receptionist asked whether I wanted to know what the extra payment was for. Essentially, this was unimportant but of course I asked. Then someone from the management told me that before his departure, after the amicable resolving of the matter, their guest, my acquaintance, under the pretext of having forgotten something from his room, asked for the key again. After his departure, they found visible traces of defecation on the carpet along with a piece of paper which used a rude word to describe the superfluous luxury of the hotel and said (as he had said to me) that it was unworthy of a country of workers and farmers.

The rest of the story is banal. The transfer didn’t come for a month. I intervened at the embassy and in the end it was resolved, leaving me with an anecdote about a proletarian author who through an action showed his unhappiness at the evolution of
real socialism. For directorial reasons, I noted that the author, like many people of humble origins, had the superficiality and manners of a lord. I haven't yet made a film in which I invoke this incident but if I find the appropriate opportunity, then I'll make use of it.

As that story is in bad taste, I'll add another from the upper echelons of society. This time it’s an occurrence from Palermo, where not that long ago I worked in the opera house whose director was a Sicilian aristocrat, the cousin of my dear Tomas di Lampedusa, who was apparently a baron but the theatre personnel referred to him as a prince.

When for the first time we spoke about the plans for staging Szymanowski's opera, halfway through the friendly and lively exchange the prince suddenly saddened. Outside the windows the ringing of bells could be heard. I thought that perhaps it was the funeral of someone close to him so I asked for the reason for his sadness. The prince answered “my spirits are low”. I took these words to be related to my artistic intentions and I was all ready to defend myself, when he explained what he meant:

“My spirits are low because it's lunch time.”

I breathed a sigh of relief but the prince remained glum.

“You don't know how sorry I am,” he said “that I can't invite you anywhere, but there's no decent restaurant in Palermo.”

Not really understanding, I made a surprised face. The prince, with a theatrical gesture, added that since I was reading his brilliant cousin's novel 'The Leopard', I should understand the reason for Palermo's gastronomic catastrophe. I looked enquiringly and my conversationalist desperately exclaimed:

“Democracy, dear sir! Democracy!”

I was unable to perceive any causal link, so the prince, in a fatherly manner, explained the matter to me. A chef, however talented, with time, starts to let poor quality food out of the kitchen – one time he won't add enough salt, another he'll burn something. In a democracy, no client will muster up the courage to go to the kitchen and throw a plate at the chef. Without that, even an angel would begin to neglect its work. Not feeling the strength to debate such a diagnosis, I gave in. Suddenly, the prince brightened up and said:

“Chin up! Not everything's lost. Let's go for lunch with the people.”

“With the people” meant to the port where, after receiving a phone call from the opera, one of the seaside taverns was emptied so that we, as the only customers,
could sit at a table alone. The staff of the taverna kissed the prince's hand while the evicted customers, plate in hand, moved somewhere else in the neighbourhood and shouted out their regards to him. When I looked at their faces, it seemed to me that Polanski in 'Pirates' chose his cast too much from high society, while the prince himself, who combined a feudal tradition with populism, was an element of this folklore.

I later found out that the prince, who was a man of advanced age, had a mother of ninety years of age who was known for her iron hand. According to gossip overheard at the opera, she had recently landed in hospital because her blood pressure had fallen. The doctor summoned the prince and apparently asked if any change had occurred of late in her life. After some thought, the prince noticed that recently he had stopped opposing his mother. Immediately, the doctor put these facts together and arrived at the hypothesis that this was probably the reason for the fall in blood pressure. The prince understood perfectly and went into the room in which his mother was lying. A moment later, the sound of raised voices and then broken porcelain could be heard from behind the closed doors, after which the elderly lady was discharged from hospital.

Intrigued by this story, I found the courage to ask the prince whether it was true that his mother, despite her Norman descent, has such a volcanic temperament. The prince answered that this was untrue – her temperament was feigned.

“You probably heard that my mother sometimes throws porcelain in a fit of anger?” he asked, “That's true but she does so in a calculated manner. She breaks only that which is cheap. She has never thrown anything of any value.”

Amused by this story, I made it into a scene in 'The Silent Touch' where Max von Sydow throws porcelain at agents and critics while his wife comments on his actions, saying that he's only feigning blind fury and in reality is very carefully choosing what to throw as he never breaks what she's painted (the wife's profession in the film is the same as my wife's – she paints artistic porcelain). I imagine that few viewers noticed this minor scene, but for me it has value because of the memory of the Sicilian prince.

There are so many events which I have taken from life and put into my films that I could publish a separate glossary to each volume of my screenplays (and there have been six or seven published in Poland, counting those which I've published with Edward Zebrowski). Now that I've mentioned one elderly lady, I'm reminded of another who I was told about by Sir Yehudi Menuhin. Also of an advanced age, he was referring to his mother, a ninety-something-year-old who, having lived a hardworking life and been subject to strict discipline, finally declared that she had fulfilled all her natural obligations and began a carefree existence in the suburbs of San Francisco where for the first time in her life she began wearing fanciful hats and made friends with tramps. An important motif of these friendships were bottles of champagne consumed in the bosom of nature. Sir Yehudi, himself a man of great
discipline, recalled his mother’s transformation with longing and great emotion alternately.

Staying on the subject of extraordinary elderly ladies, I'll mention Auntie Pela, my wife's cousin, who is descended from one of Poland's largest families. Amongst other things, I owe to her the idea of keeping a guest book. It occurred to me because I saw how, leaning over the records rescued from the burnt palace in Kiev, she was able to conjure up the memory of people and past events.

Aunt Pela became famous because, when she was young, right after being exiled from the Ukraine, she was enthusiastic about planes and once, whilst flying, she crashed. She crashed and died – that's how I can describe it now. I can't write – as is sometimes said - “died a death” as although Aunt Pela did die, supposedly during the funeral she started to give signs of life. Considering that at that time encephalography didn't exist, it seems that the doctor prematurely pronounced her death. Hence, the young aviator was quickly taken to hospital again and then, in Berlin perhaps, some operation was performed, replacing the crushed bone in her skull with a neutral platinum plate.

The story continues. During the war Aunt Pela showed her courage by helping prisoners. To add to this, she was single and a living legend, so much so that local children called her the “lady who fell from the sky”. During the German occupation, Ukrainian troops appeared and someone recognized Aunt Pela as the heir to enormous estates in the East. Someone else added that the platinum plate that she had in her head was worth as much as the whole tenement building. And that's when an assassination attempt was organized: a frail, middle-aged person was attacked by a few soldiers who wanted to crack open her skull. According to the legend, Aunt Pela escaped her persecutors by jumping from the roof of her building onto the neighbouring one and in this manner saved her own life.

When I shot a documentary film about the cultural connections of Cracow for a German producer in her hometown, I examined this spot on the roof and asked her how much truth there was to this macabre story. Auntie didn't like such questions, she snorted, and a moment later she said something that attests to the unbelievable patriotism of the generation which miraculously regained a free Poland after World War I. Recalling her jump, Aunt Pela declared that she regretted one thing. Since she was able to jump so far in middle age, then in her youth, instead of aviation, she should have taken up athletics. Poland was in need of Olympic fame and it looked as if she hadn’t taken advantage of the chance she had.

The incident with Aunt Pela was reflected in another character as a comic motif in 'At Full Gallop' – the platinum hip of the veteran aunt. The character herself is also the inspiration for a character in a yet unrealized comedy screenplay entitled 'Howl'. In this an elderly aristocratic lady finds a thread of understanding (over the heads of her own children) with her grandchildren who see that every privilege must be connected with service, and so ‘noblesse oblige’. In the framework of real socialism this kind of
reminder was considered an ideological diversion. However, today it retains its relevance through the fact that those who are newly privileged still don't feel so obliged to service although they often believe that everything that they have acquired in a short time is solely the measure of their merit and doesn't obligate them to do anything.

The unceremonious nature of authority brings to mind a character to whom I dedicated a whole film and who, even today, many years after his death, returns to my thoughts. It's minister Janusz Wilhelmi, the artistic director of television and later the vice-minister of culture and the head of cinematography, a man whom I'm particularly indebted to as it was he who, as editor-in-chief of 'Kultura', printed on the first page an essay on the 'The Structure of Crystal'. This essay determined my artistic elevation - from an unknown debut filmmaker I became someone who one of the most outstanding government intellectuals dedicated his reflections to. Not long after the Wilhelmi essay, I won an award in the magazine.

My next meeting with Wilhelmi occurred many years later when he became my immediate superior who decided the fate of my films. In my opinion, he was the last real great mind who was committed to serving the government. I'm sure that many of his close friends could today more accurately describe his curious journey from logic, which was what he practised, to Catholicism, which was what he believed in, to Marxism, which is what he served and which he, in a peculiar way, despised.

My first meeting with Wilhelmi, who was minister of culture at the time, took place in a garden. Fearful of wiretapping, he led me out of his office and held a peripatetic conversation. With me he spoke of Marxism with contempt. He described it as an antiquated, nineteenth-century idea which, however, in today’s world is salutary. This salutary nature arose from the diagnosis which Wilhelmi gave on the world which, in his opinion, was heading for disaster. The white man's civilization is finished – he claimed – the collapse is unavoidable, but it can be postponed with Marxism, which is a self-preservation idea (I'm citing his words precisely). That's why he decided to join the communists, whom he didn’t think highly of, but they were playing a positive role in history, restraining the disintegration of the world from which both he and I, in his opinion, form all our values.

I think that these peripatetic conversations which we held in the garden were a type of game for Wilhelmi. The satisfaction with which he, in the absence of witnesses, spoke of scandalous and at the same time perverse matters was visible to the naked eye. Wilhelmi must have been long-sighted – during the conversation he raised his glasses, which he needed only for reading, and observed me closely. Like in a well-directed scene, he carefully accented every, in his opinion, interesting sentence or paradox. As a matter of fact, at the time I was in a particularly uncomfortable situation – my last film 'Camouflage' had been officially condemned. The main ideologist of Gieřek’s era – Lukaszewicz – had placed me alongside Wajda, the director of 'Man of Marble', as an artist to be condemned. Lukaszewicz gathered all
the university chancellors to watch my film in Jadwisin just to see how a Polish artist defames Polish science (after March 1968 a strong nationalist tone was in force). Wilhelmi decided to cleverly play out the situation. The official condemnation which befell both me and Wajda, along with the simultaneous public enthusiasm, discredited the verdicts passed by the authorities at the time. The public attended our films in such numbers that, despite the lack of advertising, we were at the top of all the statistics. We had the same popularity as 'The Godfather', which had been shown earlier. The authorities did not take into account the market but, by the end of the seventies, one could not underestimate such widespread support. The best evidence was that they could not bring themselves to withdraw the films from the cinemas. Admittedly, there were constant rumours that this would happen at any moment but, thanks to this, the queues got longer. Was this weakness or confidence in their strength? Did Gierek by now take public opinion somewhat into account or, on the contrary, did he realize that art is at best a safety valve? Perhaps, in the end, the atmosphere surrounding our films was a type of substitute game which aimed to remove from the Political Bureau the minister of culture and deputy prime minister, heir to Gomułka – Jozef Tejchem.

His opponent, Lukaszewicz, needed some kind of scandal. After Tejchem's departure and complete failure, a scandal was no longer necessary and Lukaszewicz's last serious ideologist, Wilhelmi, probably had the task of preventing an essentially unnecessary row. I accept this simplest version of events. From Wilhelmi I heard that my film was in essence excellent, whereas 'Man of Marble' was simply artistically unsuccessful. I guessed that I was dealing here with a 'divide and rule' policy and I opposed it, defending with conviction the purely artistic value of Wajda's film. With great subtlety Wilhelmi tried to arouse my vanity by pointing out, for example, that the same cinematographer (Klosinski) whilst working with a visual artist like Wajda created bad cinematography, whilst with me it was simply excellent. In Wilhelmi's opinion, 'Man of Marble' was badly acted and Janda was a badly-directed actress who could not be compared to Maja Komorowska, who was back then known from many of my films. So his arguments were quite refined. After a serving of flattery, Wilhelmi put forward one accusation against me which I'll never forget.

"Are you not embarrassed by that scene in 'Camouflage' when the university chancellor sends the chauffeur to eat in the kitchen while the chancellor's circle is going to eat on the terrace?"
I didn't understand the accusation and asked what I was supposed to be embarrassed about.

"Hypocrisy, Mr Zanussi," said Wilhelmi, "Do you, an intellectual through and through, really want to sit at the table with a chauffeur? Is it worth mocking the fact that someone showed a chauffeur his place, which is not amongst us, but precisely amongst the kitchen staff?"

I never considered myself particularly left-wing and as a moralist I asked myself –
am I really not acting a bit like a demagogue. And, in spite of myself, I realized that at that moment I wasn't. I already had the experience of working in America and I remember the feeling of comfort that came from the fact that at the table the whole crew forgets about what divides us. After all, so little divides us. My American driver ate the same as me (in fact it was rather me who economized on per diems). We felt comfortable in each other’s company. I remember the first film crews with whom I worked in Poland. The gulf between the driver or electrician and the management was a lot bigger than today. I feel a great satisfaction that today I can feel very relaxed with them when in the evenings, after work, we meet for supper. Did Wilhelmi, and other people who think similarly to him, not believe that this could happen very quickly? Or did they just not want it to happen?

Wilhelmi hated democracy – he was not alone in this and I can't hold it against him, even though I have a different point of view.

Out of the theories that Wilhelmi delivered, I remember one in which he attacked something which appears to derive from democracy: “self-proclaimed public opinion.” What was characteristic was the adjective “self-appointed” as if opinion should come from some kind of nomination, should be legitimized by authority (government, of course). Here Wilhelmi's sophistry met with the primitive theory of comrade Zhdanov. He desired, as he told me, to regain the party's managerial role in culture despite the “self-appointed opinion” whose expression was the Warsaw salon, the Hydra which he fought against in the form of despised writers – above all Dygat, Konwicki, Brandys, Andrzejejewski and others. It was against these false literary values (Wilhelmi used the epithet 'train carriage literature’) that a writer who truly was real and undervalued by the salons was to rise – Teodor Parnicki. He was to be elevated by the party, which was enlightened and sensitive to values which the salon politicians did not notice. It seems that a similar measure was to take place in music, although I don't remember whether it was Penderecki that was good and Lutoslawski bad or vice versa. Wilhelmi gave the noble example of Russia (which he did not glorify otherwise), where Shostakovich owed his career to the party as they discovered and valued him. While here, as of October, the party's leading role in culture had disappeared. Greatness was created by a group of self-appointed people and, at the end of the day, artists did not owe anything to the authorities.

Wanting to put an end to this, Wilhelmi decided to put me up against Wajda. At the Gdansk Festival he would return me to grace by awarding my film 'Camouflage' and bypassing 'Man of Marble' as an artistically poor film. Aware of these intentions, I had the choice of various ways of displaying my solidarity with Wajda whilst, of course, risking punishment at the hands of my protector.

Every year at the Gdynia Festival there was a meeting of directors called the Filmmakers Forum. At this forum, exceptionally united, we launched an attack on Wilhelmi and his designs on the existence of film groups which guaranteed artists a minimum form of autonomy. I was one of the organisers of this campaign. From the
podium I launched an open attack on the minister and was followed by many of my colleagues, particularly young ones who felt that they could permit themselves to go further than usual. People permitted themselves to speak without ceremony, without respect. Behind the scenes at the forum there were voices saying that in the attacks there was a lack of adherence to conventions, which could result in the strengthening of the minister, who would have the full support of the authorities. My calculation was different – I thought that the minister, who came from intellectual circles, would appear less serious if he suffered a defeat in those circles. And that's exactly what happened. The public lack of authority was something that Wilhelmi could not make up for. If in his place had been an ordinary apparatchik, he would have certainly struck the class solidarity chord. However, when the minister was a man who surpassed all his party comrades in intelligence, his defeat with filmmakers only detracted from his gravity.

Since I've written so much about that memorable festival for me, I'll mention one last anecdote from the close of the event. After my address, the minister's envoys brought me a warning from him that the matter of the prize for my film, in other words my pardon, was open to question. I answered, by and large sincerely, that I would prefer not to receive the award than to receive it if Wajda was to be ostentatiously bypassed. It's easy to guess that the latter occurred.

The prize-giving was planned for Monday night. Knowing the verdict, on Sunday evening I decided to somehow show that I was in solidarity with Andrzej. I was in the middle of shooting a film for German television about three Polish composers – Lutoslawski, Penderecki and Baird, and I made sure that filming at Penderecki's clashed with the awards ceremony. In that way I couldn't take part in the ceremony and I counted on the fact that the public would understand this unequivocally. However, this time the minister pre-empted me. He told his officials to investigate the cost of a day’s filming and to add this sum to the cost estimates (which of course was presided over by the state-run Polish Film). I immediately contacted my German producer, and it turned out that the amount that he was to demand exceeded the ministry's resources. Penderecki, who had also been drawn into the intrigue, announced that he was leaving later and if the filming was to be rescheduled, they would be postponed for a long time. However, the minister did not back down. He decided that I'd fly to the shoot in a government plane which would take me in the morning from Gdansk to Cracow and bring me back in the evening for the award ceremony. I had to agree to this solution and we took off very early in the morning. Only two of us flew, the pilot and me, and on the way I realised that the controls were in the hands of a true movie enthusiast. This gave me the confidence to ask a roundabout question as to whether the plane could have any problems in getting back from Cracow. The pilot understood mid-sentence and assured me that I could count on serious difficulties in taking off. Of course, he kept his word and, if I remember correctly, we watched the television transmission from Gdansk together. The public enthusiastically applauded the Golden Lion Awards that I received, but when it turned
out that I couldn't accept the award in person due to an act of God, the applause erupted again even more enthusiastically. Wajda received the Journalists’ Award, which was presented to him on the stairs, outside of the main ceremony. For a long time, its sponsors had trouble with the press bureau.

I recalled this story in order to quote another minor impolite habit which Janusz Wilhelm was proud of. Every time someone was unfortunate enough to address him with the phrase: “Minister, may I introduce myself as we haven't yet met”, he would reply:

“And let it remain that way.”

I recently put that into a screenplay which takes place in the Middle Ages. The person is so offended that he challenges the protagonist to a duel. Clearly, no one challenged Minister Wilhelm to a duel; however, his strange career was ended due to the tragic crash of a Bulgarian plane which was flying from Sofia to Warsaw. If I remember correctly, he was returning for a parliamentary session in which he was to take over the position of minister of culture (he was just head of a department then).

I think that apart from the vindication of 'Camouflage', it's thanks to Wilhelm that I was inspired to create a few diabolical characters. The one that is most reminiscent of him is Gottfried in 'Paradigm', which was written for Vittoria Gassman. I was tempted to have Gassman wear his glasses on his forehead like Wilhelm but I decided against this idea, convinced that making something literal leads to it becoming trivial.

The events that I have described above led to one of the reviewers of the first edition of this book calling me a pupil of Talleyrand, on account of my use, let's say, of diplomatic measures in the place of an ordinary protest. As we distance ourselves from the reality of real socialism, the need for a simple, black-and-white myth (modelled on Grottger's graphics) grows both amongst the veterans and, oddly enough, amongst the heirs of those who ruled at that time. 'At Full Gallop' was a film about my childhood which showed the Stalinist years as both terrible and funny. When it was released, the reviewer of a post-leftist weekly accused me of a lack of clear moral judgements as that which was funny did not seem adequately condemned.

I'll mention 'At Full Gallop' again on another occasion, whereas I'll now return to Talleyrand because – firstly, it's a rare occasion that in a second edition one can make reference to such a recent review and, secondly, for me the issue has a certain significance. Do we really need a mythologized past? Is it not better that we retain it in our memory in such a way that sincerity and truth outweighs the need for us to feel appreciated. In the struggle with a bad system we are not finished. On the contrary, from a winning position (both in a moral and material sense) we can allow ourselves a generous acknowledgement that we were not always heroic and not everyone was a hero. And it is with this that we can underline the real heroism of others who paid a higher price – who were beaten and imprisoned – while we artists received acclaim.
with the help of small but meaningful gestures which it was better to make than not to do anything at all. Do those who judge us as the Talleyrands of that time observe how often they discredit themselves in the face of those minor temptations which the world of market values has created? On examining my conscience years later, I notice that all these games played with the authorities were something superficial in the face of such a problem as the enslavement of minds, but I'm proud that at least in this way I contributed to something that unexpectedly later resulted in freedom. And may he who wishes to throw a stone at me ask himself whether at the time he was truly without any fault and whether he is without fault today when compromise usually sports a merry, innocent countenance.

A LINE OF DIALOGUE

It's difficult for me to work out why the communist authorities had such magical faith in the power of words. The majority of the censors' interventions concerned sentences taken out of context, which couldn't be heard from the stage or screen because they threatened the collapse of the system. Did any one of the people who cut out these lines believe that the system would collapse because of them? I think that a more realistic threat was the collapse of these people’s careers. The peculiar nominalism of the totalitarian authorities surely came from the Gutenberg epoch and had noteworthy precedents in the era of the fight against Christian heresies. However, it was completely unsuitable for the ‘language’ of film as, in terms of semantic meaning, an image cannot be compared with the precision of the written word.

After the row concerning 'Camouflage', I made a film entitled 'Spiral', the screenplay to which seemed to me the most neutral of all the subjects that I had in my drawer at the time. 'Spiral' is the story of a man who has cancer and wants to find his death by going alone into the mountains. Against his will he is saved, only to go through a prolonged agony in hospital. The idea itself was based on some story which I heard when I did a bit of walking in the mountains. The subject matter seemed to me completely innocent. As it turned out, I was wrong.

I counted on the fact that I would carry out something in the shape of proof, which in mathematics is called reducțio ad absurdum, that is reducing something to an absurdity. I wanted to prove that the secular attitude towards death can be heroic – that's how I think of Camus' characters – but it always carries with it a tragedy, which is the lack of hope. I think this is what I expressed in my film. My protector, the minister who allowed for it to be made, was no longer alive – now Mr Lorenc took care of cinematography. Intelligent, educated and, as they used to say in those days, a 'tried and tested' comrade, he noticed that my ‘Spiral' might not be so innocently received as his predecessor at the ministry had imagined. That's why the suggestion was that before the premiere the film should receive the Atheist and Freethinkers Award of the 'Arguments' magazine. I was summoned to a meeting and informed in detail that I would receive such an award and, for the good of my film and my future,
it would be best if I received it without comment. And that's what happened.

'Spiral' was treated as once 'The Death of a Provincial' had been – it was shown in Cannes and gained a distinction from the ecumenical jury which was made up of Catholics and Protestants. When I showed this film at question-and-answer sessions in Moscow, I was openly attacked for ideological deviation. When I tried to protest, claiming that the film is completely non-denominational, the insightful party critic who was talking to me expressed a thought which is deeply etched in my memory. It went as follows: “The subject of death is an inappropriate subject matter. Here in Russia, when we think of death, our minds turn to religion. Perhaps in the West secularism has gone so far that death does not evoke in people such associations, but in Russia when you speak about death, it evokes thoughts of God.”

The comment itself seemed to me very interesting and constructive, but in practice the consequences were sad: my question-and-answer session was broken off and although my last session in the Moscow Film School was not cancelled, the students were dismissed and the film was only watched by the old lecturers, from whom I received a lot of ideological preaching. For the next ten years I was unable to have any contact with the Soviet public. When I finally did, Gorbachev’s Russia was already a completely different country.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR IDEAS FROM?

Within the standard repertoire of audience questions there’s always one that gets me going. People want to know where the ideas depicted by the writer or screenwriter come from. “Do you invent it all or is it from life?” If it’s “from life”, it means that the stories that one’s telling are tested and real, which is why usually no one admits to ‘inventing’ everything, while the tracking of similarities between the artist’s life and his work is a favourite occupation of all minor academic writers.

Making use of my personal background, I like to go back a long way. The history of my father’s family is known back to the middle ages, which by today's snobbish standards would place me alongside some very well-bred people. Yet this is an illusion. I know that one of my ancestors was banished from Venice for treason. Despite various archive searches, I couldn’t find out what or who had been betrayed. In any case, he was banished and he settled on the Pordenone mainland, more specifically in Castello d’Aviano. The name ‘castello’ itself sounds dignified, but the history of the Zanussi family is far from glorious. In the 17th century, the family produced one very average painter, who worked mainly in Salzburg. In the nineteenth century, during the period of railway construction, one of my ancestors built the railway from Venice to Vienna and then later to Lvov, without crossing the borders of the extensive Habsburg monarchy.
Regarding this ancestor, I managed to dig up a story that could be useful for a film. According to the data that has survived in Poland, my great-great-grandfather contracted tuberculosis before the age of fifty and returned to Italy. Shortly afterwards he died there, leaving behind in Poland an Austrian widow and two sons, who continued the construction. A letter written by his brother was rescued from the ravages of war. However, when with the help of my Italian family, I started to research the Pordenone archives, it transpired that my great-great-grandfather didn’t die on arrival. On the contrary, he had time to be happily remarried and live another dozen years, undoubtedly as a bigamist. What is more, he himself wrote the letters to Poland which were signed by his brother, who was by then deceased. I think that there is an excellent intrigue in all of this, which was only possible thanks to the fact that in those days communication was still so imperfect that, despite her husband’s work on the railway, the alleged Austrian widow couldn’t manage the trip to Friuli.

My Italian cousins received this genealogical discovery without enthusiasm; on the contrary – with sadness. Many other scandals throughout the centuries have not given us any reasons to be proud. For me a bigamist is a possible character in a screenplay which I will no doubt write. I’m drawn to his pursuit of freedom, which is seemingly connected to a respect for morality but in reality is devious and cowardly. The family left behind in Poland weighed heavily on his conscience but he couldn’t deny himself happiness with a younger wife, far from worries about the railway construction and the terrible Polish climate and cuisine which, in the guise of his own brother, he complained to his wife about, recalling “It was your cooking that was his undoing.” I’ve let myself get carried away by fantasy. There was no such sentence in his letters, although there is complaining about the barbaric food in Poland. As a writer I take a certain detail from life and skew it in such a way so that it will reflect my own convictions that this can be the case in life. And that’s why the question about whether I invent what I write is pointless – it’s not the events that count but the artist’s interpretation of them. This is what differentiates us from historians, who strive for the truth, whereas we want to know how it could be so that the given event is interesting to us. It’s not important whether it’s the truth, the important thing is that I like it.

The story of my ancestors, given such treatment, provides many interesting topics. I dare say that just as many would be supplied by any carefully studied human life.

I read somewhere that the Czech Bata changed the order of a shoemaker’s work. Instead of making shoes to measure, he aimed to fit the feet to a ready pair of shoes. My Italian cousin did the same thing with an oven by laying the foundations for an empire of cookers built over three generations, then later for fridges and television sets. Until recently, they were the largest company of this type in Europe. The owner of the company, my cousin Guido, recalls the splendour of the fifties when, apart from the joy of a growing fortune, he could rejoice in the fact that he was supplying millions of European families with their first fridge. Today, fridges are made so as to
break down quickly, otherwise there won’t be a market for them and they’ll have to close the factory, condemning the staff to unemployment. That’s why, without the slightest regret, my cousins got rid of their shares, so only our name remains in the company. The shares were bought by the Swedish company Electrolux. And I still have the joy of constant misunderstandings. For example, when I was returning from abroad during Martial law, the customs official at the airport asked me why he saw my surname during transmissions of football matches. With a serious expression, I told him that as the post is censored and is delayed in reaching addressees, I decided on such a way to send greetings to my family. In France my surname is in the telephone directory and sometimes strangers call me, complaining about a broken cooker or fridge. Explaining that I have nothing to do with production is pointless, and that’s why I usually ask the aggrieved party how much they paid for the fridge. When they give the price, I answer that for that sort of money you can’t buy anything good. I ask Electrolux to forgive me if I put off their customers. I myself have another brand of refrigerator at home and my Italian cousins have never financed my films or were in no hurry to help me with any kind of financial support. And thank God for that. This way I don’t have to have any complexes when faced with their wealth. On the contrary: whenever my films were shown at The Venice Film festival, good old Guido would say with appreciation “I’ve seen our surname in the papers so many times. How much would that cost if we were to pay for an advertisement…”

I keep in contact with my Italian relatives to this day and each year, towards the end of winter, I spend a week in their house in Cortina d’Ampezzo in the Dolomites. I always take with me various members of my family and friends as the house which is left at our disposal has many bedrooms. During the owner’s absence, it’s left under the care of one of the servants. When we first went there five years ago, the chef and waiter was an Indian who greeted us and served supper wearing white gloves. Thank goodness I had encouraged everyone to dress for dinner! However, the next day our energy levels dropped and the prevailing opinion was that we could eat supper in our jumpers, dressed casually. The waiter came out without his gloves. The third day, I started to insist that we should respect convention. My family has bourgeois traditions (as opposed to my wife’s family who have aristocratic traditions) and we are used to respecting convention. So, without any trouble, I persuaded everyone to dress very elegantly. Of course, the waiter appeared wearing gloves. I triumphed on seeing that I’d guessed the logistics of events but my wife, for whom the keeping of such superficial social conventions is something completely unimportant, suddenly asked the waiter why he hadn’t worn gloves the previous day. He answered:

“Because I was serving you a dish with sauce. Whenever there is sauce on the table, I don’t wear gloves.”

The part of my Italian family which lives by the Vistula has left behind a memory about a great-aunt who was widowed at a young age. It was joked that she never forgave her husband that he had died. What is more, with time, she transferred all her
resentment onto the whole of the sterner sex and she expressed this in a particularly cruel manner. As she was a beautiful young woman, she went twice to the altar with a future groom, then in the presence of a priest and gathered guests, when asked “Do you, of your own free will, take this man to be your husband?” she answered decisively, “No.” Then she left the church, leaving all the guests in complete shock. This story, which is told discreetly and never in front of children, makes me wonder what the groom and the guests made of this and, particularly, what happened to the reception. Did they eat the food anyway or did it go to waste? And so from this memory came the screenplay for ‘The Contract’ – for the scene in which the bride walks out of the church, having said “No”, and the wedding reception goes ahead with the father-in-law repeating that nothing’s happened. And once again: is this taken from real life? Or invented? I never knew my great-aunt, so the basis of the story is a pretext to show my own point of view of the events. Anyway, is it really mine? Is it that different to how others imagine life?

I remember my first film festival in New York. I went there with ‘Family Life’, which was quite well received by the public. Afterwards, there was a press conference. After positive experiences in Cannes, I started to confidently talk about the fact that I make auteur films because I want to express a personal point of view, a sum of my own experiences, my own view of the world. At this point a journalist asked a trick question – whether my personal point of view differs very much from the average man in the street’s point of view. Without thinking, I answered that I hope it does differ and that’s why I want to share it with the public. To this, the journalist answered solemnly that in America if someone’s point of view differs greatly from the common one, that person usually seeks help from a psychiatrist. Of course, the trap was set purposefully so as to put down European self-righteousness and the belief in the fact that every personal point of view must be interesting to others.

GHOSTS

An American friend of mine, a writer, is Guatemalan by origin. We met at some social gathering in New York. There, he gave me the manuscript of his extraordinarily interesting play and, on giving it back to him, I met his wife, Marie Luz, the daughter of the Guatemalan ambassador in Washington. This was during my first trip to the States and I remember how during our meeting I was complaining that I couldn’t travel to Mexico because the Mexican consulate refused to issue me with a visa, claiming that the holder of a communist passport must apply for a visa in his country of residence. Marie Luz was amazed at this stupidity and assured me that as her father played golf with the Mexican ambassador, she would ask him to mention the matter to him. And that’s what happened. A few days later I received a very nice phone call: it was the Mexican consulate inviting me for coffee. I ran there with my passport in my pocket and had a charming conversation regarding the weather, after which the consul asked me whether I’d been having any difficulties regarding my
visa. When I confirmed that I had, the consul apologized for the misunderstanding of the embassy official, after which he glanced at my passport and looked stupefied.

“You're the resident of a communist country,” he said “in which case you have to apply for a visa in your country of residence.”

On returning to Poland, I told this anecdote on the radio, and the next day the Mexican consul called me asking whether I intended to travel to Mexico because, of course, he was ready to grant me a visa. In truth, I went there soon afterwards.

The anecdote about visas reminds me of the times when every country required a whole visa procedure from us. When I think of how many hundreds or perhaps even thousands of photographs of me are lying in some visa office archives, it's hard to understand today, when one can travel all around Europe without a visa, why for so many years life was made difficult for me. After all, obtaining a passport was enough of a problem in itself.

My American friend is called Arturo and he is the author of stage plays but during the period when he lived in New York he had an adventure in which I played a direct part. That is he received a proposition from a famous banker - he was to be one of three writers of his speeches.

The writing of speeches itself doesn't seem to me to be something extraordinary although I feel a certain embarrassment knowing that the words that someone speaks publicly with complete conviction were written by someone else entirely.

Arturo's experience's made me consider something more than just writing speeches. The modern public person surrounded by computer science becomes dehumanized, becomes more and more an impersonal creation. When writing the speeches, Arturo took advantage of a computer data bank containing quotes. His main character could even quote himself, although there was a rule that one shouldn't repeat oneself too often. There were recommended quotes, particularly liked thoughts, as well as certain fields of discretion. As a Latino, so someone closer to Europe, Arturo was hired to make the speeches of his boss sound more sophisticated – so he was responsible for difficult and relatively original thoughts. Whereas the second of the ‘ghost-writers’ was, first and foremost, to highlight the familiar, American character of his employer. Wanting to test to what extent a writer of speeches has a free hand, I proposed to Arturo that he put into one of the speeches some idea suggested by me. I remember how Piotr Wojciechowski, the author of 'Skull within a Skull' and my friend from film school, once said humorously that out of the three ideals of the French Revolution, the West came to love liberty, the East equality and fraternity remained stateless. Artur ‘bought’ this idea and a month later he showed me it in the speech delivered by his boss in Brazil, I think. At the same time, it found its way into the computer data bank and will be used again repeatedly.
This whole sphere of activities is still relatively common. One should know that the ghost-writer or the speechwriter also performed far more subtle operations. His employer had an adolescent daughter so he commissioned dialogues which could be useful in talking with the girl. Arturo showed me a manuscript which was structured like an algorithm: if she says this or makes this rebuke, then answer with the following... If she complains that her father doesn't have enough time for her, one can answer in this manner... If she says that they don't have a common language, there is yet another answer.

And that's all about the ‘ghost-writer’. After a few months, Arturo quit this well-paid position and wrote a play about a man who is a creation of some hired minds – it was successful on student campuses. Whereas I'm considering what it means that for my whole life I wanted to be the auteur of my films. Meanwhile, today the old notion of authorship is coming to an end and there's a sign that practices like those in which Arturo participates are beginning to dominate in the world.

Twenty years ago it was about meeting with a specific author, to watch what Antonioni, Truffaut, Bergman, Ken Russell or Bunuel had made. And it wasn't important what genre it was: that 'Profession: Reporter' was a thriller and 'The Seventh Seal' was a costume drama. It was the author who counted – we went to experience his story, leaving him the right to choose what he wanted to tell us about. Auteur films were made by people who wrote screenplays to them, like Bergman or like Wajda, Resnais or Tarkovsky, who took advantage of the services of a professional screenwriter but who themselves left such a mark on the work that it was always possible to recognize them.

The same thing, although to an even greater extent, concerned literature. A book by Albert Camus or Thomas Mann was a book by an author and the whole study of literature is based on solving what the author had in mind. Meanwhile, in such a clearly established world of concepts, recently a breach has been happening. I won't talk about film because that's become obvious today. Many authors talk about themselves, honestly perhaps, but not interestingly. We don't feel the desire to listen to every confession and one can understand that this wave of epigones has put people off auteur cinema. The pendulum has swung even further. Recently, I took part in a conference for film producers outside of London, at which there was a complaint that screenplays in Europe are not polished enough. I remembered then that in America I had worked with an author, an Oscar-winner, who explained to me that he had thirty different versions of a screenplay on his computer and he regarded this as normal. When I asked whether he believed that after so many corrections the versions had improved, he answered that it depended for whom. Without doubt ‘polishing’ smooths the edges and everything becomes more banal and obvious. The screenplay loses the stamp of specific authorship and because of this it becomes generally accepted.

Whilst taking part in this conference outside of London, I asked whether
Shakespeare's plays shouldn't be treated in the same way – after all, it's obvious what are their flaws. Generations of Shakespeare experts have studied the problem inside out trying to find an answer to why 'Macbeth' is an ineffective play, in 'King Lear' there's a lack of motivation and 'Hamlet' is frustrating and unclear. This can be corrected – I proposed – and perhaps the public would be appreciative. Shakespeare trimmed down to appeal to the tastes of average television viewers - why not?

I did not bring a smile to their faces. Someone seriously answered that Shakespeare is not worth deliberating over as he's rarely staged on Broadway or in the West End, whereas all new plays usually have a ‘breaking-in’ period. Special pollsters are hired who record the public's reaction, and from this is concluded what is boring, what is too long and what can be added more of. Then, after each play, the producer commissions the appropriate corrections to the screenplays.

When I hear this, I get the impression that once again we're entering Orwell's world – dehumanized and on a mass scale. The so-called preview principle has also appeared in film (recently Istvan Szabo went through this with his 'Meeting Venus'). On the basis of the results of the audience survey, something is cut out, something is changed and only then does such a ‘polished’ product hit the market. It's not even worth discussing the author – paid accordingly, he's to get involved in the process and lead it to the point where the product sells well and gives pleasure to the viewers. An ideal example of this is almost every American television series – no one asks who the author is (with the exception of works such as the parodies consciously created by Lynch) because the screenplay is a collective work and the directors keep changing. And will it always be like that now? Did the pendulum merely swing in the opposite direction and soon it will return? Or perhaps it will never return? Then “it's time to die”...

While we're on the subject: is it fitting for someone who is not a writer to write such a book without any help? When two years ago, in England, I negotiated with an otherwise prestigious publisher, they of course proposed the help of a ‘ghost-writer’. I said then that I wasn’t interested even if, thanks to it, the book was a lot better, for it would not be mine, and I'm interested in connecting with people who want to get to know me personally.

