

Andrzej Munk's Cinema of Internalized Exile (1957-1961)

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Table of Contents

Abstract, 5

Introduction and Literature Review

Project Goals, 6-8

A Transnational National Cinema, 8-9

A Cinema of Internalized Exile, 9-13

Western Film Scholarship on the Soviet Bloc, 14-15

Post-Socialist Polish Scholarship, 15-17

New Directions in Post-Socialist Film Scholarship, 17-19

The Auteur Industry, 19-20

The Thaw, 20-23

The Polish School, 23-25

Biography, 25

Documentary Productions, 26

Themes and Style, 26-28

Chapter Overview, 28-29

Chapter One: *Man on the Tracks* (1957)

Introduction, 30

Synopsis, 31-32

Trains, Trainyards, and Depots: Between Mobility and Internalized Exile, 32-36

Fatalism and Internalized Exile, 36-39

Conclusion, 39-40

Chapter Two: *Eroica* (1958)

Introduction, 41

Synopsis, 42-44

Spaces of Internal Exile: Prison, Occupation and, National Mythology, 44-49

Inaccessible International Spaces, 50-54

Fatalism and the Condition of Internalized Exile, 54-56

Chapter Three: *Bad Luck* (1960)

Introduction, 57

Playing War: Medium Manipulation in Bad Luck, 57-62

History as Prison, 62-67

Deep Composition and Internalized Exile, 68-71

Chapter Four: *Passenger* (1961)

Introduction, 72-74

Memory Loss and Mise-En-Scene, 74-75

Selective Memory and Jewish Agency, 75-76

Polish Cinema and the Representation of “Non-Jewish Jews”, 76-80

Conclusion, 80

Conclusion, 81

Endnotes, 81-85

Works Cited, 85-86

Abstract

This thesis defines Andrzej Munk's feature films as a *cinema of internalized exile* by conducting a stylistic analysis of *Man on the Tracks* (1957), *Eroica*, (1958), *Bad Luck* (1960), and *Passenger* (1961). I extend Melinda Szaloky use of the concept of internal exile in her thematic analysis of postwar Hungarian orphan films and discuss Munk's tight and claustrophobic cinema using Hamid Naficy's concept of the "closed cinematic form." I argue first, Munk's cinema is one of *internalized exile*, because his mise-en-scene expresses the characters' isolation, anxiety, and feelings of homelessness because of the burden of nationalism, and second because Munk's characters find no agency from international spaces due to limited mobility imposed by the state and exclusion from the international community.

Introduction and Literature Review

Project Goals

This thesis defines Andrzej Munk's feature film production as a *cinema of internalized exile* by conducting a stylistic analysis of *Man on the Tracks* (1957), *Eroica*, (1958), *Bad Luck* (1960), and *Passenger* (1961). This analysis is an extension of post-Socialist discourse among Polish cinema scholars on exilic and transnational tendencies in Cold War Polish cinema. Because political and economic censorship is common to state controlled film industries,¹ the concept *internalized exile* is useful to study filmmakers working within these industries whose narratives express sentiments of disconnect and dissatisfaction with social and political systems.

Historically, Munk's films in particular provide us with an example of internalized exile because at the time of his production, Poland was not a sovereign nation, but rather a satellite of the Soviet Bloc. Reflecting this condition, his characters occupy the void between unfulfilling national and privileged international spaces. Stylistically, Munk incarcerates his characters through his claustrophobic mise-en-scene, resulting in a mental and physical state of internalized exile. Unlike his contemporary, Andrzej Wajda, Munk's narratives resist negotiating the trauma of partition through Romanticizing Polish history, and instead they condemn the symbols and rhetoric of Polish nationalism.

Hamid Naficy, a specialist in exilic and diasporic film, defines exilic cinema as an independent mode of production in which filmmakers living in exile seek to connect to their homeland and work through the trauma of deterritorialization.² Naficy identifies

“internal exile” as a condition faced by filmmakers working in totalitarian nations, who because of social or economic restraints develop an oppositional voice through their “authorial style”³ through which to conceptualize the nation by assessing its values and critiquing its performances.⁴

Working from Naficy, Eastern European film scholar Melinda Szaloky also uses the concept of internal exile, which she defines as a condition of displacement in one’s home or nation, in order to apply the concept to her reading of post-war Hungarian cinema. Extending the Hungarian sociologist Elemer Hankiss’ assumption that internal exile is a condition arising from living outside of and not identifying with the dominant system,⁵ Szaloky argues Hungary’s history of violent insurrections has “established homelessness at home as a key ingredient of the [Hungarian] national experience” and that the nation’s satellite status within the Soviet empire is a continuation of this condition.⁶

Szaloky argues that Hungary’s misfortunes are perpetuated through its national heritage. For instance, she notes the Hungarian national anthem begins with a stanza from 19th century poet Ferenc Kolcsey’s “Hymn,” a poem about the Hungarian condition of homelessness in one’s homeland. She characterizes the films of Miklos Jansco, such as *The Round-Up* (1965), and *The Confrontation* (1969) as emblematic of modern alienation being alienation from history.⁷ She supports these assumptions through examinations of “housing problem films” such as Bela Tarr’s *Family Nest* (1979) and Kezdi-Kovacs Zsolt’s *The Nice Neighbor* (1979), and “border crossing films” such as Pal Sandor’s *Daniel Takes the Train* (1982) and Karoly Makk’s *Another Way* (1982) and “orphan films” such as Istvan Szabo’s *Father* (1966) and Marta Meszaros’ *The Girl* (1968).

Because she is working with a large body of films, Szaloky's study emphasizes the films' narratives and themes over the mise-en-scene. However, she notes that a particular cycle of films that emerging during the late 1970s and early 1980s, including Janos Rozsa's *Sunday Daughters* (1979) and *Mascot* (1981) focus on homeless children living in state-run orphanages and use these confining state-institution in conjunction with oppressive barbwire and barred windows to articulate the oppressive conditions of Communist Hungary.

Szaloky uses of the term *internal exile* as a thematic trope throughout her analysis of postwar Hungarian cinema while this thesis analysis Munk's mise-en-scene in order to discuss *internalized exile* as a stylistic trope. Szaloky emphasizes that because Naficy's exilic model is transnational, internal exile is a useful concept in which to reevaluate other Soviet Bloc cinemas.⁸ However, this does not mean the term has a singular meaning throughout the Soviet Bloc. Szaloky stresses that in the Hungarian case, *internal exile* is rooted in the nation's morale ambiguity⁹ resulting from its disjointed national heritage. This thesis argues that Romantic nationalism and self-sacrifice in the name of patriotic duty have created a condition of *internalized exile* that Munk's cinemas both articulate and critique. The following section reviews the role of transnational and exilic cinema studies in Eastern European cinema scholarship.