I will add to that. In today's market lots of books are treated like screenplays: someone writes it, someone rewrites it, someone else adds that which he's an expert in – descriptions of nature or erotic episodes, specific genre inserts or even some sort of reflections - all so that the market buys it and pays for it and so people are happy. When I ask publishers whether they're counting on these books being reissued they say: “No. Today nothing is renewed anymore. A book is a disposable product because our whole modern civilization operates on a different understanding of time.” I have been told that once in Japan, when a temple was being built, a forest was planted so that in a hundred years’ time one could derive building materials from it for renovation. Today, it is like only the present exists – the past is drowning in a
civilizational cloud. It's frightening to think what our raped earth will look like in a hundred years’ time. Art is also only to exist here and now. I'm exaggerating? Of course. Someone still reissues Stendhal and Balzac, but the number of people in the world who can read is getting smaller.

The end of Gutenberg's civilization? And what in return? The civilization of the Lumiere brothers? As a filmmaker I get the impression that the civilization of film is also passing away despite the fact it has only been alive for a relatively short time. A hundred years for one art form is not long, yet how long did opera exist for? And for the last hundred years it's been dead. After all, the novel did not exist for that long and today it's dying. Perhaps then film is dead, too.

I draw this quite tragic, for me, conclusion from the fact that today everyone in our 'industry' thinks that they know what and how to do things. From this comes the thirty versions of the screenplay, the re-editing dictated by a random audience which the film has been tested on. If a certain art form reveals its secrets, that means that its already finished. After all, when Bergman and Fellini made their films, everything was a discovery. Godard expanded the language of film, proving that the capacity of this discipline is immeasurable. Whereas it appears that film, in the form that it exists now, is dead – it can continue dying out for years to come, it can also be reborn, but at the moment it simply looks like an embalmed corpse.

(Perhaps I should take advantage of the opportunity to start a new life – leave cinema and go into public service?)

As a consolation I remember Nabakov's comment that fiction was born in the Neanderthal era at the moment when someone ran into the settlement crying “wolf, wolf” when there was no wolf. Fiction is as old as mankind so it will not die but what will happen after film – that I don't know. However, I take part in various gatherings which deal with media in Western Europe and I follow the astonishing changes that are predicted for the coming years. The 'Eureka' programme supports the European system for high definition television. It is supposedly a purely technical invention – greater sharpness, better sound, panoramic screen proportions and a gigantic cost to the whole operation. Millions of televisions and video players will end up on the rubbish heap just as a few years earlier gramophone and long-play records did. Will the European system win or will we be overtaken by the Japanese or the Americans (they're in no hurry and in that way have a chance of achieving the greatest technical maturity)? During conferences in Brussels, strategies are debated: should a palliative system be introduced – something that is halfway between the old and the new – or should there be a radical change? Should it begin in the video market or from broadcasting? All of this also concerns me. Although I'm not interested in technology, I know that it will determine where in the future decisions will be made and what will be shown on wide screens – in New York and Tokyo or Paris and Rome. The location of the record company decides which pianist will enter the market and, although theoretically we know that genius will always break through, sometimes even a minor
obstacle can become the cause for failure. He who decides on a career has so many other worries that he doesn't always want to travel to listen to a candidate who plays best before his own audience. We'll see whether in ten years’ time we, in the whole of Europe, will be watching American programmes on Japanese television sets (that's exactly what’s happening today) or whether things will develop differently. I'm very interested to see what will happen, so even for this reason alone I'd like to remain in this profession.

These conversations were to lead in the direction of the near future – we have in front of us some new technique and completely impersonal or non-auteur content which a standard production proposes to the mass public. And because the elite classes have lost their meaning and the masses are right, then an optimistic faith in the future can only arise from a profound transformation of the narrative form, from a new look at fiction which will follow the path of the Nabakovian Neanderthal but will express it differently. I closely observe whether this new form is not being born anywhere near us - I visit funfairs and circuses with interest, as well as Disneylands, Disneyworlds and various exhibitions and markets, as I suspect that somewhere there new forms for expressing history could be born. Perhaps they reside in electronic games, thanks to which we will play with fiction on the computer screen. For the moment I'll admit that all of this rather disappoints and bores me but maybe that which today seems to be helpless, infantile and simply silly, tomorrow will take on subjects next to which Immanuel Kant's writings will pale in comparison.

**THE GREATS OF THIS WORLD**

When on trembling legs I first crossed the threshold of the minister of culture's office, it seemed to me that my whole future lay in his hands. I couldn’t remember anything clever to say about the fact that art is long and life is short and I didn't know anything to the tune of no one today remembers who the minister of culture in Balzac or Stendhal's time was. However, since that time, I've seen so many ministers come and go, I've lived through so many politicians that my youthful fear of authority has transformed into sincere pity for those who rule us.

During socialism, a minister could harbour the illusion that he ruled the artists' souls even though in reality his authority was limited to being able to allocate a car to someone, more rarely a flat. The rest was designated by the so-called reality, that is the rules of the game which those ruling were just as unfamiliar with as those who were being ruled. I soon saw for myself that in the most important matters the minister had no authority over me – he can forbid me to do something yet he can't solve my biggest problems: he won't find me an actor, he won't resolve any doubts regarding the key dialogue in the film, he won't suggest how to use music. Therefore, his authority remains outside the sphere of my greatest tensions. Once I understood this mechanism, I began to look at people in authority more with interest than with
fear. Of course, I'm writing this today, years later, when that government has disappeared, and it's improper to admit that we were scared of them and, what is worse I think, that we quite often succumbed to a certain fascination with the guise of absolute power. It is with embarrassment that I recall the shivers that ran down my back at the moment when, for the first time, on the white marble steps of the Central Committee, I shook the hand of Comrade Gierek, which was as big as a loaf of bread. I remember the simultaneous embarrassment and humiliation caused by this shiver – we were received in the Central Committee at some artists’ conference and I sat through it, brisling with fear lest I succumb to the atmosphere of the moment and say something I’d be embarrassed about later. From this fear, I went too far in the other direction and unnecessarily entered some squabble with Comrade Lukaszewicz, who held it against me for years to come.

I was lucky enough in life to rub shoulders with a few dozen people who, in some way, will go down in history. Being a professional anecdote teller, I feel naturally drawn to these people because they are always accompanied by a peculiar aura of drama. And drama is a category which is comprised of both tragedy and comedy. I'll begin with the most absurd adventure, which was my meeting with Idi Amin Dada.

I was his guest in Uganda in his fourth year of government. I ended up there by a stupid accident, which I should not yet relate in detail so as not to embarrass people who were directly mixed up in it. As a result of a funny coincidence, I found myself a member of the Polish delegation for some anniversary celebrations. Originally, I was to go there in my professional capacity, as a film director, but the dictator of Uganda had just experienced an unpleasant adventure with film. My friend Barbet Schroeder had filmed a documentary about him which became a hit all over Europe and the world. In it Idi Amin Dada won the palace swimming tournament, on the way sinking generals who dared to be faster than him, and he sent the Queen of England a whole plane full of old clothes, due to the ‘winter of the century’. There was even a live goat there just in case the Queen ran out of milk in the palace (I imagine that's what inspired Mr Urban to send blankets to homeless Americans). So after a film ridiculing him, General Idi Amin Dada was not sympathetic towards filmmakers and that's why at the last minute, flying from Kenya, I had to change profession. Instead of introducing myself as a “film director”, I appeared as a director, without any extra details. The other member of the delegation was a state diplomat, freshly exiled from the Central Committee and stationed in Africa at a neighbouring outpost, who hardly knew any English. I was to be his translator but the African reality reversed our hierarchy – as I was a lot taller and had the title of director, the Ugandan chief of protocol put me in the first row, behind the president, while our diplomat ended up somewhere at the back, amongst the lower-ranking guests. I tried to somehow explain the mistake but it proved impossible and for four days I played the role of a director. This brought with it unexpected complications.

During our personal audience with the president of Uganda, we were to hand over a
present from the Chairman of Polish Council of State. It was a set of crystal glass finish with silver – a carafe with two cups. It turned out in the hotel that one of the cups was cracked. What to do? Remove it? It would look like one of us had been tempted by the silver. Give it and apologize? Or maybe not give it all? Or give it and not say anything? I opted for the last solution which is what we did. We handed over the present and the general, without looking at it, put it into the hands of his adjutant. From that moment on, the cracked cup ceased being our problem.

The main problem in Uganda back then was inflation. The general explained to me simply that admittedly today, on Thursday, there's inflation but tomorrow, on Friday, there won't be any.

And indeed, on the occasion of coming to power, the general met the needs of his people and ordered that all prices be cut by a third. The following day we say patrols on the streets which ransacked shops and forced small numbers of traders to sell their similarly small number of goods at cheaper prices. If they resisted, they would be beaten. Travelling out of town in the evening, we saw soldiers beating farmers who had not heard that they should sell cheaper as the news hadn't reached them yet. Ugandan socialism emanated with simplicity and when telling this story in Poland in the seventies, I would get a round of applause.

The most amusing thing seemed to be the episode involving the inauguration of the hospital-monument celebrating four years of the new government in power. We travelled to the opening in a cavalcade of cars, up country, to the source of the White Nile. The hospital consisted of a few barracks in the middle of the bush. It was empty. The president cut the ribbon, after which there was dancing along with refreshments made up of coca cola and salted peanuts. The pleasant atmosphere was ruined by the representative of Great Britain, Lord Hennessey, who in a low voice said that he had opened the same hospital when it was given to the Ugandans by the British Queen. Now Ida Amin Dada had repainted it and, what was worse, ordered the patients to be driven out into the bush so he could show an empty hospital. As we were returning from the hospital, a procession of families carried their sick back inside and everything returned to normal. Ugandan socialism scored another success.

We sniggered at this but it stopped being funny when we heard the news of the death of a Canadian journalist who had flown with us on the plane from Nairobi. He had been shot by the general's army patrol on the charge of anti-Ugandan jeering. I never found out whether this incident had any consequences. Canada's high commissioner probably expressed his outrage. The phenomenon of General Idi Amin Dada serves as a great anecdote although in actual fact it's a lot more complex. The ex-boxer who became a general did not provide bread for his people but did give the right to shoot a white man with impunity. In this way many years of colonial captivity lived to see some re-compensation. And that was not in any way amusing.

The story of Idi Amin Dada fits into the convention of the grotesque, which is
enlightened dictatorship seen from the perspective of a man who, as a joke, spends four days pretending to be a diplomat.

The greatest social success that I achieved with the help of president Amin was in a completely unexpected place. Just after the outbreak of Martial law, I was in the Philippines, in the jury of the first film festival in Manila. As a victim of the Polish government’s coup which occurred while I was abroad, I was given red carpet treatment in this anti-communist country. Already on the first evening at a reception for the festival guests I was seated at President Marcos' table next to his beautiful wife, Imelda, and their two daughters, one of whom gave the impression of being a rebellious person (rumours said that the president ordered the removal of her fiancé from the Philippines, if not from this world, as he was not accepted by the family.) The rebellious daughter entered into conversation with me and when I offered her my hackneyed story about Ida Amin Dada, she stopped all the conversation at the table and told me to tell it again loudly. I was unsure how far solidarity between various dictators went, so I told it fairly carefully, but President Marcos laughed at every word. His circle also laughed although I doubt that they didn't notice the obvious analogy.

The Marcoses, like Ida Amin Dada, will probably go down in history and I, by the way of their lewd fame sneak into immortality, as someone who knew them personally.

The list of historical figures which I could cite is a lot longer. A few years ago I had the most unexpected professional meeting with Boris Yeltsin, the current President of Russia, who in the last years of Gorbachev's government was the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. To this day I don't know what led to that meeting. I was in Moscow for a different reason – I was giving free lectures as part of directing courses. Back then Russia was at the height of its crisis and I thought that, as a Pole, newly released from the obligation of false friendship, I had to demonstrate friendship out of good will to these artists who suddenly found themselves caught in a crevasse of history between the blocks of two great eras.

My lecture was attended unexpectedly by some man in a leather jacket. Unceremoniously, he cut me off and asked to speak with me without any witnesses, in private. A moment later another man appeared wearing the same coat and they both proposed that I make a film about the head of parliament and present it to a Western audience. At first, the proposition seemed to me offensive. I'm not a portrait painter for hire. It's true that years earlier I'd made a film about Karol Wojtyla's life which affected my career and even not long ago a Western critic asked me in good faith whether I wasn’t embarrassed about the fact that I’d made a film on commission, comparing it to the situation in which Truffaut made a film about Mitterrand. It was not easy for me to explain the difference between a normal democracy and the unusual situation in Poland. And now, at the dawn of democracy in Poland, there's a proposition that I serve a politician – a foreign one to boot! However, then another
thought came to me. After all, there should not be anything wrong with the fact that in a free Poland a Polish artist is useful as a bridge between East and West, and that's why I shouldn't immediately say no.

I said that I'd think about it but first of all I needed some proof that they really had permission from Yeltsin for me to film him. They answered that I'd believe it once I come along to film him. I tried to find out whether their powers were as great as they said they were and I demanded that they make available a phone from which I could speak with the West. In 1991 in Russia such phones were only possessed by high-ranking VIPs. The men in leather jackets proposed a meeting in the headquarters of Moscow's mayor at the time, Popov, and indeed in his empty office the phone connected just like in the West. I asked my colleagues from German and French television stations whether they would be interested in such an ad-hoc documentary about Russia, seen through my eyes, about this odd dual-rule between Gorbachev and Yeltsin with a fragment of an interview with the latter. I received acquiescence from both, but without much enthusiasm.

Two days later my cinematographer flew in from Warsaw and we began filming. I based it on meetings with various acquaintances – amongst them the widow of Sakharov and a very young, fashionable writer, Victor Erofeyev. There was also a certain Orthodox cleric, the filmmaker Andrei Smirnov and from the politicians, Gorbachev's adviser at the time, Alexander Yakovlev, who I filmed in the Kremlin in Stalin's old office. I found out whose office it had been when the long-awaited politician suddenly appeared behind us, in the part of the room where there was no visible door. Noticing our amazement, he showed us that it is hidden in the wardrobe mirror. I asked the various people I was interviewing naïve questions: what's happening in Russia, what does it mean that suddenly two various centres of power have been formed and who's behind the fact that in Lithuania the OMON special forces have stormed the radio station and Gorbachev pretends not to know anything about it? I received various answers and I interwove them with quotes from the Marquis de Custine's book about Russia (as that book always applies to everything).

By the way, that storming of the radio-television tower in Vilnius, an incident which has remained in my memory can, I think, can be treated symbolically. My driver was listening to the news in the car and on hearing about the storming, in which a few dozen Lithuanians died, he commented joyfully that finally the ungrateful inhabitants of the republic had received a suitable lesson. I felt blood rushing to my head and I told my driver that he was a swine and that I didn’t intend to travel one metre further with him. I told him to stop and that I’d find myself a taxi and that I didn’t want to see him ever again. The driver stopped but he felt aggrieved. He asked why I was judging him so harshly. After all, I couldn’t know what he thinks or feels and he said what one should say because that’s what the radio said. When today, years later, I look for a powerful example to illustrate the thinking of the homo sovieticus, I come to the conclusion that this stratification of thoughts, feelings and spoken words is emblematic of this.
Coming back to Yeltsin... our conversation kept being put off so that one cinematographer left me to go back to Warsaw and another arrived, while in the Kremlin MPs struggled to appeal to the Russian Duma, in the name of Gorbachev, to remove Yeltsin from power. A few times, during breaks in parliamentary sessions, he himself told me that it wasn’t worth filming our interview while it was unsure whether he’d be able to remain in power. In the end he won the final vote. It was decided that we would film the interview the next day. Meanwhile, the men in the leather coats came in the afternoon looking concerned saying that the leader had decided that he'd go and rest in Sochi and that's where he'd give the interview. Initially, everything seemed to be simple: the leader of the Duma had at his disposal an Antonov plane and we'd fly in it together. Then some bad news came: the leader would fly democratically – on an airline. The problem lay in the fact that as a foreigner flying on an Aeroflot plane, I would have to pay for myself and my cinematographer in cash. The amount wasn't excessive but it was the principle: the Russians themselves had proposed this job to me and now they were telling me to pay for the privilege! I said that I wouldn't go and that we didn’t have to finish the film. My organisers rushed to make calls and a moment later they found a solution: Yeltsin's company plane could be hired in rubles so the leader would fly democratically while we'd fly on his plane and catch up in Sochi.

In the end, everything changed: the leader of the Duma was indisposed and cancelled the interview, thanks to which we shot it in Moscow. It was an extraordinary adventure for me as I had never before spoken on camera with a politician and, instead of humbly asking questions, I tried to exchange views. At one point this caused some tension and Yeltsin – not without reason – said that as I'm asking him about matters which I know more about than him, then perhaps I should also answer my own questions (it was about the Orthodox tradition of thought and the concept of ownership in Eastern theology.)

The film was ready a few weeks later and I think that German television showed it a few days before Yanayev's notorious August coup. The day after the screening, the 'Süddeutsche Zeitung' newspaper dismissed me with the scathing announcement that when artists touch on politics, they show themselves to be ignorant. It was just that during all the conversations that I conducted in Moscow it transpired that Gorbachev, who was loved by the Germans, was receding into the background, while Yeltsin was slowly coming to the forefront. After the coup, there was another screening of my film and this review was quoted with a contradictory comment that sometimes he who doesn't deal with politics can see more than the specialists who are blinded by an excess of knowledge.

I make a note of this tiny triumph as compensation for the many failures which I sometimes recall on these pages, while others I pass over because they don't seem worth mentioning. The life of an artist, like the life of a sportsman, is full of so many different competitions, in which one time you're a winner and another time a loser.
The life of an artist during socialism was all the more ambiguous as we were constantly faced with choices, all of which were bad, and the trick was to guess the relatively lesser evil. I had lived through this already as a child, therefore not yet as an artist, and I talk about this in 'At Full Gallop'. In the early fifties, in a city-centre school in Warsaw, the very fact of serving at the Mass was enough to get expelled and I, through stupidity or inattention, brought into school photographs, one on which showed me in a surplice. One of my friends called the head teacher and I, wanting to destroy the evidence, ate the photograph before she appeared. I was proud that I had managed to happily get out of trouble, after which I remembered a recent reading of 'Quo Vadis' and I realised the misery of what I had done. I immediately ran to confession and was advised to be prudent in future and to avoid lying by not answering questions. Today I think that in this way my confessor was explaining to me one of the great wisdoms which instructs heroism to act with the strength we can afford. Heroism beyond our means is often a sign of arrogance.

I describe many events from my life aware of this state of affairs. This takes away from me the claim of a heroic myth but, despite all this, I still show myself with excessive self-praise judging by the review in 'Tygodnik Powszechny', in the most unfavourable piece written about this book, which points out that I discreetly put myself before the readers as a positive example. If that's the case, then it's not worth continuing to read this. However, I believe that there's been a misunderstanding. Looking at the years gone by from the perspective of someone who's nearly sixty, I try to find a trace of the solutions in which I was able to choose the lesser evil and it seems to me that in them is the truth about the painful price of compromise which every one of us makes with the world.

The documentary with the participation of Yeltsin came into being during a change of regimes. In Poland there was already total freedom, while behind the Eastern border came the end of perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union. The film was shown there many times and it brought me a fair bit of unexpected popularity, particularly in the provinces, where I was recognized as that foreigner who spoke with their future president in front of a camera. Recently, I experienced this popularity in Tomsk, where I found myself with my films.

Today Tomsk is a small town in Siberia although once it was the capital. Despite this, it was bypassed by the railway built at the beginning of the century. Apparently, local traders did not pay the railway-builders, convinced of the fact that the construction would not bypass such an important town. I visited Tomsk, invited by Mother Teresa's missionary sisters, who take care of the poor. The sisters, a few Indian women from Kerala in southern India, speak poor English and even worse Russian and live on a hill, spending every day giving out soup to the homeless. On my way to their house, I passed a swarm of poor people who were returning from lunch. Amongst them were people without legs and arms. There were those whose undressed wounds were visible from under their clothes. It was a sight like from a
Victor Hugo novel. The sisters had nothing more to eat than the leftovers of soup made of overcooked potatoes in salty water.

That same evening, I was invited to supper by a local businessman, who recognized me as the man he saw arm in arm with his president in the film which had once again been shown on Russian television. The supper, as is always in the house of rich Russians, was so sumptuous that the small group of guests was unable to eat half the delicacies. At the same time, the host led a worldly conversation with me, surprising me with questions along the lines of: “Have you noticed that diamonds bought in the Paris branch of Cartier are a lot more expensive than those bought in his New York branch on Fifth Avenue?” To be honest, I've never bought diamonds but I agreed with the millionaire, understanding that it was all about the impression that the conversation was to make on the surrounding people. At the end of the meal, I asked whether he had noticed the funny American custom which means that after finishing a meal in a restaurant, they often ask for a doggy bag and they take what is left to eat at home the next day. My host remembered this custom. He burst out laughing, recalling that the richest nation in the world is so practical and frugal. Encouraged by this observation, I asked whether there was anything on the table that might go to waste after supper. There were dishes with salmon, kebabs, pineapple salad, trays of caviar canapés, heaps of cured meats and bowls of mayonnaise. I mentioned that I'd willingly take it for Mother Teresa's sisters. Immediately, an order was issued to pack everything up and we departed from the millionaire's house, weighed down with plastic bags. When the sister on duty noticed our supplies, she woke up the mother superior who called out to the other sisters, and in the middle of the night a few sleepy Indian women looked at delicacies that they'd never seen before in their lives. The mother superior pondered on how to fairly distribute them between the poor and in the end she made a Solomonic judgement: everything was to be thrown in a bucket, mixed into a mush and a spoonful was to be given to everyone along with the soup.

I have another Russian story from another town, in which I met a Catholic priest who had been born in Western Europe. After a long conversation, he asked whether I could invite him for dinner because living off congregation donations does not allow him to frequent expensive restaurants. On his suggestion, we went to an Italian restaurant in that town, in which two plates of pasta and two glasses of Chianti cost around fifty dollars, which was more expensive than any restaurant that I knew in the West. Towards the end of our meal, we were visited by the owner, an Italian born in Piedmont who discovered Russia by working in factories built by Fiat. Lately, he told me, he had freed himself and was rich. Seeing that a restaurant which offered such extortionate prices was empty, I asked whether the mafia hindered his creative activities as stories about mafia were shocking indeed. The Italian burst out laughing and answered, unaware I think that he was paraphrasing the King of France: “You're joking! I am the mafia!” After which he hurriedly explained that in his native Piedmont he had nothing to do with the mafia and that he brought it to life in deepest Russia after watching the television series 'The Octopus' and that now he controlled a
large part of town, extorting protection money from traders while the restaurant served to launder money. That's why he introduced prohibitive prices – because every client means a loss of money. According to the cash reports, his premises are visited by thousands of customers every day, and this money goes into his account after taxes are deducted.

Siberia is also linked to a recent memory of a group of children from a primary school in Novosibirsk who invited me for a discussion after watching my films on video. I don't make films for children but the school had an expanded cultural education programme and it turned out that the discussion was on a higher level than that which film critics have reached in recent years. After watching 'At Full Gallop', the children told me that the main problem of the film is the ‘white lie’ of the kind that objectively doesn't harm anyone but, in their opinion, harms the person who lies as every lie sticks to a person. The aunt in the film lies in this manner and, as she's an authentic character what the children sensed was also confirmed in real life. Years of moonlighting will cause anyone to feel internal emptiness. After watching 'Illumination', even though it's certificate is eighteen and the average age of the class was nine, the discussion included the scene in which my protagonist collects snow in his hand which then slowly melts. “His life is leaking away like that,” the children explained to me. Therefore, I asked them whether it's a film about a wasted life and they answered that no because the scene is witnessed by the protagonist's son, who will know how to act in his own life.

Moved by this discussion, I invited the children to Warsaw. I have a large house in Laski and I knew that I could accommodate a whole class there. The parents started to collect money for the trip and a year later I received an email that the class could come. Unfortunately, I was recovering from a car accident so I asked for four to six weeks' delay. A desperate email informed me that since the collapse of the rouble, in a month's time their money could be worth so little that it wouldn't be sufficient for the journey.

They came. We drove them around Warsaw and Poland, aware that children from Novosibirsk had never seen an object that was more than a hundred years old. After visiting Malbork, they said that they'd seen the castle before in Disney cartoons. In establishments for the blind, outside of Warsaw, they met young Germans who had come as part of the 'Atonement' project, who worked for free in order to erase the guilt of their parents, or more often their grandparents, for acts committed against Poles. Then the children from Novosibirsk saw the monument to Siberian exiles – the carriage full of crosses was a clear symbol to them. We told them that their great-grandparents were probably exiled in the same way. They thought this through and during a meeting with Mayor Świecicki in the town hall, one little girl unexpectedly said that when she grew up she would also come to Poland to work off the Russians’ feeling of guilt towards the Poles. I think that even if this surprising declaration was prompted by her teacher, it's the first time that I heard someone from Russia admit responsibility for the past. Heartened, I thought that perhaps we Poles, who always
think of ourselves in the categories of experienced wrongs, could (even symbolically) undertake a small penance at least towards the Ukraine, which we injured historically quite a bit, although undoubtedly those injured did not remain in our debt.

I often raise such sensitive subjects in Russia. I discuss them in interviews and question-and-answer sessions. I often provoke objections and protests and, despite this, the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography has awarded me with an honorary degree. In his eulogy the government representative said that Russia is so great because it can appreciate friends who are critical and truthful. I would like to be able to say the same about my own country.

PHOTO
In New Delhi, India, 1975. I was a member of the festival jury and I met Indira Gandhi

Staying with a certain exotism, I'll mention Indira Gandhi. In the mid-seventies I was in the jury of the festival in Delhi. Mrs Gandhi received guests in the presidential palace; I went out onto the terrace with a couple of Brazilian friends and Mrs Gandhi entered into a conversation with us that lasted around half an hour. None of the guests dared interrupt her or approach, so in the end we ourselves realized this and someone told the hostess that we should give others a chance to speak to her, too. With extraordinary simplicity she answered: “Don't leave – I am able to rest when speaking to you. You're so unimportant,” she added with a smile.

To the list of passing encounters I'll also add Princess Diana. I'm writing these words already after her tragic death, which has triggered an emotional veneration of this woman. My meeting was of an unromantic character and its circumstances, one could say, were embarrassing.

In the late eighties I entered into negotiations with the BBC on the matter of a film about Witold Lutosławski. During this time, I was staying in Paris and, like every incomer from behind the Iron Curtain, I was obliged to have a visa. One day I was urgently summoned to London with the assurance that a visa would be waiting for me at the Paris consulate while at the airport the plane ticket was already prepaid. I went to the consulate as quickly as I could, where it turned out that the situation was impossible, as usual. One had to wait two weeks for a visa to be issued. Irritated, I returned to my hotel and called to say that I wouldn't be able to come in time. My producers, irritated that the invitation from such an important institution as the BBC was not enough for me to get a visa on the spot, decided to try again and a moment later told me to return to the consulate. This time the visa was waiting for me and a few hours later I found myself in London. We managed to settle professional matters by the evening, then my hosts asked me whether I would like to go to a concert. I answered that I would as, clearly, I hadn't had time to make any plans. However, it was a special concert – Princess Diana was taking part and it turned out that during
the interval I was to be introduced to her. Surprised, I asked to what I owed this honour and then my kind host explained to me, with an impish smile, the secret mechanism of the distinction that had befallen on me. After the initial refusal of my visa, in no time I was put on the list of people who that evening were to be introduced to the princess. After this, there was an automatic phone call from the palace and my visa difficulties vanished.

Looking into the face of that very pretty girl, I thought, with embarrassment, that she was smiling at me without knowing that she was being taken advantage of just so I could get my visa more quickly. However, I had in my mind the stories of my two friends, the British producers (who today have titles) who once worked on helping Princess Diana learn to play the role in life which she chose by marrying Prince Charles. It regarded behaviour during meetings with children in hospitals and orphanages. The producer taught Diana that she should always make eye contact with the ugliest and most unpleasant child and that's the one she should hug first. Such a choice works in the media. In life, our parents give us similar advice when they tell us to show selfless sympathy to those who never show it to us. Diana grew up in a broken family and learnt these lessons quite late, which doesn't mean that with which she conquered the media was the result of cynical manipulation. Anyway, the whole misery of her life shows that we had nothing to be envious of – on the contrary, we should remember her with sympathy.

SPEECHES

At my primary school, just after the war, I was still taught calligraphy. It was a private school, of the Wojciech Górski Foundation, under the patronage of Saint Wojciech, and it was located at the time within the walls of the burned down Zamoyski School on Smolna Street. Learning calligraphy did not prove very useful – my handwriting is an untidy scrawl. Instead, I had no rhetoric which used to be taught in high schools and I don't know how to deliver speeches or even to make toasts (particularly as I hardly ever consume alcohol), which is a certain limitation particularly during trips to the Caucasus. I never prepared myself for a political career and I thought that I would somehow slip through life without making public speeches. The greatest threat of this kind appears at funerals but usually respect for the deceased allows me to refuse to give a speech with utter sincerity.

The necessity of making a public speech came upon me unexpectedly a few years ago when Communism was coming to an end but we didn't know when exactly this would happen. It was then that Gorbachev came to Poland on a state visit and a meeting with intellectuals was to take place in the newly-finished ballroom, in Warsaw Castle. Of course, they were to be mostly pro-government intellectuals but a few people from the more ‘calculable’ opposition were invited for show. Feeling ourselves the minority in comparison to the several hundred pro-government guests,
we stayed together and when today I watch the television report of that meeting, I see sitting in a corner Iza Cywinska, Kazio Kutz, Krzys Kieslowski and me. The master of ceremonies was Mieczyslaw Rakowski – the prime minister at the time and the right hand of the general.

On receiving the invitation, we considered whether to take part in such a function and we came to the conclusion that we should because, to put it simply, the absent are always in the wrong. If we give up ground, then someone else fills the space, which seems particularly important when the statesman of the superpower that controls our country comes over. Giving him grounds to conclude that the authority recognized by him had the support of the intelligentsia seemed to be inappropriate. We acknowledged that we should come and, with the use of applause, at least, show our support for those who will say brave and just things. Everybody knew that Marcin Krol would be allowed to speak and, indeed, he raised the subject of Katyn, which still constituted a taboo topic for the communist authorities. I remember how under Martial law, so on the orders of General Jaruzelski, the inscriptions were torn off the symbolic graves in Powazki cemetery.

I was surprised at the last moment when one of the adjutants of Professor Suchodolski, who was formally presiding over the meeting, brought me a piece of paper which said that I was on the list of speakers. Initially, I said that I had nothing to say and that I asked to be removed from the list, then I reflected that I was acting ridiculously. If I was being demonstrative by coming to the meeting, then I should take the opportunity to say something. The question was what? The meeting was transmitted live on television, both in Poland and the Soviet Union. Admittedly, it was happening before midday, so I could count on the fact that not many people would see me; however, I understood that I had a chance of going down in history as someone who made a complete fool out of himself at a time when he had the chance to say something significant. There was also another limiting factor – there was no sense in kicking up a row and saying something that was openly aggressive and offensive towards a person who undoubtedly had merit in the probably unintentional dismantling of a system. Therefore, one had to say something that would be understood both in Poland and in Russia as the voice of an artist outside of the government’s clientele and, at the same time, wouldn’t be an unnecessary provocation of the Russian Bear. For the purposes of Poland, it was enough that I mention Wajda so that it's clear that I'm part of the opposition. I did so in the first sentence, praising him as the greatest Polish filmmaker, which was an open taunt about the fact that the hosts had not invited him. Later it got worse. From travelling around the Soviet Union I remembered the surprise which the combined term ‘Judeo-Christianity’ aroused. I first noticed this when I showed my film 'From a Far Country' at a special screening for the Filmmakers Union in Odessa. My Russian friends, Andrei Smirnov and Elem Klimov, at the helm of the Filmmakers Union, made this journey in time possible for me when my film about the Pope was yet to be shown in Polish cinemas. So a member of the public asked me about the character of the Jewish Marxist rescued from the ghetto and about the reason why his relationship with the Polish
church was shown. I answered fairly broadly about the complex ties between Christianity and Judaism, ending with the account of the Pope's, then recent, visit to the synagogue in Rome. I summarized with the statement that Christianity and Judaism constitute a common source of today’s Europe. My Odessa debater replied that perhaps Catholicism and Judaism have something in common but for Orthodoxy the Jews remain Christ's killers. I remembered this expression and now, sitting at a meeting with Gorbachev, I fervently wondered how to use the term ‘Judeo-Christianity’. Gorbachev entered the room along with his wife Raisa, Shevardnadze, Jaruzelski and Rakowski. The deliberations began. The first speaker from the ‘other’ side was the president of the Catholic University of Lublin, the philosopher Father Krapiec, who engaged in a discussion about Crusaders and their doctrines which maintained that unbaptised nations have no rights. This doctrine was condemned by the Pope and the priest asked Gorbachev whether he had noticed that Brezhnev's doctrine regarding limited sovereignty was structurally similar and whether he, as Brezhnev’s successor, agreed with it. We were extremely interested as to whether, when pinned against the wall, Gorbachev would answer, but even in such a small trap this distinguished politician showed deftness by saying that the question was too deep and that he would answer it in writing. He actually did so. At a time when it was convenient for him.

Listening with one ear to other speakers, I searched my mind for some ready-made piece of wisdom which I could utilize. Finally, when I was called to the microphone I said that Judeo-Christianity formed the most creative of all civilizations. Its predecessors, the civilizations of China, India or Egypt, did not release in man such creative forces as they didn't give him freedom. Therefore, maybe the technological or civilizational failures of the Soviet Union come from the fact that it had moved too far away from the tradition of Judeo-Christianity.

The question remained unanswered, of course. I returned to my seat, pouring with sweat. At home I immediately listened back to what I had said from the tape: it was worded worse than I'm summarizing it now but no terrible ‘bombshell’ was dropped. And, by the way, I thought at the time, what a difficult task it was to write speeches for a person who, unlike me, is of real public importance.

I fell into a rhetorical trap for the second time this decade in Germany when I accepted the invitation to take part in the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. At the beginning it seemed innocent enough – no one warned me about speaking. Only once I was there, in some sports hall in Frankfurt, did I learn that I was to speak and that the ceremony was to be televised. To be honest, more than the millions of viewers, I was disconcerted by those who were present in the hall – Willy Brandt, Gunter Grass and from the Polish side Tadeusz Rozwicz and, I think, Kusniewicz. Moreover, both were in a comfortable situation as they had prepared fragments of their works, whereas what can a filmmaker do? Show some shadow-puppets on a screen?
And again, amidst my racing thoughts, it came to me that I'd borrow from a newspaper some recently read war memories and I'd assign them to myself. During the war, when the allied air raids began over Hamburg with the participation of the Poles, one of whom said that one should pray not just for the pilots but also for those who were being bombed. During the war, even for a Christian, this was extremely hard. I admit that I shamelessly told this story linking it to my grandfather. I hope this was of benefit for the reconciliation of Poles and Germans, but to this day I have slight pangs of conscience that to achieve my aim I appropriated someone else's story. Confessing this now brings a certain relief.

The most important of my public appearances took place a few years ago in Paris where I found myself at a Eureka congress – I don't know exactly who invited me and what for. It was already after the formation of Mazowiecki's government but television was still ruled by Jerzy Urban (I remember that it was from him that I received the only formal congratulations on my fiftieth birthday). The congress was taking place in La Defense and was presided over, or rather under the patronage of, President Mitterrand and included the Commissioner of the European Union, Jacques Delors, the French ministers of foreign affairs, Dumas, and of culture, Lang, as well as a few dozen ministers of culture from EU countries. The company was dignified and the problems were quite distant to us: European integration; the protection of cultural products against the deluge of programmes from across the ocean; the issue of whether to impose programmes on viewers that they don't want, in this way limiting their import; the legal question; how to define a national programme made as a co-production; whether or not to form a fictional European nationality, and so on.

Against the background of these problems, the organisers wished to emphasize the presence of Poles and Hungarians, who were already taking decisive steps towards the Union. And again in a relaxed situation I was startled by a piece of paper, this time from minister Lang, saying that I would be asked to speak. This happened at the plenary session which closed the congress with the participation of all the ministers and dignitaries. Once again panic and the desire to hide in some hole, once again the fear that I'd squander the chance to score a goal for Poland and kick the ball out of play.

Finally, it was my turn. The room was bored although before me there had been speakers from whom one could learn a great deal. They spoke most frequently about nothing, but they did this so beautifully that one simply felt that everyone had been taking rhetoric lessons, which I hadn't managed. Whereas it seemed to me that I had something to say, only I didn't know how to say it. I still had the memory of my failure in Cannes when I was receiving my prize for 'The Constant Factor' and I had those few seconds on stage which I wasted pitifully. Then I had wanted to say something about the fact that I had filmed many mountain scenes but only in 'The Constant Factor' was I able to climb the Himalayas and thanks to that I'm here, so high up on the Cannes stage. I said this quite clearly and whoever was watching me
close-up on television understood me perfectly. However, in the room no one paid attention to me – I spoke too quietly, I didn't force the audience to concentrate on what I was saying and I went unnoticed.

It was a personal defeat – mostly my own pride suffered. Whereas now I was faced with a much greater task – I was to do something so that my country would be noticed, to force the bored dignitaries to remember that Poland was becoming a free country and that it must be thought of differently.

To this day I remember every word which I uttered on that podium. First of all, wishing to silence the room, I made a clownish gesture. I uttered the obligatory expression: “Mr President, Mr Commissioner, ministers, ladies and gentlemen” after which, knowing that the European Union flag with fifteen stars was hanging above me, I turned my back to the audience. I had planned this. I counted to fifteen, looking at the flag, and I felt the room go quiet as a speaker with his back to the audience is a rarity. Flushed from the tension, I turned back around again and said: “I’m moved because for the first time in my life I'm speaking underneath this flag.” Then, knowing now that the room's attention was on me, I put forward the idea that neither Paris, nor Brussels, nor Milan, nor Bonn are in the middle of Europe but Warsaw, Cracow and Budapest are (there was no reason yet to mention Prague). I said that we were late for the express train named ‘United European’ but if they provided us with a replacement bus in time, then we'd catch up with them at the next station. It was a so-so cheap metaphor but then I wanted to say something that I really believed and which I wanted to convince people of: that us being on that train was in our mutual interest. The West has experience and capital but on our side there is vitality, energy and motivation. Millions of Poles, Hungarians, Czechs or Slovaks (and soon maybe also millions of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians and others) will join Europe, motivated by a strong desire to improve their fate. And that is our capital, which is equally as valuable as that which immigrants continually bring to the States. Western Europe is sick with senile decay, immersed in stagnation. We have energy and in that sense we feel young. Status quo is not enough for us – we want more. And even if hordes of barbarians from the East throw themselves at Western Europe, she can only gain something because it will spur her to fight and, therefore, to develop. This reasoning is on a Darwinian level but I think this appropriate for politics. If we were talking about culture, I would refer to our existential experiences but amongst politicians it's the lowest values that count.