A Transnational National Cinema

In order to consider East European cinemas as transnational one must recognize first, textual and stylistic continuities occurred within Soviet-bloc cinema cultures, and second, cultural theories, such as exilic theories, had a tremendous impact on post-

Socialist reevaluations of Soviet-bloc cinema. In *Cinema of the Other Europe* (2003), Eastern European and Balkan cinema specialist Dina Iordanova points out that much of East European cinema is comparable to non-European, Third World, and Independent American cinema movements in terms of style, theme, and in some cases, modes of production.¹⁰ She stresses that current transnational cultural theory, such as post-colonialism and globalization studies should enhance forthcoming Eastern European film scholarship because on a regional level, transnational development in the form of industrial, thematic, and stylistic concurrences across Eastern Europe's film cultures have been the norm, even during the Cold War. Furthermore, she observes the regions' industrial, thematic, and stylistic concurrences, coupled with the "forced togetherness" of Bloc directors make a cross-regional examination necessary and logical extension of national cinema studies.¹¹

Naficy's exilic model draws from authorship and auteur theory¹² and can be extended to include an examination of Munk's cinema. Munk's cinema, like that of exilic and auteur cinemas is "designed and polished for commercial distribution."¹³ Apart from its global distribution and canonization within the European Art House movement,¹⁴ Munk's cinema is transnational because it draws on national experience, in order to address universal concerns,¹⁵ such as the hindrance of historical nostalgia to modernity and the crisis of ideological and nationalist dogmatism.

A Cinema of Internalized Exile

Exile, both internal and external, is a key facet of Polish identity and conditions to consider when examining Polish cinema.¹⁶ In an essay on representations of home and

exile in the films of Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, Izabela Kalinowski notes the strain between “mythical” spaces of the lost homeland and spaces of “transit and impermanence.”¹⁷ For Kalinowski, the opening sequence of Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) is significant in that it takes place at a rural Catholic church in which the film’s protagonist, a young resistance member named Maciek assassinates a man who is a member of the communist party.¹⁸

The church, according to Kalinowski, is used by Wajda to represent a Polish national space because postwar Polish identity drew from the area’s tradition of Catholicism; for centuries Catholicism had been a focal point of Polish Nationalism and resistance against invading Islamic Turks and Orthodox Russians.¹⁹ Referring to the tension between the Catholic Church and communist doctrine during the cold war, Polish film historian Marek Haltof writes, “In trying to change the nature of Polish Nationalism, communist authorities fought a losing battle. They failed to replace nationalism with internationalism, religion with ideology, and Polish romanticism with revolutionary spirit.”²⁰ Communist authorities allowed The Catholic Church to exist in Poland,²¹ however Polish films with overtly religious films were censored.²²

Kalinowski discusses spaces of displacement in Wajda’s films. For instance, in *Ashes and Diamonds* most of the narrative takes place in a hotel, a space Kalinowski refers to as the “metaphor for the all-embracing homelessness of post-war Poland.”²³ Kalinowski discusses the hotel as a site where different social and ideological groups exchange small talk and discuss their various points of origin. According to Kalinowski, homelessness at home is the commonality that links the hotel inhabitants, as demonstrated when Maciek and a hotel clerk discuss the Warsaw they hope to

someday see again. Sadly though, the Warsaw they yearn for exists only in prewar memory.²⁴

Izabela Kalinowski discusses the exilic mentality manifested in the Polish arts from 19th century literature, comparing it to the Polish School of filmmaking (1956-1961), and on through Kieslowski's post-socialist "Colors Trilogy" *Blue* (1993), *White* (1994), and *Red* (1994).²⁵ Her essay focuses on *White*, a film about the dual trauma of being a foreigner in a hostile western city, Paris, in order to reveal the anxiety that arises from living outside of one's formative society. For the film's protagonist, Karol, the return home to Poland is the only antidote to western rejection, which is expressed in a scene in which his bank card is shredded by an ATM.²⁶ According to Kalinowski's essay, *White* suggests that the West is neither an inviting nor a liberating space.

Katarzyna Marciniak uses her concept of *transnational desires* to discuss representations of Western spaces as hostile in her essay on Agnieszka Holland's *A Woman Alone* (1981). Marciniak defines *transnational desires* as an urgent but ultimately futile desire for mobility and a need to move beyond the constraints placed upon the subject by borders and nationalism. Marciniak says *transnational desires* in Polish cinema leads characters down a path of hopelessness and anxiety that arises from being subjugated by two opposing, and equally unappealing political ideologies. In order to illustrate how Holland articulates this condition, Marciniak notes how Holland's use of tight framing, natural lighting and mostly ambient sounds create an oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere around the film's protagonist, Irena, a single mother and postal worker.²⁷

Marciniak claims that Irena's ambition to escape Poland to such a liberated or "Western" space is stymied because such a space is an imaginary and unattainable space. Irena's only moment of liberation comes when she purchases a used car in hopes of escaping to the international space of the West. She imagines the West as a space in which her material desires will be fulfilled, however, a near fatal car crash ends her ambitions. Ironically, the liberated West that Irena dreams of is actually East Germany, suggesting her international agency is less attainable than previously thought.²⁸

According to Marciniak, when *transnational desires* are left unfulfilled in Holland's film, individuals are forced into a state of withdrawal to the point where human and sexual relationships themselves become unfulfilling. This inward retreat results in a feeling of displacement or homelessness - a form of internalized exile - in which the subjects find their international mobility severely limited by the prospect of two equally unappealing options - Polish Socialism or Global Capitalism. Holland visually expresses Irena's isolation by trapping her within a dark and gloomy apartment amidst an oppressive, male-dominated Catholic society which berates her for being a single mother.

In a similar vein, in this thesis, I argue that Munk's cinema is one of *internalized exile*. Through his films' mise-en-scene, Munk expresses his characters' isolation, anxiety, and feelings of homelessness because of the burden of nationalism for a nation state that according to Polish film historians was until 1989 an imagined concept.²⁹ In this thesis, term "nation" refers not to the geographic and political construct of Poland, but rather how the concept of a homogeneous nation is perpetuated through national heritages and mythologies. Prior to the advent of film in Poland, the Polish nation existed as a concept perpetuated by oral tradition and myth,³⁰ and appropriately, Polish film scholar

Paul Coates describes the Polish condition vis-à-vis Benedict Anderson's concept of the *imagined community* in which the concept of nationhood is defined by a select group of like minded individuals.³¹ In Poland, 19th century romantic poets such as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Slowacki would set a precedent later followed by filmmakers for Poland's special role in conceptualizing the nation as a lost and alienated community.³² Furthermore, internalized exile is experienced by Munk's characters who find no agency from international spaces, which in Munk's cinema are any spaces outside the geographic and political influence of the Soviet-Bloc, because of limited mobility imposed by the state and exclusion by the international community.

Stylistically, Andrzej Munk's cinema is best characterized vis-à-vis Hamid Naficy's concept of the "closed cinematic form," which he identifies as tight and claustrophobic elements of the exilic filmmaker's mise-en-scene. Munk's films take place within stifling locations, such as prisons (*Eroica* pt I, *Bad Luck*, and *Passenger*), interrogation rooms (*Bad Luck* and *Man on the Tracks*), and cramped living quarters (*Eroica* pt. II, *Man on the Tracks*, *Passenger*). In order to articulate his characters' anxiety, claustrophobia, and the condition of internalized exile, Munk's mise-en-scenes all contain physical barriers in the form of barred windows or shadows that resemble bars.³³

The following section discusses post-Socialists reassessments of Polish film history, the tension between national cinema models and new cultural theories, and how this thesis works towards resolving this tension and unlocking internalized exile as a useful and historically viable concept.

Western Film Scholarship on the Soviet Bloc

Eastern European English scholarship during the Cold War generally worked within the national and auteur cinema frameworks, while post Cold War scholarship has begun adapting transnational and post colonial theories. Eastern European film scholar Aniko Imre writes in the introduction to East European Cinemas (2005) that the transformation throughout the Eastern Bloc from state socialism to global capitalism has radically altered the region's film industries and the methods through which critics and scholars have studied them. The decrease of state funding after the collapse of Communism made it necessary for filmmakers to explore new means of funding and distribution, as well as find ways to compete with domestic genre pictures such as comedies, action films and melodramas in addition to Hollywood imports.³⁴

According to Imre, because of the economic restructuring of East European industries, Cold War English film scholarship was rendered obsolete, such as Michael Stohl's Cinema beyond the Danube (1974) Mira and Antonin Liehm's The Most Important Art (1977), and David Paul's Politics Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema (1983.) Imre criticizes these texts not only because they approach Eastern European film cultures as a homogeneous mass, but because they also evaluate films and directors from a Western perspective, privileging films that took an ideological stance against totalitarianism and Soviet occupation.³⁵

Cold War English language scholarship on Polish cinema is scarce. Boleslaw Michalek and Frank Turaj's The Modern Cinema of Poland (1988), though focusing specifically on the Polish film industry, still limits itself by focusing only to post-WWII Polish cinema and the political and ideological mission of the auteur. However, it is

useful in the present study in that the idea of internalized exile is suggested in the chapter on Andrzej Wadja. Michalek and Turaj discuss how Wadja's "creation of mythologized images of home" is an attempt to negotiate the trauma of perpetual homelessness brought about by Poland's history of partition and occupation.³⁶

Post-Socialist Polish Scholarship

It was not until nearly fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc that Marek Haltof's Polish National Cinema (2002) emerged as the first truly comprehensive English study of the Polish film industry. Prewar industry history is scarce in English language Cold War scholarship. The Most Important Art, though including a comprehensive survey of post-war Eastern Bloc cinemas, still collapses the pre-war histories of Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Hungarian cinemas.³⁷ Acknowledging the gaps in Polish film history, Haltof's text was a thorough examination of prewar Polish cinema including coverage of industry structure and practices,³⁸ technical and theoretical achievements,³⁹ the star system,⁴⁰ screen representation of Socialist Realism during the Stalin years,⁴¹ and the various genres such as patriotic films, comedies and pre-war Yiddish films.⁴² Perhaps its most important contribution to English language Polish film scholarship was its extensive examination of Poland's silent and early sound eras,⁴³ eras previously slighted by Polish communist authorities as representing a "bourgeois Poland" in which commercial cinema flourished as opposed to respectable art house cinema.⁴⁴

Haltof, a native Pole, argues that Cold War Polish cinemas reception in the West has functioned mainly as an introduction to life under totalitarianism, and because critics

and scholars have traditionally favored thematic or Aesopian readings, scholarship with an emphasis on a particular filmmaker's style has been overlooked. Haltof offers little in the way of stylistic analysis of Polish cinema, but he does discuss characteristics in Polish cinema recognized locally and internationally as being distinctly "Polish." For Haltof, to speak of a unified and distinctly "Polish condition" is to refer to the nation's devastating history of invasion, occupation, partition and decimation. He stresses that Polish film narratives, even prior to WWII have traditionally reflected this history of defeat, occupation and cessation of Polish culture.⁴⁵

Polish film scholars are unanimous in their view that Poland's history of invasion, occupation and victimization to war atrocity is paramount to understanding representations of Polish identity in film.⁴⁶ Boleslaw Michalek and Frank Turaj write in The Modern Cinema of Poland "...from the end of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century Poland existed only as history. There was no Polish State...there were few mechanisms for...national expression."⁴⁷ Polish filmmakers have played a formative role of negotiating the trauma of war and devastation. Michalek and Turaj write that the privileged position of filmmakers in Cold War Polish society cannot be overstated, as filmmakers, in the tradition of Polish Romantic poets, interpret through their medium "universal aspirations and concerns."⁴⁸ The Polish term *wieszcz* or "seer," referring to the political mission of artists to represent Poland during times of repressed sovereignty, was adapted during the 20th century by film historians, in order to stress the important role filmmakers played in Polish identity construction.⁴⁹ Coates characterizes the era from the end of WWII through Kieslowski's *Colors Trilogy* as another "wait for liberation" in which Polish filmmakers, especially members of the Polish School, in the

tradition of 19th century romantic poets, endeavored to write Polish history and to create a new Polish nationalism and identity.⁵⁰

Cinema's role in Polish nation building and national identity dates back to the early years of the medium. In the autumn of 1896, films by the Lumiere brothers premiered in Krakow's municipal theater. Early Polish cinema served as an apparatus for identity construction to Poles at the turn of the 20th century by tapping sources of Polish national pride and history. Polish theaters became public spaces in which Poles could witness national events, such as the funerals of famed writers and poets and see moving images from Polish cities long since annexed by a litany of occupiers. Historic nation building films appear to have been popular among early Polish cinema goers such as a 1910 reenactment of one of Poland's most celebrated events, the battle at Grunewald, in which Polish and Lithuanian forces repelled Germany's Teutonic Knights.⁵¹

Dominant motifs central to the concept of Polish identity, and addressed by postwar directors, are self-sacrifice and heroism. However, Imre takes issue with this trope, noting that after the Cold War ended, so too did the tradition of allegorical filmmaking: "Tragic and romantic heroes are out of place in the era of the triumphant global postmodern...the heroic is inconceivable without the ridiculous."⁵² Imre, like other post-socialist East European film scholars, argues that Cold War cinema needs to be reexamined, not simply historically, but also conceptually.