A year or eighteen months after this speech, I met in Poland Countess Denhoff, the German political journalist who had once been advisor to Willy Brandt regarding his opening to our part of the world. With satisfaction I heard the same praise of our economic and civilizational potential. The streets of Warsaw were back then full of fold-out beds and fold-out tables, sale of meat straight from the back of the lorry was thriving and the average Polish intellectual was ashamed of his countrymen, just as earlier the communist authorities told us to be ashamed of those traders thanks to which we could wear Turkish sheepskin coats and eat Thai confectionary. And yet
back then we really should have been ashamed not of the traders but of the salesmen who, without batting an eyelash, signed contracts that were unfavourable to our country and compensated their professional incompetence with servility towards the not very patriotic authorities.

In all of the above mentioned speeches I was weighed down by the problem of a foreign language. Apart from my mother tongue, whose words sometimes also get stuck in my throat, a foreign language, acquired by laborious cramming of vocabulary, gets jammed from emotion and we usually use it not to say what we want but what we are able to. I experienced this at the very outset of my cinematic career when I went to Argentina with 'The Structure of Crystal' for the last festival in Mar del Plata. Earlier, both Munk and Wajda had been successful there so the fact that they sent me, a debut filmmaker with a modest black and white film, was a great distinction and gave me the jitters. To add to this, there was a very long flight via Dakar, Recife and Buenos Aires which was so delayed that I had to run to my own screening straight from the plane. It was my very first encounter with Spanish-speaking people – I had started learning this language as an adult and I hadn't any practice in speaking it. I remember that my legs buckled under me when I went up onto the stage.

The compere talked about what adventures had accompanied me on my trip (the delay was anticipated by problems with my circulation which I experienced for the first time in my life before that visit). I was applauded for not waiting for the results of the tests and escaping the doctors to come to the festival, believing that it’s better to die in glamorous circumstances than to go to a sanatorium and find out that it's only neurosis. After some nice introductions, there were questions. The compere, introducing me as a debut filmmaker, asked under whose auspices I wanted to take part in the festival – what master was the patron of my debut. I easily understood the elaborately phrased question and I wanted to mention the name Bresson whose 'A Man Escaped' and 'Pickpocket' belonged to my favourite films. Unfortunately, because of emotions the name Bresson escaped me and instead Cartier, the photographer, came into my head. Not knowing what to say, I stammered something for a moment and finally I was surprised to hear my own voice name the writer Marcel Proust. The compere asked why a writer, to which I thoughtlessly blurted out:

“Because in his writing he anticipated cinematography.”

I certainly said this because I knew the word ‘antecipër’. I was applauded and from that moment onwards all the journalists quizzed me on the subject of Marcel Proust and his links with cinema. While the truth was that I never said that. It just came out.

In 1981 I was at a festival in New York with the film 'The Contract', which after Venice ended up in the Lincoln Center in September, with nearly a year’s delay. The New York Festival is what once brought me to America and since that time I’ve been a fairly regular participant. I didn't expect any special experiences, particularly as it's
a festival of festivals and it takes place without giving out any awards. Before the screening, I met the new life companion of my old distributor who once launched 'The Quarterly Balance' in American cinemas (thanks to this I gained my first commercial success across the ocean). Waiting for the screening, we chatted about various matters and it turned out that his new companion professionally counselled people who spoke publicly. She spoke about her job with such solemnity that I defensively started to make jokes – because what can one advise someone who is to speak publicly? The expert gave me a litany of tips which, I believe, every child knows: speak slowly and clearly, pay attention to the audience’s reactions, don't look at your feet but into people's eyes, and so on. I managed to ridicule these pearls of wisdom, proposing that I could work for her part-time, after which I went out onto the stage with a prepared humorous lines with which I was to win over the audience. In the meantime, the late director of the festival, Richard Raud, introduced me for longer than is usual, saying that he welcomed me as a filmmaker, a friend of the festival but above all a representative of a country which had challenged the world. And at that moment the packed Lincoln Center rose to its feet as one and clapped and cheered for a long time. Leslie Caron stood right next to me and I saw that she was crying and then I couldn't see anything anymore because crying is contagious and my eyes had also filled with tears, my voice went and I stumbled to the microphone, sobbing: “Thank you”. Of course, this was applause for Poland. It was in September, before December 1981. I suppose I was crying because I already felt that it could be my last festival.

It's time to wrap up and yet I'm reminded of another even older story about public speaking and this time the punchline leads to film. In the late Spring of 1980, when the strikes were in progress and Gierek's government had made concessions, after a long discussion with Comrade Lukaszewicz at the Party Headquarters, I obtained permission from the authorities to make a film about the Pope. This permission, albeit given reluctantly (apparently Gierek himself said that it would be bad to give permission but even worse to deny it), meant that I felt obliged to show a certain courtesy towards the government. That's when I was asked to participate in some UNESCO event which was dedicated to peace education. It appeared innocent enough, so I agreed to go there, feeling that in this way I was making a gesture of goodwill. In Paris I met Jozef Cyrankiewicz, who at the time was the chairman of the World Peace Council and because of this he presided over the Polish delegation. I don't remember who else was with us, the only person who has stayed in my mind was our eternal prime minister, a secretive man who carried many secrets with him – suffice it to mention the incomprehensible trial of Mazurkiewicz and his apparent revelations just before his execution. I circled around the former prime minister thinking of how to drag him out for a conversation while he, in the breaks during his boring meetings, smoked cigarettes from a glass holder and watched me because he had nothing else to do. And then, suddenly, some short official from the embassy or the Polish mission near UNESCO appeared and asked me if I had a speech ready. To tell the truth, I had prepared a few words but I wanted to know why he was asking. The official answered authoritatively that he wished to become acquainted with what
I planned to say and possibly correct something in the text. I was dumbfounded on hearing such a shamelessly arrogant demand, while at the same time I noticed Mr Cyrankiewicz looking at us with amusement. With an audience, I started to play an improvised scene on the subject of artists' whims. I looked my interlocutor deep in the eyes and thoughtfully said that I was still deciding what tone I would speak in. Of course, this must have alarmed him.

“What does it depend on?” he asked.

“The weather,” I answered proudly, pointing through the window to the sky. “If it clears up, then I'll say something warm about children and elderly people and if it clouds over, then I'll lay into the weapons producers. Wherever they are,” I added ominously, suggesting that I don't distinguish between the peace-loving, military complex of socialism and the imperialists from Washington. On hearing what I was threatening to do, the official broke down and I suggested a third option: I could just not speak. I think that's how it ended. Amused by this conversation, the prime minister took me aside and entertained me with a tale which was tossed like a sweet to a child who'd recited a poem well.

The tale concerned memories from 1948. Mr Cyrankiewicz knew from somewhere that I was a physicist and because of this he chose a story from the time of the intellectuals congress in Wrocław. At the last minute, Albert Einstein cancelled his visit but he sent a text to be read out which became the subject of political objection so much so that before it was delivered, it reached the prime minister. Namely, Einstein wrote that aggression is an innate human trait and even if socialism triumphed over the whole world, then socialist nations would attack one another all the same. Such a statement could not come from the podium of the World Peace Council; therefore, the prime minister took the responsibility on himself for its censorship, explaining it with a simple comment:

“Well, Einstein is undoubtedly a great physicist but I doubt if he's a great philosopher.”

Back in 1980, when the conflict between Russia and China was constantly on the front pages of the newspapers, Mr Cyrankiewicz stated:

“When I think about it today I don't know whether Einstein was indeed such a genius in physics but he was an excellent philosopher.”

My relationships with the left wing of the West were always difficult. As a young man I was unable to understand that someone sensible in the West could believe in an ideology of violence, rape and hypocrisy. After 1968 everything became even more complicated. I remember when I found myself at my first international festival in Bergamo with 'The Structure of Crystal' and there was a demonstration. A crowd of young people arrived in their own cars (to me that was the highest outward sign of
luxury) and chanted at the festival guests: “Fascisti borghesi ancora pochi mesi!” This called for an imminent end to the old order. Not being a fascist, and even less so a member of the bourgeoisie, but someone living on a quarter daily allowance granted by ‘Polish Film’, I witnessed the cutting short of the festival as an event which was ‘opium for the people’. Later, I encountered demonstrations many times – with the very same 'The Structure of Crystal'. In Pesaro, where I took part in the debate, I was praised for the element of class struggle in the film or, as was said by Marguerite Duras, for the fact that my film is “a sea moved by a slow rhythm of waves, a sea from which a cry for help is uttered from a country which is drowning in Soviet captivity.” I listened to these compliments from the mouth of a great writer, sitting next to a secret police agent from the embassy, pretending not to understand and when called upon to speak, I said that in my film there is no sea but mountains. Then, humiliated like a Japanese man who has lost face, I went out into the corridor to chasten the great writer for consciously forcing me to play the fool although she fully realized how much such praise could harm me. Mrs Duras seemed to make a sincere apology but later I noticed that in the West various people often derive a perverse satisfaction from the fact that when associating with enslaved people, they can place them in an uncomfortable position. It reminded me somewhat of tourists' attitudes toward soldiers who, upright and motionless, stand guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. How exciting is telling a funny joke or a bawdy story within their hearing and observing their faces – whether they blush or maybe even burst out laughing. I suspect that for inappropriate behaviour soldiers would face latrine duty; we are faced with the loss of our passport. A few years later Marguerite Duras was in Poland and I showed her around Warsaw. She came to learn the reality about the country which she had heard so much about and about which I also had told her. It was a nice gesture and I even felt a peculiar triumph at the thought that perhaps I'd contributed to this journey. But, to my annoyance, Marguerite came with George Orwell's widow and I was constantly in fear that someone should find out the surname of the person who I was receiving in Warsaw at the very beginning of the seventies when I was still a fairly unknown, and therefore defenceless, artist. Fortunately, Mrs Orwell had only her maiden name written into her passport.

While I’m on the subject of female writers, in the same cycle of afflictions I noted Susan Sontag. We were both jury members at the Chicago Festival or perhaps we met there during the festival – I don't remember. Susan Sontag was very left-wing and she argued with me about everything, praising the Soviet system and cursing capitalism with fervour, which made a reasonable exchange of views impossible. With this she was extraordinarily eloquent and in a discussion she even resorted to tricks, such as taking advantage of her obvious superior language skills. Finally, came the moment of truth – in the 'Village Voice' Susan issued a criticism of herself and the formation which, in her view, had realized for a long time that they believed in something that was far from the truth but she hadn’t had the courage to admit it. After the article, I met Susan at the festival in Cannes in 1982. She found it in herself to apologize to me for the discussion that she had unfairly led. What is more, she admitted that she had also been unfair towards Milosz, writing off his arguments only because he was an
emigrant and, what is worse, a renegade because he deserted the post which the party had assigned him to.

The opposition of ideological material was not dangerous until all Western communists, even the most ardent ones from France, harboured certain doubts and allowed us, people who had built socialism, to have certain reservations towards them. I felt this in person when I made the film 'From a Far Country'. I still haven't got over it because one can be forgiven for revisionism or metaphysical tendencies but not for a religious film or an open alliance with the church, which does indeed have mortal enemies, whereas it doesn't have many means of defending its allies. Besides, I don't think it's just a matter of means. All the intellectual circles in the West are today fiercely anti-clerical, which clearly shows that those churches have managed to alienate many thinkers. In the Church's stance is the assumption that truth will defend itself and that the people who serve it do so consciously and at their own risk, a thought which, I must admit, is by all means correct but not very practical.

PHOTO:

Photo from the States – 'The Catamount Killing'. On set with the actress Anne Wedgeworth, the protagonist of the film.

AMERYKANSKIE MARZENIE

Today the English language is invading all the languages of the world and that's why, in defiance, I've written the title in Polish. The American dream is the dream of Americans of a better, more prosperous life but it's also a dream about America. Millions of people from all over the world believe that the new continent is a place where dreams come true, a place of equal chances and just rewards for resourcefulness and good work. America is the address under which paradise on earth is to be found. Many believe this, and not just those who attempt to force the gates of paradise, but also those who have never lifted a finger to break out of their inaction. For them it's enough that across the ocean there's a paradise which one can visit in one's dreams and, since there is something to dream about, one can reconcile oneself to a bleak life without any perspectives.

American dreams are best sold at the cinema and I suppose that's why American cinema has conquered the world. A film screening is like a drug, and a narcotic dream shows a dream world which no one expects to conform to reality. Dreams are a journey into a fairytale world: the fairytale can sometimes be cruel, sometimes bloody, but we forgive it a great deal just because it takes place on another planet which is called the USA.

Seeing today the fall of European cinema, I'm saddened that behind it there is no
European dream – ‘Un rêve européen!’ (somehow it would be natural to give it a French name). Very few people on our old continent believe today that agreements from Maastricht bring us something better – a common fear prevails about what we have lost rather than happiness from what we are gaining. It's as if Europe's bright future was already behind us and we cynically repeat that the best has been and gone and there is only worse to come.

Writing “we”, I have in mind Western Europeans. For us in central Europe the perspective is a lot brighter and I think that amongst Poles, Czechs or Hungarians the concept of being European has a judgemental value. It's not for nothing that in past years we would shout out “Europe!” at the sight of a clean toilet or a smiling waitress.

When twenty years ago I was faced with a dilemma, to make a modest film in America or not, my perspective was completely different. I was coming from Europe at a time when the European dream was indisputable. Twenty years ago in Paris, Munich or Rome there was a feeling that our European life was materially a little poorer but spiritually a lot richer than life across the ocean. Twenty years ago in Europe excellent theatre flourished, great novels were coming out and exquisite films were being made which Americans dreamt of in vain. Who could compete with Bunuel, Fellini, Antonioni or Truffaut? No Hollywood film could match the fantasy or originality of Bergman’s or Truffaut's achievements. The American film industry gave the impression of a behemoth which produces mass products which are perfect for large department stores. European culture had something of a noble craft in it, something reminiscent of the work of a tailor or a cobbler whose sewing is custom-made and will never be matched by even the best mass-produced product.

Writing these words, I thought of how long I have not worn custom-made suits or shoes – and yet at one time I used to wear such clothes and I remember the measurements taken by a seamstress who used to sew our shirts. And here, please forgive a minor digression which is somehow on the way because it was from the time of my first journey abroad. I found myself in Italy, in Santa Caterina on the Ligurian coast. It was late autumn, a long time after the end of the season. I was the only tourist and I wanted to go by motorboat to Portofino but the crew said that it wasn’t worth setting sail with just one passenger. They suggested that if I bought three tickets, they’d set sail. I understood their reasoning but I could barely afford just one ticket, so there was nothing left to do but to wait and see if another passenger would appear. After a quarter of an hour, a pair of affluent looking Italians appeared and the sailor agreed to sail. On the way, I timidly struck up a conversation, interested, as always, with whom I was sharing my adventure. It turned out that my companion was a producer of men’s underwear from Milan. He proudly told me how from a small workshop in which he had employed a few women he had ended up with a factory hall in which he produced thousands of shirts every day and he could produce more if he could find an outlet for them. When he found out that I was a passenger from behind the Iron Curtain (in those years this was still a rarity), he rejoiced as if this was the hand of providence.
“I'll make you the representative of my company in Poland,” he proposed without a moment’s thought. Back then I was a third-year student at the film school in Lodz and I burst out laughing, thinking about how I would arrange the legalisation of my role in the ministry or some foreign trade headquarters (in those years it was completely impossible). The shirtmaker did not understand the reason for my amusement and asked me why his proposition was not to my liking. I started to explain to him that I had another profession which consumed me – that I'm a novice film-director and I can't get involved in business (today no one would be able to give such an answer!) The industrialist respected my calling and proposed something else:

“I'll give you ten of my shirts as a present. You'll simply wear them and if someone notices and asks what the shirt is, then you'll take out my visiting card and say that I'm looking for outlets for my goods behind the Iron Curtain.”

The prospect was quite tempting and, feeling embarrassed, I was ready to accept when my interlocutor began to look at the shirt I was wearing. I felt terrible because it was slightly ragged – I was wearing some old pre-war shirt of my father’s. The manufacturer studied it carefully and saddened said:

“Now I understand your reaction,” he said “You wear custom-made shirts. I can see. You would never wear off-the-peg clothing. I understand. Artists attach great importance to such things…”

I could not deny it and the mirage of ten Italian shirts vanished forever, but I remembered for life that compared with off-the-peg clothing, the high quality of hand-made work dazzles. At least that's how it once was when I was still very young.

Twenty years ago in the States I was offered work in the film industry. I was asked to make a film of a novel by James Hadley Chase, an author who was unknown to me. There was already a finished screenplay but my producer agreed to any changes that I wanted to make. When today I think of such a luxury, it brings tears to my eyes. Back then, in New York, I was torn with indecision whether it was worth occupying oneself with such a vile occupation as filming the second-rate novel of a crime writer, who I later found out was a best-selling author. However, it was perfectly clear to me that even on a train journey I had never picked up any of his books. The arguments in favour of accepting the offer arose from a desire for adventure. I hadn't yet made any films abroad and I dreamt of it, just like every artist who wants to prove to the world that he counts not just on his native, home turf but can tell a story in an interesting way even when he's in foreign exile. I knew America a little by then, but of course I took it in with the eyes of a tourist. I had been in the country for nearly a year, which had been filled with readings and visits to various universities, as well as meetings with audiences to which I presented my film. After a warm welcome at the festival in New York, 'Family Life' was sometimes compared to a fashionable hit film at the time entitled 'Five Easy Pieces', with Jack Nicholson. Of course, this did not
demonstrate a real knowledge of the States and I was aware that I wouldn't make a real American film if I based it on my own ideas, so the support of a bestseller was justified. On the other hand, my auteur pride and a sense of cultural superiority told me to spurn the modest proposal of a film which was to be made as an independent production. Admittedly, behind it stood the legendary Otto Preminger, but not in person because the film wasn't supported by a union; therefore, I could be in the running as a director.

The problem lay in who was doing who a favour: was it me accepting ‘grudgingly’ this proposition, or my producer agreeing ‘grudgingly’ to hire an almost unknown, young European director (and an Eastern European one to boot). The problem remained unresolved. Temptation got the better of me – to make, out of a silly (in my haughty opinion) story about a crime, my own 'Crime and Punishment'. Working with a very compliant American writer, I rewrote half the screenplay, in the second half adding my ‘punishment’. The protagonist who kills a cashier, and thanks to a subtle intrigue escapes justice, falls under the weight of his own conscience. He gives himself up into the hands of the law, at the end dramatically calling out to the good policeman: “Kill me, have mercy and just kill me!” Earlier his lover says something to the contrary – that she would like to go to jail and in that way free herself from a feeling of guilt (these words always aroused a murmur of disapproval in the audience). Previously, I intended to lead the audience on in the story in such a way that everyone would want the crime to happen. The victim was to be a dull and unpleasant cashier and the protagonists considered that they had experienced so much injustice that they were entitled to a good life. The road to this life leads through murder. I showed it in a drastic, extremely disgusting manner, surprising the viewer who expected a sterile, plastic world in which the only thing that counts is intelligent intrigue. This was centred around the question of whether the protagonists were able to outsmart the detectives and shift the suspicion in the direction of the non-existent lover of the luckless cashier who they created themselves beforehand by appearing at night in disguise.

After rewriting the screenplay, the arduous search for the cast began. We needed actors that were fairly well-known but not too expensive, ones who people would not go specially to see but who they would recognize on the poster. The male villain was to be played by the German-American star from 'The Magnificent Seven' Horst Buchholz, and I must admit a quite nationalistic satisfaction from the fact that a German would be the philosophizing murderer. Today I would no longer feel such a satisfaction considering this thought to be too shallow, but twenty years ago the war was still a trauma for me. We had more problems with the female part - it was to be a woman well over forty who is experiencing her last crazy love affair. In the screenplay, her twenty-year-old daughter is the wife of the local policeman who in the end becomes the heavy hand of the law.

In searching for the cast, my producer suggested an actress who had received an Oscar (or maybe just a nomination) for the supporting role played alongside, the as yet unknown, Gene Hackman in the famous film 'Bonnie and Clyde'. She originated
from Sweden, an outstanding stage actress who was also the epitome of calm and stability – someone who had their feet firmly on the ground. During our conversation we quickly connected and I thought that I'd slightly rewrite the screenplay and take advantage of the contrast between her stability and the madness which she descends into under the influence of the murky love for the criminal stranger from Germany. We quickly rewrote it, scene by scene, and showed it to the actress, who often had good suggestions. A week later, the screenplay was finished, as if altered by a tailor, and it seemed to fit like a glove. I signed the financially pitiful contract and we were to start shooting in two days’ time. Suddenly, the actress phoned me and said that she wouldn't play the part. I asked why. She answered that she'd tell me some day but right now she was giving me a firm warning not to get my hopes up. She wouldn't play the part. It seemed as if she was offended because she refused any further discussion.

The film fell apart. Without the main actress there was no financing and we were all left out in the cold. The producer was tearing his hair out but – what is significant and how American – he didn't even ask me how it came about and who was at fault. All our strength went into clearing up the situation. The Swedish actress's refusal was final and one should not be deluded that she would ever change her mind. Therefore, a replacement had to be found. Finding an actress for the main part in two days seemed to be practically impossible, particularly as it had to be a 'minor star' so someone that the viewer would recognize and buy a cinema ticket to see. I frantically phoned around my friends asking for advice. Help came in the form of Jerry Schatzberg (the director of 'Scarecrow' with Hackman). He asked what the focus of the film was – was it just on the female lead? I said no that it also focused on the intrigue and on a certain thought and finally on the male part, which was quite well cast. In answer to this Schatzberg advised me to take whoever I could and then shoot it focusing more on the partner. “In the worse case you'll have a film with a bad female part,” he added “That's not the worst that could happen.” On the spot he recommended the actress from 'Scarecrow'. He knew that she'd read my screenplay and was a little disappointed that she had not been considered.

There was hope on the horizon. I remembered Schatzberg's actress and the producer promised to take the blame on himself that I hadn't proposed the part to her earlier. The actress replied through her agent that she didn't accept roles the day before shooting and if she were to make an exception, then it was under the condition that there would be no preliminary talks with the director, no readings and, God forbid, no screen test but first the contract and then talks – otherwise we could look for somebody else. The producer asked me whether I was sure. Remembering Schatzberg's advice, I said yes.

The next morning, I arranged a meeting with the actress in the Manhattan flat that had been rented for me. Filled with emotion, I opened the door and my legs buckled underneath me – I understood that I would perish and that the film would be completely rubbish. The actress looked like the sister (younger, at that) of the one
who would be playing her daughter and her face was like the mask of a beautiful but stupid doll (where was my Swede with her feet firmly on the ground?). To add to this, she was uncommunicative – she gazed at me vaguely and kept bursting into laughter (for example, when I asked her about Shakespeare, explaining that the role is similar to Lady Macbeth.) After a quarter of an hour, I understood that all that remained was to break my own directing contract, secretly leave the States and never return again. I phoned my agent Howard (who once scared me at the festival in New York, saying that I took as a threat. I associated the word ‘agent’ with the CIA) Howard, a native of Bialystok, took the whole thing very seriously but did not share my despair. He said that there was a way out of trouble: the actress’s contract became legally binding within twenty-four hours and if I gave her my fee as compensation, that she would probably agree to give up the part and then we would still have one or two days to look further.

Once again there was a ray of hope. Without any grudges, I decided to shoot a film without being paid, just to free myself of the shame of a terrible cast. The only thing that bothered me was that I had to phone the producer and tell him all of this. I confessed to my agent that the necessity for this dramatic conversation was hanging over me. With an understanding smile, Howard said that he would do it for me, after which he switched on his speaker phone and told me to listen. “As a lesson,” he emphasized, laughing at my European embarrassment.

On the speaker phone I heard the hoarse voice of the producer. Howard began the conversation with something completely different.

“You know,” he said “You're paying that Pole very little for his work. This contract is a joke and he's working for you for peanuts!”

The producer was outraged.

“Why are you bringing this up? The contract is signed and that's that!”

“Yes, but you're paying him very little!”

“He's completely unknown in the States so he can't be expensive!” screamed the producer.

“Exactly,” my agent picked up on this “He's cheap and that's why he's wrong! He doesn't want to work with that actress that he liked yesterday.”

I expected yelling but in America people rarely waste time and energy on externalizing their feelings, compared to Europe. All the effort went into finding a solution. It was agreed that compensation, in the form of my small wage, would be proposed to the actress's agent while we continued our search.
Appeased, I rushed home in order to start making calls when I heard banging on the door. The actress from the morning had appeared again. I don't know how she got past the doorman but, seeing her, I understood that no one would have been able to stop her. She was sweating and had cold, narrowed eyes. She spoke in a quiet, husky voice which at any moment could have developed into a scream.

I won't quote her insults because strong words in a foreign language are like water off a duck’s back. I found out that I was one of the parts of my body and that I could put the money that my agent had offered her in another part of my body. I could also leave the States even today and never return but she would play that part whether I liked it or not. I was struck dumb by this fury – I wondered whether this really was the same person that had stood before me a few hours earlier. The false youth had disappeared – bags appeared under her eyes and the voice sounded like I wanted it to sound in the suicide scene at the end of the film. I understood that Howard was right. I was a young and inexperienced director and that morning I hadn't noticed that there was more to the actress than met the eye. I humbly said that it would be best if we forgot about this conversation and that she played the role. And that's what happened. The role proved to be outstanding although only years later, and for another film, did this strange lady receive an Oscar, for a supporting role. And during filming I realized even further how inexperienced I really was. My star acted very well and was fairly disciplined but she would cause savage rows every time the filming schedule changed. She had no whims apart from one: before each shot she would redo her make-up ad nauseum and constantly ask to have her nose powdered. Any experienced director would immediately have realized that the star was snorting cocaine, which twenty years ago in the States was already quite fashionable. My star administered a dose depending on whether the scene was lyrical or dramatic. Once, towards the end of filming, she had a bit too much of the drug and in the fight scene with her film lover she hit him with superhuman strength, badly damaging his eyebrow. An ambulance and the police had to be called - an investigation was carried out and there was a court case. The actor received compensation paid from the insurance for the civil liability of the actress. Worst of all was that after this unfortunate incident, there was a love scene left to be shot that had been postponed for the last day of shooting. Before filming, two lawyers appeared on set and through them the actors negotiated who would touch who and in what manner. I had nothing to say apart from insisting that everything be done in profile as the German lover had a dressing on one eye. Today, years later, I believe that what came out of it was one of the most passionate love scenes that I have ever shot. The actress received an award (in Tehran, I think). The film was modestly successful: it was bought by many countries (it was indeed co-produced with Germany) and it circulated the whole of Europe and English-speaking countries. Many years later, when I was in Kenya, I was recognized because of this one film. Similarly, in New Zealand. To begin with in Poland it did not qualify for distribution. Apparently, the film purchasing committee was divided – some of my doubtful friends claimed that one should not show that Polish artists abroad make such commercial films, others (including a certain Party poet) claimed that they
should be shown so as to discredit false authorities. It was bought only twenty years later and, ironically, it hit the screens in Poland in art house cinemas as part of the film club programme. It was shown on television at a good time, while my other films are aired around midnight. That which had been so commercial turned out to be artistic today – one could even say problematic and the film lived to see a few serious reviews and analyzes. So that's how standards change, just as the times change.

Do I regret making 'The Catamount Killing'? No. I'm rather proud of it. I made that film straight after 'Illumination' and I had a great desire to reach a wider public and at the same time to remain myself. And I think I succeeded.

Afterwards, I had many offers of fairly similar 'B-movies' and I could reject them without regret because, thanks to that adventure, I knew what I really loved about my work. And I was not tempted to repeat the experience in which what hung over me was probably more ignorance than compromise. For example, how was I to judge the work of the set designer who had arranged the inside of a police station for me when it was the first American police station that I'd seen in my life? I think that today I know a lot more about the States. I've already managed to experience a lot there. I learnt that I shouldn't tell Americans stories about themselves, the kind that I would gladly write and film myself for the purposes of Europe. I'll compare this with my favourite example of a hypothetical Bulgarian who is making a film for me in Poland – I too don't believe him at first.

And by the way, only now has the situation changed so much that making a film in America is the highest honour in our industry. In the eyes of the viewers, real films are American films. There are no successors to Bergman, Bunuel or Fellini – in the nineties there appeared only one European who defended the sense of auteur cinema – that was Kieslowski. He was my close friend and I value him just as much as a human being as an artist. This helps to overcome ordinary envy – the happiness that I felt for what he was doing was greater than the regret that I hadn't made 'Decalogue', 'The Double Life of Veronique' and 'Three Colours'.

I should add one last word about my first actress - the one who refused to act in 'The Catamount Killing'. She phoned a few months later and we agreed to talk. She said that her psychologist had forbidden her from playing the part. In the screenplay there was a statement that the heroine was once beautiful, only later did she grow fat and ugly. And my actress had not been pretty as a young girl. She debuted as the daughter of General Grant and after some actor’s line extolling her beauty, she came out onto the stage and the audience feel about laughing. From that time on she had had a complex but she hid it so well that not for a moment did I think that she needed advice from a psychologist.
I can easily confess that I never courted Marxism, never believed in the idea and that I didn’t expect the coming of a communist paradise. However, I cannot take credit for this. My father was an exploiter and at the beginning of the fifties I was reproached for my unsuitable class background. And despite this, I subconsciously took on many views which only years later I recognised as a result of a communist upbringing. The most dangerous of these erroneous beliefs was the fact that democracy, which is weak by nature, must lose when confronted with dictatorship. As a consequence of this, I was convinced that Communism would win over what’s called ‘the free world’. The second stupidity which I was inclined to believe was the conviction that Communism is essentially more rational, and so may economically win. The free market seemed to me a field in which so much is wasted that a planned economy beat it hands down. Only when I was studying, did I begin to understand that I was wrong. With time, the scale of this mistake revealed itself to me fully philosophically, particularly in relation to society.

I remember that my left-wing father, in the pre-war sense, was outraged about how workers were treated during the Stalinist years. He himself educated one of his foremen to be an engineer and as an employer he felt a responsibility for the people that he employed. In real socialism that responsibility was transferred somewhere far away onto an anonymous institution.

From the pre-war ethos I adopted the belief that every person deserves respect. I remember how I was filled with astonishment hearing the party voices that spoke with contempt about the simple man, if only that of Minister Wilhelmi.

Another difficult episode from this series was the issue of reward for the work of the film crew on ‘From a Far Country’. The producer promised that a fair amount in foreign currency would be divided up amongst the crew in return for efficient work. As the film production team ‘Tor’, taking advantage of the first ‘Solidarity’, we ensured that the division took place officially through payment into foreign currency PKO bank accounts, which those who were rewarded were to open. The department of culture of the Central Committee were against this. I was summoned to a meeting where I heard the argument that the prizes could apply to those artists who already have access to foreign currency shops, but due to social-educational reasons it was unacceptable that similar privileges be granted to the proletarian part of the crew – the drivers, the lighting technicians, the construction workers or the dressers. The matter dragged on until Martial law, when I took advantage of a stay in Italy and intervened with the Italian Communist authorities, threatening that the matter would be leaked to the press. After a year, the foreign currency bonus was finally paid out accordingly.

From my youth I remember Lenin’s baleful parable that capitalism will sell the rope
that it will hang itself from. Even in the sixties, the great economist Galbraith stated
that the Soviet economy had performed well. As far as I remember, it was not until
the Vietnam war that I myself felt that economically socialism was losing once and
for all. The economy of eternal shortages wasn’t able to cope with the burdens of war
and the fortifications on the Chinese border. In the West’s memory, Vietnam is lost –
from our perspective that seems doubtful. I remember fierce discussions which I
conducted with Susan Sontag, who praised the regime of Ho Chi Minh. Over a dozen
years later (by now in times of remorse), I asked her in Cannes whether she intended
to compensate the world for the stupidities that she’d committed or given her backing
to. She was ready to admit that such an action was necessary. Admitting one’s
mistake is not enough. If the grandchildren of Germans, who have Auschwitz on their
conscience, come to plant trees and tidy up the paths of the museum, then perhaps it
is worth accepting the same standard towards those who supported Stalin’s or Pol
Pot’s crimes.

I say this often in the West, provoking outrage, because after equating Marxism with
Hitler’s ideology is not universally accepted even though, structurally speaking, both
the themes of racial supremacy and class supremacy contain theoretical analogies.
Never in my life have I met an ex-Nazi; however, I do remember a Stalinist criminal
who sometimes appeared at film school to visit his daughter, our classmate. He was a
man who had been formally charged post-October and, even though the punishment
meted out to him seemed a mockery in the face of the crime that he had committed, I
have to admit that as a disgraced man he aroused both pity and fear. However, in the
West I often meet completely innocent believers of the idea which bore fruit to a
crime – today they are saddened by the mistake they made but, in general, they don’t
see it as a fault. And they are usually people who are concerned with some greater
matter. In reality, they are nearer to me in temperament than the good-natured
bourgeoisie, who were always relatively indifferent to matters of the world.
Whenever I bring up the demand for compensation, I feel that I am being
unreasonably harsh. Then I remember the 1955 Youth Festival and those crowds of
fanatical followers, I see those eyes narrowed in the face of my doubts. Back then, I
preferred the quiet bourgeoisie but today I’m afraid to make a clear-cut judgement.

For me, the most painful memory is of a meeting that I had in France just after the
imposition of Martial law. I was already in the West and that’s why I was able to
attend it while my Polish colleagues were stuck at home. Meanwhile, in the south of
France an review of Polish films was taking place. The copies of the films were
already there and it seemed to me a great opportunity to appear in such a place and
talk about our issues. Agnieszka Holland came with me from Sweden and for a few
days we were the guests of the very nice organisers, who were members of the
Communist party. Most of the cultural gatherings, particularly those concerning our
part of the world, are organised in France by Communists. Our hosts were friendly
and kind, thus led by an ordinary human intuition, we spoke privately with them in an
open and direct manner. It turned out that their knowledge of Marxist-Leninist
classics was completely pathetic, so we had to explain what they believe in, what democratic centralism is and what practical role the vanguard of the working-class, that is the party, plays. I remember that they were astonished by my story of how I was stopped in the Ursus district of Warsaw by the people’s militia when I was passing the factory by car during the time of the strikes. For a moment, the militia suspected me of contact with the workers but after hearing how I spoke, they left me alone, observing: “You’re an intellectual – what would you talk to these workers about?” Meanwhile, just at that time, the workers-intelligentsia alliance was born, which turned the Polish reality into an unexplainable phenomenon for Western communists (let’s also add to this the role of the Church). As a result of our ideological conversations, our French hosts’ beliefs seemed to be powerfully shaken. On our side, we were unrelenting, demanding that they draw practical conclusions which they put into practice.

And it genuinely looked as if they were going to return their party membership cards. Meanwhile, something else happened.

On returning to Paris, I found out that the Polish embassy had received a denunciation based on the accounts of our conversations. The denunciation was harsher in relation to Agnieszka, who had publicly stated that General Jaruzelski was a Polish version of Pinochet, which is factually true and flatters Jaruzelski. The reaction of the Polish authorities was unrelenting – Agnieszka was unable to return, while I received only a warning. What affected me was not that but rather the fact that my ordinary human intuition had let me down – the festival people who we had spoken to did not look like informers. Moreover, I became convinced of this when I met them a few months later in Cannes. They were shocked by my story of the denunciation. They admitted that after we left, they went for a meeting with their party secretary. He convinced them that Agnieszka and I were secret agents paid by the CIA and that’s why we were able to travel despite Martial law, so they were not to believe a word that we had said. After that, he communicated everything to the Polish embassy.

According to the rules of Leninism, that secretary was right. It is forbidden to debate with the enemy. One has to fight him. At least that’s what they taught me at secondary school.

From that perspective how trivial appears the last expression of Leninism that I experienced during the mid-eighties in Poland. I’d come back after a few film productions in the West and the exchange rate between the zloty and foreign currencies was so high that, for a moment, I could feel like a very wealthy man. And that prosperity weighed on me because I saw how my friends - scientists and doctors-who were working honestly were earning only a pittance. Not to mention the many dissidents who lived solely from donations and foreign help. Trying to find a place for myself in this awkward situation, I tried to do something for the city. I wrote to
my district’s department of urban greenery to say that I wanted to pay for the planting
of a few trees on my street. I asked only for permission and perhaps some suggestions
on where and what trees I could plant. I sent this letter, in keeping with the
suggestions of the Deputy Speaker of the Senate, Mrs Skibniewska. And I received a
crushing reply. It said that it was not I, but the department, that is responsible for the
greenery in the city and that they will plant trees when the time comes and that it’s
nothing to do with me. I carried the letter with me and took pleasure in quoting it at a
meeting with the West’s leftists to illustrate to them the Leninist principle of
centralism and the impropriety of any grassroots initiatives. As for the trees, I
planted them without asking anyone again. And they’re growing well.

When my thoughts return to the final collapse of the communist delusion, I remember
a conversation that I had in Moscow towards the end of the seventies with a high-
ranking Russian Central Committee officer. Privately, he admitted that I was right in
my argument that the countries from our Eastern bloc had lost the technological race
with the West. And he added an original footnote: in his view this defeat was
connected to Poland. It was Polish stubbornness and petit bourgeois nationalism
which meant that in 1920 the October revolution didn’t join up with the German one
and didn’t encompass the whole of Western Europe as far as Spain. And there was
such an opportunity. Then the world’s progress would have developed differently.
Communist Europe would not have allowed the imposition of such vagaries of
fortune which today the West imposes. How many technical inventions are the result
of a foreign way of thinking? The car or the telephone, for instance. Instead of them,
transportation systems could have been developed and those which were based on the
technical ideas of Europe would have led the field. So, that is why the failure of the
system is mainly the fault of the Poles.

I came into contact with great technologies when I travelled several times with my
films to Novosibirsk. The first time I was there was with ‘The Structure of Crystal’
and to this day I remember the astounding discussion that followed the screening. The
scientists gathered in the room grasped all the ideas in my film which I as the creator
wanted to convey, and what is more, they knew how to comment on them. My
impractical main character who worked at a small meteorological station was, in their
understanding, a man whom we owe more to than someone who
is developing
science. For he is developing the soul and he shares his achievements with his
surroundings. All of us would go to him for consolation if something in life broke
down. His selfless service is more important than a lot of fruitless research.

After such an interpretation of the film it was easy for me to enter the
‘Akademgorodok’ community. Accepted as a physicist who makes films, I had access
to many outstanding figures of science - people who made up the Russian space
programme. And from them I heard something amazing. In Novosibirsk, constant
observation was carried out on research publications from the States and Western
Europe. They kept track of which area of research was kept classified or suddenly
disappeared from publication. That’s when a signal was given that the field has some military applications. Then research followed.

This whole activity was not far removed from espionage. One could describe it rather as open-source intelligence. It had to be conducted by scientists because it’s hard to imagine such an enormous mass of specialists working in the secret services. Stories of games and subterfuges practiced by both parties astonished me then. I remember when President Kennedy spoke of the construction of the ‘clean’ atomic bomb. He did this at a time when apparently some sort of path of development of this weapon had collapsed and only twenty years later the invention of the neutron bomb was announced. Just as much mysterious information surrounded the ‘Star Wars' weapons (regardless of the whether they were a bluff or not). Although I don’t believe in conspiracy theories, I suppose that the most fascinating technological struggles are those that are practically not known by anyone – at least certainly not politicians, economists or public opinion.

In view of our silly illusions for many years, it appeared to me that Communism could surpass capitalism thanks to the fact that it could concentrate its means and focus them on one goal. After all, it seems logical to build one productive factory instead of three which will compete with one another until, in the end, two of them go bankrupt. This would appear to be a waste, when it reality it’s quite the opposite. It was planned industry that for so many years wasted people’s work! Similarly, democracy seems defenceless towards enlightened dictatorship - the necessity of convincing voters and parliamentary battles causes a loss of strength for what could be decided with one gesture of authoritarian power. And yet it’s the opposite. It is through this convincing and agreeing that better decisions are born.

Despite the fact that all this has seemed so simple for a long time now, to this day people of my generation find it difficult to differentiate the values of sort of material goods from the price which one can gain from them. Our privatisation constantly founders by this mental error, inherited from Communism.

The set of concepts associated with democracy are still not very accessible for my generation. Just a dozen years ago, during the time of the student strikes of the first 'Solidarity', for the first time I formulated for my own use the simple thought that political differences have nothing to do with ethics. One can in good faith be right-wing or left-wing, opt for higher or lower taxes, greater or lesser state intervention, greater or lesser social care and do this from the noblest moral motives, bearing in mind the interests of other people. It’s just the same as the difference of opinion of two doctors who give a different diagnosis and propose different treatments for the same noble cause. Democracy assumes that we will think rationally about political solutions without unnecessary emotions (shouldn’t we be wary of overly-emotional doctors?). Meanwhile, Communism has left us with the conviction that politics involves a struggle between good and evil, the honest and the dishonest, selfishness
and altruism, which is inherently false. Good and bad people stand on both sides of the barricades and there are, more often than not, many more than just two sides, depending on the issue which we are considering at that moment. This multiplicity does not agree with our Manichean experience – if in the old world there were only good and bad people, then one shouldn’t ally oneself with bad people in any matter. That’s why buying a tram ticket to profit the unjust authorities was morally contestable in those days, whereas today it’s not.

When, during the first few months of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government, our friend Joanna Szczepkowska suddenly stated on television that Communism had ended, we were, for a moment, dazzled by the truth within this expression. Not long after, another one of my friends, Krzysztof Kieslowski, declared that it was a terrible untruth: “Communism lives on in the depths of our hearts”. The fact is that no one has seen the corpse. And another fact is that we’re liberating ourselves from enslavement slowly, in small steps. But to end with, I must optimistically write that, admittedly, hard times are coming for us artists because we’re no longer speaking “instead of”, or in anyone’s name, as in the past, but for ourselves, and yet it’s better for us today because we’re speaking honestly. It is with pleasure that I repeat a metaphor that was invented during his time by the Cardinal of Manila, Sin, the hero of his country’s liberation from Marcos’ dictatorship. When asked at a press conference in Rome how he felt as the leader of a triumphant church, he answered that he felt like the donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The donkey also thought that the applause and the palm branches were for him.

In January, 1981 I was invited to be part of the jury of the Manila festival. My newest film at the time, ‘From a Far Country’, was to be screened outside of the competition as part of a special gala screening.

I went to Manila aware that I was taking part in a government festival of a dishonest regime. I had my justification in the company that I found myself in: the head of the jury was Satyajit Ray, while I was seated with the impeccably honest left-wing ‘Times’ critic from London David Robinson. Apart from this, I was aware that we were not happy with the boycott of Polish cultural events by Western artists; however, what did make us happy was when those artists behaved with dignity, not identifying culture with a bad government.

In the Philippines it was not easy. Mrs. Marcos was hurriedly building a pharaoh palace in time for the festival. Apparently, because of the hurry the ceiling fell down, burying a few dozen builders. Concrete was poured over the ruins so when we sat in the hall, we were aware that underneath us lay unburied people.

These kinds of stories were spun by opposition Filipino filmmakers. Their films were not allowed in the festival and we, as members of the jury, had assigned to us security officers who had the unclear task of guarding us so that nothing should happen to us.
It was obvious that it was also so that we were not in contact with the wrong people. The officers were young and, from the perspective of my socialist experience, were disarmingly naïve. During a walk in the forest with one of them, we held a shooting tournament – we aimed his gun at a piece of paper pinned to a tree. As a phlegmatic type of person, I shoot with accuracy and I gained great respect in the eyes of my minder. I took advantage of this by escaping from him each day for forbidden meetings at the university with the aforementioned Cardinal Sin. These escapes were childishly simple. During siesta time, my guard would sit under the door of my apartment while I made an arrangement with my neighbour that I would climb over the balcony to his room. Then, behind my guard’s back, I left the hotel and took a taxi to my meeting. The system of looking after foreigners was so imperfect that I never had the feeling that I was being followed in town. I grew to like my officer guard so much that when I was leaving I wanted to give him a present. He was nearly my height so I thought that I would give him a nearly new jacket of a decent brand as I had torn the suit trousers during some escapade. The jacket was already packed when, as we were parting, my officer admitted that he had a request of me. I was to travel from Manila to Germany and he had just bought a new Mercedes and was waiting for some spare part to come from Stuttgart – he gave me a number and asked me to call regarding the matter. I understood that my present was completely inappropriate and it was rather me who could expect a gift from my officer as he surpassed me with his wealth.

The get-togethers with the Marcoses were unusually frequent. Practically every day during the course of the festival, a palace officer came with an invitation for supper in the company of Imelda and her guests. Sometimes, the president himself was present. It was impossible to decline although accepting the invitation had its risks. It wasn’t so bad when the supper was to take place at the palace but sometimes, without any warning, Mrs. Marcos took her guests to various restaurants in town. When she entered, the public stood up from their tables and the national anthem was played, then towards the end of the evening the beautiful Imelda took the microphone and sang popular hits to the whole room. She had a great voice and a small repertoire but the delight of her subordinates was unchanging (one has to add that they heard these hits only once while some of us jurors heard them every evening.)

Supper in town was dangerous because of the risk of poisoning to all of us. Assassination attempts were constantly being made on the Marcoses and during our first meeting, the Italian ambassador advised me to never order the same dish as Mrs Marcos and not to drink the table water as it may be poisoned. I was careful to do this but Mrs Marcos soon noticed and loudly commented that Poles are famous for their courage and it was obvious that I was scared. I answered that if I were to die, I’d rather die in my homeland than someone else’s and asked her why these assassination attempts were made on her. She answered aptly that a fraction of a percent of frustrated oppositionists used such methods but, apart from that, she and her husband, who were elected democratically, were loved by their people. It’s hard to
argue with this. Willy-nilly, I continued the subject of the assassination attempts and that’s when Imelda answered me, with a great dose of authenticity, that on only a few occasions did she realize that she could die. During many assassination attempts, she didn’t have time to notice what was going on. That was the case during bomb explosions or street shootings. However, she felt the closeness to death when one of her own guards attacked her with a sword. She remembered the raising of the sword, the slow motion, the blow on the arm after which she lost the feeling in her hand because it cut through one of the nerves (here she showed us her scars). She said that in the background one of her bodyguards was aiming at the assassin but she was still in the line of fire so he didn’t shoot and the assassin raised his sword and struck again. I don’t know how she survived. I understand that she was aware of the fact that her life hung by a thread. And I suppose that she was sincere when she spoke of her belief that her nation loved her and that she was serving her homeland.

Human reason accepts so easily all kinds of justifications, power obscures the conscience, reason is able to explain everything. I don’t believe that a theory can originate from this about the banality of evil. Certainly, looking at it from close up, one can detect when self-hypocrisy is exposed and evil becomes completely conscious. In dictatorship, there comes a moment when one gives an order to beat someone up from the opposition or at least scare them, and more often than not, to take their life. Am I to believe that General Jaruzelski knew nothing about the killing of Popieluszko and Gierek didn’t know about Pyjas’ death. I’m certain that the presidential couple of the Philippines also had such moments in their past but they experienced them without witnesses and I, standing to the side, wasn’t able to trouble them with any of my questions. The one thing I did was to make sure that the jury’s verdict pointed out that the Filipino dissidents’ films had not been admitted to the competition (although, in truth, I saw those films and I think that more often than not they were not admitted for erotic reasons rather than ones related to freedom).

The director of the festival refused to publicly read this passage so part of the jury, including me, refused to take part in the awards ceremony. The bargaining lasted until the last minute. Despite the ‘live’ television transmission, there was quite a big delay and finally Mrs Marcos herself allowed the verdict to be read in its entirety, after which, in her own speech, she admitted that some mistakes had been made.

And this is the point which always drove me to despair: that the authorities are able to look at themselves critically for as long as they're in power. And in this way they knock the weapon out of their enemies’ hands.

I experienced this very vividly in the last months of Gierek’s power. Wanting to improve his credibility, the secretary of the Central Committee decided to ‘tame’ some of the artists and started to invite us for conversations, during which he encouraged us to freely state our grievances against the authorities. I prepared myself for this conversation, aware that many elements related to my work were dependent
on this person – he could take away my passport and not allow me to work in this country. I also knew what the purpose of this conversation was – he wanted to be able to say that in the end “we came to an understanding”. And that’s why to every one of my charges against the government he would shake his head and claim that the authorities were also worried that so many things were declining, that corruption was rife, that there were incompetent people in important positions, that the economy was collapsing. I blurted out most of my arguments and the secretary noted them down and agreed with me. Finally, I had to fire from the largest cannon. I said that I was fed up that the authorities didn’t protect my national interest towards our Eastern neighbours. To this the secretary narrowed his eyes and asked: “And what would you know about that? Have you been present during our conversations?” And indeed my argument was poor – we don’t know to what extent the Polish authorities were driven by servility and fear and to what extent pressure could have been applied. We don’t know whether they were able to oppose and not introduce Martial law. I imagine that one day historians will say that, yes, they could have, but the state of people’s consciousness who had been terrorised by fear probably wouldn’t have allowed it. Subjectively, are they guilty? I don’t believe that someone will find the answer before Judgement Day.

When finishing this chapter a few years ago, I assumed that my encounters with Marxism still in power was a closed chapter. However, fate played a trick on me.

In 1998 I was invited as a guest of honour to the film festival in Kerala with my film ‘Our God’s Brother’, which was based on a play written by the Pope. The state of Kerala lies in southern India and is traditionally governed by orthodox communists and is inhabited by the largest percentage of Christians in India. They make up a quarter of the nearly thirty million population. Already at the airport, I tried to gently bring to the journalists’ attention my conviction that Christianity is a proposal that is eternally relevant, while Marxism was a big chapter in the last two hundred years but has already been exhausted and I don’t believe that it could still be an important source of inspiration for humanity. A few hours after my arrival, the official opening ceremony of the festival took place. In the largest cinema in Kerala’s capital, Trivandrum, I sat in an armchair on the stage and a traditional wreath of flowers was hung around my neck, after which the prime minister appeared with a speech based on the idea that, in keeping with Lenin’s teachings, film is the most important of the arts for us. Next, he delivered some mysterious passage in the local language (the rest of the speech was in English). From the atmosphere in the auditorium I figured out that he was talking about me, but without any translation I ignored that fragment. To end with, I said a few words of thanks for the honour of being invited as the guest of honour. I complained about globalization, which doesn’t worry me when it concerns industry and commerce (because, after all, I can use the same toothpaste or brand of car anywhere); however, what worries me is when culture loses its local character and universalism becomes market-driven rather than an expression of values which have universal resonance.
My speech was very kindly received but after I left the stage, I found out that a moment earlier the prime minister, speaking in his native language, had asked rhetorically where the guest of honour had come from and gave two possibilities: one was a beautiful Poland in the hands of workers and peasants, the other was a Poland crushed by the steamroller of capitalist exploitation. The first was supposed to be ruled by people like Gomulka and Gierek, the other by some sort of American spies, such as President Walesa.

Not understanding this alternative, I didn’t get a chance to say which Poland I identified with but, despite which, during the opening ceremony, I was invited (or rather – challenged) to a public debate with an ex-member of the Comintern, an almost eighty-year-old secretary of the local Central Committee. It was to be a public debate, under the open sky, in the nearly forty-degree heat. It was obvious that I couldn’t refuse and two days later I took part in the verbal duel in front of a crowd of over a thousand (it’s easy to get a large audience in India).

During the debate, I came to the sudden realization that my whole experience from the years of Communism was only linked to self-defence. Everyone who took part in public life in those days learnt various tricks - the art of not answering a question - yet we lacked practice in attacking, and here I turned out to be helpless. In his introduction my antagonist stigmatized my statement at the airport in which I stressed that I considered Marxism an exhausted theory. He summarised that thought saying that, instead of propagating such opinions, it would be better if I got down to some learning and studied the classics of Marxism. I tried to kindly reply that seeing that my fellow speaker considered that I am not a worthy enough (that is, not educated enough) contestant for a public debate, then why did he invite me to take part in one, probably wasting the time of those who attended. Undaunted by this, my opponent answered that it would not be a waste of time as he would convince all those present that ignorance doesn’t pay. This cut me to the quick and in my mind I ran through those years when during various courses I had to study and pass exams on Marxism. I remembered that I’d once failed a test on Engels so, without thinking, I suggested that we test one another and asked him what 'Anti-Duhring' was. The Comintern member waved his hand and said that it’s not enough to know the classics, one has to also understand them and he accused me of not comprehending the fact that Christianity is a tool of imperialism and colonialism which serves to enslave nations, while Marxism is a scientific theory of liberation. Other arguments followed, such as that Poland is famous mainly for anti-Semitism as it’s a Christian country, that Polish bishops helped to send Jews to the gas chambers and that the word ‘pogrom’ itself comes from the word ‘Poland’. I tried to interrupt this gibberish; I called on a Russian who was present in the square to say from where the word ‘pogrom’ originates, but these arguments proved to be ineffective. I proposed that we get away from theoretical deliberation and look at the issue empirically. After all, Communism was collapsing.
“Where?” asked the surprised ideologist.

“Well, at least in Russia!” I answered.

The ideologist burst out laughing and said that what I was saying was imperialist propaganda. He explained the matter in detail, citing his personal friendship with a man who he considered the greatest statesman of our century. He was talking about Joseph Stalin. So, Stalin – according to the ideologist – had brilliant intuition when it came to sensing traitors. He could identify a Judas – explained the Comintern member, according to a Christian principle – and that’s why he had to take so many people’s lives as the imperialists were constantly sending their agents at him. Later, during Brezhnev’s reign, a great accident occurred as the old leader didn’t notice that they’d provided him with a secret agent, whose name was Gorbachev, and that agent tried to temporarily seize power. But the course of history cannot be stopped and the Russians continue to vote for communists, and they will return to power. Lenin rightly foresaw that the time will come when we will have to take a step back in order to take two steps forward.

I give an account of these arguments as my amazement does not allow me to find any rational arguments to fight with blatant idiocy in a country that has access to satellite television, the press and the internet. My fellow speaker masterfully changed the ground of the conversation – from trivial demagogy to subtlety in one move. At one point, for example, he pointed out an inconsistency, saying that since as an ex-physicist I admit to Christianity, I contradict the testimony of reason as the Bible is filled with contradictions: in one chapter Christ drives out the money-changers from the temple while in another he asks someone who has been beaten to turn the other cheek. Someone from the audience hurried to my aid, quoting a Sanskrit proverb which says that wisdom begins just at the point where reason ends and no wisdom can express itself differently than through a group of sentences that are seemingly contradictory but are internally consistent. Otherwise – added my defender – wisdom could be contained within a telegram and we know, after all, that one can’t do that. Next to him, there were accusations of Christianity’s inculturation and that without the Judaic and Greek traditions the Gospel has no meaning while they, the Hindus, see the world completely differently and don’t intend to study Jewish and Greek philosophy as they have their own, which it is not possible to reconcile with Christianity.

The friendly Bishop of Trivandrum complained to me that such verbal attacks had been going on for many years now and that Christians preferred to avoid debates as they are overwhelmed by demagoguery. Before I left, I was visited by a Muslim imam who came to congratulate me that I had the courage to engage in a public debate. In my opinion, its outcome remained unresolved, but I felt the inhabitants’ sympathy on my side when the aggressive ideologist made the accusation that
Christianity is a source of intolerance, to which I answered that Marxism also has sins of this sort – in the form of gulags. The ideologist shrugged, claiming that the gulags were an expression of socialist humanism, whereas the fact that today in Kerala they invite me as a guest – that is proof of tolerance. I answered that I had already been in India a dozen times and nobody until now had regarded inviting me as an act of tolerance. And at that moment, Indian hospitality stirred the feelings of the crowd. The ideologist was booed slightly while, the following day, the press reported that he had gone too far.

**THE ADVENTURE WITH THE POPE**

There were two books written about it: the producer Giacomo Pezzali published his memoirs 'Poland – the Last Clapperboard' twice, while Tadeusz Sobolewski wrote the excellent text 'A Layman in the Temple', of which only a fragment was published (a considerable chapter found itself into the volume dedicated to the jubilee of Professor Aleksander Jackiewicz). I want to avoid writing an autobiography but how to skip this adventure which in some way will never be equalled in size? I remember how when exiting Castel Gandolfo, after the screening of the film about the Pope, I said exactly these words: “Such an adventure will happen only once in my life – this simply cannot repeat itself.”

Over dozens of meet-the-author sessions I've answered hundreds of questions regarding my film about the Pope.

According to the statistics, it was seen by more viewers than all of my other films put together and yet it was not a groundbreaking work – it wasn't even outstanding (although it's not up to me to judge my films). However, it was one of the few works made to order and perhaps, from this perspective, it's worth looking at today.

What does an artist-for-hire look like? When does one create to order? Is it ethical? Should one admit to it?

In order to recreate the perspective from which I experienced these things back then I have to go back to the year 1978. I had just finished shooting the film 'Roads in the Night' (at that time it had the more beautiful title: 'Rainy Prelude') and I was writing the screenplays to 'The Constant Factor' and 'The Contract'. It was late spring. I remember I was sitting at a table by an open window in my parents’ flat, which was opposite the Central Warsaw railway station. I was looking at the well-like courtyard in which you couldn't see the sky at all unless you looked directly upwards. And that's when the phone rang. Like a dream: a phone call from Hollywood asking whether I was ready to make a film about John Paul II. I said that I didn't understand why such a film should be made: John Paul II was just beginning his pontificate and a feature film about a living figure seemed to be something absurd. The voice in the receiver – the producer whose name I'd seen in the credits of Zeffirelli's film 'Jesus of Nazareth' – ignored my reservations.
“Do you have time to make such a film?”

As a free man I thought that my time was at my own disposal. I made films in Poland in a rhythm which naturally resulted from my inclination – usually one per year, generally in autumn or winter (I made few films in the summer). So it wasn't a case of time but of the sense of the project.

Not waiting for an answer, the producer asked whether I could come to Rome for talks. I answered honestly that I very much liked to travel and that I’d gladly come to explain to him that such a film was pointless. Despite this, he agreed to invite me and sent the invitation and ticket through the 'Polish Film' institution. In the invitation he did not state the subject of the film because he knew that in such a case even the consent for my travel would be the subject of debate at the Central Committee (every business trip back then had to be approved by the authorities).

Due to some strange coincidence, my flight out of Warsaw fell exactly on the same day as the Pope's arrival on his first pilgrimage to Poland. I was invited to the welcoming committee and I waited on the airport tarmac, with my travel bag, for the arrival of the Al Italia Boeing 727. During our wait, along with the bishops and a handful of figures from public life, we took photographs (which is normally strictly forbidden at the airport). Many years later, I recognized the prominent ears of the then Bishop of Olsztyn, who is now Cardinal Glemp.

Back then I barely knew the Pope – I had met him once or twice in Cracow at the Vetulani’s home (I studied philosophy with the late Janek). Then as a film-school student I asked for his help in resolving difficulties when shooting 'Death of a Provincial' in Tyniec. When I found out that Cardinal Wojtyła had become pope, I felt regret that I'd lost the opportunity to get to know better a man who would be remembered by history. As it turned out – I got such a chance. It happened when the phone rang from Hollywood to my parents’ Warsaw flat.

During my first meeting in Rome, I met Vicenzo La Bella, the one who had called from Hollywood and was one of the few people born as a Vatican citizen. His father was a professional porter of the papal litter who had carried on his shoulders a Benedict, two Pius's and a John. Then for Pope John Paul the ceremony was changed and the litter removed, and the producer's elderly father retired. The second gentleman that I met was the Italian producer Pezzali and the third, the project's initiator, the sought-after Catholic writer Diego Fabbri, the author of the play 'The Trial of Jesus', whose literary stance is perhaps reminiscent of Jerzy Zawieyski.

In accordance with my previous announcement, I tried to explain why, in my opinion, making a biographical film about a living person was completely ludicrous – how on earth can an actor play a role which can be seen by everyone on television ‘in the original’. It seemed to me obvious that the very idea was pointless from the
beginning. The producers explained to me that it was not the case because if we were dealing with apparent interest from investors it meant that such a film must be made. What’s more, it occurred to me that I was the only Polish candidate to direct the film and if I refused, then the film would be made anyway except by an Englishman or American.

It was then for the first time that I was faced with the problem of the obligation or duty of an artist in such a stark form. I was convinced that I could not express myself in a task that was restrictive from all sides – it's something else to make a biographical film about a figure who is no longer alive or to tell the story of some fictional pope (that's what happened in 'The Shoes of the Fisherman'). I felt obliged to respect the privacy of a living man so I couldn’t talk about anything which, undoubtedly, would be most interesting to the viewer – his personal dilemmas, his suffering, his triumphs and failures. In a word: I couldn’t encroach on the sphere of judgement because I would either create a hagiography, so something in the shape of a life of a saint in his lifetime (which to a great extent would be tactless), or I would engage in controversy or judgement, which in this situation was pointless.

It seemed to me that from the point of view of an artist everything that I was doing was doomed to failure (to this day I think that I was right, to some extent) and I remember the surprising words of, I think, Diego Fabbri, who dispelled my doubts by saying:

“Don't worry that this film will not be great. All that it's meant to be is beneficial.”

These words put me on the trail of the task in hand. As a Pole I'm to make a beneficial film for Poland, beneficial for Christianity, beneficial for the Pope himself – and the beneficial element will be the information which will be smuggled through in the film. People are interested in a man who unexpectedly, as the first non-Italian in four hundred years, became Pope. Hence, the title 'From a Far Country'. I came up with it with the author of the book, who also added 'John Paul II'. Poland, a country very far away, behind the Iron Curtain, suddenly became interesting to people who had never heard of it before.

Now the question of principles. Should an artist be beneficial? Brought up in the romantic ethos we all considered (the filmmakers of my generation – the creators of auteur cinema in Poland) that we are most beneficial when we share with the public the depths of ourselves, that is writing and making films that are an easy expression of our personal experiences. Such a definition of auteur cinema is fairly universal, it was similarly formulated by my colleagues in France and Germany and, to tell the truth, my whole cinematic career had such an attitude to the profession as a framework (the American episode which I wrote about earlier as an exception, confirmed this rule).

The proposition of a film about the Pope did not fit into such an understanding of the profession and it seemed to me that, for ethical reasons, I shouldn't agree to create a
work which, in artistic terms, from birth was doomed to incompleteness. On the other hand, the word ‘beneficial’ brought with it a pragmatic perspective. Undoubtedly, during difficult times of change, which Poland is emerging from defiant against totalitarianism, when strikes and dissident protests were taking place and the air was already filled with the smell of gunpowder (the choice of a Pole as pope made us convinced of this), the chance to gain a few sympathy points for the country was worth more than my artistic ego. Should one not put aside artistic ambitions in order to make a beneficial film which will certainly not only go down in history but with which one could temporarily bring the inconceivable reality of the Pope's native country to many people?

It was clear that if I refused, the film would be made anyway. It would be made by someone who would, naturally, be indifferent to the country which he was talking about; someone who would do the work professionally, not thinking about Poland, but about his viewer. Today, from the perspective of time, I am absolutely convinced that the danger which I imagined was correct. After my film, a rival work was made – a series about the life of Karol Wojtyła, with Albert Finney in the main role. I saw a few fragments of this series, filmed in Austrian locations at a time when Poland was under Martial law. Graz was used as Cracow and Austrian servicemen alternately played Nazis and Red Army soldiers (interesting that they played them with great relish). The film was poor. I can say this with relief because, of course, I was worried that an American would make a more profitable film. It turned out that financially we were more or less equal in market terms, even with a slight advantage to my film. The simplicity of historical shortcuts in the American version confirmed my belief that I did what I should have done. I will cite just one scene: in the American series, after the liberation of Cracow, a group of Polish patriots is singing the national anthem in English and the Russians are singing 'Kalinka', after which they put aside their harmonicas, take off their belts and beat the Poles.

The negotiations surrounding the film about John Paul II lasted a year as we had to pass through three sets of censors: the commercial ones, the church ones and the communist ones. The commercial ones consisted of our distributors accepting the screenplay. The main weight of distribution fell to the English company ITC, run by Lew Grade, which is worth a separate paragraph.

Born as Lew Gradowski in Odessa, or the vicinity, a future lord emigrated along with his mother and brother to Paris where, as the story goes, along with his brother he earned money through tap dancing. Later, in England, they sacrificed their talents to two arenas of performing arts: one took care of theatre as a West End producer, earning a knighthood, while the other took care of television and film. He also earned a title for such indisputable contributions as inventing 'The Muppet Show'. In his time, Lord Grade of Elstree (which is also the name of his London studios) produced 'Jesus of Nazareth' for the cinemas, while his legendary commercial disaster was the fantastically expensive film 'Raise the Titanic'.
When I met Sir Lew Grade, he was already well into his seventies. He received me in his offices near Marble Arch and suggested five am as a meeting time – this peculiar hour was connected to his frequent travels across the ocean, where he flew usually once a week in the supersonic Concord and, as I understand it, wanting to avoid tiring time differences, he lived according to his own time.

I refused the five-am meeting. I was overcome by a combative mood. I was fired up to make the film but I was a proud artist from the People's Republic of Poland who would not allow a commercial magnate to kick me around at five am. My resistance was met with astonishment – many greater artists than me had not protested at such a moment – but my meeting was moved to seven am. The conversation concerned the screenplay. Lord Grade insisted that there be everything in the film that, in my opinion, there shouldn't be – some personal note. For example, the young Wojtyła with a guitar, before he becomes a cleric.

“Beneath the window of an actress friend?” I asked ironically, but the Lord Grade did not notice the subtlety and insisted that such a scene should be added.

“The Pope will never agree to it,” I objected, to which the lord answered unworried: “If I present it to him, then he'll agree.”

I knew that I would never add any such thing and I explained to him that if we were making a film about Queen Elizabeth and there was talk of a similar scene – for example, that the Prince of Edinburgh is making advances towards another lady – that would also be tactless and the lord would certainly not be ready to discuss this with the Queen.

Despite these problems, overcoming the commercial censors did not prove to be difficult as, from the outset, it was obvious that the film had immediately been contracted by the American television network NBC for the sum of five million dollars, I think, so nearly as much as the budget was (to this day I wonder where that money went if the filming in Poland cost only a few hundred thousand dollars). The communist censorship was important for the following reasons: firstly – the authorities had to agree to me directing the film, secondly – we wanted to shoot it in Poland, which we also needed permission for. Negotiations took place at the level of the Secretary of the Central Committee and the chief ideologist, Comrade Lukaszewicz.

On my way to that conversation I was calm although the outcome was unknown to me. For my own psychological comfort, like in roulette, I bet on both outcomes: that they let me, and that they don't let me. I found many positives in both – if they did let me, then I would engage in some extraordinary adventure, which crossed over the framework of art and touched upon history. And if they didn't let me, then I'd be freed of the obligation, which I accepted with resignation as a victim of patriotism. So, at
least mentally, I'd be free of any stress.

The secretary looked radiant as he received me, from which I guessed that I'd probably make the film. Before getting onto the screenplay, we spoke about the Pope, who Łukaszewicz praised as a great Polish patriot. This praise was so effusive that I took a risk by asking the question whether he had assessed Wojtyła in the same way when he had been Bishop of Cracow. Łukaszewicz had a peculiar liveliness of the mind and it was not for nothing that amongst those in the party he was nicknamed ‘the pigeon-fancier’, which in Silesia, where he came from, meant a person who comes from the lumpenproletariat (what is called these days ‘white trash’). Alongside the whole pompousness of the party, this roguish character trait made him amiable – it gave him a human dimension which was, in its own manner, authentic.

I will not quote the word which the secretary used to describe Wojtyła as the Bishop of Cracow. The word was very uncomplimentary and quite unparliamentary and was said with a provocative expression so that I was forced to continue the conversation.

“How is that possible?” I asked “If Wojtyła was like this as a bishop, then could he change as a pope?”

Łukaszewicz laughed merrily as he was waiting for this question.

“He could” he answered “Everyone can. A person changes remarkably from day to day, from hour to hour. Today he's like this, tomorrow he's like that: one time a great Polish patriot, another – and here he used the unparliamentary word.

“What does it depend on?”

“On many things, for example, on the opponent. While he was fighting against us, Wojtyła was small; now he's fighting against the whole world and he's great.”

I cite this stupid conversation because there was something in it that was characteristic of the time and of the man who would soon fall from grace. Subsequently, as part of a rather ridiculous show, he was momentarily detained along with Gierek and Jaroszewicz. In the end he died in disgrace as one of those who in Gierek's period made his mark by promoting the propaganda of success.

The conversation turned to the screenplay and it turned out that the objections of the authorities were very minor and irrelevant, in fact. I remember one – it concerned a word in the commentary over the newsreels from Stalinist times. What absolutely had to be added was that the victims of Stalinism were also communists, like Gomulka, for example. What meaning did it have? From my point of view, none. It could be said and I promised to do it. I did not keep my promise as I shot the film at a time when the team in power had changed, so I thought that such promises no longer applied.
The third censor, the church, falls outside of the report as here the memory is long and the partners of our talks are still alive and an unwritten contract applies that we won't reveal any details. At one point, it seemed that things were not looking good. There were dozens of objections to the screenplay from the Vatican. We heard about this from our producers and along with my co-writers, Andrzej Kijowski and Jan Jozef Szczepanski, the three of us went to Rome, convinced that there would be a repeat of what we had already experienced at home. We went there in a fighting mood, ready to put the matter on a knife's edge – if their objections required changes which were too big, we would leave the project in solidarity and let them make the kind of film that they wanted to but without our participation. (In order to avoid the questions that are often asked in connection with this matter, I'll explain that the Vatican did not in any way participate financially in this film and it was solely a matter of a moral acceptance on their part, without which the film would have been pointless. As far as I know, the series with Albert Finney which was made later did not have such support and, despite this, also found itself being screened, similar to the series about the marriage of Lady Diana and Prince Charles). Public figures – the king or the pope – can in such cases go to court and charge the makers with a violation of their personal rights, but it's known that normally such an abuse is dismissed with contemptuous silence.

By some strange coincidence, on the plane to Rome we met Father Andrzej Bardecki, who we told of this strange situation with the Vatican and we even gave him the screenplay to leaf through. And that's it. When a few days later we tried to arrange a meeting with the representatives of the Papal Commission for Mass Media, who were responsible for filming permission in the Vatican, it turned out that we already had a permit and no one had heard of any complaints.

And that's how the die was cast. I understood that now I would not get out of it and I would make this film, whether I liked it or not. Other complications came up. The beginning of the shoot was scheduled for September and in August the whole country was shaken by the strikes. The Gdansk Agreement was signed, the authorities changed and events occurred so fast that we could, without any great risk, introduce into the screenplay much of what at the beginning seemed impossible: tanks against students on the Anniversary of 3rd May in Cracow, later the fight for the church in Nowa Huta and finally, towards the end of the film, the ‘clandestine circulation’ in which the writer, who has broken off with Communism, publishes his books.

In the screenplay I wanted to follow the rules of Tarkovsky's film about Rublev. I thought that our task was to make a film about the Pope, without the Pope. The ‘without’ concerned the sphere which was subject to judgements. One couldn't show the deeds of young Wojtyla which were praiseworthy because then we would be pathetic boot-lickers; we couldn't show his private life because of his right to privacy. For example, in the calendar of the Pope's life, which was to be our basic source material for the screenplay (here, the author, Father Adam Boniecki was our reliable
supporter), there is information which allows one to imagine the tragedy of his parents’ death (first his mother's, then, many years later, his father's). Wojtyla was not present at both deaths and it's easy to imagine that this fact was painful for him. One could write such a scene but I had a strong sense that this would have been tactless. Andrzej Wajda reproached me that I omitted the humorous anecdote about how after the conclave, the Pope and his secretary Dziwisz had their first night in the Vatican and didn't know where to find something to eat. Only the following day was it considered that the foreign Pope did not feel at home in Rome and didn’t have any friendly Sisters at hand who would bring him some provisions. It's a nice story but too fictional – like from a film.

Searching for a solution, I clung onto the Rublev example. There, Tarkovsky having no materials from the great artist's life, made him a witness of an era – he built a series of incidents in which the characters are other people, while Rublev himself appears and watches them. It seemed to me that this model should work in our film. If in telling the Pope's life story, we told the story of fifty years of Polish life and we introduced fictional or semi-fictional characters whose paths somehow crossed the path of the future pope, then it was enough to show which country he came from. And the rest they could discover about him from what he does today - after all he appears on television and he can often be seen or heard, particularly in the West. (This last premise saved me, in my opinion, from the trap which later the rival series fell into. Delivering fragments of papal speeches, Albert Finney imitates the voice and intonation but there is a false note because it's not the same man – after all, we know what the real one looks like!)

So far, I'd made auteur films and that first commissioned film was to be a neutral statement which served the figure whose story I was telling rather than my personal vision. Without hesitation, I decided that I had to have screenwriters, even though until then I had rigorously made films that were fully auteur and the only exception – the American film – did not predispose me to break the said rule. (I forget to mention for the record that I made another non-auteur film for television in Germany – it was an adaptation of Nalkowski's play 'House of Women'. The film was objectively successful and so unimportant to me that I regularly forget to list it in my filmography).

The idea of a film about Wojtyla came from Diego Fabbri and he was also to guarantee something in the form of artistic supervision, whereas the choice of writers was basically up to me. From the beginning the producers thought that if they needed me in this film, then they had to give me freedom. I didn't want to hear of foreign screenwriters. For a moment, in Poland, the authorities suggested that if I want to turn to Jan Jozef Szczepanski and Andrzej Kijowski, then the third person should be someone who was more agreeable to the authorities. And here immediately the name of a writer was mentioned who was regarded by those in the party as a friend of Wojtyla's from the time of the occupation, namely Wojciech Zukrowski. I couldn't deny this candidate his professional qualifications – he had not only adapted Moczar's
books for the screen, which were filmed by Passendorf, but he was also the author of
the literary original of Wajda's 'Lotna'. However, he was not accepted by the two
other screenwriters as well as by me, due to the fact that Zukrowski was one of the
most renowned supporters of the regime.

In the end the authorities stopped insisting and we set about working in such a way
that each author wrote the threads of his characters and then I would try to weave
them together. Jan Jozef Szczepanski wrote the first ‘model’ passion scene in
Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, when a young Karol Wojtyla witnesses the separation of the
sacred and the profane. After the spectacle, he sees the actor who played Christ in an
inn drinking beer with his friends. It seemed to me that this episode contained the
prefiguration of the future pope's crossroads, his calling to the theatre, art, priesthood
and liturgy. In the passion play, liturgy and theatre reveal their relationship to one
another: the people watch - like a spectacle and they take part – like a liturgy –
kneeling when the actor playing Christ falls under the weight of the cross.

Another part of Jan Jozef's work was the plebeian theme – a peasant family from
somewhere near Kalwaria, their wartime adventures and the story of the next
generation in Nowa Huta, including the theme of the old party labourer's rebellion
against the management of the conglomerate.

On the other hand, Andrzej Kijowski contributed the theme of the writer and the
actress, basing it on a couple of mutual friends who allowed themselves to be seduced
by the authorities in the fifties and later rebelled and even crossed over to the
opposition. Into this we interwove a few dozen episodes which showed, quite
informatively, the life of Karol Wojtyla shown through the eyes of his friends. And
finally, to complete the cognitive mission of the film we stuck in a few documentary
inserts with a commentary about the history of Poland.

We knew from the beginning that the film was to be addressed to a primarily
American audience to whom the intricacies of Poland's fate were unknown. I carried
in my memory a conversation that I'd had with a serious Hollywood producer to
whom I was trying to sell an idea concerning the wartime years in Poland. Without
any embarrassment, my producer asked me to explain to him whether Poland took
part in the war on the side of the Germans or against them because he remembered
that it varied. For example, Hungary was with them and the Czechs against. Aware of
such ignorance, we filled the film with information from which it would transpire that
Poland was a mainly Catholic country (although amongst the characters one remained
an atheist to the very end), that it gained a regime which it did not choose and that it
fought for human freedom and rights, and in this the church was its inspiration. I
think that if I had been making a film for Poles, I would not have been obligated to
relate all this information; however, I would have allowed myself a more critical look
at Polish Catholicism. Here it was impossible – the screenplay was in some way a
piece of propaganda and, I must admit, stylistically it bordered on socialist realism
although these stereotypes were unknown to my audience and so they were a lot less
banal. When after many years I showed the film in Russia, I noticed that it functioned there perfectly – it informed them of what they didn't know, in a language which they were used to. It did not captivate – which, of course, as an artist, I regret – but I remember that from the beginning it was, in my mind, to be predominantly ‘beneficial’ and accomplish something that is more of a service than self-expression.