New Directions in Post-Socialist Film Scholarship

Imre identifies four major shortcomings in Cold War era film scholarship. First, during the Cold War, critical voices from within Eastern Europe's film industry seldom

emerged, and therefore, these cinemas became known internationally through Western scholars and critics who privileged films, usually distributed by American and British companies, that fit the model of the East European auteur cinema; the films were usually masculine, existential, and used allegorical tropes of national history or “resistant cinemas” that surreptitiously critiqued the socialist system.⁵³ Second, by focusing on “resistant” cinemas as the dominant East European cinemas, scholars overlooked the significant output of documentary, animation, genre films and parodies produced throughout the Eastern Bloc. Third, the resistant cinema model established for critics and scholars in the West, an ideological paradigm of planned economic policy versus that of free markets. According to Imre, this binary prevented discussion of how these cinemas offered non-ideological critiques of nationalism.⁵⁴ Finally, the paradigm of the auteur’s ideological crusade against an oppressive political system left East European cinema scholarship impervious to a range of theoretical concepts, such as post-colonial or exilic theories which began to inform film scholarship in the 1960s.⁵⁵

Christina Stojanova notes that Eastern European auteurs such as Poland’s Andrzej Wajda have by and large become synonymous with East European cinema.⁵⁶ Similarly, in his introduction to Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema, David Paul laments that the financial risk involved in film distribution has limited Western access to East European cinemas to authorial cinemas from the likes of Hungary’s Jancsó, and Czechoslovakia’s Forman.⁵⁷ In a 2004 article on transnationalism and Hungarian cinema,⁵⁸ Imre criticizes the tendency of the Cold War auteur to assume national audiences were eager and capable of decoding the Aesopian narratives dealing with national trauma and collective history. However, Cold War audience reception

studies from throughout the Soviet Bloc are scarce,⁵⁹ so failures or a success of the auteurs' political mission is inconclusive. As Paul Coates points out, Poland's National Film Archives and the Archive of Contemporary Files have barely been opened by even Polish scholars, most of whom, he accuses "are more interested in engaging with current non-Polish debates on digital media and postmodernity than in mapping these fundamental local resources."⁶⁰

This thesis adapts concepts such as internal exile which are relatively terms used in East European film scholarship. However, this thesis is also sensitive to certain axioms about the structure of Poland's film industry which had a great impact upon what type of films were made, and ultimately influenced how a director such as Munk could develop his style.

The Auteur Industry

The structure of the Polish film industry during the Cold War was similar to the American studio system in that it created an environment in which a filmmaker with a highly personalized style could emerge. Although Munk's feature film career (1957-1961) spans an era of reasonable freedom not only within Poland's industry, but throughout the Soviet Bloc, the communist Polish state still owned and controlled the film industry. In separate government institutions, subordinate to the Central Office of Cinematography, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Culture and Art, committees were formed to oversee production, distribution, funding and technicians. For instance, one of the duties of the production unit was to select and hire a director for individual film

projects. Ironically, after being selected, directors maintained relative freedom to create and had the ability to personalize their projects once production began.⁶¹

Though amateur film production existed during the Cold War, professional Polish directors worked for the state.⁶² So, while Imre stresses that new scholarship move beyond studies which focus on the ideological mission of auteurs, and criticized the privileged Western gaze of Stohl's Cinema Beyond the Danube, Mira and Liehm's The Most Important Art, and Paul's Politics Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema, the structure of socialist Poland's film industry makes the relegation of the director's personal style and influences a difficult task.

This thesis takes a position between the exilic theories of Imre, on the one hand, arguing that internalized exile was the result of an ultimately impossible longing for international spaces, while on the other hand, this thesis, like the scholarship presented by Coates and Haltof, also stresses the importance of historical perspectives to new theoretical ones. Since the influence of the national still remains necessary to even transnational cinema studies,⁶³ the following section provides an historical overview of the "new wave" or Polish School of filmmaking made possible through the de-Stalinization process that occurred throughout Eastern Europe beginning in the mid-1950s.

The Thaw

After the Second World War the Soviet Union occupied and imposed upon much of Eastern Europe Soviet and Stalinist social and economic models.⁶⁴ At the dawn of the 1950s, parties opposed to Communism throughout Eastern Europe were either been ban

or co-opted into populist fronts maintained by Communist leadership. Land was collectivized, economies were planned and harsh restrictions were placed upon mediated and social expressions.⁶⁵ After Stalin's death in 1953, throughout the Soviet-bloc debates on how to proceed economically and socially began first with Communist leadership and quickly spread to party members, leftist intellectuals, workers and students.⁶⁶ Then in February of 1956 Krushchev's speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU denounced many of the social and economic aspects of Stalinism and was interpreted by many party leaders and citizens as a positive step towards the reduction of Soviet influence on the sovereignty of Bloc-nations.⁶⁷

In Poland, Stalinism had directed the course of political, social, economic, and artistic fields starting in 1949 and Polish filmmakers were expected to tow the Communist party line by adhering to the tenets of Socialist Realism. Between 1949 and 1955, 31 of the 33 films produced in Poland followed the tenets of *socialist realism* and theaters in Poland were unable to show films other than those made within the Soviet Bloc.⁶⁸ In 1956 Poland began to openly oppose Soviet policy and influence, beginning with a worker uprising in the city of Poznan in June of 1956 and culminating in the "Polish October," when the once imprisoned populist leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, was elected as First Secretary of the Communist Party. His policies further liberalized the Polish Communist Party by broadening religious freedoms and reinstating University professors dismissed as dissidents. During these months of sweeping reform, working and housing conditions improved, new election laws were ratified, the ban of foreign radio broadcasts was lifted, and talks began between the new Polish government and Soviet officials to limit the number of Soviet troops stationed in Poland and curtail Soviet

“advisors” within Poland’s military.⁶⁹ Though Poland under Gomulka’s regime had the outward appearance of a sovereign nation, Poles were still considered denizens of the Soviet-bloc.⁷⁰

The anti-Soviet momentum that began in Poznan in June of 1956 quickly spread to neighboring Hungary. In October of 1956 a coalition of students, intellectuals and citizens rose up against the Hungarian authorities and the occupational Soviet army, demanding the election of a new government, inquiries into past atrocities, the withdraw of Soviet troops from Hungary, fair and equal diplomacy between the Soviet Union and Hungary, higher wages and the formation of workers’ councils, and the amnesty of all participants in the uprising.⁷¹ On November 4th, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary, put down the revolution, and rounded up perceived agitators, mainly apprentices, members of workers’ councils, and members of the intelligentsia.⁷² However, between 1959 and 1963, realizing oppression by no means led to order, Hungarian authorities loosened their grip on Hungarian culture and society.⁷³ Amnesties were granted to those imprisoned for participating in the uprising and the more repressive of Hungary’s authorities were removed from office.

The easing of totalitarian practices affected the film industries as well, and between 1956 and 1968, a “Thaw” relinquished much of Eastern Europe’s film cultures from the dark years of Stalinism. The “Thaw” can be recognized stylistically by a move from Socialist Realism in favor other influences, such as the European Avant-Garde and international auteurs, such as Orson Welles, Akira Kurosawa and John Huston. The freedom to explore new themes and styles that emerged from this liberal climate became the impetus for such movements as the Hungarian New Wave and the Polish School.⁷⁴

Soviet film historian Josephine Woll's notes the process of "de-Stalinization" in Eastern Europe between Stalin's death in 1953 and the 1967 invasion of Czechoslovakia saw, among other things, the abandonment of socialist-realist themes that championed "The Working Class [as] the Basis for All Human Life"⁷⁵ and granted filmmakers from the Soviet Union and other satellite nations the freedom to discuss once taboo subjects. One such subject was the catastrophic toll World War II had taken on the Soviet populace. With films such as Mikhail Kalatozov's, *The Cranes are Flying* (1957),⁷⁶ and Grigorii Chuhrai's, *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) "the concept of heroic in Soviet cinema"⁷⁷ shifted considerably from a socialist realists' dream, to a Soviet citizen's reality.

In Hungary, Zoltan Fabri's *Fourteen Lives Were Saved* (1954) with "its realistic setting and its portrayal of ordinary people" marked a significant departure from the myopic gaze of Socialist Realism. But it was Fabri's follow up to *Fourteen Lives*, *Merry-Go-Round*, and its reception at the 1956 Cannes film festival that brought Fabri and the rest of Hungary's film industry international acclaim.⁷⁸

Polish School

The *Polish School* of filmmaking is the postwar generation of Lodz film school graduates that reinvigorated and brought new prestige to the Polish film industry, throughout the Soviet Bloc and at international festivals. Ascribing Ewelina Nurczynska-Fidelska, Marek Haltof writes in *Polish National Cinema*, "The Polish School as a uniform cultural marvel did not exist: instead, we are dealing with the emergence of *auteurs* who initiated a serious artistic and intellectual dialogue with their viewers, and who reflected the spirit and times of their work."⁷⁹

Lodz graduates began their professional careers at a time when they could challenge the thematic and aesthetic malaise of Socialist Realism. Organizational changes within the Polish film industry implemented during the mid-1950s created a more liberal atmosphere in which *Polish School* directors had the freedom to explore new themes and formal styles. In May of 1955 the Polish industry began a mode of production in which a single feature was composed of a unit consisting of a director, a scriptwriter, producers, artistic and literary directors and a production manager. While still employees of the State, filmmakers during this period managed to have a fair amount of input and control over their productions. Furthermore, production units had economic advantages. The efficiency of the production unit model reduced the average cost of feature films and increased production capacity from two to four films per year to over sixteen films per year.⁸⁰

Though opinions among Polish film scholars vary as to what years the movement began and ended,⁸¹ the *Polish School* can best be divided into four eras. The first stage (1955-1956) saw the emergence of themes that opposed and challenged the tenets of Socialist Realism in films such as Andrzej Wajda's seminal *A Generation* (1955) and Andrzej Munk's *Blue Cross* (1955). During the second stage (1957-1959) a range of perspectives carried on the tradition of Polish romanticism through the examination of recent history, such as the Second World War, (Wajda's *Lotna*, 1959) the occupation of Poland first by Germany and then the Soviet Union, in Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), and Munk's *Eroica* (1958) and the Warsaw uprising in Wajda's *Kanal* (1957) and Munk's *Eroica*. The third stage, (1960-1961) is characterized by highly personalized narratives involving Polish everymen such as Munk's *Bad Luck*. The final stage, (1962-

1965) is best characterized as a self-reflexive era in which films such as Tadeusz Konowicki's *Salto* carried on Munk's theme of skepticism towards themes of Polish heroism and self-sacrifice.⁸² This, and other themes are discussed in the next section, following a biographical sketch of Munk and his career.

Biography

Munk produced only four feature films between 1957 and his death in 1961 but his career spanned what can be considered the golden-age of Polish cinema. Because of a career cut short, and the elevation of his contemporary, director Andrzej Wajda, a figure synonymous with 20th century Polish cinema, English scholarship on Munk is scarce. The son of a Jewish engineer, Andrzej Munk was born in Cracow in 1921. He developed an interest in photography and politics in his teens and was drafted into the Polish army immediately following his graduation from high school in 1939. After Poland's defeat, Munk returned to Warsaw to work as a manual laborer.⁸³ How Munk concealed his Jewish heritage and pre-war socialist affiliations remains unclear,⁸⁴ though it is known he spent the duration of the occupation studying engineering under his father and fighting in the Resistance.⁸⁵

After the war, Munk studied architecture and law in hopes of contributing to building a new Socialist Poland. However, he soon became disillusioned with the Polish Communist Party, which preferred the imposition of social reform rather than allowing its natural progression. Munk left law school around 1947 and enrolled in the newly founded state film school in Lodz, graduating in 1950 with top honors.⁸⁶

Documentary Productions

Early in his career, Munk worked in non-fiction production and demonstrated a credulous enthusiasm for an emerging socialist Poland.⁸⁷ Munk's thesis film, *Art of the Young* (1949) documents the nationalist and ideological mission of young socialist realist artists in Poland, while his *It Began in Spain* (1950) used montage to chronicle the struggle against 1930s fascism. In *Science Closer to Life* (1951), Munk stressed the importance of applying science and reason to socialist doctrine, while *Direction Nowa Huta* (1951) lauded post-war reconstruction and industrialization of Poland.⁸⁸

Munk's early documentary work expressed an affinity for the Polish working class. In *Peasant Memories* (1952), Munk gave a voice to rural Poles so they could discuss how their quality of life had improved because of socialism. His *The Stars Must Shine* (1954), which chronicles the dangerous lives of Polish miners and engineers searching for exploitable veins of coal, has been compared to the British documentaries *Night Mail* (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, 1934) and *Coal Face* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935.)⁸⁹

Themes and Style

Because of his disillusionment with Polish socialism and skepticism towards ideological dogmas, patriotic duty and Polish historical mythology, Munk's feature film productions from *Man on the Tracks* (1958) through *Passenger* (1961) have been characterized by Michalek & Turaj⁹⁰ and Iordanova⁹¹ as taking a cynical and fatalistic stance on the notion of National identity. Munk's characters are conscious of the "burden of history"⁹² and their inability to escape misfortune. They are entangled by history and

memory and see their fate as largely predetermined because of the fatalistic condition of Polish identity resulting from hundreds of years of hardship. According to Haltof, Munk's films often take aim at the empty gestures and ultimate waste of Romantic-heroism, for heroism's sake, a concept known in Poland as *bohaterszczyzna*.⁹³

In 1955 Munk directed *Men of Blue Cross*, a docu-drama set in WWII that chronicles the Polish mountain rescue service as they carry wounded partisan fighters from Poland to Czechoslovakia through the Tatra Mountains. Though stilted by traces of Socialist Realism, Stuart Klawans argues that Munk's use of extreme close-ups of wounded, cold, but none-the-less jubilant partisans, permeates the film with a "sardonic grotesquerie,"⁹⁴ later indicative to Munk's cinema.