The making of 'From a Far Country' was one long series of anecdotes. It is not for nothing that two separate books were published on the subject, as well as an album with photographs and the fictionalized screenplay. Today, after many years, from obligation I'll cite at least one – the one that worked best at question-and-answer sessions, and I had an extraordinary amount of them in many countries, as well as in Poland when the film was shown in churches to the dissatisfaction of the authorities. The production, which began in the autumn of 1980, took place in an atmosphere of the growing tension which accompanied the fight to register Solidarity and was a result of the threat of a strike and possible Soviet intervention. The song of the year had a chorus “Will they enter, won't they enter”, and we thought about this on a daily basis. In the event of the Soviet army entering the country, the production had thought of an evacuation plan. The film negative was developed in Rome and it remained there, so it was safe. The actors, apart from Czarek Morawski, who played Wojtyla, were foreigners (the film was in English) so they had a chance to leave. The cinematographer and I would possibly not be able to leave and that's why there was an emergency Italian director on stand-by who could finish the film somewhere in Austria and Germany. Just in case, along with the Polish locations, there was an additional list of substitute locations which were chosen from cursory scouting or from memory. To be honest, I didn't count on such a turn of events although it was quite likely. When a year later Martial law was introduced, I tried our security measures out in a new situation, and it seemed that we had been relatively well prepared. This was all the more important as no one wanted to insure a film about the Pope shot in Poland and for the financiers the risk was enormous. Hence, the first imperative: to film quickly.

We began in mid-September, completely unprepared, whilst still making changes to the screenplay. The point was to catch even a bit of the summer – the film was to be fairly epic, it was showing fifty years of Polish life so it had to be shot in various seasons. We started from the end – the choice of Pope and his visit to the Blonia Park in Cracow. A year after the first visit, an altar was once more erected and an extra gave communion, while in the reverse shots we took the figure of the Pope from documentary footage. There's a humorous anecdote involving a hat which was worn by the French consul's wife in Cracow. She was taking communion from the hands of the Pope, which was captured in the news reel, whereupon our actress, the wife of a writer (the character was to some degree modelled on the actress Danuta Michalowska), had to take communion, wearing the same hat, from the hands of an extra so that the reality and the fiction could be edited together. Unfortunately, the French consul had already been promoted to the rank of ambassador somewhere in Africa and a few days before filming we brought the hat to Cracow with the help of a
Quai d'Orsay courier.

The whole production was shrouded in mystery. On the instructions of the authorities an embargo was imposed on all information regarding the film. There were no interviews or coverage, and nowhere was there even the smallest mention of the fact that such a film was being made. It got to the point where our convoy of several dozen vehicles that were going to the shoot were stopped by a police patrol just to find out whether it was true that we were making a film about the Pope. We were under constant observation by the security services, a few of the crew were regarded to be informers and, besides that, we were closely observed in our hotels. I guess that our conversations were regularly tapped. This did not influence our work in any way, at the most it spiced things up in the eyes of our Western collaborators.

In accordance with the proverb that it's always darkest before dawn, the production management (it was then for the first time that I worked with Michal Szczerbic and that extraordinary adventure transformed our professional relationship into a friendship) asked the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens’ Militia (ZOMO) for cooperation, explaining that since the film was to be shot without any publicity, it was best to base it on a reliable political element. The ZOMO units were not such a famous formation back then, so we watched them with interest when they came to be filmed – they were always very tense, obviously agitated. In the wardrobe and make-up, our ladies got various stories out of them – who they were and where they were from. Not infrequently, we encountered wards of children's homes and I must admit that mostly they aroused sympathy and pity in us. They all loved the Pope. In the film they appeared as SS troops and they carried out their task with a self-determination which sometimes led to excess. The second large group of extras was made up of people from various parishes who also had strong feelings for the Pope, so when we shot scenes of the SS persecuting civilians, it led to such abandon that it bordered on sadomasochism: the ZOMO units beat the extras from sympathy for the Pope while the extras meekly suffered their blows for the very same reason.

During the shoot, we were constantly accompanied by an Italian television crew who were shooting a documentary film, a so-called special. In many Western television stations such a documentary precedes the film premiere and television screening. The Italians were not very interested in our work as they were hoping for a real ‘scoop’ in a completely different sphere. According to widely circulating rumours, the invasion of the Red Army was to happen around the 15th December and there were a great number of troops gathered at the Ukrainian border. The optimists kept repeating that it was all empty threats, while the pessimists were sure that they would invade and there would a be a repeat of Czechoslovakia or Hungary (rather the latter because it was hard to believe that Poland would admit friendly armies, particularly Russians and Germans, without opening fire.) The Italians would call Rome daily and at supper they would take me aside and say that according to the information of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, intervention was hanging by a thread, which for them was a cause of uncontrollable optimism. We went to extra lengths to reciprocate
these indelicacies by spinning yarns about what the Russians do to foreign correspondents in the case of war and promising that when we returned after years spent in Siberian exile, we would provide their families in Italy with information of where they had frozen to death.

In the meantime, the time to shoot the main military scene was approaching. It was the scene concerning the liberation of Cracow. We wanted to show the invasion of the Red Army in such a way that even the ignorant Western viewer would understand that we were defeated by being crushingly outnumbered by the ‘liberators’ and today, having had their army on our soil for so long, we were non-sovereign and in such condition that the Church was a natural refuge for our nation.

Michal Szczerbic mobilized a great many soldiers and seven tanks for the shoot. he arranged for few dozen shops be closed on the Cracow Market Square as well as the dismantling of the modern street lamps. To add to this, the night before filming there was a heavy snowfall which covered the modernized surface surrounding the Cloth Hall which had been newly-completed by Professor Zin.

The tanks had to be brought by transporters so as not to ruin the surfaces of the Cracow streets. The transport began in the evening, the day before filming.

Foreseeing a difficult day, I turned in early. I was woken from my hotel bed by a hysterical phone call from Warsaw. I was instructed to immediately make my way to the Cracow Television Centre and in a local programme, after the evening news, to say that we were making a film about the Pope. The embargo had been lifted because panic had ensued that those tanks were the beginning of the Soviet invasion. I talked about the film on television, after which I went to the Market Square where, in the light of the reflectors, the tanks were being unloaded and the eagles were being repainted as red stars (which, just in case, we immediately covered up so as not to worry the numerous onlookers).

At the crack of dawn the next day the traffic was halted in the Main Market Square and we got on with filming. I was aware that the situation was tense – this was the most expensive scene in the whole film so I wanted to film it in the best way I could. The financiers and distributors had travelled from London and New York, so we really wanted to show them that the money was being effectively spent.

I noticed that in the crowd of soldiers assigned for filming there were a lot more volunteers to wear the uniforms of Germans, who were to march in front of the camera as prisoners of war, than those who were to play Russians. I thought that this this was a sign of patriotism but it turned out that it was pragmatism. One of my assistants heard that those who were dressed as Russian soldiers were scared that if they went to the gate to answer the call of nature, they could get hit over the head by someone (whereas if they did the same in a Polish or German uniform then, at the
most, the guards would give them a dressing down).

The liberation of Cracow scene was to last a maximum of two to three minutes’ screen time but the preparations, as always when making a film, took a few hours. Finally, after a few general rehearsals, the first clapperboard sounded. The tanks set off, the Russians drove the line of prisoners of war in front of the camera and in the foreground my protagonists began a conversation about how they had survived the war. I found myself on the crane, next to my cinematographer, Slawomir Idziak, filming a wide shot which descended into a medium shot of the protagonists. I don't remember whether it was the first or the second take that was interrupted by an extraordinary incident.

From one of the streets that had been closed off by the police, a police car suddenly pulled out and zig-zagged between the tanks (from which not much could be seen so there could have easily been an accident). The car drove up to the crane on which I was sitting and through a megaphone I was called down. It turned out that what was waiting for me in the police car was a phone call from Warsaw. I thought that they would definitely tell me to stop shooting and I had already calculated in my mind how to say that I'd stop and not stop or at least finish the dialogue so as to be able to edit the scene without the missing later shots.

The voice in the receiver spoke to me in English. I was connected to the secretary of the American Embassy in Warsaw who was phoning from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he had gone for an explanation. It turned out that the satellite had transferred to Washington a picture of the Soviet tanks, the soldiers and crowds on the Market Square in Cracow. In order to lend credibility to his calming reassurances the ministry official took advantage of a police connection thanks to which I could tell the American, who I knew, that I was shooting a film about the Pope, partly with American money to boot. Except that until yesterday it had been a secret.

Getting out of the car, I looked up at the sky (it was clouded over the whole time) and thought that apart from God there was also some foreign satellite that was constantly watching us. This story seemed to me so amusing that I tell it at every question-and-answer session following the film and I no longer know which detail is indeed true and what I invented to embellish the story. Anyway, the phone call and the satellite remain absolutely authentic.

The last scenes in Poland were the ones in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska where in many parishes on our appeal people voluntarily descended to take part in early Easter Passions. We estimated it to be a few thousand people. Bitter frost (that could have also have occurred during Easter) and a short shooting day – I remember our feverish work and the exceptional calmness of the extras who participated in the pageant, praying and not worrying about the filming. When, at the end of shooting, the production wanted to proceed with paying the extras’ wages, but the people, one parish after another, waived the money, saying that they came because of the Pope
and they asked that the money be donated to a good cause.

Sometime earlier in northern Italy, in the region that my ancestors come from (in Friuli) there was an earthquake, so the extras’ money from all the Podhale parishes went to purchase blankets and tents for the Friuli citizens who were left homeless that winter. A year later, during the winter of Martial law, the whole of Italy (including Friuli) sent gifts for Poles. It was so symmetrical that there’s no way of omitting it from my memoirs.

The final filming was done in the Vatican itself. Apart from the scene in Saint Paul's Basilica, we had another few days’ filming in interiors which are not usually available to filmmakers – in the Sistine and Pauline Chapels as well as in the Saint Damasus gardens and courtyard. My producer went wild, insisting that we shoot as much as possible as such an occasion would not arise again. On the other hand, the screenplay did not anticipate anything more, so I improvised a little. I additionally shot various passageways only so that the character – a priest from Nowa Huta – could finally find himself in the chapel where Cardinal Wojtyla (played by Morawski in a grey, balding wig) led retreats which he had been invited to by Paul VI - a gesture that paved his way to be chosen as pope. Reading the records of these retreats, I was amazed to find that they are a lot less original than those which the cardinal was delivering in Poland at the time. Astute Vaticanists told me that in this lay Wojtyla's victory as he did not at that moment use his erudite advantage and presented himself to the all-powerful curia as a moderate man.

I allowed myself to make the above comment and yet the whole time I was avoiding the heart of the matter – who was the Pope in my film presentation and who is he to me today? I have written many articles about this on so many different occasions that I wouldn't want to repeat myself – so maybe as a synthesis I'll quote a certain conversation which I had regarding the Pope after the film. I was staying then at the home of my industrial family in Italy and I took part in a social gathering of people who undoubtedly had greater authority than the politicians I knew. They were great Italian financiers, industrialists, the owners of great corporations – I'm not mentioning anyone by name because I think that would be indiscreet as I want to repeat a conversation in which I express a contrary view. It was regarding Wojtyla – a man who those gathered unanimously regarded as a deeply damaging figure. The prerequisite to such a verdict was a view that was otherwise justified, that this pope had become a destabilizer – he tried to disturb a state of equilibrium and thereby harmed Europe. In the opinion of my interlocutors, John Paul II's pontificate was damaging from the perspective of great politics because it exacerbated the conflict between the superpowers (I think this was the year 1982). The crowning example were the events in Poland which were, not without reason, blamed directly on the Pope: without him there would have not been any 'Solidarity' strikes, nor would there have been that determination with which the Poles (foolishly, according to my opponents) instead of taming the invader, forced him to use violence.
What was interesting was a micro, or as they put it – capillary, argument. The Pope sought to reform Christianity, whose reformation threatened the stability of societies. The owners of big industry told me that the so-called consumerism of Western Europe guaranteed that our continent would have no wars for close to half a century. A person who is focused on consuming and earning doesn't get involved in great ideas and isn't prone to killing anyone. Whereas Wojtyla inspired new integrist or fundamentalism, that is he told people to be follow the Gospel in their normal, everyday lives; to be a Catholic from day to day, at the office or in a shop, to make choices dictated by faith. In its expression this idea was destabilizing.

I remember this conversation as I was entranced by the clarity with which they identified the subject of the dispute. My interlocutors, in part, considered themselves to be Catholics and they were ready to admit that reducing the confession of one's faith to the routine of Sunday behaviour was something very sad but since man, in his multitude, is weak then it's better to be a feeble Catholic who fritters away his life but doesn't transfer it to aggression. Of course, a good Catholic should have greater aspirations, should reach spiritually higher, but this is just for the chosen ones and when the masses try to be too impassioned about faith it often leads to violence. No one tried to say that this was a defect of faith, on the contrary – it was underlined that it's not Christianity that makes aggressors of people but that innate human aggression distorts Christianity. So, if we're doomed to eternal distortion, then what we have is better than what people will achieve as a result of the longings aroused by John Paul II's pontificate, which are in excess of their actual faith and virtue.

I believe this reasoning is mistaken and most people from our Polish or Central-European experience understand that the industrial barons, however broad their perspective, do not attain knowledge of suffering, humiliation, fear, of life without dignity and hope and also about what Christianity can really bring to people, because in order to bring something, it must be constantly renewed. The resistance of many people in the West concerns precisely this renewal and it flows, in my opinion, from a desire to retain a status quo, that is, that which they find. I'll return to this thought because it runs through these memoirs in a few contexts, most of all with the juxtaposition of the title. After all, status quo cannot be maintained and if we do not have any desires, if we don't dream of a better world and the one that we have is to be that best of all worlds then, honest to God... it's time to die!

Did my film about John Paul II bring him closer to people? This is obviously not for me to judge. The fact that it was so widely shown – usually before the Pope's visits in various countries - gives me the feeling that I did something that can be described as beneficial. In a few places in the world I witnessed what resonance it caused. In Italy it was quite well distributed in cinemas and received with great hostility by the left-wing press. In Turin and a few other cities there were some incidents – Communist hit-squads blocked viewers access to cinemas, in turn young Catholics from the organization 'Communione e Liberazione' organised mass support for the film. In the
Philippines it was shown at the festival in Manila, out of competition. It was regarded
as subversive because the church in the Philippines played a similar role in the fight
against dictatorship as it did in Poland, except that the dictatorship there was anti-
communist, whereas here it was the opposite (despite this, they were so similar).

PHOTO:
After the premiere of 'From a Far Country' at the Rome Opera in 1981.
Prime Minister Spadolini, Minister Signorelly (later Mayor of Rome)

In the States the NBC Network showed the film at Christmas, just after the
introduction of Martial law and in the interval they showed an interview with
Ambassador Spasowski, who had just left his post by way of protest and asked
President Reagan for asylum (for which he was sentenced to death in absentia, on a
par with Mr Rurarz and Mr Najder).

The film 'From a far Country' can be called confessional, that is, addressed to people
who are interested in a figure connected to a certain faith. However, it is not a
religious film, like my numerous films dedicated to secular themes.

I am trying to introduce a distinction here which for many people, particularly from
church environments, is not fully understood. It's easy to recognise a confessional
film, that is a religious film, if the protagonist is a saint or a priest or a nun. However,
the above-mentioned characteristics lead to making easy mistakes. Not long ago, I
borrowed from the Jesuit priests a series with some sort of thorn birds in the title, in
which Richard Chamberlain plays a cardinal and the whole thing was a commercial
piece of nonsense which was slightly insulting to Catholics. The mechanisms of
ecclesiastical promotions that were portrayed in the film were as close to reality as
the truths from the American series 'Dynasty'. Whereas, I think that there is no need
to insistently single out Christian art forms as each great art form (if it is great) leads
to the Truth. If a person believes in one revealed Truth, then one will find the road to
it through art. When I take the darkest examples of art that have arisen from despair,
such as Camus' work, then there too I see that the depiction of the human condition is
a cleansing effect. It somehow corrects any falsities in our life and shows human fate
in perspective, which enriches us and is therefore uplifting.

The nineteenth century proposed a series of expressions which sound silly today but
which are essentially helpful. It was said that art must be sublime and elevating. If
we take such words seriously, then pomposity was never elevating. One can say this
about Dostoyevsky and Mann together with Proust, and that's why they're closer to a
reflection of the great Truth than many a sugar-coated life of a holy man.

I think that out of all of my films the most clearly religious one was 'Imperative',
which developed the motif of 'Illumination' and 'The Constant Factor' and openly
dealt with the question: “Does God exist?”
As I have already mentioned, after filming in Poland, with the feeling that we had managed to escape from history, we took the film about the Pope to Rome. There, in the Vatican, we shot the last scenes, from which I remember an amusing conversation that I had with Cardinal Casaroli about what the danger of bringing in a dozen or so fake bishops and cardinals was (that is extras in costume).

“It's as if,” said the cardinal “one was to bring a crowd of fake generals into the Pentagon: a third world war could be started, while in the Vatican it could cause a schism or public outrage. If instead of real bishops and cardinals, false ones are wandering the corridors all day long, then how many humble servants of the Church may suffer a nervous breakdown not knowing that the scandalizers are not real priests.

I became convinced of this the next day during a break from filming, when I observed a queue of extras – bishops and cardinals – waiting for the Vatican toilets. They smoked cigarettes, sat on the steps, pushed and shoved while the Papal Swiss Guard, who was standing next to them, could not believe his eyes. When we were doing a night shoot in Saint Peter's Basilica, I made sure that only pious people from local parishes, as well as monks and nuns, were hired as extras. According to the screenplay, the scene takes place in 1945 and at the last minute it turned out that we were missing monastic clergy in pre-Council attire. So, additional extras had to be hired immediately from the Cinecitta film studio in Rome and dressed in habits that are no longer worn today. In every country, extras are people who desire to make an easy living, often figures from the underworld, not to mention the daughters of Corinth, who are always keen to earn extra money. I was filled with apprehension knowing that such suspicious participants would be present during filming, so at the beginning of work I gave a solemn speech about the sanctity of the place and that we were the first crew to film a proper feature film there, hence we must show ourselves worthy of the trust shown to us. It looked as if the participants of the shoot really took it to heart that they were taking part in something extraordinary. The filming proceeded in due order and seriousness although the bit-player in the sedan chair who was playing Pius XII lost his characteristic, stuck-on nose in two consecutive takes. No one laughed even when it was found attached to the shoe of one of the real prelates. Only around midnight, towards the end of filming, did I notice that discipline was becoming unharnessed. To my indignation, a group of extras climbed onto St. Peter’s Baldachin and started to take photos of one another. I grabbed the microphone and berated the ladies, saying that they should have enough ordinary decency that when putting on religious attire they moderate their behaviour. I was sure that I was berating extras, but it turned out that they were real nuns.

PHOTOS

In Castel Gandolfo, in August 1981, after the screening of 'From a Far Country' for the Pope. In the middle is Cardinal Casaroli, the Secretary of State at the time.
After the screening of 'From a Far Country'.

While editing the film in London, I heard about the assassination attempt on the Pope. Later, when the film was ready, we waited until its protagonist got better so that he could see it himself. However, the Pope was still in the Gemelli clinic and the Venice Festival was approaching. My producer insisted that we show the film in the Vatican because we couldn’t wait any longer. I was strongly opposed to this but the producer's opinion prevailed and suddenly it turned out that the date of the screening was fixed. Horrified, I flew to Rome and begged the Pope's secretary, Father Dziwisz, to help me warn whoever possible that the screening would not be going ahead and to determine who the Pope would invite, a little later, to a screening in his presence. We managed to warn everyone, apart from one cardinal, whose surname I didn't know and who arrived at dawn at the producer's house. He felt disconcerted when it was revealed that he would be the first and only representative of the Vatican who would come to determine whether the film about the Pope was appropriate. After the screening, I was sure that, according to all the rules and due to caution, he should state that he had some objections. So I tried to anticipate this by complimenting the dignitary as a person about whose experience I had (allegedly) heard a great deal and who thus would not make hasty judgements after the screening because such a matter must be considered deeply, for a week or so. (A week later the Pope was to see the film!) The cardinal clutched at this straw and, after the screening, solemnly pronounced that the work is complex and to pass judgement on it then would demonstrate recklessness and disrespect towards the creators. It should be thought over, and this would take about a week. I breathed a sigh of relief, we proceeded to have some drinks and the cardinal took me aside and asked: “Are films in colour made often these days?” From this question I deduced that the last film that he had seen was forty years previously when he had entered the seminary.

The Pope did indeed see the film a week later. He was still very weak and Cardinal Casaroli insisted that there be an interval during the screening. I, in turn, preferred there not to be one as I knew it would just be filled with a worrying silence (the first half of the film takes place after the war, during the period when Nowa Huta is built and it's uncertain how the film will develop). I asked the Pope whether he would like an interval and, thankfully for me, he said that he'd prefer it the Polish way – without a break.

This meant two hours and twenty minutes’ screening time – a long time for a seriously ill person. When the lights came up at the end, the Pope remained motionless in his armchair - the thought went through my mind that perhaps he'd collapsed and it would turn out that an artist had harmed him as much as the assassin earlier. Fortunately, the opposite happened – in his customary manner the Pope thought for a moment, then embraced me but what he said I won't say because he asked that I don't as unwise people might not distinguish between his private opinion and what he teaches as part of his position. I can only mention that his comments
were primarily drama-related and concerned what it was like to watch a work in which you are the protagonist. Not many people in the world can have this experience, and the conclusions drawn from this are all the more interesting as they were uttered by a person who himself was an author of stage plays, so was ‘part of the industry’. Whereas, the official wording of the Vatican spoke of the fact that the film could be useful in the service of the Pope and that it's artistic evaluation belonged solely to the viewers.

Just before the screening, I noted one small detail which caused my producer to panic. In Castel Gandolfo, where the screening took place, there was no cinema. We had to bring a movie projector, involve a projectionist, put up a screen – and that's when it turned out that the marble floor acts like a mirror and there are no carpets in the palace. Apparently, protocol forbids popes to make use of these symbols of oriental excess. They had to hastily bring carpets in from an Arab shop (others were closed on a Saturday) and it was barely done in time for the screening.

After the screening, the Pope requested that we didn’t give the press or media any accounts of how the film was received. This seemed obvious to everyone present and the considerable group of journalists who were waiting by the exit were left without any longed-for gossip. Despite this, the next day’s newspapers carried the headlines “I cried along with the Pope” - they came from the account of the projectionist, who did not resist the temptation of finding himself, for once in his life, on the front pages of a newspaper. Today, years later, I can swear that the projectionist exaggerated – the film was well received by the Pope but when it comes to tears, they are fabricated.

A year after this film, I made another documentary as part of the 'Cultural Capitals of Europe' series. During Martial law, it was hard for me to make a film about Cracow and, in the meantime, the Vatican created an opportunity for a person momentarily without a fatherland. Despite all my contacts and the success of the film about the Pope, shooting for this documentary was hard work. In each case, it was necessary to have a dozen permits and someone was always opposed to something. Impatiently, I felt that there was a lack of trust for the director so I decided to stop work and turned to Cardinal Casaroli with the request that he resolve whether my film was welcome or not. The elderly, experienced cardinal listened to my complaints and said something that I remember fairly precisely to this day: “It seems that you are looking for good priests in the Vatican? Then you're looking in the wrong place. Good priests can be found in dioceses and parishes, while here in the Vatican are the worst. For example, ones like me.” From his lips this was not a joke. (I think we all know that wonderful saying of Mother Teresa of Calcutta who when asked by a journalist what is the worst thing about the Church today answered: “Me. And you.”) Cardinal Casaroli did not have a metaphor in mind. He had in mind the love of power. As well as ordinary imperfection. He explained to me why in every case there needed to be so many permits: because everyone is so imperfect. And every one of the cardinals has his own beloved cousins and relations. Everyone would like, at least once in their life,
to do something for them – for example, give them the opportunity to marry in the Sistine Chapel or have a reception in the Vatican gardens. And if one were to allow this, then weddings and receptions would last from morning to night. But because the permission has to be given by three different cardinals, and they, as imperfect people, usually don't like one another then it's calm in the chapel and gardens as no one gets permission.

I understood these wise words in the same way as I understood why the Pope does not undertake the difficulty of reforming such customs – there is a wisdom in them that has been developed over centuries and it would take a real genius to replace this order with another type of order without ruining that which works effectively. And our Pope had devised his pilgrimages and in that way had direct contact with the world, over the heads of the cardinals.

After this nice conversation with the cardinal, the filming for the documentary got going. Then, on the last day, in the basilica's vestry, someone forbid me to film a parrot in a cage which was standing in the window, citing the fact that my permission was for people and objects but not for birds. I couldn't believe that this was true and when we'd finished the film, I wrote to Cardinal Casaroli, asking for a comment. He sent it to me through one of his colleagues and it turned out that once again I had not foreseen that something that blatantly foolish may not be so. There actually was a law that for birds one had to have separate permission. It originated from the times when during the Korean War someone took a picture of Pius XII with his canary and the communist press picked it up and gave it the title:

“While in Korea people are dying, the Pope has his own worries. His favourite canary won't sing.”

I hope that I'll never film in the Vatican again. I would not like to wait for permission, just as I would never want to infringe on what is sacred with a camera.

PHOTO:

With the Pope and the screenwriters of the film 'From a Far Country'.

The understanding of sanctity in our world is becoming less clear these days. Shooting 'Imperative' in an Orthodox church, I learned that Catholics are very liberal in this regard. For Buddhists an expression of sanctity is any kind of repetition and Thai monks refused any retakes when I shot a scene for 'Long Conversation with a Bird'. They said that I could do anything, but only once. If they were to do something a few times, it would be a liturgy and one cannot perform liturgy to order for a film because it strips away its sanctity. Every time I hear such ideas, I feel great respect for people who believe in sanctity which is transcendent, that is something which is objectively beyond us. Besides, it's
not just present in temples. Whilst making a film about Maximilian Kolbe, I was the last person to bring extras into Auschwitz. For Jews this is an inappropriate action and because Auschwitz claimed the greatest number of Jewish lives one has to respect this (although in our tradition this is incomprehensible). Spielberg, who filmed a few years after me, built a mirror image of Auschwitz but did not enter the area of the camp. I too would never again ask for permission to do so.

Writing this chapter a few years ago, I never expected that it would be extended and yet that's what has happened. Another two films and a book connected to the Pope have appeared from my output. The first is a documentary compiled of footage that has been stored at various television stations (mainly from the Vatican). It was commissioned by the Americans and the Italians and I made it with the help of my recently-deceased friend, journalist and publicist, Leonardo Valente. Leonardo was once a close friend of Paul VI and during his pontificate he edited the Italian daily newspaper 'Avvenire', which was the voice of the Italian episcopate, just as ‘L'Osservatore Romano' is the voice of the Vatican. Later he held a high position in Italian public television and, at the same time, was a man of broad horizons who was closely associated with the post-Vatican Council transformation which Catholicism is going through.

Watching hours of material of the Pope brings to mind a few reflections, of which the first is exceptionally sad. John Paul's pontificate falls in times when the least permanent record dominates television - recording on the unreliable magnetic beta system. Therefore, this most photographed Pope may be remembered in history with a very unreliable record of his activities. Beta tapes demagnetize with time. Television archives are commonly run in a disorderly manner. They serve television channels on a short-term basis, hence often there is no copying done onto newer digital technology and we are in danger of losing many images of the Pope, just as the tapes of his first pilgrimage to Poland no longer exist as during Martial law – in accordance with the suggestions of the authorities – they were re-used to record the progress of ‘normalization’.

The second reflection I had – the one that I tried to express in the whole film – is connected with the fact that John Paul II is an extraordinarily expressive person. That his gestures, intonation, mimicry give a faithful expression of that which he wants to impart to the people, and that's why in the recordings of his travels there are so many details which carry more than just uttered words. Sometimes it's one gesture or a sudden moment of reflection – and the message becomes clear in the universal language of images.

The Pope – the head of the Church – climbs up the stairs to the altar leading a disabled girl by the hand. The Pope sheds tears listening to the singing of Polish pilgrims a year after the imposition of Martial law (this material was shot once by Slawek Idziak for our film about the Vatican). And finally, the Pope who can't control his laughter. A scene in the courtyard of St. Damasus in the Vatican: a meeting with
young people and performances by magicians; one cuts through the other with a big, wooden saw and thanks to some trick we all ascertain with our own eyes that the conjurer's assistant has been cut in half, yet a moment later this assistant is joined together again and takes a bow. What made the Pope laugh? Did the person who decided on the reality of miracles think about how easily appearances can be deceptive and about how often God suspends the laws of nature which were put in place by him so as to step into our lives? I asked the Pope about this on some occasion, offering such a hypothesis, but the protagonist of my film simply smiled mysteriously, giving the understanding that he remembered that moment well.

The documentary film was later transformed into a book. An album about John Paul – The Prophet of the New Millennium, which used reproductions of stills from the film. This was possible thanks to the fact that the Vatican as a sovereign nation was able to resolve the juristic problem regarding who owned the rights to the stills from the filmed material. In the case of photography, we consider two events as the creative act: the pointing of the camera in a certain direction and the pressing of the shutter button at the given moment. In the case of film stills, the second creative act takes place independently, without the participation of the cinematographer. For the purposes of the book, it was ruled that the rights belong to the producer and they are at the disposal of the Vatican television station. In this way an album was published which is now available in various language versions, including Polish.

The next film meeting with the Pope concerned his play 'Our God's Brother'. While still a student, Karol Wojtyla was active in the theatre and had a few dramatic works to his name which were only staged after the author's elevation to St. Peter's throne. 'Our God's Brother' was staged by Krystyna Skuszanka at the Slowacki Theatre in Cracow at the time of the first thaw before Martial law. Another play, 'The Jeweller's Shop', was filmed as a Canadian-Italian co-production with Burt Lancaster (and also Daniel Olbrychski). Following this commercially successful venture, the co-writer of the film version, Mario di Nardo, acted as producer and wanted to prepare an adaptation of 'Our God's Brother'. He had Italian television behind him and, for a moment, it looked as if the work would be directed by Andrzej Wajda based on the screenplay by Tadeusz Konwicki, filmed in co-production with Poland ('Tor', the production company which I'm head of, was to be the Polish producer). The version of the screenplay which was considered at the time intertwined the story from Karol Wojtyla's play - the experiences of Adam Chmielowski – with the story of the author who, when writing the play, was a humble curate of a parish outside of Cracow. This idea met with some resistance from the Vatican. It dragged on, Wajda got involved with other projects and I entertained the thought of confining ourselves to the original text of the play, avoiding any significant changes or cuts and, in this way, to propose an encounter with an unknown work whose author, years later, became the subject of public interest.
And that's how the film, in the shape of a television play, was made. It was acted in English, for the sake of the non-Polish audience, and shot on location in Cracow with the participation of actors from six countries. From the production side, the venture proved to be extremely arduous as the change of the ruling coalition in Italy, the coming to power of the post-communists and left-wing Catholics, meant radical changes in the management of Italian television. Despite previously signed documents, the project was relegated, without hiding a disdain for the author and the fact that he propagated content that was so politically progressive that he took away the left wing's monopoly on caring for the poor. I'm probably presenting this reluctance in a caricatured manner but it became a public fact which led to a question in the Italian parliament which was raised by my notable friend Franco Zeffirelli (who has recently been representing the post-fascists). From inside Italian public television I was defended by a member of the board of directors, Liliana Cavali, who until recently had sympathized with the communist party but recently has been closer to the Catholics. My old producer, Giacomo Pezzali, ended the difficulties with the brave decision of risking starting production without any guarantee from the side of public television. Finally, with the help of the Germans and Poles, the film was finished in time for the Pope's visit in 1997 and had its premiere in Cracow during the author's stay. John Paul II himself watched the film later in Castel Gandolfo and admitted that he was very anxious about this encounter with his own text which he had never before managed to see on stage. Such an encounter, fifty years after it was written, would be an intense experience for any author. There was an additional factor here too, which I can guess – the Pope read the 'Tygodnik Powszechny' newspaper whose one reviewer wrote that it wasn't worth making the film because it did a disservice to the text. That's also why the Vatican removed the dozens of television correspondents who wanted to report on the author's encounter with his own work. After the screening, all reservations and concerns disappeared, but it was too late. The leading actor, the American Scott Wilson, heard from the author that he could no longer imagine his protagonist played by anyone else. I write that Scott had heard these words but that's not the precise truth. We all heard them but Scott didn't hear anything because he burst into tears.

Despite all these difficulties, since the birth of 'Our God's Father', it has travelled the world – from Japan, through Russia, America and most of Western Europe, even to Iran, which honoured the screenwriters (that is the Pope, Maria di Nardo and me) with a prize in the form of a Persian carpet. Remembering our adventures with the screening in Castel Gandolfo, I knew that the Pope didn't use carpets so I'm storing the prize at my place. On an anecdotal level, I am left with the memory of meeting the press in Japan where, after all my explanations regarding who the author of the play was, I was asked whether the work had anything to do with John Paul II. I explained that it did – he was the author of the original stage play. In that case why does Karol Wojtyla appear in the credits and not John Paul II. I replied that fifty years ago, when the play was written, Karol Wojtyla was not yet John Paul II. So my interlocutor shrewdly asked whether the surname Wojtyla is so difficult to pronounce that it had to be changed after his appointment. I explained that this didn't matter at
all and that's when the question was asked: when he was young, did Karol Wojtyła know that he'd become pope some day? I answered no, because how could he know? The Japanese man was surprised and said that the Dalai Lama knows from childhood what awaits him. When I gave an account of this to the Holy Father, he pondered for a moment upon the fact that one becomes pope so suddenly; there is no day nor even hour to prepare oneself.

The youthful play of the future Pope contains many imperfections, as does any work which has not been tried out by the author himself during rehearsals with actors. However, it is full of ideas which were developed during the whole pontificate, starting from the words “Be not afraid” (which in the play the author put into the mouth of a character inspired by Lenin, and later made it the motto of his pontificate) to the cry: “The tyranny of reason!”, which helps to understand the encyclical ‘Fides et ratio’. The juxtaposition of the order of justice and the order of mercy transfers the problem of poverty from the political sphere to the mystical sphere: poverty from one's own choice is a liberation, whereas imposed poverty becomes a degradation. It is a wonder that ideas that were so prophetic of the reality of end the century found their expression fifty years ago in a provincial parish. All at a time when the most developed countries were participating in a recurrence of misery and rejection. These ideas, written in a young person's exercise book, were not met with understanding in the forties; they were relegated to the editorial drawer at the 'Tygodnik' newspaper and only when the author became Pope, was it noticed that from the hand of someone that did not belong to the Catholic literary clique had come a text which, although imperfect, could be the pride of Polish religious literature in the forties. How many of Wojtyla's contemporary writers of this trend have rightly passed into oblivion while he – in my opinion - is left and was worth remembering. I insist on this, despite the opinion of some critics writing in Polish Catholic periodicals – the worldwide reception of this film confirms this fact quite strongly.

Writing these words, I can't free myself of the thought that one day (may it be as late as possible) we will be faced with what all children are faced when at a certain point they lose their parents. What will Polish Catholicism be like when we lose the person who is our Pope, when some distant stranger sits on the papal throne and we have to accept the fact that this pontificate was an exception, that the rule is a different state of affairs? Anyone who believes deeply must not be subject to despondency when we lose the intermediary who for the Poles is this Pope.

**BLUEBEARD**

Two of my radically different films are paradoxically connected through various themes which I would like to take the opportunity to discuss. I'm talking about my film about the Pope, 'From a Far Country', and the adaptation of Max Frisch's novel 'Bluebeard'. They were made a few years apart, both in the eighties. The first thing
which connects them is my own attitude towards my profession. The film about the Pope was the renunciation of my auteur ambitions. I made it as a favour – or speaking in the grandiose language of the church – as a ‘token of service’. The same was of 'Bluebeard’, while at the same time it was different. Both films are connected by a cause-and-effect thread: when German television offered me Frisch's text, I heard the following argument:

“In making a film about the Pope who were faced with a task not just as an artist but also as a diplomat. Making a film based on the prose of Max Frisch is a somewhat similar task.”

The point was that Frisch, a great, world-renowned writer, had never before allowed a film version of his novel to be made, although there had been many such initiatives. In his contracts, waiving his rights to film or television adaptations, he reserved the right to judge the screenplay and dissolve the contract if the screenplay wasn’t to his liking.

When we met in Zurich, Max Frisch treated me like a poacher who had taken it upon himself to lead an old fox out into the field. Without any embarrassment, he told me that all his life he had made good money from options which he gave for adaptations of his novels (now and again they were bought by big Hollywood studios); however, he had not yet approved a screenplay.

We spoke on this subject in 1983. Max Frisch was nearing his seventy-fifth birthday. I met him in passing in Warsaw, at the premiere of his play which was staged at the Contemporary Theatre by Erwin Axer, with Maja Komorowska playing the main part (I remember that on one occasion I drove Frisch back to his hotel). I was forty-something and his character reminded me of my father. He also reminded me of my father physically – with his stocky figure, wearing a pair of thick glasses, and for his temperament, a hothead who at any moment, even during a calm conversation, could suddenly explode with a wave of uncontrollable anger.

Undoubtedly, all of this is not enough to explain why I accepted the challenge. The book which I was offered – 'Bluebeard' – was as close to me as it was unfamiliar. The unfamiliarity lies within the twisted and quite perverse eroticism (the protagonist is accused of murdering his ex-wife, who had sex for money) and Swiss reality, which I had only a vague concept of as the stifling atmosphere of that country never particularly attracted me. Whereas, the closeness lies within the form. In constructing his novel, Frisch has gone further than Orson Welles in playing with different versions of events: the trial which takes place at the beginning is a real event which turns into an imaginary game. The accused is acquitted but, despite this, the trial continues and in the end there is an admission of guilt although it's obvious that the self-incrimination is the protagonist's delusion.