Munk's first narrative feature is *Man on the Tracks* (1957), commonly referred to by critics as both the Polish *Citizen Kane* and *Rashomon*⁹⁵ due to its conflicting and multiple point-of-view narrative structure. The film was received enthusiastically in Poland and abroad, winning the top prize for direction at Czechoslovakia's Karlovy Vary Festival in 1958.⁹⁶ His follow up, *Eroica* (1958) which also uses a fragmented narrative, this time to discuss the Warsaw uprising from various angles and points of view,⁹⁷ won multiple awards at the Mar del Plata festival in Argentina. After *Eroica*, Munk was granted a teaching position at the Lodz school of Cinematography where he continued to make non-fiction films (*A Walk in Old Town* 1958, and *Anniversary Newsreel*, 1959.)⁹⁸ He made two more feature films, *Bad Luck* (1960), about the misfortunate life of the Polish everyman, Jan, affectionately referred to by Dina Iordanova as the "Polish *Forrest Gump*,"⁹⁹ and *Passenger* (1961), his unfinished treatise on historical amnesia and Holocaust.¹⁰⁰

Munk's films, like many films that came out of the Eastern bloc, rely heavily upon flashbacks as a narrative device. With the exception of *Eroica*, Munk uses flashbacks to structure his films' narratives as a means to explain history as a close-ended narrative of defeat that embodies the Polish condition. In Flashbacks and Films (1989), Maureen Turim posits that a character's selective memory manifests itself through the director's use of flashbacks in order to relay the "fictive social reality," to make objectivity problematic, and to reveal how narration constructs history.¹⁰¹ She writes that "modernist flashbacks" function as evidence in a trial, and can enlighten or challenge the spectators' notion of history¹⁰² by representing memory as "disjointed and distorted."¹⁰³

Chapter Overview

Chapter one analyzes Munk's first feature, *Man on the Tracks* (1957) in order to show how the stifling and claustrophobic mise-en-scene reflects the protagonists' entrapment by tradition, nostalgia, nationalism and the lure of an imagined Western space. Chapter two examines the two-act war film *Eroica*, which incorporates dark comedy in order to discuss the alienating effects of nationalism in a situation like World War II era Poland, when national sovereignty was an imagined concept. I discuss Munk's take on *bohaterszczyzna* (romantic heroism) a theme often attributed to Polish war dramas, and the means by which he critiques the symbols and rhetoric of Polish identity construction. I discuss parallels between the mise-en-scene of occupied Warsaw in act one and the POW camp in act two. Chapter III examines Munk's use of prison spaces to discuss Poland's cyclical and fatalistic history in Munk's comedy, *Bad Luck* (1960). The film suggests prison life is more desirable than the ebb and flow of Poland's ideological

and historical catastrophes and through the use of deep compositions, Munk articulates the cyclical nature of Poland's history as another element of his cinema of internalized exile. Chapter IV covers Munk's most complex film, *Passenger* (shot in 1961 and released in 1963) a unique example of a holocaust survival tale told from the view point of the oppressor. I discuss how Munk – who was Jewish - uses *Passenger* as a means to critique the scarcity of Jewish perspectives in post-war Polish cinema.

Chapter One: *Man on the Tracks*

Introduction

Man on the Tracks was the first film of the “Polish October” to capture the spirit of social unrest and dissatisfaction with imposed National Socialism.¹⁰⁴ At the time of its release in January of 1957, the liberalized political climate in Poland made its reception and legacy as an anti-Stalinist and anti-socialist realist text.¹⁰⁵ *Man on the Tracks* and other “settlement of accounts films” (*filmy rozrachunkowe*.) defied Socialist Realism by addressing the everyday problems within Socialism, such as bureaucratic nepotism and corruption.¹⁰⁶ It directly confronted the tenets of socialist realism by setting its narrative in a space of industrial production - a train yard - in order to critique objective dogmatism, nationalism, and national mythology. The film’s protagonist, an elderly railway engineer named Orzechowski is the product of Poland’s capitalist past. By making him a sympathetic character, Munk’s film demonstrated that Polish cinema, when freed from the restrictions of Socialist Realism, was able to discuss social and political issues¹⁰⁷ while at the same time achieving a level of technical prestige.

In *Man on the Tracks*, the tensions that arise between tradition and modernity, nostalgia and progress and political and private spaces create situations in which the protagonists are faced with equally unappealing and stifling systems, and because of this loss of agency, they live in what I argue is a state of internalized exile. This chapter analyzes ways in which Munk enunciates his characters’ confinement and fatalism by placing them in balance with, or at times in opposition to the *mise-en-scene*.

Synopsis

The narrative of *Man on the Tracks* begins with a train accident which takes the life of a recently fired engineer, Orzechowski. Throughout the remainder of the film, a committee comprised of railway officials named Tuszka and Konarski, and Communist party officials named Warda and Karas, debate Orzechowski's motivations for standing on the tracks and attempt to discover whether it was a suicide, a murder, or an attempt at sabotage.

The narrative unfolds over the course of three flashbacks. The first flashback is told by the Station-Master, Tuszka, an eager political climber who worked beneath Orzechowski before the German invasion. Tuszka speaks unfavorably of Orzechowski and finds his methods to be outdated and opposed to post-war state ideology. Tuszka tells the committee that Orzechowski's tendency to stir up unrest among the workers and his refusal to sign a contract to burn inferior coal led to his dismissal. Based on evidence which indicates the semaphore had been tampered with moments before the near derailment, Tuszka believes, as does Konarski, that Orzechowski's death resulted from a failed attempt at sabotage.

The second flashback is from Zapora, a young party member who through Tuszka obtained a position with the railway in 1946. After a few years, he's assigned by Tuszka to spy on Orzechowski's team with special instructions to report any misconduct by the engineer directly to the Station Master. Zapora and Orzechowski have a contentious relationship that at times nearly led to blows. However Orzechowski saw in Zapora the makings of a fine engineer, and Zapora came to respect Orzechowski's sense of duty and tradition. Zapora insists to the committee that even though Orzechowski appeared to have

a reason for revenge, his adherence to tradition and his training made him an unlikely saboteur.

The third flashback involves Salata, a tired, somewhat pathetic switchman who was accused of negligence and arrested after the accident. Salata is harassed and threatened by members of the committee to characterize Orzechowski as a vengeful drunk. Once the switchman realizes that to not do so places his freedom in jeopardy, he eagerly complies. Zopora interrupts Salata's story to defend Orzechowski's integrity, only to have the committee chairman, Karas offer his version of what he believes happened. Noting that Orzechowski's watch was found unscathed between the rails and several burnt matches were discovered near the lamp, Karas concludes that Orzechowski had attempted without success to relight the semaphore and stepped on the tracks to stop the train from derailing.

Trains, Trainyards, and Depots: Between Mobility and Internalized Exile

In postwar Polish cinema, trains commonly appear to reflect memories of war and occupation and represent the role of the state in obstructing personal mobility.¹⁰⁸ In the opening sequence of *Man on the Tracks*, a train passes over the camera which is fixed at a low angle in the middle of the tracks. This scene, along with Munk's continual use of diegetic industrial sound throughout the film, establishes trains as stifling and repressive elements within the mise-en-scene. In order to understand just how intensively the mise-en-scene creates an atmosphere of isolation, desperation, and despair, one must examine Munk's strategies of framing the committee members, train passengers, and individual protagonists.