Remembering these first negotiations on the subject of my work, I must recall that the
eighties for me took place in the West in the realities of a new world with which I had to reconcile myself, not being able to return easily to my fatherland. In 1983 I couldn't anticipate that I would make a significant film in my country and, in truth, I wasn't sure whether I'd make any kind of film. Initially, as the head of the Film Production Unit, I had not been vetted, through the decision of the commission, which was comprised on one side by Party directors, such as Mr Poreba and Mr Waskowski and, from the other, the ex-rector of the film school and my nemesis during my time there, Mr Kuszewski. At the time, when Tor's fate hung in the balance, I suddenly appeared in Poland and this changed the decision. In the end, out of seven groups, it was decided that only Wajda's 'X' would be dissolved and we were pardoned. When we protested in connection with the dissolution of 'X', we were threatened with a re-vetting and we, as a group, wondered whether or not to maintain a group if we wouldn't be able to make a film that meant anything anyway. During the course of these experiences, I understood that my existence depended above all on what I did abroad as at home the market was shrinking year by year. During the first months of Martial law I wrote a screenplay which – I believe to this day – could have been my best film. I entitled it 'The Lackey of Schonbrunn'. It was a wide-ranging, epic story based on the life of the Emperor of Mexico, Maximilian Habsburg, and his diabolical lackey, who – as proved by historical fact – was his destructive inspiration. The intelligent and endearing future lackey was born as a bastard in the Schonbrunn stables and was a contemporary of the future Emperor of Mexico. Initially, he worked keeping the palace furnaces burning, then he was promoted to a dresser, later he became a secretary (even though he didn't know how to write yet), then in Mexico he became a minister – by carrying out all possible villainy he acquired wealth and respect. I printed 'The Lackey' in the second volume of my screenplays which was published a few years ago (it also appeared in the literary publication 'Dialogue'). I have a feeling that it was a potentially groundbreaking work for me which in the clearest manner talks about the essence of evil as a free choice (my protagonist wants to prove that God doesn't exist through the fact that he himself remains unpunished for his wickedness). Unfortunately, I was unable to make a film from this screenplay and I'm slowly losing hope that I ever will. Indeed, I found a producer, a few in fact, and we had the support of a German television station but later we were missing some small part of the budget (which was, out of necessity, not that small) and in the end, after detailed location scouting and putting together a cast, it turned out that I wouldn’t make 'The Lackey' just as, years earlier, I hadn't made 'A Middle of the Road Death' – the first of my important screenplays that I never filmed.

When I write that it's time to die I also have in mind that gigantic transformation which occurred during my life over the course of barely a dozen years. When I was entering the profession and, earlier still, when I was deciding that I would become a professional storyteller (I think this is the essence of the auteur in film), the person who was an example to me was Bergman – the first artist who did not sporadically make more or less auteuristic films but made them continuously, who made this a rule
for himself. For me he became a benchmark: if in a world of mass media there's a place for such activity, then I was ready to take a risk and try – perhaps I would succeed. And I did. From 'The Structure of Crystal' to 'Imperative', I made over a dozen auteur films at a steady pace: one a year, sometimes even two, and it seemed to me that this would go on forever. Before my very eyes, from year to year, more and more viewers demanded intelligent and complex films. If one year Antonioni was booed at Cannes, then two years later his films were being watched by the whole world.

Then there was a slump. Or rather a change of direction – that which I wrote about at the beginning of this book. And it was only when this direction started to change that I understood how lucky I had been that I'd been able to meet with the public not only in my country but relatively widely around the world. My films were watched by one generation and it seems to me that they have been remembered – and this is after all the greatest value for an artist. It's not enough for a viewer to buy a ticket. This will satisfy the investor because the film will pay for itself. For the artist it's not enough that people see it – they also have to like it and therefore remember it. If I make something that flashes by on a cinema or television screen and the next day no one remembers what they saw last night, then it wasn't worth making the film – at least not for me because I've already had a taste of taking pride in my profession. My pride lies in the fact that I don't have to work to earn a living in order to stay alive, that I don't make films because I have to but because I want to, that I care about it, that I see some reason to address the viewer. All this was blatantly obvious in the seventies, while today it's just a memory of good old times which have passed and at the most I can wonder whether they'll return. Perhaps the tide will change again and people will once again miss cinema in which the artist's name guarantees a quality of style and subject matter. And even if that occurs, will it not already be a completely different direction? Will the viewer turn to those who once created cinema? Or perhaps we will be replaced by others, like my students, who today I try to equip with the appropriate tools to do battle, so that they don't perish in a world in which success is measured mechanically in the number of tickets sold, regardless of who they were sold to or what benefit they brought to the people who bought them.

Repeating these deliberations, I revisit memories from those years when in front of my very eyes the order and the value system on which I built my existence as a director began to break down. The fact that the production of 'The Lackey of Schonbrunn' broke down despite so much effort gave me a lot to think about. The project augured well in purely commercial terms and the screenplay contained many events – so it wasn't a philosophical bore (later, in the West I managed to realise plans that were on the surface a great deal less 'sellable', such as 'Paradigm'). Despite this, 'The Lackey' had to end up on the shelf, from which it is taken off every year or two, primarily to return there. Most of the television stations with which I hold talks complain that the character is negative although, in my opinion, we will like him. I believe the viewer will feel that all the lackey's baseness is his way of challenging God and his revenge for the fact that the world is so unjust. The second objection
which concerns the style is as pertinent as it is perfidious – the broadcasters claim that the story is a tad too extraordinary, affirming the widely-held platitude regarding the difference between television and film. The film is about extraordinary people and extraordinary events; television is the opposite – it is about what is ordinary. It is said that characters which are worth making films about should be ‘bigger than life’. The problem lies in the fact that in Europe there is no way of making films now without the participation of television stations.

 Already after my problems with 'The Lackey', I had an interesting conversation with Jean Capin, one of the most open-minded programme directors in French television, who invited me for a meeting about a possible collaboration, after which he completely openly said:

 “The station wants your name. But it doesn't want your style, no matter what it's like, as the station has its own style.”

 This was a great way of putting it. Both accurate and cynical. Shortly afterwards, the person who said it lost his job because, I think, the world is fair and it finds fools to stupefy others and if someone dares stupefy others intentionally, then he loses because he's doing so insincerely.

 This aphorism sounds fairly suspicious but I combine it with a deep conviction. Time after time I saw intelligent artists who said: “If I wanted to I could make ‘any old thing’ but I don't want to”, after which it usually turned out that it's not possible to convincingly make something which one regards as ‘any old thing’ - that's why the feeling of superiority is usually completely unsubstantiated. I suspect that Bergman or Fellini would not be able to convincingly make an episode of 'Dynasty' because to do that one has to be as limited as those who write, film and watch it. (I can't deny myself the pleasure of once again vilifying that nonsense, particularly when I think of the fact that it's often watched by people who, in more ambitious times, made up my audience and today, wearing slippers, they chew that chewing gum for the eyes. How hard it is to have a young soul when one is no longer young). And for those who glorify their chastity (I have in mind my various artist friends), who proudly claim that they will not tarnish themselves with ‘commerce’, I suggest a different insulting comparison: it's like when a woman who boasts that she has retained her chastity, which is undoubtedly commendable, but one also has to ask whether anyone had designs on this chastity. So as not to be bought – in life and in art – two sides are required: one that is selling itself and the other that wants to buy. Phone calls from Hollywood offering great wages in return for making ‘any old thing’ did not happen very often in Poland.

 Many times I have used a similar metaphor when speaking with people in the West who, on hearing how our characters broke down here, clearly felt a superiority, as if they were certain that none of them in a similar situation would have not agreed to collaborate, would not have informed on a friend, nor signed a declaration of loyalty.
or gone on a march. While, in the meantime, we know very well that Western society, going through similar trials, did not show any proof of its moral superiority. (How well this could be seen on both sides of Germany! Knowing the Western side better, I often thought that these same people are irreproachable under little or no pressure, yet how yielding they become towards their superiors and how spontaneously unanimous with what they hear at briefings – in the GDR they would have probably been excellent censors or collaborators with the STASI).

I have thought about the situation in which I found myself when it turned out that I could count only on what I was able to do in the West, and my best project there had just fallen through. The conclusion was to take whatever I was offered. They offered me Frisch, I did Frisch. The luxury of the life I had lived thus far lay in the fact that from amongst the artistically interesting, ambitious, in a word, worthy projects I could choose those that were convenient for me. Now I have noticed that that's all finished. Now the projects will choose me. Frisch's project chose me, so we would try. It was worthy, so I wouldn't complain.

Meanwhile, Frisch did complain. Not about me but with the very intention of the adaptation. He told me that he didn't believe in the possibility of transferring into the language of film what was contained in the language of literature. I honestly declared that my auteur ambitions were already fulfilled to a great extent. If I'd been hired in order to adapt his prose, then I'd do so faithfully, without accentuating myself, but just using my skills and tools to transfer his work into the language of images. This part of our conversation went smoothly, particularly as it took place amongst culinary sensations. Max Frisch greatly enjoyed fine cuisine and each of our sessions ended in some exquisite restaurant, where I was sometimes accompanied by my wife, while at Frisch's side appeared a female psychologist who, I later found out, was the model for the main character of the girl from 'Homo Faber'. Now, when Volker Schlondorff (while Frisch was still alive) made a film based on this novel and on the screen I see a forty-something-year-old female psychologist, she is rejuvenated in my memories.

Frisch's complaints concerned my adaptation. As usual, he wanted to see a detailed screenplay in order to give permission, while I wanted to save myself from disappointment and I proposed that I'd explain to him the manner in which I wanted to approach the subject matter, but I didn't want to be then tested like a schoolboy on whether I'd kept my word and, even more importantly, I didn't want to become involved in a project that I was unsure of.

I'll pause for a moment at this last sentence because it signals a problem which I often struggle with. For a project to have a chance of going ahead and to get money for it, it should be brought into its best possible shape. On the other hand, the chances that the project will fail are enormous and every artist has a certain limited amount of enthusiasm which he can bestow on his works – in the same way as, even with the biggest heart, one has a limited ability to love and one shouldn't waste feelings where it can result in disappointment. Hence, the tendency for reserve towards uncertain
projects. The principle which I count as a simple guideline of mental hygiene is: not to engage while nothing is certain. Therefore, I was convinced that it wasn’t worth going into detail and engaging in Frisch's work if I was to be rejected later. He, in turn, said that he wouldn't give his permission until he was convinced how, in detail, I intended to adapt his novel. I solemnly promised him that I wouldn't change a word of his dialogue and I wouldn't introduce any ‘oddities’, that the light in the courtroom would be changing as it becomes imaginary and that in a few scenes the windows would create a feeling that not everything that we are watching is real and actual. And this was still not enough. Max Frisch wanted a screenplay. Irritated, I bought a school notebook and cut his book with scissors so as not to add any other word apart from the page numbers. I sent him this notebook and received a telegram. The author hung out the white flag. He said that he gave in. The television stations (German and Swiss) were delighted and, from my side, I decided to win one more point in this game. I wrote to Frisch that his approval must find expression in the language which I use, thus in images. I asked him to agree to be an extra in the film. We chose a scene with Maja Komorowska as the writer really liked this actress and he even agreed to change the nationality of the character who she was playing so that her slight accent in German and English (the film was to be acted in both languages) had its logical justification. A close-up of Max Frisch is shown in the film and clearly shows that it was done with his consent.

'Bluebeard' was for me an exercise in calligraphy and I'm rather pleased with the result. Shown at the Venice Film Festival, it received the first prize (along with the German film 'Heimat'), so I was satisfied. On the other hand, the screening for German literary critics provided an opportunity for tirades and objections that prose should never be adapted for the screen. A simple conclusion came from this occasion – how many people today read prose and how many watch television? In order to validate this thought I'll give the strongest argument of Fisher Verlag, who published Frisch's book and, following the success of the film, immediately published my screenplay with photographs. It was basically the same book written out into scenes and in this form it shone with a light reflected by literature onto the screen, then back to become a book again. The relationships at the turn of our century have become confused and one should reflect deeply on this – perhaps indeed Gutenberg's time has passed? And if so, is it worth sacrificing so much time in school to learning literature and one's mother tongue? Perhaps more time should be reserved for the language of computers?

I ask this a little through contrariness. I don't like computers. I dealt with them during my physics studies and the whole exaltation of computer upstarts who discovered all this passed me by because I already had it behind me. As a result of that, to this day I write on a typewriter because it's faster than on a computer and I have notes, phone numbers and addresses in notebooks because there's no way of travelling with all these discs and risking that because of some trick the memory will be erased and I'll be left in the middle of some city without any addresses.
MELPOMENE

I don't know which I remember first: theatre or cinema. In memories, particularly those from childhood, time is not deposited in layers, it does the opposite – it creates balls of turbulence. The turning point of my childhood was the end of the war; I had probably already been to the theatre during the occupation, I vaguely remember some fairy tales on a stage. They did not make a great impression on me, neither did the first films that I saw in Cracow right after the Germans left. The theatre, as the kingdom of Melpomene (rather than Santa Claus) revealed itself to me a few years later in Warsaw. It was a theatre with a certain address, perhaps the only large theatre which survived in Warsaw – Teatr Polski (The Polish Theatre).

Probably the earliest show that I remember was 'Mr Jowialski' with Solski, Zelwerowicz, Cwiklinska and young Wollejka in the glory of the fame that the role of the young Chopin had brought him. Then there was 'El Cid' with Barszczewska, Andryczowna and the very odd Jan Kreczmar. His oddity was hidden in his gaze but I became convinced of this years later when Corneille's romantic lead played the father in my film 'Family Life'. He was seriously ill then, just after an operation, which had deprived him of a leg. He acted with a provisional artificial limb on an unhealed wound and on the very first day he heroically climbed the steps to the garden by himself, walking from the car to the location, a villa in Konstancin. He asked that no one be nearby at this time because he wanted to grapple with his pain in solitude. Along with all of the crew I went down to the ground floor. There one could hear Jan's footsteps, and sometimes the sound of a fall, because that did occur, but one was not allowed to run to his aid. At that time, the greying, ill Jan Kreczmar was the closest to the character that he'd played before my very eyes when I was still young. As for the gaze which I would describe as very odd, it's mystery was very simple. Jan was cross-eyed, which I think is called divergence. His eyes diverged widely to the sides and in front of the camera (and also on the stage, staring straight at the audience) he used the strength of his muscles to draw his eyes together so that they looked parallel. However, when his profile was to the camera his eyes diverged again. The greatest effect was caused by the word “cut” at the end of a take – the eyes, exempt from their effort, fired off like two rockets and, despite Jan's gravitas, the whole crew spent a long time learning how to hide their amusement.

So 'El Cid' and later 'Lorenzaccio' in which, from the perspective of my teenage self, I
found meanings which I think resound to Musset's credit: a play on the subject of virtue with harlotry, and the price of dealing with evil embodied in authority. And with this the strength of the actors: Wolltejko, Hancza, Barszczewska, Kreczmar... I don't know if today even one theatre could assemble a cast of such calibre. And this was the case in all the shows that I remember: 'Woe from Wit', 'Poles are no Geese' with Romanowna and 'The Doll' with Andrzejowna and Leszczynski, and finally another revelation: 'Horsztynski'. I'm no longer sure what moved me in this last play, but to this day I remember certain scenes, including Kruczkwowski's epilogue. Otherwise, I must admit that his play 'Julius and Ethel' with the unforgettable Mikołajska and Wyrzykowski also moved me, despite the fact that listening to Radio Free Europe I was convinced of the Rosenbergs' guilt (their guilt but not their punishment!)

The theatre of my mature years began, I think, with 'Forefathers’ Eve' by Bardini. Then I watched Axer's productions, acquiring a taste for his 'Kordian', 'Flies' and 'Germany' at the National Theatre as well as the countless shows at the Contemporary Theatre on Mokotowska Street. I have a particular weakness for that stage as it's the parish hall of the Church of the Saviour. Before it was made into a theatre, it served as a religious education room. There, too, dressed in my first suit (with shorts, I think) I took my first communion. Not for the last time do liturgy and theatre show their marriage to one another.

These days I often lecture on various courses or directing seminars and I readily tell an anecdote heard many years later, supposedly from the time of rehearsals for 'Kordian'. Alongside Lomnicki acted Kurnakowicz, a great actor but apparently quite a drinker and not great in the world of abstract concepts. Meanwhile, Mr Erwin, one of the few great intellectuals in the art world explained the meaning of 'Kordian' so deeply that doubtless you could put it into a university dissertation. In the dressing room, before the premiere, the great actor, not always understanding the director, quietly asked Lomnicki, who was playing Kordian: “So tell me darling, what’s happening in this play? Do I like you or don't I?” On hearing the answer, he played Konstanty admirably. In relations among people, in life (as well as in film and on the stage) this basic “like – don't like” plays the greatest role. If I remember it correctly then, Konstanty liked Kordian.

Recently I saw a new television adaptation of this play with a young and very promising Michal Zebrowski in the lead role and I thought that in the times of Brezhnev this text sounded infinitely more powerful. However, I prefer the times when it sounds less so.

The 1950s brought me two more encounters with the world of theatre. The first was the Theatre National Populaire of Jean Vilar with Gerard Philip. Despite persistent efforts, I didn't get into the Polish Theatre, but after hours of standing in a queue I was able to buy a standing ticket to the Gwardia Hall to see 'Ruy Blas' and through opera glasses watch something that to this day remains for me a miracle of theatre. 'Titus Andronicus' with Laurence Olivier and Vivienne Leigh also belonged to this same category as did later 'Servant of Two Masters' directed by Strehler. I don't know any better theatre.

This theatre left in me a feeling of devout reverence. I was never tempted to look behind the scenes. Quite the opposite, I was scared of such a possibility. When I went with some friends (already at university, I think) do see 'Nora', with the wonderful Barszczewska, my friends went after the show to ask for an autograph, while I remained in the foyer, not
wanting to ruin my impressions. In our fairly devout home I never privately met any priests – it seemed that their place was solely in church at the altar. I think that thanks to this practice I’m free from anti-clerical feelings. And I can't stand meeting actors in the dressing room.

However, I had to get to know the theatre behind the scenes through my father, who worked on the construction of theatres several times and, after the war, took part in two successive conversions of the 'Roma' theatre into a temporary opera hall. The first conversion was quite cosmetic and consisted of shortening the semi-circular hall and creating a narrow pit for the orchestra. At the back of the stage, under the old screen, there remained two large plaster statues of high-ranking churchmen – a Cracow cardinal and Pius XI, I think. I remember that one had an outstretched hand in a gesture of benediction and to this hand was attached some decoration from the first post-war premiere. It had been 'Goplana' by Zelenski. Taken by my father, I walked in on rehearsals and noticed that Goplana's water courtiers used colourful torches, flickering them mysteriously (years later I was moved by this effect when it was used by Lubimow). I remember the shocking event when at the official government performance of 'Mr Twardowski' (in the corrected materialistic version) in the penultimate scene some curtain that was attached to the hand of the statue came loose and above the devil appeared the figure of the cardinal with the gesture of benediction. Apparently, Pieck and Bierut were in the audience and that's why the event was read as political sabotage. It's true that there was a second reconstruction – the charming neo-Gothic chapel was taken apart and transferred to Brodno and in the area of the old cemetery, from the time of Warsaw's last cholera epidemic, a part of the building was added which today serves the operetta.

There are also a number of memories associated with the opera from that incredible season just before the transfer to the Corazzi building when during Wodiczka's management there was suddenly a stream of premieres that to this day I don't think have been equalled: the excellent 'The Haunted Manor' and 'Don Pasquale', which was directed by Bardini, Swinarski's 'Oedipus' and 'Orpheus', and 'Boris Godunov', also by Bardini. For a brief moment, the transfer to the Theatre Square seemed like an occasion for the rebirth of opera.

The new building was constructed amid dramatic struggles. I remember from my father's accounts the problems with hanging the concrete shells with the ceramic horizon line on the ceiling, on which in honour of our eastern neighbours, they were obliged to place an image of the recently launched Sputnik satellite. While building the steps, there was some mix-up as a result of countless changes in the design and suddenly there a mezzanine had to be built which was worthy of an underground station but not representative of the interior. From deliberations with Director Szyfman, my father brought back accounts of the political content within the site. It was said that the décor of the lobby and the auditorium were to dazzle with ostentation so as to boost the confidence of the audience who, in truth, lived in more humble conditions than in the West but in the opera were to feel its share of luxury. Indeed, it turned out to be luxurious – but what's worse is what has been appearing on the stage there for many years. We have not been cured of our complexes and the shows at the National Opera, with a few examples, are rather saddening.

But why exactly would it be any different? The luxury remains in the baubles. We cannot afford great voices.

As I'm reluctant to go behind the scenes, I didn’t suppose I'd ever be tempted to direct on
the stage. However, that's what happened. I attempted theatre practically when I was still a student, taking part in some ephemeral university mime group in Warsaw (as a fairly heavily built person I was closer to directing than performing). With some group next to the All Saints Church I performed on stage in a play about Maximilian Kolbe and I'm afraid to admit that I played a saint, I think due to the fact that I wear glasses. The temptation to perform pulled me so far that I took part in an amateur competition in the then famous Student Satire Theatre. The selection committee was made up of Wojciech Solarz, Jerzy Makuszewski and I think also Agnieszka Osiecka – I knew them all through Wick Ronisz, with whom I made my first amateur films as a student. I was eliminated during the qualifying round. I wasn't deeply affected by this because already then I was experiencing considerable joy from my films. And as for my performing ambitions – I have another admission: in the first or second year of my studies I entered a competition to become a television presenter. Polish television was taking its first steps back then and I remember my quiet calculation that if I got through and I become a programme announcer, nobody who I studied with would find out because in the whole of Warsaw there were barely a few thousand receivers. I met Mr Suzin during the qualifying round and he went through. I didn't. What weighed against me was my way of speaking, which I can't stand and I am unable to change. I don't like my artificially set voice and that evenness which is created by the rounded sentences and the closed, chiselled intonation. I would like to be able to speak simply but that's really the hardest thing to do. I place a little of the blame on my ancestors – my father also spoke quite artificially, perhaps it's a sign that a family of immigrants had a habit of speaking too correctly so as not to give away their accent. I'm forcing this interpretation so as to share the responsibility, whereas I really suppose that in my speech is reflected my whole conflict with myself and the world.

Often, caused by a spirit of defiance, I lambast spontaneity as the most undesirable trait that I find in people. The contrariness lies in the fact that today spontaneity is treated as a guarantee of truth or authenticity, the denial of convention and hypocrisy, while I want to view it as something counter to our bestial nature. Spontaneously, I'm ready to be the first to grab the best bit of food from the table, take the most comfortable seat, push away others and snatch whatever I feel like. The opposite of this spontaneity seems to be manners, as a result of working on oneself, conscious choices, limitations and abnegations which we force on ourselves, finding a model for that better part of our nature which, with difficulty, clears the way through that which is bestial in us. I also suppose that, in the moment of its development, my way of speaking was dictated by a desire to control a show any feelings, which in itself is not reprehensible but in my case went too far. To prove that I truly think this I cite the fact that when I was invited onto a talk show called MDM with the suggestion that I don't say anything, I agreed without hesitation. It's true that my appearance on the show was a joke at my own expense. Like many men I easily answer questions and comment on everything I'm asked about. Only sometimes (thanks to my wife) I happen to notice that I'm speaking even when I have nothing to say.

An active meeting with the stage came very late to me, after many years of a career in film. Andrzej Wajda was most involved in this as he himself practised theatre and he encouraged his younger friends to combine both disciplines. Wajda suggested that I do 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' in Cracow. In Warsaw he himself was in the middle of rehearsals with Hubner in the Powszechny Theatre, while in Cracow, the director of the Gawlik Theatre was looking for a director who would bring some originality to the staging. I agreed because I
knew Milos Forman's film and I knew that it was banned in Poland on account of solidarity with our comrades in Czechoslovakia (they could not forgive Forman that he stayed in the West). With the help of Krystyna Zachwatowicz, who designed the set, I decided to throw myself into the adventure. I was drawn to the legend of the Old Theatre in Cracow and the thrill of an adventure.

I was sure of the play itself and I had a superb cast – Nowicki in the main role, Budzisz-Krzyzanowska, Olszewska as nurse Rachel, Bradecki as the victim of suicide and also Radziwiłłowicz as the doctor (and my assistant).

However, the adventure in Cracow turned out to be a personal failure. Not artistically but personally. The show was nothing less than decent. It ran successfully for a long time, whereas I entered into such a great conflict with the whole company of actors that I decided never again to set foot behind the scenes of a theatre. I spent a very long time wondering what the reason for this failure was and, only after seventeen years, working with Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz in Paris, did I find out how I'd wounded the actors of this best company in the Republic of Poland.

It turned out that the first source of dissonance was my false humility. I came as a well-known director to a well-known company with a good play and at the first rehearsal I said that I had no experience in the theatre, that I simply didn’t know anything, but I'd try not to interfere. They'd be great and perhaps I could be useful in coming to their aid like a midwife at the birth of a child. To this day, after having directed several dozen plays, I like to use this metaphor to cut myself off from purely director's theatre, which wore me out as a viewer and which I don't need to do as an artist – I gain enough satisfaction in the cinema.

At the Old Theatre I suggested that I'd watch the rehearsals and if I liked something, then I'd tell them, but apart from that I felt responsible for the fact that the actors didn’t block each other out on stage. The rest they were capable of doing themselves so they didn’t need to mind me.

I said it all almost entirely sincerely, but on two points I was wrong. Firstly, quite casually, I had demystified theatre; I do this in my mind to this day, in the same way as I demystify cinema, but this offends actors. The theatre is a temple of the arts and they are its priests so my remarks that Modrzejewska or Sarah Bernhardt rehearsed for a week at the most were an insult to their craft. On the other hand, I had certain reasons to say so because, as in any theatre, the actors at the Old Theatre excused themselves from rehearsals for some work on the side and I agreed to this, saying “If you need rehearsals, please just come for the dress rehearsal.”

The second mistake lay in the fact that I didn't understand how alone actors are on stage and how much they need an authority to help them judge what they are doing. And also how necessary dialogue or creative inspiration is. In cinema, out of necessity, I take from the actors what is ready – in theatre there is time for discovery and for searching. Today I know that it's not true that every actor knows by himself or herself how to act something – the director can be helpful.

My humility was false in the sense that it consisted of a lack of solidarity. What is worse, I admitted to this after the premiere. In some interview to the press I said that I had a poor...
experience working at the Old Theatre. Let me be justified by the conviction that the company is so great (particularly in its home town) that my voice sounded like the whim of a random customer at a renowned restaurant. It turned out that it sounded like a denunciation and I only understood this after seventeen years.

I have apologized for this many times, the last time from the stage of the Old Theatre itself during a meeting with the audience. It seemed to me that this time I was obviously humble and sincere. But I don't think I'll live to see forgiveness: the local press in Cracow reported my words as if I were a complete halfwit. I don't dare think that what I said was too difficult for the reporters, it's more likely that they're continuing to inflict punishment on me.

The distress after the Cracow premiere was so great that I only had the courage three years later to try to find out whether theatre is indeed inaccessible for me. I agreed to Ionesco's 'Exit the King' in Munich. The text seemed close to my heart, I have an eternal obsession with death and to add to this it came to me to stage this play in a very realistic manner, in spite of the directions of the author. For example, I wanted to stage 'Exit the King' in contemporary Spain and dress the protagonist and his queen like figures from everyday life. Years later, Ionesco complimented me on this. The play was fronted by an actor who was my friend. This was Vadim Glowna and his then wife Vera Tschechowa, from the dynasty in which the surname was passed down to women (Vera is the granddaughter of the famous Olga Tschechowa). For the first time I was directing in German and during rehearsals I was continually glancing at the original and trying not to alienate the performers with anything. Today, in retrospect, I think that it was a good show and it gave me the experience that theatre can be pleasant. Throughout the whole period of rehearsals there were no clashes with anyone – I tiptoed around the actors and they reciprocated by doing likewise. I think that the fear was mutual but effect praiseworthy. During rehearsals I received some more support in the form of Ewa Starowieyska, who since then I've worked with over a dozen times in Italy, Switzerland, France and Russia. And that's how I started to like theatre again.

In Germany I directed another dozen or so plays from the repertoire that is not liked by German directors; however, it is liked by the public. It's funny that in theatre I was never a very prestigious director and I did not come into contact with any of the finest stages, apart from the Moscow Art Theatre and the Odeon, where I was an author; however, I had great success with the public and received prizes for the most popular performance.

The repertoire which is disliked by German directors are the realistic Anglo-Saxon plays: Pinter, Miller, Dorfmann and Kempinski. As a filmmaker I feel a connection between these dramatic works and the art form which I practice, and I directed it willingly, assuming that in theatre I'm not looking for a chance to express myself but rather that I'm taking on the role of a midwife helping to deliver someone else's child.

Of my adventures in Germany, I'll mention the worst, which was the staging of Stoppard's play 'Night and Day' in the city theatre in the capital, Bonn. I was offered this suddenly, as a replacement for another director. I was free then so I accepted the job without having time to study the play. Hence, the unfortunate slip-up when, during the third rehearsal, I picked up the original text and realized that I'd understood one bit of dialogue, based on the German text, completely incorrectly and, what was worse. I'd explained to the actors that the mysterious figure about which so much is said is the main character's lover. Whereas the author had conceived this as the capital of a fictional African country and the allusions had a
different meaning. I, till halfway through rehearsals, forged ahead with a nonsensical theory that a city can be a lover and vice versa. What is even more amusing is that my actors fully agreed with this theory.

'Night and Day' is also associated with a bad experience during the premiere. The leading lady in the show had gained fame in television and she was probably just as popular as she was lacking in talent. I had no say in the cast and worked hard to stop the play from being a dismal failure, but during the dress rehearsal I understood that there was nothing more that could be done. So I decided to skip the big monologue, which would only incriminate her further. It was possible to divide up the monologue in such a way that it's meaning was delivered by other actors; however, my leading lady declared that during the premiere she would deliver the full text. She was delighted with herself, whereas I knew that she was simply awful. The management of the theatre supported my intentions but the actress said that she would not back down and would deliver the monologue. I had to threaten that if she uttered one sentence that had not been agreed on, then I would bring down the curtain. And, indeed, at the premiere I came to stand behind the scenes by the switch and get ready to do what I had announced I would. I’ll never forget the pause before the monologue itself when the actress' eyes met mine, she took a breath and froze in silence while I lifted my hand to press the switch. And the story continued without the discarded monologue.

In this same show and for the same purpose, I used yet another trick. The play took place in Africa, in a small house in the bush, and in the background the sound of the jungle could be heard from a tape recording. A week before the premiere, I had the idea of introducing on stage a live, talking parrot. The theatre consented to my idea – a live animal is always an attraction even though it may pose a threat to the actors. Here, however, I was scheming in my intention – the parrot spoke rarely during rehearsals but it had a beneficial influence on the actors. First of all, on the main female performer as it reacted to every manifestation of over-excitement, by repeating the actress' lines. This forced her to act in a more restrained manner. The premiere went quite well and we received good reviews but a week after the premiere I found out that the parrot had died. Apparently, it had been poisoned. Of course, I don't know who did it but as the police saying goes: “Cherchez la femme”.

I happened to use a trick in a play on another occasion. I was directing 'Julius Caesar' in Italy. Initially, it was an outdoor performance, played in the Verona amphitheatre (there were seven thousand viewers at the premiere!), later it was adapted for an auditorium and played in Rome – in the Teatro Valle, in Taormina (once again, an amphitheatre) and also in Bologna, Turin, Milan and Trieste. The trouble with this show was the fact that four great actors considered that each of them individually was the leader of the spectacle. So, Cassius, Brutus, Mark Antony and the title hero Caesar constantly demanded priority on the billing, better costumes, interviews, press conferences and so on. The show was a success, it ran for a very long time and the management constantly put me to the test, demanding that I restore the original staging, because during my absence the actors had changed positions, and stood with their faces to the audience, pushing their partners out of the light. Unable to keep an eye on every performance, I took advantage of the one Pole in the cast, Eugeniusz Priwiezenczew. He played a cameo of the seer, so a soothsayer, who only says two lines in the whole play, one of which is the famous warning “Beware the Ides of March”. My Priwiezenczew had worked for a long time in Szajna's theatre and I made use of his physical discipline, having him sit at the top of a great triumphal arch under which the action took
place. On my command he was to react to every arbitrary change of position by the actors by wriggling on the top of arch. His every move attracted the attention of the audience so that the disobedient actor immediately lost the audience's interest. Thanks to this trick we were able to retain discipline although my Polish performer risked getting beaten up a few times.

'Julius Caesar' came into being in the mid-eighties. In order to employ Mr Priwiezencew I had to write an essay to the Italian actors’ union proving that in Shakespeare’s text the seer is probably a Syrian, that is a person from the East, and that's why for artistic reasons I must have a Pole for this part because no Italian would create such an impression. The essay did the job and Priwiezencew received the right to work.

This one encounter with Shakespeare is also linked to a problem with language. A special, new translation of the play into Italian had been developed for the performance. Working on this with a translator, I chanced on a completely unexpected difficulty. In Mark Antony's speech about Cassius there is mention in the original that he is “an honourable man” - these words in a literal Italian translation raise a laugh from the audience because the Italian “uomo d'onore” unquestionably means “Mafioso”. The last Italian who invoked honour in public life was Mussolini (in France it was de Gaulle, while in England it was Churchill). Later, this concept disappeared from the dictionary. So, in our version of the play, we introduced the phrase “an honest man” rather than “an honourable man”. Once, honesty was the virtue of an artisan – something more was expected from a politician.

I had the opportunity to mention this process of devaluation of character traits required from public people when I ended up at an extraordinarily exciting World Economy Forum in Davos, where a dozen or so prime ministers, a few presidents, kings, governors of national banks and presidents of corporations discussed world problems and threats. As an artist I ended up on a panel devoted to morality and universal values. Next to me sat an adviser to the American president, the head of Interpol and two heads of banks. When, during a discussion about values which should be universal in today's world, honesty was mentioned, I asked about honour. I referred to a recent example which concerned the former president of the German Bank, Mr Schlesinger, who two days before a change in discount rates announced that he didn't see any reason to change them. There is no doubt that he lied in order to protect the German mark but he acted contrary to such values as honesty, all the more so honour. “If that's how the head of the main bank acts, then why should your ordinary man in the street honestly pay his taxes,” I asked, proposing that the discussion about values refer not to repression, as suggested by the opinionated head of Interpol, but to the standards of society's conduct. To my surprise, a certain Japanese man objected to this and pronounced that my way of presenting the matter was completely incomprehensible to him. The head of a bank, like every politician or wartime leader, agrees to risk and sometimes, if it's required for the good of the country, he must lie and he doesn't assume any detriment to his honour, provided of course he promptly commits suicide. This was what the Japanese man supposed was what the president of the German bank did. The Germans who were present at the meeting put him straight: the president simply retired. The Japanese man was amazed: “How is that possible? After all, he must have children, a family, friends – so how can he live among them now after losing face?”
Directing 'Julius Caesar', I was very tempted to interpret the play contrary to way in which other ‘committed’ directors usually interpreted it. It has already entered into the canon that Julius Caesar brings to mind Hitler, Stalin or Mussolini, or at least Idi Amin Dada – whereas I wanted to make him a sympathetic, calm person who is forced into dictatorship by an escape from freedom – a human weakness, not the fatalism of history or a deformation of character. Such an interpretation condemned me to a conflict with public opinion, which in Italy is extremely politicized and to which I was at a disadvantage because I had directed a biographical film about the Pope. I was never forgiven for this deed. In my opinion, this criticism is completely unfounded because my film about the Pope doesn't talk about the Pope but about a country; however, because of this film I was, in a sense, ‘finished’. I admit that from the beginning I knew that I would have to pay such a price so I don't regret my deed and I can't complain about the loss of favour from this enormously influential part of the cultural establishment. To put it simply: I knew what I was doing and I knew there was no return. I write about this whilst writing about the film itself – I only mention it here when talking about theatre as it is in the theatre that I felt the state of disfavour when during the first winter of Martial law I directed 'The Slaughterhouse' – a play that I feel is very close to me but it was unfamiliar, and even hostile, to the establishment which was called ‘chic-radical’ or “caviar progressiste”. Mrozek mocks the spectre of freedom which manifests itself in the form of a mirage of liberation from all possible forms of restraint. At the end of the play the viewers are to receive knives and can use them in the darkness if they want to achieve liberation by killing one of their neighbours. 'The Slaughterhouse' was written as a radio play in Warsaw. I saw it staged brilliantly by Jarocki. Whereas, in Milan I had to make another adaptation and resolve the difficult problem of handing out the knives, made all the harder because – as I was warned – in a city of terrorism we may chance upon a madman who really attacks someone. What is more, the premiere was to be attended by the mayor, against whom there had been assassination attempts before. I decided that the knives given to members of the audience would be wooden, but in the auditorium there would be a few actors who had been placed there by me who would have real knives and would let out howls in the darkness. The provocation was so successful that at the premiere the mayor's bodyguards tried to call off the play's finale by shouting out that the theatre must not dare put out the lights. The press described this, giving us a fair amount of publicity, and I felt one of the extraordinary appeals of theatre which is immediacy – that one can mix reality with fiction, intertwine real life with pretence. The ten actor-provocateurs sat among the public and worked throughout the performance. In the first act they formed a regular claque (after all Milan is the birthplace of claus). They applauded and snorted with laughter, helping the audience to notice the jokes in the text which had escaped their attention. Whereas, after the interval, in order to balance thing up, they were loudly scandalized by the play and they whipped up the atmosphere, encouraging viewers to leave the auditorium as a protest against the reactionary subtext contained in the dialogues. I think that the claque and the protest was sufficiently balanced that I don't have to be embarrassed about using undignified tricks on the audience.

Taking advantage of being in a losing position towards the establishment, several times in Italy I directed plays that no one had dared touch. One of them was a play written in the Pope's youth (directed together with Mrs Kurczab, who was also the play's translator). The play was about Job and it was written by the teenage Wojtyla – it is dramatically clumsy and linguistically quite overblown (we were able to minimize this in the translation) but intellectually it was surprisingly mature. The author wrote it during the war and what he had
to say about suffering and the helplessness of man deserved attention, even if it had not come from the pen of the future bishop of Rome.