Munk frames railway officials within industrial spaces to illustrate how bureaucratic and industrial systems appear to function as a cohesive unit. Before the committee assembles to discuss Orzechowski's death, there is a long shot of a train rotating on a platform. The camera pulls back through the window of the meeting room as the train lines up with the tracks which run through the diagonal portion of the frame linking to Tuszka in the left portion of the frame. As Tuszka closes the window, the camera tracks left to Konarski, and then to Karas who explains the function of the semaphore. The camera continues to follow the two as the camera circles the table, eventually stopping at Warda, now seated at the table between the standing figures of the two railway officials. Tuszka, who is looking out the window at the train yard, suggests that Karas act as committee chair, and Karas, who has no experience with the railway or its men, asks the more experienced Tuszka to explain to the committee his relationship with Orzechowski.

In this single take, Munk establishes the unity between the railway officials and their environment, as well as their dominance over the party members. Within the deep composition of the frame, the image of the rotating train overlaps with the diagonal lines of the tracks and points towards Tuszka, emphasizing that he is the dominant subject within the frame. Through the dialogue between Konarski and Karas, we understand that the former's dominance over the latter comes from his experience with the railway and its workers. Once the meeting officially begins, Tuszka and Konarski sit in the foreground of the office window with Warda and Karas to their left and right, as the activity in the yard is held in deep focus.

Tuszka first tells the committee of his short time as Orzechowski's assistant, and how it was thankfully interrupted by the war. After the war, Tuszka quickly ascends the ranks and in 1950 is assigned to the post of Station Master, where he once again meets Orzechowski. At the start of his account, there is a shot of Tuszka and other railway officials surveying the rail yard from atop a rotating platform, discussing the need for increased efficiency. This is followed by a POV shot in which the camera tracks across the yard's stationary trains and follows the officials down the tracks and into the yard while trains in the background shadow the movement of the group. Emphasizing the officials' dominance within the mise-en-scene indicates their dominance within the train yard, and by extension, Polish society.

At first, the dominance of the railway officials does not appear to extend beyond the rail yards. Munk's framing of passengers in and around trains demonstrates a mobility and agency apparently unhindered by bureaucracy. Passengers use trains to move freely from location to location, art dealers exchange their works and young couples nestle behind curtains. Munk employs a two minute tracking shot through a depot illustrating how depots function as a microcosm of the society. The camera follows Zapora down the length of the platform, past a woman with flowers kissing a man good-bye, through a crowd of people sleeping on benches and more drinking at a bar. Some people in the depot are laughing, others are crying and more than a few appear to be searching for loved ones amidst the throng of passengers in waiting.

These two scenes emphasize the dominance and balance of railway officials in their environment by creating the illusion of order and efficiency that is extended to the public sphere. The Polish rail system is presented as a space of mobility, passion, and

exchange where passengers appear to have agency and autonomy. However, this apparent social and labor utopia crumbles under further scrutiny.

Although the railway officials seem to be in control of their environment, when the narrative reveals their accusations against Orzechowski are false, the relationship between Konarski and Tuszka and their surroundings becomes discordant. After Tuszka's testimony, he faces right while a train enters the left portion of the frame upsetting the previously established balance between Station Master and yard. This break in continuity is followed by Warda's revelation that Tuszka was quick to fire Orzechowski and his motives may have been personal. When Zapora's subsequent account of Orzechowski's dismissal differs from that of Tuszka's, the window once again expresses the tension on screen as two large crane hooks pass directly behind the worried rail officials. Here, Munk upsets the previously established balance between the officials and the train yard in order to cast doubt upon Tuszka's testimony and to stress the objectivity of his memory.

Munk also uses the committee room to articulate the restrictive nature of Polish bureaucracy. The window functions as a frame within a frame that articulates conformity and tension within the narrative but is actually comprised of a mosaic of windows that take on the appearance of a cage. When Konarski and Tuszka assert their dominance they stand over the seated Warda. However, the foreground is dominated by barred windows on the left, the right, and reflected in a picture frame over head. It is within this claustrophobic moment that the shortcomings of bureaucracy are juxtaposed with mounting opposition between party members and railway officials, which under socialism should ideally function integrally. With the ineffectiveness of bureaucracy exposed, trains and depots take on a new meaning. For instance, near the conclusion of

the long tracking shot at the depot, a woman's voice over a loud speaker espouses Communist doctrine. With the depot now corrupted by an imposed state ideology, Munk makes it apparent that the mobility within the microcosms of Polish society aboard trains and in depots is strictly regulated. By doing so, Munk is able to discuss the limitations on agency in a society in which paths are regulated, and are also, as the next section demonstrates, predetermined.

Fatalism and Internalized Exile

Munk's mise-en-scene articulates the limitations of bureaucratic, industrial and public spaces, places in which Orzechowski, Zapora and Salata, only appear to have agency. The tensions that arise between this appearance of agency and the limitations placed on mobility by the state make their condition one of internalized exile.

Residing in a small hut next to the semaphore, Salata's life is predetermined by a schedule that he cannot control but must keep. Though he occupies an important role in the railway system, he is not respected by the other workers and his duties are unnoticed by the throngs of travelers that pass him and his family on a daily basis. Even when his dying wife is taken by stretcher and loaded onto a waiting train, Salata must stay behind. Bound to his work, he watches helplessly as the train pulls away while a man ominously digs a hole in the ground. Salata's work is a daily reminder of his lowly position. As the semaphore operator on duty at the time of the crash, he is arrested immediately for negligence, even though Orzechowski is the suspected culprit. His interrogation is constructed by a montage of extreme close-ups, rapidly cutting from the committee members' questions to Salata's timid responses. Not questioned so much as he is

accused, Salata is treated as a common criminal by Warda and is bullied by Tuzska and Konarski into implicating Orzechowski.

Zapora lives in a world defined by binaries causing him disenchantment and emotional ruin. His account begins in 1946 on his return from an unsuccessful plunder of the ruins in Western Europe. Without a ticket home, he resorts to train hopping and is almost arrested when Tuzska comes to his aid. From this encounter, Zapora quickly shifts from that of a vagrant whose only mobility comes from clinging to the side of moving trains, to becoming a repair technician and then an assistant on board a “teapot” train. Zapora’s ambition knows no limit, and for him trains come to represent social, economic, and political mobility. This ambition and mobility is first seen while Zapora drives his small train and nearly blows its engine while racing a much larger and powerful locomotive. Zapora replaces Orzechowski as engineer after only four years, a position it took Orzechowski three times as long to earn. Zapora’s faith in the system at first empowers him, but later crumbles when he realizes that he is a pawn in Tuzska’s vendetta against Orzechowski.

Orzechowski’s tenure with the railway spans forty years of Polish occupation, independence, and social experimentations with capitalism and Communism. Like other figures in postwar Polish cinema, Orzechowski is a tragic representation of 20th century Poland - one doomed by a sense of patriotic duty and romantic heroism. Orzechowski’s death at the beginning of the film is a mystery that is solved through the film’s narrative, but foreshadowed through the mise-en-scene in a way that underscores the tension between Orzechowski’s nostalgia for the past and the present in which he has been rendered obsolete. Showing Orzechowski’s death at the start of the film followed by the

mise-en-scene's affirmation of his fate through flashbacks, only emphasizes a degree of cyclical fatalism that places him in a state of internalized exile.