After radical cuts, the text was staged outdoors in San Miniato, in front of a thousand people (the performance was shown ten times) along with attractions which do not belong to theatre or to film. Along the street or the narrow square where the audience sat, motorcycles rode by, there were shots, every night a pyrotechnician from Cinecitta set the bishop's palace alight for one minute. On the steps of the palace there was a miniature model of Job’s village and vineyards, which was inundated by a flood organized by the fire service. The daughter of Vittoria Gassman (who inherited from him an extraordinarily sonorous voice) played an angel and recited a monologue, shouting into the depths of the street, and the public fell silent. And when at the end of the monologue Gassman lowered her voice to a whisper, the microphone came on and completely changed the acoustics. Such an effect is only possible outdoors and that's when it's appealing. Anyway, how beautiful theatre is when deprived of plush armchairs and inscribed into architecture and nature, and at the same time unique – every participant can feel like he's witnessing something that will never repeat itself identically. Perhaps this type of spectacle counterbalances the television series or interactive television, where electronics can provide us with illusions or sensory hallucinations but they can't give the feeling that we're communing with something living. Perhaps the future lies in the initiative of the actors who I recently saw in Romania, where a small group of actors is hired out for performances in private houses and there perform the play looking straight into the eyes of strangers in their homes. All of this may be an invitation to a new direction of theatre language, under the condition that this new language will come into being not for the sake of empty searching but to express something that the old language is unable to carry. And that, what theatre today should talk about, is the most serious question that should be asked of this artistic discipline.

The one person I often talk to about this is Tadeusz Bradecki – author (I list this in first place), director and actor. He acted in my film 'Spiral', 'The Constant Factor', the film about the Pope, 'The Temptation', 'A Year of the Quiet Sun', 'Inventory', my television film about 'Napoleon' and recently in 'Our God's Brother'. His cameo was cut from 'The Silent Touch' during editing. Apart from this long list, we are connected together through our fairly extraordinary collaborations in the theatre – three times we worked together on plays in Italy, during which twice my role was called artistic supervision, once on the poster it may have been called ‘co-directing’. The paradox lies in the fact that Tadeusz is a more outstanding man of the theatre than me, while I have sometimes the more famous surname on the poster and in this way the commonality of our interests has led us to a few original jobs. One of them was a performance of Uga Betti's play 'The Queen and the Rebels', a play written at the time of the Cold War by the author of 'Corruption in the Palace of Justice', a man of decidedly non-communist convictions, because of which to this day few people in Italy want their name linked to his. Being ‘finished’ on that side, I pulled Tadeusz into this and together we put our name to a show which seemed pretty good to me.

The second of our mutual endeavours concerned an opera about Maximilian Kolbe, which was composed by the contemporary French composer Probst to Ionesco's text. The preview took place in Rimini in a great exhibition hall for a few thousand people. The opera itself is intimate and I was taking a risk by deciding to show it in spite of despite the fact that the great hall is divided in half by a platform. The rest was thought up by Tadeusz and the show
was a great success. It was later transferred to France and Austria, where it stayed for a couple of seasons and then it reached Bytom, where Tadeusz staged it, but without me.

Kolbe brings me to opera – now this is the last chapter of my adventures with the stage. I inaugurated it in Bremen when I received a proposal of staging 'King Roger' by Szymanowski. It seemed to me that I couldn't say no because it was a chance for one more performance of this beautiful although not quite successful opera which still cannot break through onto the world stage. I approached rehearsals with my heart on my sleeve – I was embarrassed that I'm so inept at reading musical notation that I would be thrown out of every music school, even at primary level. But, apparently, in opera musicality is what counts more than formal education – after all it is a form of theatre where the director is responsible for the spectacle, while the conductor takes care of the music. Directing an opera is like driving a tram – one has to follow the tracks which is the score (where did I get this metaphor from?). However, I admit that the joy from this ride is immense. My 'King Roger' was quite original because I didn't believe in the libretto and I found that there were more autobiographical elements than those concerning Sicilian history. So I added a prologue presenting Iwaszkiewicz's relationship with Szymanowski. Also, on the basis of their letters and memoirs, I described the rather peculiar circumstances of how this work came into being. What we did was to project images of the Bolshevik revolution, burning palaces and manors in the Ukraine, while the librettist and composer exchanged their intentions and hidden feelings in their letters. Later in the spectacle, the tenor-shepherd is replaced by the mime-dancer, while the tenor stands on the proscenium and sings his part, without acting. I later repeated this idea in Palermo and I think it helps to present the work, which on one hand seduces with its wealth of ideas and on the other discourages with their underutilisation. “How very Polish,” said the conductor Sternberg, who was a native of Chicago and Lvov, from whom I heard a sigh from the orchestra pit a week after rehearsals (which were conducted in German, of course) and “Okey dokey” in his lilting Lvov accent.

After 'King Roger' was well received, the Great Theatre, or rather the Greatest Theatre (how do you translate Teatro Massimi?) offered me another operatic adaptation: the coupling of ‘King Oedipus' by Stravinsky and 'Antigone' by Honegger in one evening. We initially agreed that my collaborators from ‘King Roger’ would take part in this project – so the set designer Ewa Starowiejska, the choreographer Ewa Wycichowska and the choir of the National Philharmonic, who I write about with great affection as not only is it made up of great voices but also with great dedication submits to the hardships of singing in motion, which most traditional opera choirs usually shun (what is at work here is probably the law of contradiction as the philharmonic choir sings all year long standing motionless on stage). When a few months before the start of rehearsals I went to Palermo, I was invited for a meeting with the authorities of the city and the region and I found out that budget cuts would make the participation of the Polish Philharmonic choir impossible. Stravinsky's and Honegger's scores are difficult and I had already befriended the Polish choir so I voiced an objection and, with my back to the wall, I stated the matter clearly: if they renounce my choir, then they renounce me too. Some local director could replace me. After this pronouncement, I was asked to leave the executive committee so that it could deliberate and, after half an hour, I returned to the smoke-filled room where the director of the opera informed me in a sepulchral voice that those gathered felt like victims of blackmail, that it was too late for change and that the authorities painfully agreed to the conditions of the previous contract. I was happy to have won but I'll admit that I wasn't yet so deeply
involved in the show so the decision to place matters on a knife's edge came to me relatively painlessly.

Later rehearsals began, initially with only the participation of the soloists. In Palermo I was staying in a hotel right next to the theatre so that every day I could see the stage door from my window. One day, looking vacantly at the street, I noticed a brand new poster: the theatre had announced enrolments for a choir! I asked at the hotel reception what this meant. From gossip that the porter told me, I realized that apparently some foreign director considered the level of the current choir so low that for the purposes of the new show they would have to bring in singers from abroad. Therefore, it had been decided to disband the choir and form a new one. I felt a shiver down my spine as I was aware that Palermo is not a town in which a foreigner can feel safe and there were dozens of families of the members of the disbanded choir that might seek revenge! I ran to the management and asked why they were dumping the responsibility on me for a decision in which I had no part. I insisted that Stravinsky and Honegger would be sung by a choir from Warsaw; however, I never suggested making any changes to their choir and now I was scared of revenge. The director laughed at my fears and said that he was sincerely grateful to me that I hadn’t agreed to work with the old choir.

“It was a very poor choir,” he explained “and you’ve helped us bring in some new blood. It was constantly spoken about, so this was just an excuse. In fact, it had been known for a long time that the choir must be disbanded.”

Appeased, I expressed the hope that the new choir would be better but the director of the opera sadly disagreed.

“There are good voices but we can only take a couple, while the rest of the places in the choir are for various recommended people because here the senator has a granddaughter and there there's a catechist or a governor... The new choir will be no better than the previous one.”

Confused, I asked:

“So what are all these changes for?”

The director, full of understanding for my northern obtuseness, hastened to explain:

“Every few years something changes, after all. The senator is not elected, the governor is dismissed and so the choir has to have new members so that it matches the current balance of power.”

I also have on my account one more staging of an opera, in Basel. It was Zemlinski's opera, which I'm mentioning for completely non-musical reasons. I was directing another staging of his two operas based on the texts of Oscar Wilde. It is the very essence of decadence; the music is full of allusions and self-deprecatory humour. In the first staging, which took place in Hamburg, Wilde's libretto lived to see a new version in accordance with the requirements of progress. An absurd fairytale was made into a drama about the class system, just like during the best times of our socialist realism. (I can't forget Leon Schiller – the accents
regarding class in his 'Halka', as well as the critical reading of 'The Countess'. Free Germans did the same.)

Of course, I returned to the original libretto and was accused of not being progressive enough. However, the opera in Basel went well – except that Zemlinski still remains unknown.

To my list of operatic experiences I should also add the concert for three female voices (which complemented the concert of the three tenors) which I produced for the Italian RAI television station with the participation of three ladies who scared many directors. (In the opera the director is the person who most easily receives blows from the singers). I directed in a plaster cast, after an accident, and perhaps due to my invalid status it was easier for me to brave Katia Ricciarelli, who is known for her difficult character. I once met her husband, Pipo Baudo (the equivalent to the now deceased Irena Dzidzic), who invited me onto his programme, following which for a few years in Italy people recognised me in the street. I mentioned this when I met the star, saying that I already knew her husband. “Which one?” she asked me, indifferently. And maybe one more anecdote. Twice, in Palermo, I directed operas written in our century and twice I dealt with an international array of excellent singers. However, in one of the plays I chanced upon a Russian tenor who had a lyrical part but liked to sing heroically. After many rehearsals, the conductor discreetly requested that I put the singer as far back on the stage as possible because there was no way of preventing him from singing forcefully, while the score required him to sound quiet and lyrical. I did what I could but the Russian continued to yell and, to make matters worse, he told me that he was just taking it easy and that at the premiere he would sing at full volume so that the blast would ruin the hairdos of the ladies in the front rows. This announcement sounded ominous; at the same time the tenor told me where the extraordinary power of his voice came from. When he sang he lived on raw meat and it was this that gave him that great strength. To his misfortune (and our salvation), before the premiere, probably to save money, he ate meat that wasn't quite fresh. He fainted at the dress rehearsal, whereas at the premiere he swayed on his feet singing as lyrically as he was meant to. Only after a few performances did a hurricane begin to blow through the first few rows.

In a few interviews I have publicly complained that the type of theatre that we create today has been around for too long. For years there are no new plays being written (apart from in English-speaking countries) and, indeed, one can't count on the fact that the public are indefinitely going to watch the fate of the three sisters and Hamlet as everyone who likes a bit of theatre has seen these plays many times and knows exactly how they end.

Once, along with Edward Żebrowski, I tried to adapt two of our television scripts into a play. A text made up of two one-act plays was formed under the title of 'Women's Games'. The number of times this play has been staged far exceeds its value. I suspect that the real reason for its success is that it contains a role for an ageing star, who is often the theatre director’s wife. In Poland we have lived to see at least seven productions, one of which – in the Contemporary Theatre with Zofia Mrozowska, Englert and Lipinska – was by Edward. For my part, along with him we filmed a version of the play with Elisabeth Bergner in Germany.

In the casting another Viennese actress was considered with whom I'd conducted a
conversation and it seemed that I'd been successful. Unfortunately, after a month, just before filming, I received a telegram in which the venerable actress explained that she had come to the conclusion that acting in many ways resembled the oldest profession in the world, with the difference that there the age limit is determined by nature itself, whereas acting raises the question of how long one should continue in the profession. At her age – wrote the actress – the actor's personality is not important, what is important is that someone is really old and can say the lines by heart and the viewer is happy in the same way as he would be on seeing a playing child or a dog fetching a ball. And she declined. My German producer took a risk and asked Elisabeth Bergner – a great actress who during Hitler's time moved from Germany to England. Amongst Elisabeth's admirers there is a whole array of celebrities of that era: - from Rilke, through Bertold Brecht, Bernard Shaw (whose Saint Joan she played with great success in England and on Broadway) to Albert Einstein, for whom she played this very same Joan in Princeton, inviting into the auditorium only the physicist and his wife and paying for the whole performance. In Hollywood, in her time, Bergner was a rival to Greta Garbo but marriage to a second-rate director blighted her great movie-star career. She remained a star of the stage to her death.

The fact that Elisabeth agreed to act in Germany, and as a stand-in for another actress, was a surprise to my producers and a good bit of gossip for the press. The last time Elisabeth had performed in Germany (which was already then under Hitler) was at Hauptmann's jubilee, and since then she had been in her former fatherland maybe once, after the war. Moreover, it's difficult to state where her fatherland was. Encyclopaedias give two different dates and places of her birth. She undoubtedly came from the south but she always avoided answering questions about her first memories from childhood. During filming, I was struck by how easily she pronounced Polish surnames, so I assume that she may have had some involvement with the Slavic community during her childhood, particularly if she did indeed spend it in Galicia, as one of her biographers claims.

The first time I met Elisabeth was at a small airport in Saarbrucken close to the French border (we shot our film in a television studio there). Photographers came as well as the whole management of the television station. On the steps of the plane appeared a little waif of a woman, who was close to eighty, wearing a neckerchief, with a cap pulled tightly down over her forehead. When I sat down with her in the car, she asked me a series of detailed questions on the subject of my film, which of course I was taken with, after which she wanted to know how much I knew about her. After I asked about a few pre-war plays and films, she reprimanded me that I had prepared superficially for our meeting. At the press conference, Elisabeth announced that she was happy that she could act in Germany as the role, which was written by two young Poles, allowed her to express her whole disgust that she feels towards the German people, among whom she had spent her youth. Of course, the journalists asked whether we had similar feelings and here Elisabeth cornered us by saying: “No evasions, gentleman. If you like the Germans, then I'm breaking my contract and going back to London. In the first half of the seventies such a confrontational way of approaching the problem was something terrifyingly radical but here, surprisingly, it passed without any consequences. I don't think there's any other European country in which you can express abhorrence for the nation while using the money of the of that country’s public television. However, there is no other nation in Europe which has such reasons for critical settlements with its past as Germany does.
I have encountered this problem a number of times. A few years later I was making one of my most important films, 'Roads in the Night', as a German production. In it I told the story of the war seen through the eyes of two aristocrats – a German man and a Polish woman – people who are connected by a mutual feeling of culture but are divided by national interests. There is no way to build a bridge across this conflict, for either one supports barbarity and serves it or one must cut oneself off, cut ties with one’s family, repudiate one’s country. A third path seems impossible, while the second was chosen by a whole host of great Germans, with Thomas Mann at the forefront. In my film there's a scene where the Polish woman played by Maja Komorowska gives the German a gold cross, saying “Let it accompany you and protect what is best in you.” Earlier, the German, who is going to the Eastern front (we sense that he will die), had tried to make some small, friendly gesture towards the Poles. Now, he refuses to take the cross in the event that it should look as if he was taking some payment for what he did. On hearing this, the Polish woman says “How miserable must you Germans be that such a thought comes to your mind.” The management of the television station very much wanted to cut this line but, being experienced in sparring with the authorities, I anticipated this suggestion by publicly asking whether they wanted to cut this dialogue and they immediately did so. Without doubt, the line might have been painful for German viewers but I believe that I had the right to write it. By the way, there's another detail. Initially, the film was entitled 'Raindrop Prelude' and contained a lot of music by Chopin. The television station persuaded me to change the title. Musical terminology in the title would mean a loss of at least two per cent of viewers.

I return to Elisabeth Bergner, as this collaboration seems me worthy of a detailed account. I can still see this petite woman who throughout her life was able to retain the enthusiasm of a child whilst simultaneously having such strength of character that no one was able to successfully stand up to her. The desire to act in our television film was a whim for Elisabeth and when, halfway through filming, some minor conflict occurred, Bergner suddenly announced at lunch that she thought she was bored with the part and that she was leaving. Flabbergasted, I asked “What about the contract? After all, it's signed. Money is already involved. In such a situation can one just say that one's bored?” Elisabeth burst out laughing and answered: “It depends who – I can. I can afford to pay you back.” Later, I found out that in the same way she had finished her stage career in London, where she had acted in the Hungarian play 'Cat's Play' (in Poland, Eichlerowna acted in this in the Little Theatre). She acted in the premiere with bravado and received great reviews, after which she said it was boring to do it every night and she broke off the whole production, paying mind-boggling compensation. However, in our film she persevered to the end. When I met her a few years later, she reminded me of this conversation over lunch, saying that she had been moved by my terrified expression. When she noticed that I didn’t believe in threats, she realised that she would have to go through with it. Thankfully, I already had enough difficult experiences with stars behind me to believe it.

The collaboration with Elisabeth was a succession of provocations, conflicts, crises and reconciliations which in a flash turned into clashes. There was not a moment of peace but what remains in my memory is primarily the wonder and amazement that one can remain young for so long.

At the beginning, the person who fell victim to Elisabeth was her acting partner brought over from Poland, Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak, who was acting abroad for the first time,
Additionally in a language which she didn’t know. Of course, she had mastered her lines but due to not knowing the language, she avoided private conversations. Elisabeth immediately sensed this and invited Jadwiga to her hotel, then proceeded to not utter a word to her for hours. When next day I asked Elisabeth what the meaning of this strange behaviour was, she answered “Your actress has the chance to act alongside Elisabeth Bergner. For such an occasion it's worth learning a foreign language. I wanted to make her aware of this.” Later, after all this, she collaborated loyally, making sure that Jadwiga came across in the best possible light. When I thanked her for this, she shrugged her shoulders and said “I'm not being kind but rather being calculated. I can't allow for that young girl not to be good. After all, it would discredit me. Every actor is responsible for the partner with whom he agrees to act.”

Then there was a conflict with the cinematographer, Witold Sobocinski, who Elisabeth treated with such spite that once again I had to intervene. Here there was no doubt – the star admitted to being to blame and gave a supper in Witek's honour, publicly explaining that he had fallen victim to her spontaneous reactions. For many years, while she still acted in Hollywood, she had showered cinematographers with presents because, with the passing of time, it was purely down to them whether her screen face appeared young. Now, she said, it was different: “The worse I look, the better it is for the film, so I allowed myself to take out those years of humiliation on Witold.” Of course, such a pronouncement was followed by a joyful reconciliation, after which Elisabeth teasingly remarked that she was practically the same age as cinema itself, while our Polish cinematographer had such an expression when filming as if he was the one who’d invented cinema.

The text of ‘Mercy Paid in Advance’, which in the theatre makes up the second part of the play 'Women's Games', was based on the memoirs of the wife of my friend and co-writer Edward Żebrowski. She was a doctor and once she had earned extra money as a nurse working night shifts in the houses of rich patients. As a foreigner who was working illegally, she was usually assigned shifts with particularly difficult patients. From snippets of her stories we assembled the dialogues of the screenplay. Elisabeth plays an unbearable but fabulously rich old woman who hires a night nurse, not out of necessity (she’s basically healthy) but out of boredom, for the perverse pleasure of tormenting a young person. One of the themes of this tormenting was the national theme - the mocking of unknown nations. In the text of our play we made our second character Serbian so as to avoid the charge of being Polnocentric. The character played by Elisabeth was, of course, German.

One of the scenes in the text centres around a bedpan which the old lady demands whenever she notices that her nurse believes in the convention of social conversation that they both engage in during the night. The film in Saarbrucken was directed along with my co-writer and, as we both had a fair bit of distance from the text, we divided the work in such a way that one of us directed the shoot until lunchtime and the other after. The bedpan scene fell to me. After the first rehearsal, I heard Elisabeth loudly praising me to the crew saying: “It's unbelievable how tactfully he stages the scene, completely like a non-Pole.” I thought I had misheard but a moment later Elisabeth clearly repeated what a great surprise it was to her that a Pole could treat a risky joke so sensitively. The charge of heavy-handed humour usually applies to Germans, so the crew waited tensely to see how I would react to such offensive praise. I felt extremely embarrassed and asked Elisabeth for a word in private. She answered that she couldn't stand secrets and asked that I speak to her in front of everyone.
Reluctantly, I agreed and gave a monologue about the fact that nobody, and particularly a German Jew like her, should publicly make such offensive generalisations regarding whole nations. Elisabeth interrupted me by laughing and said that she was waiting for me to say that and she was sorry to have forced me to do so by repeating her tactless praise twice. Yet it was necessary for the sake of the whole play. An actor needs his own life experience and she had never had the courage to offend some smaller nation and, wanting to feel what our antipathetic protagonist felt, she had to experiment on me. Now, she wanted to apologize to me and, for this purpose, she immediately ordered champagne. I let out a sigh of relief, as did the Germans, but Elisabeth told them that her self-restraint concerned smaller nations, whereas regarding the great German nation she already had a bad opinion. And if such a bedpan scene had been directed by a German, she would have definitely refused to act in it.

The collaboration with Elisabeth turned into friendship. I visited her a few times in her beautiful flat in Eaton Square, in London. I remember an extraordinary conversation when I related to her the disputes that I’d had with my students from the West Berlin Film Academy. It was the late seventies and German filmmakers were experiencing (insincerely, in my opinion) revolutionary fascination and we argued with them about Brecht, who for my generation – regardless of his merits in the arts – was a symbol of moral corruption, if only for his behaviour towards the workers’ revolt in Berlin. Listening to my story, Elisabeth told me to stop and brought over her small, bronze Brecht statuette which he himself had once sent to her and completely seriously began a three-way conversation, addressing the statuette: “Bertolt, did you hear what Krzysztof said? And he's right! I also told you that you have no character and that your political convictions are a masquerade...” After which she asked me: “Please continue, let him hear what you young people behind the Iron Curtain think of his stance.” Troubled, I continued my monologue, avoiding eye contact with the statuette, whilst Elisabeth continued to debate with Brecht, moving onto fairly troublesome details of his relationship with Helen Weigel. At one point, she realized that it was not proper to say such things in front of Brecht, so she threw a handkerchief over his head, saying “It's best if he doesn't hear this!” How much provocation, how much eccentricity and how much real belief was in this – I don't know. Elisabeth was a strongly believing member of the Christian Science sect (she tried to medically treat my co-director Edward though Bible readings) yet, on the other hand, I know that sometimes she consciously embarrassed people she was talking to. There was a legendary interview with her conducted by some extremely famous English critic who had the misfortune to ask her about her childhood. Elisabeth never liked questions about the past (however, she adored making plans that ran far ahead into the future) and she gave the critic the condition that if he wanted to talk about her childhood, then they both had to get under the piano because only from that perspective could she speak about the years in which she hid under the piano.

The last meeting with Elisabeth Bergner took place in the eighties. According to the most gracious calculations, she was already past ninety and German television wanted me to direct an hour-long fiction film featuring her – apparently, this was her wish. I agreed, even though the script was a little random. For the final talks, my producer and I went to London and there, as agreed on the phone, we made our way to Eaton Square. Elisabeth received us in her dressing gown and did not hide her irritation. “Why so late?” she asked although we were on time. My producer attempted to explain something but Elisabeth interrupted her without apologizing and turned to me and formally enquired “What, Sir, are you doing here with this lady?” Earlier we had used the familiar form of address with one another so,
disconcerted, I asked whether she recognised me. I noticed her shrug her shoulders “What does it matter?” I reminded her of our collaboration ten years earlier in Saarbrucken. Elisabeth was amazed: “What are you talking about? That Polish director was my great friend and spoke beautiful English, while you make mistakes, you're a lot older and stouter than him and you have a beard. Besides, I called you to repair my bathroom”. My swearing that it was me in our photo together were of no use – Elisabeth opened the door of her bathroom, pointing to where the tap was dripping and asked my producer whether she had the necessary tools in her bag.

The conversation came to a stand-still. Despairing, we were about to leave the flat when Elisabeth waved her hand and said “Enough, I think it's enough. Come in for a cup of tea.” Then, seeing our troubled expressions she asked: “Now, why did you come here?” and she answered for us “To see whether Elisabeth Bergner is so old that she can't act anymore or whether perhaps she still can. So I played a senile old lady for you. And I think I was good.” Afterwards, there was tea, reconciliation and a discussion regarding the project. Saying goodbye to us on the stairs, Elisabeth with all seriousness said to me:

“But you didn't repair the tap, did you?”

I didn't make the film either. The television station came to the conclusion that people who remember Elisabeth Bergner no longer make up enough of the audience. Audience figure diktats were beginning.

Elisabeth died a year later.

Writing at length about Elisabeth, I can see before me a whole host of great actors who I had the opportunity to work with (and also those who I missed by a whisker).

Someone with a personality and age to equal Elisabeth Bergner was Seweryna Broniszowna, an actress from the Polish Theatre who I admired during my childhood (she played Mrs Rollison in 'Forefather's Eve' directed by Bardini). I met her working on 'Spiral', where she agreed to play a bit-part in the hospital corridor. When I arrived on the set, I found her already in the set bed and, aware that she was over ninety, I loudly introduced myself as the director. In a hushed tone she asked me about the films I’d made – it turned out that she had great hearing and memory and, what is more, was interested in contemporary life. Embarrassed, I apologized for my initial words in which I had treated her like an elderly lady, to which Seweryn replied with a smile that she had become accustomed to this and that she never protested “People treat an elderly lady like a child, explaining everything as if to a child. I like that.” A moment later I heard Mr Nowicki loudly introduce himself as the actor who would be playing the scene with her – she listened to him patiently.

Of the great Polish actresses of the older generation I met Nina Andrycz in 'The Contract' (earlier, alongside Barbara Wachowicz, I conducted my first ever interview with her for the publication ‘Ekran’. I must have been seventeen then and Mrs Andrycz was exactly the same as she was thirty years later on set). Another chapter of my memory is filled with Hanna Skarzanka, I think the only indisputable beauty of the socialist realism era. The unforgettable Marianna from Ford's 'Youth of Chopin' acted in my films twice, the first time in 'The Year of the Quiet Sun'. I remember that I didn't go to Torun for the premiere, sensing that Father Popieluszko was already dead (the truth came out two days later). In this same chapter I'd like to recall Zofia Mrozowska, who I often met from the time of 'The Quarterly
Balance' up until 'The Constant Factor'. Zofia also acted in 'Women's Games' when it was staged at the Contemporary Theatre by Edward Zebrowski. This same part (also in both incarnations – the young and the old) was played in my staging at the Moscow Art Theatre by Katia Wasiyeva – an actress who in Russia is one of the top stars of her generation. In the younger incarnation of this role in the Odeon, and earlier in my television adaptation, Leslie Caron appeared – a star who I met whilst sitting with her on the jury of the San Sebastian Film Festival. I remember that apart from films the jury also judged the art of cooking – dinner was in a different restaurant every day and we could debate over points for appetizers, main courses and desserts (it was harder to reach a consensus here than when judging the films). Besides being an excellent actress, Leslie is also a great cook.

Of the great names of the stage and screen I would also mention Vittorio Gassman. Gassman is fluent in three languages – Italian, which is his native language, French (the language which he acted in in 'Paradigm') and English (he acted in English in King Vidor's 'War and Peace' and then in many films, including Altman's). At the table, depending on the company, Gassman spoke alternately in Italian, French and English, speaking each language completely differently. In Italian he was coarse, one of the people, telling simple jokes whilst cackling as he claimed that he had been brought up on the streets and that Italian was the language of his childhood. In French it was the opposite: he delighted in beautiful pronunciation and told sophisticated anecdotes because he recognized this as the language of culture. Finally, in English he spoke to the point like a businessman, with an American accent which he assumed from one of his ex-wives who was American. Gassman's American jokes were pithy but not subtle – it was possible to translate them poorly into Italian, whereas in French they sounded nasty.

I don't remember any anecdotes from the two occasions that I worked with Brigitte Fossey – the great French actress who as a child appeared in René Clément's famous 'Forbidden Games'. We worked together on 'Imperative' and 'Long Conversation with a Bird' – both times in English as Brigitte was an American, from her mother's side. Neither do I have any anecdotes related to Marie-Christine Barrault – the famous niece of the protagonist of 'Children of Paradise'. We made 'Paradigm' together and at the same time Marie-Christine was on a theatre tour, so every evening she left the set to perform in a different town, then she returned after the performance and in the morning, without mentioning her lack of sleep or tiredness, she enthusiastically got down to work. There are few actors I've met that acted with such relish as Marie-Christine. The part in 'Paradigm' was written for her and she was amused that everything that she played in the film was a lie. Only in the last scene does it turn out who she really is, a weapon manufacturer's wife. This discovery constitutes the whole punchline of the film – the wife is a covert revolutionary who wants the weapons to serve the revolution and in the name of this idea she cynically allows her husband to be murdered, posing as an oppressed victim in front of her young lover. Marie-Christine played this in the same way as she ate, with relish, heedless of her figure, and she discussed and length and with great interest the problem of whether one can signal to the viewer that one is lying when one is deceiving the other characters of the drama. We decided that this couldn't be given away, whereas one could act in such an exaggerated manner that it would appear as bad acting, regardless of the risk that the viewer who didn’t watch to end wouldn't
understand the idea behind it. It is with gratitude that I think of Marie-Christine and of the fact that she had the courage to resolve this dilemma in such a risky manner. Thanks to her I made a film which I can count as one of my most aesthetically brave. 'Paradigm' met with selective enthusiasm. The 'Nouvel Obsevateur' proclaimed me as a continuator of Bunuel, but I think that the film came too late, at a time when there was no longer room for subtle, stylistic efforts. 'Paradigm' was met with uncanny understanding in Russia. I took the film there during the first years of 'perestroika' and during a discussion in Moscow, I heard an opinion which showed a deep understanding of my intentions. Someone asked why in the film a woman is the personification of evil (this, in fact, is not true) to which someone else answered “Is it a coincidence that in so many languages the word “revolution” is feminine?” My message was the thought that in placing Marxism and Christianity together, revolution is a short-cut and, one can relate the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians that the devil may sometimes appear as the angel of light both to the ideal and the revolution. These are the last words of the film. 'Paradigm' was shown in Venice outside of competition (as I was president of the jury) and sparked the fury of the politicized, left-wing press. Having no chance of success, I found a certain satisfaction in the fact that I sparked such fury.

While making 'Paradigm', I met another veteran of world cinema and stage – Raf Vallone, the unforgettable shepherd in the neo-realist film 'No Peace Under the Olive Tree', later the trilingual performer of Miller's 'A View from the Bridge' – on the stage he acted in Italian, later in French, finally in English on Broadway and on film. In real life, he is a humble, ambitious and determined person – I worked with him fairly recently staging Rocca Familiari's new text and the nearly eighty-year-old Raf proved to be a titan. After him all that remains of the last of the great masters of stage and screen is Max von Sydow. We worked together fairly recently and it doesn't seem proper for me to write average compliments about him although there is no compliment that he doesn't deserve. Such a humble man who is so free of acting, in life such a great actor who enjoys his job, is open to people and interested in life. One sad anecdote about Max is worth recalling as a warning: this very much loved actor very nearly lost his life in one of my films! And this occurred due to an unlikely mistake of which the perpetrator is unknown to this day.

In 'The Touch' Max plays a hypochondriac, a person who is always taking medicines. We prepared as a prop a vial with innocent placebo tablets. From some other source we had a few vials with a Danish label for the final scene when the infant is suffering from asthma and it has to be surrounded by medicines. No one knows how it occurred that in one scene Max received the wrong vial. We did a few takes and each time the actor swallowed a dozen or so tablets, convinced that they were placebos. That night, in the hotel, he collapsed – a drop in blood pressure, difficulty breathing. An ambulance was called. Whilst saving the half-conscious Max, the doctors searched for all possible reasons for his collapse until someone in the crew worthy of the title 'Sherlock Holmes' examined all of the props that had been used the previous day. It turned out that the anti-asthma medicine was a delayed-action preparation which, despite being only a child's dose, posed a great risk of accumulating in the body. Of course, the doctors were able to neutralize this effect, the production expressed its readiness to pay compensation (which Max donated to a charity in Poland) and all of this occurred without notification of the complaint to the public prosecutor. However, we were just one step away from a real tragedy. Film can often be a dangerous game.
Alongside Max acted Sarah Miles, who was famous from David Lean films. Over a dozen years earlier I had worked with Chris Cazenove (later famous in ‘Dynasty’) and the even more famous (in many films with Meryl Streep or ‘Jurassic Park’) Sam Neill (he played the lead role in my film about the Pope). While the famous Milva appeared in an episode of ‘Wherever you are...’. As for collaborations that never happened, I was preparing for a film with Jane Fonda (we had already made many detailed arrangements). For a moment Warren Beauty wanted me to direct and I remember how during those few days in New York my phone never stopped ringing with ingratiating invitations from people who found out that I was ‘on the way up’. I did screen tests with Lennie Olin (already known from ‘The Unbearable Lightness of Being’) for a film about Christine, Queen of Scotland but, unfortunately, the film fell through and I was left with the screenplay, which I published in the third volume of my screenplays. I got ready to direct a film which was written by Margarethe von Trotta (she acted in my ‘Bluebeard’), negotiated with Mel Gibson and Liv Ullmann... just to mention the projects that came close to being made. And how many others did I dream loudly about but absolutely nothing came of them?

When explaining to actors the relationships in our profession, I gladly make the following distinction: there are actors who must solicit work and there are those who I solicit so that the film can be made. Or in other words: famous actors decide whether there will be money to make a film, while others simply look for work. Out of those great actors on which funding depends none of those I've met (maybe with one exception) turned out to be a bad actor, but there are dozens of talented actors and only some of them are famous.

In Europe it is considered that theatre is the domain of real work for an actor, whereas film and television are only an extra. In the States, the popular view is exactly the opposite. Americans say: anyone can act in theatre – the lame, the cross-eyed, a stutterer – in a word any freak, whereas a film allows a selection of only a few that the viewers want to identify with. This is what the magical power of acting relies on: that millions of people will find the incarnation of their dreams, problems, feelings and fears in one person. This is actually how great stars work – those which producers simply call ‘bankable’, so those for which banks always give money and who one can bet on. And it is these actors that incur the greatest risk because they are the ones that choose films, and what they choose will immediately be made. In the past such actors came from different countries. There were many of them in Europe – I'll mention only Brigitte Bardot, whose films in France brought a greater income from exports than the whole production of the Renault car factory. Today, the ability to create universal stars is possessed only by America and even great European actors like Gerard Depardieu, Isabelle Adjani or Juliette Binoche are known thanks to the fact that they are promoted by the Americans. Europe has lost its ability to produce idols – it does not have its own types or its own dreams.

I mention this while on the subject of many other topics in this book. And each time I'm reminded of its title. Is it also time to die for Europe? Has this continent, which has risen and fallen so many times throughout history, yet always remained an inspiration for the rest of the world, exhausted its strengths? Or has it just momentarily fallen into decline?

OTHER MUSES
I have written so much about my connections with Melpomene – by their very nature they have been singled out because they are active. Now what remains to be mentioned, even in a cursory manner, are the other art forms with which I commune passively. As I'm using the written word I must start with literature, to which I feel reverent respect as the mother of all art forms. I don't know whether this respect was instilled in me at school or rather whether it comes from my own experiences. After all, it is thanks to the written word that I have struck up so many beautiful friendships and experienced so many wonderful moments during dark and difficult times. From my earliest readings of ‘Pan Tadeusz’ by my father, every Sunday morning until adolescence when I was struck by the whole great canon of contemporary literature which was often read in typescript, before publication (the invaluable merit of the School of Film Knowledge formed by Aleksander Jackiewicz!). I'm afraid that it might be boring to list my various favourite books, those which remain in my memory and those which I often return to. However, I think it's worth mentioning here the few contacts with writers that I have had in my life.

From my youth, I remember the visit of Władysław Broniewski to our school. The writer was drunk, he read badly, but in no way did he arouse any desire in us young people to laugh. He was tragic – you could feel it in his whole being, in his vacant eyes and his hoarse voice. At home, I found out from my father that Broniewski had defended Poland from the Bolsheviks during the 1920 war. Thanks to this, I was able to forgive him for what he wrote about Stalin. Similarly, during my school years, Galczynski, whose work I'm still unable to judge, flashed past me somewhere. Somewhere (in some cafe, I think) I was shown Tuwim, it's possible that I was even introduced to him because he was sure to be known by my composer cousin. The most romantic memory I have is associated with Leopold Staff, whose poems I was fond of and who I met as I waited at a bus stop half-way down Nowy Świat Street. Somewhere through the haze of my childhood also appear Szaniawski, Parandowski and Golubiew. During the Peace Congress, I obtained a few autographs of Western Communist writers (I managed this thanks to my early knowledge of languages) but my father advised me to use them as firelighters. Since that time I don't collect autographs.

In maturity I was able to collaborate in Poland with Witold Zalewski, the long-time literary director of the Film Production Unit in which I received my first job. Later, I twice collaborated on screenplays with Jan Józef Szczepański, a man whose unblemished life commands lasting respect in me. I had friendly contact with Kusniewicz, I often meet Szczypiorski and, through the director Stanisław Rozewicz, I've encountered his brother Tadeusz a few times. I've already written about my meetings with Czesław Milosz. I'm grateful to him that he loyally watches my films – from 'Family Life' to 'At Full Gallop'. I mention only those writers who I'm particularly close to as I know a great many. Due to the fact that my screenplays and plays were published, I am a long-time member of the Polish Writers’ Union, later the Polish Writers' Association, and lately also of Pen Club.

And here is little anecdote about ‘knowing’. Only a few years ago, at a party in the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv, I accidentally stood next to Zbigniew Herbert in a queue and decided to introduce myself to him. The master greeted me kindly and said “How good that I can stop hating you now?” “For what?” I asked amazed. “For not knowing you.” I think there was wisdom in the poet's joke. Many people show aggression towards public figures just because they are unknown to them.
Whilst reviewing my list of world writers, I remembered Martin Walser, who I met working for a moment on the screenplay of 'The Horse' (in the end this film was made by Vadim Glowna). We held careful discussions about how one can be an intellectual in Western Germany and be a member of the Communist party. I asked this same question of Tankred Dorst when it fell to me to rework his screenplay into an auteur film that I would direct. The reworking was quite polemic: using his themes, I wrote my own very different text. In his story, the romance of a fourteen-year-old with a forty-year-old was an expression of romantic liberation, whereas in my film the older man’s refusal to have an affair is a heroic gesture of responsibility. The whole project fell to me at the moment when Dorst was forced to abandon his search for funding for the film he wanted to make himself. I, in turn, received television funding under the condition that I at least roughly become a part of the canvas of his original screenplay (sometimes silly administrative considerations determine similar solutions). Dorst did not want to make a film solely for television, but the station had already spent the money and had to shoot a film. And that's how 'Long Conversation with a Bird' was born, shot in Germany and Thailand, a film which cost me a broken leg, but one which I think was worth it. I was surprised that after watching my film, the author could easily have withdrawn his name, yet he decided to leave it and, in this way, the author of a libertine celebration of passion signed his name to my morality piece. Of other famed writers I happened to meet Gunter Grass, but he was always far from having a black-and-white view of politics and when he spoke of progress, I had the impression that he was speaking of something that I might call something different, but would praise without hesitation.

And one more meeting, this time a Polish one. Maria Dabrowska. I met her during my film-school studies. I wanted to make a documentary about her, upon which she told me to wait because she didn't have much life left and documentaries about writers are best made immediately after their death. I kept my word and whilst finishing my studies I made one of my first films for television about Dabrowska, using the last documentary shots taken of her on 8mm camera by her cousin, the great actress Barszczewska.

It's worth mentioning other writers who I knew quite superficially: Brodkski, nights in Moscow spent talking with the Nobel-prize winner Marquez during the film festival or Yevtushenko. I met him in America... of his friend Marquez Graham Greene said that he worked for the secret service, as he himself did. Together they were to organise the release of one of the bankers that had been kidnapped in South America, some sort of trade between the KGB and CIA. It was frightening to hear first-hand accounts of something that I knew only from the press.

To end with a few words about words themselves. I have a feeling for the beauty of a well-constructed sentence. I think I can appreciate good style, just as in music I can differentiate an ugly or beautiful quality of tone. And I think that I write in a fairly ugly way. Undoubtedly, I speak better than I write and I should sacrifice a lot of time to that which I leave on paper in order to acknowledge, in my own mind, that it's form is 'acceptable'. I'm not doing so with this text. What you are reading has been left, despite the efforts of the editor, a frayed notebook, barely sketched, filled with shortcomings, failings and omissions. Something has changed in our way of communicating. In literature, just as in cinema. I think that Bunuel first started making films that were like rough sketches. He was aware that...
in a dark cinema the viewer is chewing gum, talking, sometimes pinching his partner and only sometimes looking up at the screen in concentration.

It's even worse in television, where film is only a small part of life – we watch it whilst talking on the phone, going into the kitchen to make tea, sometimes reading the paper. I suppose that in Mozart's time something similar was happening – during a musical accompaniment or concert, the audience ate and drank whilst Mozart watched every note. A few years ago I prepared my screenplays to be published. It was the third, dramatic volume, in which half of the texts were my life's failings: films that had never been made. Presenting them for reading, I worked on the description, concerned with arranging the words in some sort of rhythm, so that the material became equivalent to the movie which I will probably never shoot. This penultimate, third volume, published festively and expensively probably ended up in some houses on bookshelves, but I suppose that my impoverished intellectual audience was unable to buy it! The fact that it passed completely unnoticed, that I did not live to see one review in the cinema, press or even in the religiously affiliated and friendly 'Tygodnik Powszechny' was the ultimate blow. My faith in the word, my own word, was broken. Today, there is no immortality of the word. Even the immortality of the soul is questionable in our culture.

Aware of how very mortal the word is, in the past few years I have been writing more and more. Unexpectedly, for me, I write various articles and even sporadically write introductions to books by real authors. (The latter concerns the essays of Jan Jozef Szczepanski which have been republished by the Literary Publishers. I am deeply enthusiastic about them as a rare expression in literature of a complete cohesion between an author and his work. On my own private Olympus, Mr Szczepanski is one of the unwavering moral and artistic authorities). Furthermore, I became a columnist, initially for the capitalist magazine 'Cash', later for 'Polska Zbrojna' ('Armed Poland') and finally, for nearly two years now – for 'Polityka'. Each one of these undertakings demands some sort of justification.

I began writing for 'Cash' out of the conviction that while the current changes are under way there are new elites being born while old ones are dying out. As part of an elite I want to consider anyone who feels some sort of responsibility for the rest, who is not indifferent to the fate of the country, even there where it doesn't directly concern them. In a word, those who want to and are able to see beyond their own immediate interests. According to this definition, less and less are the elite those who cannot make ends meet, who think only of their own defeat. The elite will also not include the frustrated intellectual youth, who in university departments contemplate cult values, wanting to show their maladjustment by creating a new ghetto. The participants of cult choices search for their own identification marks, fearful for their identity. To a lesser extent they search for values because they don't want to be open, because the motivation for their actions is fear rather than a longing. I write about this with a certain exaggeration so as with one sentence to reply to my parting with the public at the film review in Lagow. These frustrated students of film who cannot carry the weight of the current changes want to build a wall around themselves and create a camp in which they will have something of their own, some artists that are their own.

Looking back on the nineties (and writing these words in the last year of this decade) I think that two of my artistic enterprises were of a particular importance. The first – the film
'Inventory' which describes the issue of the future co-existence of victims and wrongdoers in the first year of freedom. It was a film which came too soon but one which I believe was important. Also, because it was made for practically nothing, it cost not much more than fifty thousand dollars, with which I wanted to demonstrate that we would survive the poverty of the transformation years, that it's possible to make films cheaply if we're forced to. We weren't. Money for film production remained the same during these difficult years. What collapsed was not production but distribution. Our relationship with the public also violently collapsed as the elite collapsed. And I try to search for these elites there where they are being born anew, I believe that a certain percentage of computer specialists, new entrepreneurs and stock-market speculators will grow into an elite and it is this percentage that I would like to find. That's why I wrote for 'Cash' and that's why a few years later I made an extreme effort to make the television series 'Weekend Stories', in which I dispensed with a sophisticated form and tried as simply and as entertainingly as possible to present serious ideas to as wide an audience as possible in an ordinary programme alongside the soaps 'Isaura' and 'Klan'. I have the statistics in front of me and I think it worked. 'Weekend Stories' was considered to be prestigious but it was widely watched and travelled abroad. For me it is a piece of work that is limited, modest and unattractive because it didn't bring any awards but it was testimony of my participation in life right here and now. I was hurt when the weekly of the Catholic intelligentsia summed up my efforts contemptuously but the unkindliness of people who logically one should have something in common with always hurts the most. I decided to write for 'Polska Zbrojna' ('Armed Poland') when I noticed that within my circle of friends, which numbers at least a few hundred, there were no servicemen. In Polish pre-war society this was unthinkable, while today Sovietization is also expressed in the fact that our servicemen became some sort of caste who live completely outside of society, particularly outside of intellectual and academic spheres. This seems to be abnormal and efforts should be made to reinstate the natural presence of the army in our everyday lives. And this is the reason for my regular columns, which are an invitation to a friendly dialogue on mutual subjects (military subjects are completely alien to me). Finally, the strangest adventure in my writing career: my column in 'Polityka', a publication which I was brought up on as it was a bastion of freer thought in the Polish People's Republic, a licensed bastion, of course, which was operating under the approval of the system itself. In the seventies, the columns of Toeplitz and Passent were discussed fairly universally and the introductions by the editor-in-chief were analyzed for what was hidden between the lines to find out 'which way the wind was blowing'. Today 'Polityka' remains the most influential opinion-shaping organ amongst the intelligentsia. By inviting me, the editorial team wanted clearly to accommodate the part of its readership which politically isn't strongly left-leaning and culturally can be friendly towards a post Church-council Christian tradition. In accepting the invitation of 'Polityka', I knew that I was filling the shoes of columnists who, later in the eighties, lost many sympathizers although some of their colleagues still write in that paper. In the first column, I expressed the fact that I was distancing myself from certain authors, whereas with others I feel a deep closeness – I stretched my distance as far as President Kwasniewski that in the small matter of a diploma he did not give testimony to the truth and with that he had lost my trust. The former editor-in-chief of 'Polityka', in his new body, assessed that such a statement disqualified me morally; however, I carry on writing undeterred by hostile letters from readers who, on the
one hand, regard me to have been ‘planted’ by the Church, while on the other accuse me of justifying Communism. I believe that extreme judgements simply cancel one another out and I continue to write. I do so without being able to match the technique of classic columnists of the past and, against this background, I experienced a minor incident which I will briefly describe here.

Comparing my printed typescripts, I noticed that minor deletions kept appearing which showed that the editing team was discreetly censoring me. I gave expression to this in my next column and a confrontation followed. At first glance it looked as if I had indisputable evidence: in a few columns the most provocative and contentious sentences were taken out. However, after a more detailed look at the texts, it turned out that the reason was not censorship but simply technique. Risky or pugnacious sentences are easiest to throw in all of a sudden. One has to have more courage to develop them into a subject that I’d devote a column to. Today, after clearing up this misunderstanding, I recall it because it reflects the frequent mechanism of distrust. When I anticipate wrongdoing, then I always find evidence that it already exists; meanwhile, it may turn out that the problem lies in my defective writing.

Weekly writing in a prominent magazine has a great appeal as it's met with a wide response, but it's also a form of enslavement because every week I have to mobilize myself to speak to a few hundred thousand readers. Not every week do I feel this courage within myself, but an obligation that's been taken on once enforces discipline. A particular drawback of this job are the countless letters from readers, which are most frequently anonymous and usually abusive. On the whole, they are written by unhappy people, who are rather indifferent to me, but I've come into the line of fire, so they express the resentment that they feel to me and to the world. Some of these letters are serial so they stir up defiance because if someone wants to discourage me, I won't let them, although often deep down I think that I'd be in a better position exposing myself to so much hatred only after making a film.

Writing for a newspaper goes against the romantic stereotype of an artist, who should be surrounded by a certain air of mystery (the same could also be said of politicians and de Gaulle was most deeply aware of the fact that a leader cannot be understandable to a nation and that his charisma lies in his mystery). My whole nature doesn't like romanticism, and although I know I'm harming myself through sharing my opinions, I do so quite deliberately. And at the same time I draw another benefit from this – I satisfy my inclinations towards journalism. That which I can contain in a column is not worth putting into a screenplay.

A few words about my contact with other art forms. I should start with music – I am closely connected with it even though I lack elementary education in it. During my post-war childhood, I experienced the dilemma of whether to learn English or to play the piano. English won as the piano turned out to be expensive. During our private English lessons, we quietly changed the clock so as to gain an extra quarter of an hour. But I never learned the piano. However, in my childhood I knew the whole opera repertoire, which my father sang whilst shaving and whistled on walks outside the city. My true initiation occurred during my studies when my physics department went all together to the Warsaw Autumn festival. That's when I was introduced to the whole of contemporary music and at home I had a new reason for violent disputes with my father. He loved Tchaikovsky while I was discovering
Berg and calling Tchaikovsky a klezmer or cafe musician. Years later, with my tail between my legs, I have to admit that my father was right. My love of music also includes Stravinsky, Prokofiev, to a small degree Bartok, and goes even as far as Lutoslawski, but has left behind Berg and all atonal music. I listen to Tchaikovsky with emotion and apologize for my juvenile words.

At one time, revolution in music seemed to me a kind of generational caesura. I made one of my first films about Penderecki. Today, I appreciate the evolution which he, and many others who once were once considered to be avant-garde, went through and perhaps today they have grown out of this distinction. My guide on this journey was my dear musical friend Wojciech Kilar, the hero of a similar transformation which occurred in him earlier than many remember. It is with Wojtek, who wrote the music to all my films, without exception, that I shot in my time a documentary film about what we had done together. I am unable now to summarize our collaboration in a few sentences. I get the impression that we simply developed together, in a parallel manner or in different directions, but in a continually close relationship. Once, I began a collaboration with Mikolaj Gorecki, later for many years I was very close to Witold Lutoslawski, who I made two films about. All in all, I'm closer to music than to other disciplines, but it's difficult to write about such connections.

We are left with the fine arts. I grew up in opposition to Wajda, who is obviously a painter and that's why I like to underline that I'm closer to sound. Of course, this is just contrariness. I bemoan the fact that cinema today is becoming closer to sound. Through television or video, a film watched (or rather listened to) on a small screen becomes a radio play which is supported by a photograph. By the standards of industrial production, the microphone is today more important than the lens – the order of the ‘audio-visual’ clusters determines the hierarchy of resources and ‘audio’ resounds in a room when the visual disappears from sight because the viewer has gone to the kitchen or is looking through the newspaper. Within the general defeat of our discipline, the downfall of the visual side plays an important role.

Fortunately, on the horizon there's the LCD screen, stereoscopic glasses in the virtual reality headset and, finally, the high resolution image (I recently tried the analogue version of this newly established technique while making the programme 'Chopin at the Central Station').

My contact with painting and sculpture had the same rhythm as my contact with music – a breakthrough in 1956, violent disputes about Picasso, rapture that painting doesn't have to be figurative, then laborious studies of modernity with a hint of the provincial complex and fuelled with energy taken from opposition to art as a propaganda tool. And finally a return to the source, to what is simply beautiful and moving. Not long ago I met the Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj, who is the author of one of the greatest Polish triumphs in the visual arts. With what joy do I find in him the return to classicism, harmony and balance, as opposed to the art of spilling one’s guts and shocking the audience with that which life shocks us with anyway. And to add to this, the order in his studio and surroundings. My wife is also a painter, so I know how much it takes to maintain such an order around oneself. In Mitoraj I see how order pays dividends with order.

PHOTO
With Baryshnikov

I have always experienced the most artistic emotions when in contact with architecture. I came away with this from childhood and later when preparing for my polytechnic exams, which I never took. Our home was forever littered with pre-war artistic magazines dedicated to architecture. Idealizing the 'pre-war' years, I dreamily looked at Gdynia, the remains of the Warsaw district of Zoliborz and everything that was reminiscent of the hazy image of the lost paradise (which belonged to my parents, I only knew it from stories). I have taken from this something that is viewed by the West as suspicious, a weakness for the architecture of totalitarianism such as EUR in Rome and some of Hitler's constructions (more specifically Speer's buildings). Only later did La Défense in Paris bring me joy through its discovery of proportional scale and its clear language. At the Venice festival I had Ricardo Bofill on the jury, who has combined his Catalan communism with postmodernism. I prefer this to the soulless walls of glass put up in Manhattan, but I think that now at the end of the nineteenth century this syncretism is a sign of fatigue. However, architecture cannot stand still – construction cannot be stopped. It's possible that cinema will die out, the live actor and live music too, but architecture will survive, even if it is designed by a computer – the program will always be the choice of the investor and so, directly, the consumer.

What else is left? Ballet? Unfortunately, here I have had no direct contact. With my elephantine physique I never dreamt of expressing anything myself using the body. Having contact with ballet whilst working on operas, I was amazed that their world, which is seemingly quite crazy, is essentially a lot more normal than many artistic worlds. Their values can be measured quite objectively – with the naked eye one can see who is better and who is worse and a measure of physical effort, often pain, gives a dancer credibility. Years ago I met Nureyev and we spent a whole night talking thanks to Leslie Caron who, being a dancer herself, always lived amongst ballet people. I was amazed that Nureyev spoke about his art with the precision of a mechanic – the achieved effects depended on the axis of rotation, the bounce, the leaning over, the use of the right muscle in the leg or the neck. When I met Nureyev, he was already at the end of his good form and spoke brutally about the end of his career, knowing that during some performance he would feel pain in his spine whilst lifting his partner and his spine would crack because his partner would bounce badly off the floor and wouldn’t help him with this movement. Not liking women by nature, Nureyev passionately anticipated the harm that he would endure and he listed all his partners who were too heavy or too big and who he had to lift. Meanwhile, the reality turned out to be different: he danced to the very end, dying of AIDS. Only recently, in the new Paris opera, did I see one of his choreographies – Tchaikovsky's 'Swan Lake'. The parts that he allocated to be danced by women were reminiscent of geometry and were completely inhuman. The emotions were danced by the men.

The extreme opposite of Nureyev was another Russian, who was also an emigrant - Mischa Baryshnikov. I met him in New York and for several years we have been fighting to get a film project made about Nijinsky in which he would play the main part. The project is based on the short time when Nijinsky wanted to return to dance, convinced that God had entrusted him with a certain message which he would be able to express through dance. It seemed to me that the screenplay contained the beautiful thought that a man who has seen the face of God must die like Icarus, whose wings melted. This interpretation of madness
seems to me to be most beautiful and I wrote down this thought in 'Wherever thou Art, if thou Art'. Despite the great authority that is Baryshnikov, we weren't able to find the money to make the film. I think the project was ahead of its time. The interest in God, the Absolute and the Great Mystery has started to grow only now, whereas a few years ago our text was too bold and mystical to be financed in the States. So it fell into the cemetery of ideas. A shame. Baryshnikov is already at such an age that at any moment now he'll stop dancing. Nijinsky was ten years younger than him when, after speaking to God, he was consumed the darkness of insanity. He lived with it for over thirty years, until his fifties.

Can ballet disappear? I think that it is as eternal as is the human body as a tool of expression. Every gesture, every movement is ballet and I think that man cannot do without it. Those who dance are quite simply superior to us. When sitting in front of a computer, connected by a cable to a screen, will we ever relinquish the ballet or the disco? I don't think there's a risk of that. One sort or another – on the stage or on the ice, as a sport or as an art form – ballet will not disappear. Whereas cinema...

The figure of Mischa Baryshnikov reminds me, like a reflected wave, of meeting his great friend, the now deceased poet, the Nobel prize-winner Joseph Brodsky. I knew Brodsky's poems and essays since the time he had been deported from Leningrad to the West. Later, in the early nineties, by chance at the film festival in Salerno, I received an invitation to the nearby island of Capri where Brodsky, together with the Czech Hrabal, were to receive literary awards. I remember that at the time my leg was in plaster, as it was just after an accident on the southern seas during the shooting of 'Long Conversation with a Bird' yet, despite the partial immobilization, I succumbed to the temptation of a short journey by hydrofoil, desiring to personally meet the great man and poet.

I arrived a little late because, due to the fact that it was being broadcast live, the ceremony had started promptly, which was contrary to the southern tradition. I found my way to a room in a small, charming hotel and there I became a victim of television frivolity. The commentator who was conducting the transmission, without warning, invited me to translate what Brodsky was saying as he had decided not to speak in English. So they took advantage of the opportunity for a Polish director to act as a bridge between nations. I am willingly to act as a bridge but I am unable to translate a poet from Russian into Italian, and despite the fact that it regarded a few short words of thanks for the award, and earlier a similarly short eulogy, I felt unhappy in the role and after the ceremony had finished, I offered Brodsky my sincerest apologies for the fact that my unwise colleagues from my industry (because filmmakers, by nature are closer to television) had exposed him to such distress. Brodsky laughed and said that he also wanted to apologize to me because he saw how I was suffering, while he spoke fluent Polish. He had learnt it well because when he was still in far-away Leningrad he had wanted to read Western books which were published in Poland but were still banned in Russia.

Brodsky died a few years later. He was fairly young but during the time of persecutions he fell victim to the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union. As a dissident he was given some shock treatment (probably insulin) which was to destroy his resistance; meanwhile, it incurably destroyed his heart. I think about this today and when I happen to walk the streets of St Petersburg, in my imagination I search amongst the passers-by for the nurse who stuck the needle in his vein, the doctor who is certainly still working in psychiatry and the KGB worker who is probably a rich ‘new Russian’ by now. And it's so
hard to come to terms with the fact that we will never live to see the reign of justice in this world. And Brodsky, who I once expressed this opinion to in New York, waved his hand at this and answered that it's not worth even thinking about.

Brodsky died and Baryshnikov told me a strange story about his second funeral. The first took place in New York, but six months later the Venice authorities allowed the transportation of the coffin and burial in the city that Brodsky loved more than any other. Only the closest members of his family, friends, Nobel-winners and the highest city authorities were invited to the funeral. In the funeral procession Mischa noticed that the front suddenly slowed down, someone discreetly activated their mobile phone and a moment later some people ran along the cemetery fence. The procession continued but very slowly. Finally, the coffin reached the quarter in which there were Protestant graves and everything looked perfectly normal, except that the gravediggers were only just finishing digging the grave. It turned out that the confusion resulted from the fact that another great poet, Ezra Pound, is also buried in that quarter and someone oblivious to history had allocated Brodsky a place right next to him, thinking that poets should lie neighbouring one another. However, this person forgot about the fact that Pound was an enthusiast of fascism and also an anti-Semite. The mistake committed in choosing a burial place was huge, but I admire the Italians that they were able to so imperceptibly fix the mistake during the course of the funeral.

PHOTO:
With the Pope in Castel Gandolfo, I believe before the assassination attempt.

FAITH

I'm offering you a detailed report of so many of my actions and convictions that it's impossible to ignore the sphere which, I don't know why, we view as very intimate – the sphere of faith.

I consider myself a Catholic. I am one in the sense of a conscious affiliation to the Church, but I hesitate to note this down as an objective fact because it seems to me that one is a Catholic sometimes, in the same way that faith is an unstable gift. There are moments when a person experiences a certain consciousness and there are long periods of darkness when we don't experience the perpetual light but we live in the belief that it still exists.

I also consider myself a rationalist, which means that in the romantic contrast of emotions and reason I am closer to the lens of learning than the breath of inspiration. Temperament has an effect on the religiousness of a person but it does not determine the fact – I know rationalist believers and romantic non-believers. My comprehensive picture of the world agrees with the thought that above mankind there is Someone who is Alpha and Omega, that is the Beginning and the End, the Creator and the Judge. Within the same thinking falls the belief that twenty centuries ago an act of Incarnation and Redemption occurred. From the perspective of different continents, you have to appreciate other paths and other phrasings which in a similarly imperfect manner point to some path which allows people to overcome the threshold of themselves and come closer to the One who is. However, I am very conscious of my own limitations. I am immersed in my own legacy and the field of search is not large enough. That is why I look to Saint Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Teresa and John
of the Cross. And not to yoga, Zen or Islam, although I view them with great respect and interest. A few days spent years ago in a Buddhist monastery outside Bangkok left a strong mark upon me; however, a smaller one than long stays in Tyniec and Bielany.

Out of these above-mentioned confessions, what has an effect on my art is primarily a vision of fate in which I look for meaning, despite the fact that the world overwhims us with the absurd. I suspect that there is always a trace of mystery in individual human fate – that's why so often I ponder over coincidence, probability, statistics as a domain in which God reveals his disguise. I often think about life events in two different orders – cause-and-effect, in which an accident on a journey is a result of a slippery road and poor wheel traction, and the other – the enigmatic, mysterious one which is superstitious, why today this and this happened to me or to one of my characters. Studies in the field of science have taught me humility towards that which is unknown and, unlike the humanists, I do not harbour the belief that the visible world is completely knowable. It is, but superficially so.

In this cursory catalogue of beliefs, I must make one more remark. I feel a strong relationship between a person's spiritual life and his conduct, in other words: between metaphysics and ethics. I am convinced that freedom is accomplished through one's choices and we always choose, even when locked in a prison cell, we choose the thoughts and feelings which we allow ourselves to harbour. I like people who make conscious choices and I get angry when I see inertia and a lack of will. I believe that spirituality is born out of longing, desire, a hazy premonition of harmony, goodness and beauty. People who accept the world as it is, seem to me to be dead – they either do not see or do not feel or long for something. I can easily imagine that the Last Judgement will forgive thieves and sinners, but will it forgive the lazy, lethargic and indifferent? The Bible mentions the cold and the hot but does not really give the lukewarm a chance of salvation.

This remark allows me to return to art. Writing that it's time to die, I had in mind a transformation which I understand quantitatively. The number of societies is changing, statistics are changing, anything in a mass form is deemed to be good. All this seemed sad to me but, in the end, it is bearable. The elite have become barren and culture cyclically returns to its roots, to what is authentic and less refined. I do not despair at the vision of the ubiquity of the television series, even if I am saddened by the loss of more refined cinematic forms. I'm not terror-stricken at the idea of pocket-sized books or art for the masses in the form of illustrated magazines. My world ends only in the moment when this mass art renounces any reflection on so-called fundamental subjects, that is when it abandons the distinction between good and evil and does not give expression to that longing for the ideal which in the learned language is called transcendentalism, that is a way out of our slightness, a way out from all that limits us. When art does not want to speak about what transcends our life, then I genuinely think that it's time to die. Watching American television series, I feel that there is no room in them for reflection about whether we really are masters of our own lives or whether we are ruled by some other power, it doesn't matter what we call it – blind fate, chance or Providence. If art relinquishes this question, then it becomes blind, in my opinion. I have invented a saying about metaphysical blindness being the disease of our times. My Jesuit friend chided me for this idea but recently even the Pope described the misery of our times similarly. Have we really started to believe in a secure existence in our warm homes and not feel the menace which the Middle Ages were
permeated with the menace of death, hunger, war, epidemics, Aids and Chernobyl or even ordinary cancer, which chooses us also not sparing those who live hygienically, or the virtuous or the industrious.

We have become accustomed to thinking about humanity in the categories of continuous progress, forgetting that in the most important human matters progress is immeasurable. Can one speak about progress in art after what has been written by Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare or Stendhal? Do Rublev and Fra Angelico give way to El Greco, and then to Picasso. Is Mozart more primitive than Beethoven or maybe than Wagner? Each one of these questions seems to be meaningless. A similarly meaningless question is whether today, in the twentieth century, we are more conscious of our human condition, our fate, than people in the Middle Ages or the eighteenth century. What is more, by this measure of understanding, an educated person often gives way to an uneducated person. The percentage of wise men and fools in every sample of humanity is probably the same (I wrote this sentence in dialogue form in 'Camouflage' and I amused the audience, who laughed during the screenings hearing that the number of idiots among professors and students is identical!). However, this does not mean that there are no periods when barbarity and ignorance, egoism and bestiality take precedence over that which culture essentially is: an awareness of good that is greater than benefit, comfort, pleasure and everything that can be applied to us in our animal form. When I look at the tendencies in today’s mass art, I get the impression that the time of barbarism is approaching.

Barbarism means the inability to go beyond one's self-interest, the inability to penetrate something which is selfless in a direct, immediate dimension. Barbarism seems to me also the inability to overcome chaos or the lack of effort to attempt so, and chaos means death. The last pontificate popularized the saying about civilization or the culture of death. I understand it as an acknowledgement that hope is the way out of chaos, except that hope is not something constant which can be once and for all ticked off in the appropriate box. To me, faith is a state which we're aiming for, whilst yielding to the fluctuations of consciousness which even sometimes led mystics to doubt and the brink of despair. That's why faith, like every process, requires constant effort and endeavour. While barbarism remains a natural innate human state, just like chaos and inertness are that which all life rises against. I’m scared of digressing so much on the subject of faith, so I'll return to what is easily visible to the eye: to barbarism in culture seen in flagrante.

And now a fairly new anecdote regarding a snobbish burden which relates to a figure from a royal family. During Prince Charles' short visit to Warsaw, I had the opportunity to sit next to him at a dinner hosted by the British ambassador. Prince Charles revealed himself to be open and surprisingly honest. He was hurt by a CNN programme which, reporting about his visit to Warsaw, suggested that an important part of it was the Prince's affair with a female police officer from security. There was no mention of his lecture at the university which concerned his vision of architecture and its influence on human relationships. The alleged affair was absurd – the Prince was staying in Poland for two days, his calendar was full and the very conjecture was completely improbable but fitted into the aesthetic of idiotic television series, and in 'Dynasty' such a story could occur. During the conversation, Prince Charles asked a rhetorical question: “Where is progress?” During the lifetime of his ancestors who sat on the English throne – he continued – not only did affairs occur but so
did great crimes. These were described by Shakespeare and, although he addressed a simple and completely uneducated audience who couldn't read or write, the message of his plays was an expression of wisdom and depth. Whereas today, educated people – doctors or lawyers, are satisfied with 'Dynasty' style nonsense and then take a life-view from that and believe that it's possible that the heir to the throne would hastily seduce an unfamiliar policewoman whilst abroad. From this incident I remembered the identity of the broadcaster who today imposes the standard of world information. It's CNN that first informed us about the war in the Gulf and today it's clear to everyone this information was completely falsified. I heard a question on this subject asked by one of the participants of the Davos forum. The current director of CNN answered that information is first and foremost a commodity and if this commodity sells, then the malcontents who don't like it can go and find some other kind. The mission of telling the truth becomes an anachronism at the moment when both the seller and the recipient do not insist that the commodity contains this feature. If that's how it is to be, then it's time to die. But let us remember that we too are to blame if we agree to this state of affairs.

Last season, I had a series of classes with the students of the Polish Studies department in Warsaw (fleeting in Wroclaw too). I was struck by the fact that the new generation of people immersed in culture have, to a great degree, succumbed to doubt. From all sides came postmodernist gibberish from which one was to derive that discovery is a sign of the maturity of our times, that truth and beauty do not exist and they are just conventions (and the most amusing thing is to mix them up). How reminiscent is this of the past century. However, a fin-de-siècle rerun does not have any charm as it's old and somewhat stale. I believe that the expression of what is truth and beauty changes constantly but I don't lose faith that behind the imperfect phrase there is always a value which is absolute – beauty and truth without any adjectives. When we lose this belief, then it's not worth creating art.

I heard from the mouth of a great thinker that my certainty regarding this could lead the young to fascism or nationalism. I believe that it's quite the opposite. If everything turns out to be relative, it's then that nothing else remains but tribal confidence and mindless fanaticism. If we are threatened with a new time of darkness, then those primarily responsible are those who today spread total disbelief in any lasting values.

This remark leads me to a thought about what has occurred on our continent. Once, even twenty years ago, everything that was most important in culture occurred here in Europe. However, today when I look closely at Europe, I recognise that the state of mind here is indeed an expression of doubt in all values. One after another, films illustrate the thesis of my intellectual opponent, preaching relativity, irresponsibility and the utter helplessness of man. Evil is always external, man falls victim to some conditions, but in reality nothing really depends on him. He is not the master of his own fate. American mass culture proclaims a completely different thesis and there is something disarmingly naïve, primitive yet optimistic about this. Even in the lousiest commercial films, good and evil differ from one another and the world is divided into black and white (in the meaning of characters, of course).

In writing this, perhaps I should refrain from complaining and say: it's not time to die but simply to leave. I've been to America many times. I made one film there and several times I
was very close to making others. There is nothing standing in the way of trying again. If Europe is drowning at its own request, then instead of convincing Polish students, is it not better to attack American financiers with the same conviction? After all, in the end, they are a little closer to me!

However, I will not go. I won't go of my own accord (of course, if they invite me, then I'll be there in a flash). I won't go of my own initiative because there is one big obstacle which means that in America I always feel like a stranger. This obstacle concerns metaphysics, the understanding of fate and reflection, which in my opinion is fundamental to culture.

To illustrate my feelings, I will describe events from my recent collaboration on an American film script which I was reworking based on the original text. Its protagonist was a young American who to achieve journalistic success decides to pretend to be Jewish and enlist in the Israeli army. When he's already in the army, during the course of a conversation with a friend in a Jerusalem cafe, he decides to call the wife who he left behind in America, without telling her why he's disappearing. The decision is the beginning of a moral breakthrough and coincides with a terrorist attack – someone throws a bomb when the protagonist is making the call. The cafe is wiped from the face of the Earth, his friend is killed, as are many other customers, and my protagonist, who survives, asks himself the question: who saved him and why? After all, he could have gone to make the call a moment later, he could have not gone at all and then he would have died. Shaken by this realization (this was my version of the screenplay), he once again calls his wife and tells her that a moment ago someone saved his life. The American producer threw out this scene in disgust, arguing: “No American after a bomb attack would be thinking about who saved his life. He would rush out in pursuit of the person who threw the bomb.” For the record, I'll add that in this situation this pursuit is pointless, whereas the saying “no American” means that in the eyes of the viewer someone who thinks about whether God takes part in our lives is a man who one cannot identify with in a film. And in Europe, until recently, one could.

PHOTO
Ten years after 'Illumination'

BEEN AND GONE

It's hard to believe that all of this was yesterday. The censor has retired. The man from the Central Committee is in some company. I met the head of television a few times, he was even at my house and wrote in my guestbook. Deprived of power, people take on a different shape. They are smaller but then you see in them a real human dimension. Those who today are on a pedestal do not give the impression of being supermen. On the contrary, in a democracy power doesn't have great appeal, it loses its magical dimension and becomes that which it should be, which is service. I myself very nearly entered public service, yet I remained an artist. That's also service.

The time has passed when artists were deadly important, when one sentence in the dialogue was deliberated over by the highest authorities of the state and when one word overlooked by the censors stirred the public’s emotions. That unforgettable, knowing sniggering of the auditorium! I remember the public's reaction to the scene in 'Camouflage' when they load apples from the student canteen into the trunk of the rector's Volga. The snigger in the
auditorium meant “We know the authorities steal!” In recent past times the artist was a skirmisher or at least a flea on a bear: he nipped at the authorities on full display to the public. That was the whole point of the spectacle.

I remember that once at a festival I complained about persecution by the censors in the company of Fassbinder. Fassbinder listened to me with a dreamy expression and finally said: “I envy you! Here in Germany I can hang myself right in front of the chancellor's palace (he didn’t mention on what he could hang himself) and tomorrow at the most there would be would be a small notice in the press. And in your country the political office deliberates what to cut out of 'Ashes and Diamonds'!”

We didn't know that we were envied, but I think we felt important and that's why it's hard for us today. How important was the weight of those issues that we were able to disturb or how far did we succumb to a game of appearances?

When I finished 'Illumination', the censors did not want to send it to distribution and, after further interventions, I was summoned to the Central Committee before Jan Szydlak – a member and secretary of the Politburo at the time, practically the second most important person in the People's Republic of Poland. For a young filmmaker it was a great honour. Mr Szydlak summoned me so as to explain why he couldn't agree to 'Illumination' featuring a fragment of the March newsreels. It concerned the part where my protagonist loses his job at the university due to the fact that he had supported the student strike (Malgosia Pritulak played the scene beautifully in which the wife dramatically stops the protagonist, warning him that if he goes, then he'll lose his job). With Conradesque desperation, Staszek Latallo says that knows this will be the case, but he goes anyway. Then there was a fragment from the newsreel featuring the students being beaten up and the next scene was a year later. Mr Szydlak said that this had to go because people from the state apparatus who came to power after March would take this scene as a sign that the Politburo was opening a review of the assessment of the events in March. Putting the matter in this way it seemed that I was acting indirectly as a spokesman for the authorities. If the authorities accepted it, it meant that the view was acceptable. During the conversation, I bargained so that some allusion to March remained.

As artists, under the previous system we garnered applause in the same way as that donkey on which Christ appeared during Palm Sunday in Jerusalem. In reality, it wasn’t meant for us. With our help, the public applauded any actions against the authorities. And we thought that they were applauding us.

Let's get back to normality. We must earn the applause that is really meant for us. In this there is nothing new under the sun. When Victor Hugo gained ovations for 'Hernani', they were also not meant for him. Verdi was the composer of Italian Unification, but today we value him not for the fact that he served the Kingdom, but for the beauty that he created.

It's time to live, not to die. Time to live more humbly, but honestly, creating on one's own account and not in the name of the public who expressed themselves through us. Today one has to show oneself to be needed by people, or at least nice enough for people to watch us and not cut the grant in parliament without which culture will die. If any of the artists sigh nostalgically about past times, then it means that he wants to continue to shine with
reflected light rather than with his own.

I write all this to cheer myself up. In reality, I feel a little sorrow for my lost distinction. One has to die to be born again. In middle age that's not easy.

Of course, the most difficult part is the date of one's death. I was born in 1939 and in the year 2000 I will be sixty-one. My family is fairly long-lived and I hope that my funeral will fall no earlier than the end of the first quarter of the third millennium. Would I like to live that long? Of course! Preferably until a hundred or even more with good health. For the moment I like life and I don't think this feeling will pass. Although who knows – if the people who I love the most were to not be by my side...

When I think about what I will leave behind, I'm under no illusions. No one will remember old films. I think that with progress the human memory shrinks: during the Renaissance, Aristotle and Plato functioned as if they had barely lived yesterday. Today it seems to me that the real ‘yesterday’ has moved away from us with the speed of light.

Colour films do not endure. I made only two black-and-white films and at least those will physically survive – the rest of the Kodak negatives will start to fade in a few years’ time and I suspect that none of them will outlive me. In the fight against time, I'm doomed to failure as is every creator of representational art.

I could also try to predict the type of death that awaits me. My father and my grandfather died of a cerebral haemorrhage. From an old prayer I remember the following words: “Deliver us from a sudden and unexpected death, oh Lord!” So, perhaps, let it be expected, but sudden. A slow one seems to me to be torture.

In one of my last films my protagonist, who is played by Max von Sydow, repeats the thought which I think I've taken from my mother “Old age is a type of anaesthetic thanks to which death hurts a little less.” In so many of my films I've dealt with death even though I realise that it's a taboo subject matter. One can speak of everything, apart from that. Consumer society can't bear this subject. Death occurs to others, it's symbolic, in television series where the body count is high. It's somebody else's death in which there is only an overcoming of a barrier and nothing more. Is our culture, so helpless in the face of death, not foredoomed? I don't want to die in the final era when Europe will die and with it all that I love. Although who knows – perhaps it’s easier to leave when everything dies along with us. For now, I get up in the morning and nothing hurts yet (later, when there is nothing giving you any trouble, one has to wonder if one is still alive). I still have a few dozen screenplays before me which I haven't found any money for. If I find it, then I will probably have work until retirement. How much more will I write? That I don't know. It's a waste of time to write and simply put it in a drawer. Will I achieve any more success? Will I receive an Oscar? Will there ever be a queue for one of my films? (I remember the delight with which, years ago, I watched people in New York queue for 'Quarterly Balance' and paid what seemed to me the staggering price of five dollars – the amount that I was permitted to take abroad at one time!). I continue to take part in a lottery in which success is the second prize (the first is immortality, by which I mean relative immortality – the one which artists dream of). How it will be with immortality in that real infinite dimension I'd rather not speculate because that's a subject for intellectual games. I only repeat after Saint Augustine
that everything that we understand is not God.

THE END

With my mother, 1946
Mother Wanda

The film school years – half way through my studies, 1963 or 1964
Army camp 1963

With Daniel Olbrychski at my assessment
Illumination

Cannes Film Festival, 1980
At one of the Moscow film festivals, at the end of the seventies

With Maja after 'Spiral'
Cannes 1980, after the screening of 'The Constant Factor' with Bradecki and Idziak. At that time, I received the award for best director.

'The Quarterly Balance' – Marek Piwowski and Maja Komorowska
In New Delhi, India, 1975. I was a member of the festival jury and I met Indira Gandhi.

Photo from the States – 'The Catamount Killing'. On set with the actress Anne Wedgeworth, the protagonist of the film.
After the premiere of 'From a Far Country' at the Rome Opera in 1981 with Prime minister Spadolini and Minister Signorelly (later Mayor of Rome)

In Castel Gandolfo, in August 1981, after the screening of 'From a Far Country' for the Pope. In the middle is Cardinal Casaroli, the Secretary of State at the time.
After the screening of 'From a Far Country'.

With the Pope and the screenwriters of the film 'From a Far Country'.
With Elisabeth Bergner and Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak in Saarbrucken

With Baryshnikov
With the Pope in Castel Gandolfo, I believe before the assassination attempt.
Ten years after 'Illumination'