After Tuszka's arrival at the train yard in 1950, he informs Orzechowski that the new era calls for fewer maintenance orders and an increase in coal efficiency. Orzechowski retorts that his methods have never been called into question, he is punctual and he operates in the manner in which he was trained. Tuszka remarks that the new era calls for new methods and he suggests that Orzechowski should comply. During this exchange, Orzechowski stands on a set of tracks while in the far background three large engines loom ominously behind. Tuszka towers over the engineer in the right hand of the frame. With the trains and the station master dominating the frame, this composition, again foreshadows the engineer's fate.

Later, Orzechowski meets with a former partner from his days on the Vienna Warsaw route, a meeting which articulates his condition of being caught between nostalgia for the Poland of his youth and the new Poland's sweeping social changes. After discussing their years of railway service and dissatisfaction with new policies and bureaucracy, Orzechowski returns to his quarters. The dimly lit room makes Orzechowski's advanced age painstakingly apparent, as he undresses for bed. Orzechowski remains still with his back to the camera, as if hiding his shame while in the distance a train whistle cues the viewers to his fate.

This indication of Orzechowski's age and reverence to a now outdated system continues the next day when his authority is challenged by Zapora. Tired from the events of the previous evening, Orzechowski removes his cap and places it on a protruding gear shift. When the vibrations of the train cause it to fall, he orders one of his assistants to

retrieve it. Zapora refuses, stating they are not his servants and the cap remains in its place for the duration of the trip. Upon returning to the station, Zapora witnesses the engineer's painstaking and humiliating struggle to retrieve his cap.

Munk again alludes to Orzechowski's fate after Tuszka relieves him of duty. After exiting Tuszka's office, Orzechowski's silhouette, seen through the door, is cut in half by horizontal bars, foreshadowing his death on the tracks. Moments later, Orzechowski attacks Zapora, accusing him of conspiring with Tuszka in order to advance his career. Tuszka breaks up the scuffle and orders Orzechowski to vacate the yard. Zapora picks up the engineer's cap which had come off during the scuffle and returns it to the now humiliated Orzechowski. In what turns out to be the last time his superiors and assistants see him alive, Orzechowski slowly walks down a set of tracks which disappear into the horizon. Surrounded by several locomotives in the peripherals of the tracks, his path is determined.

Conclusion

In *Man on the Tracks*, characters live in a state of internalized exile because their spaces of personal agency are illusions. Salata lives where he works, so his personal, private, and professional lives are intermingled. Ultimately though, he's tied down by a schedule that must be maintained and is determined by a system in which he certainly plays a vital role, but as his humiliating interrogation attests that Salata has no agency within this system. After Zapora's unfulfilling trip to the West, he at first finds life in Poland equally difficult. Through his association with the party, he is able to achieve a level of power and success, but realizes that his agency is given to him only as part of

Tuszka's revenge plot against Orzechowski. Orzechowski's skill and tenure as an engineer is overlooked by his rivals, who scoff at his nostalgic sense of tradition. His refusal to deviate from his set ways, coupled with a system that condemns the old way both as decadent and in opposition to the new Poland, all make his fate on the tracks inevitable. Throughout *Man on the Tracks*, Munk uses the narrative and mise-en-scene in order to discuss nostalgia's link to fatalism, the suppression of the weak at the hands of bureaucracy, and the disenchantment of two opposing but equally unappealing systems. The film's characters live within a predetermined system and travel predetermined paths. They are without agency and are stifled by authority; the spaces they occupy are governed by corrupt authority figures.

Munk concludes *Man on the Tracks* without resolving the character Orzechowski's motivation for stepping onto the tracks. There can be no certain resolution because the evidence comes from multiple sources, all of whom have different relationships with Orzechowski and opinions concerning his motives. Whether or not Orzechowski's act was a final nod of respect to Zapora, to ensure passengers' safety, or a final ascetic act of devotion towards the railway system is left ambiguous. Regardless of his reasoning, the sentiment that caused Orzechowski to step in front of the train is rooted in Poland's history of misery and misfortune, which resulted in an affiliation between heroic self-sacrifice and national identity.¹⁰⁹ Romantic, self-sacrificing heroism (*bohaterszczyzna*) is returned to time and again by members of the Polish School because the concept links post-war proletarian internationalism with a pre-war sense of nationalism.¹¹⁰ Munk examines *bohaterszczyzna* to a greater degree in his follow up to *Man on the Tracks*, *Eroica*.

Chapter Two: *Eroica*

Introduction

In the two-act black comedy, *Eroica* (1958) Munk deconstructs Polish identity by offering different perspectives on the notion of heroism during two sacred and symbolic moments of defeat, Germany's invasion of Poland in September of 1939 and the failed Warsaw uprising of 1944. Polish film scholars agree that any considerations of postwar Polish culture, including film, must first start with Poland's destruction during World War II, an event so catastrophic that it served as a reminder for years of the prewar society that had vanished.¹¹¹ World War II devastated the Polish film industry. Within moments of the German *blitzkrieg*, before much of Poland knew an invasion was underway, several members of Poland's artistic community, actors, writers, and dancers were killed. In the years that followed, many directors, actors, and technicians were either murdered by the Nazi or Soviet armies, or forced into exile. Poland produced no feature films during the years of occupation, though the Nazis reopened theaters after September of 1939 in order to profit and show propagandistic films, such as the anti-Semitic "educational film," *Menschenleben in Gefahr*.¹¹²

Eroica suggests that acts of heroism are subjective and open to reinterpretation and propagation through iconography and myth.¹¹³ Munk's mise-en-scene reinforces character isolation by showing the characters in prison, under occupation, and surrounded by symbols of national mythology and identity. Munk also uses low angle shots throughout *Eroica* in an ironic fashion; making characters appear larger than life during moments of defeat and extreme cowardice.

Synopsis

Part one, *Scherzo alla Polacca*, deals with the exploits of “Ninny,” a reluctant participant in the 1944 Warsaw uprising. After an air raid disrupts his company’s drill, Ninny decides his to return to village 20 kilometers from Warsaw, where he discovers his home has been requisitioned by a Hungarian officer. The officer instructs Ninny to inform Polish command that Hungary is prepared to offer military support. In the proceeding comic farce, Ninny poses as a refugee and is captured and interrogated by his own countrymen. After delivering the message to the Polish high command, Ninny discovers a cache of liquor and drunkenly proceeds through the Warsaw uprising. Returning to his village, Ninny delivers the coded message only to discover the Polish Resistance turned down the Hungarians’ offer for support.

Part two, *Ostinato Lugubre*, takes place in the barracks of a POW camp occupied by career military officers who’ve been interned since 1939. Two new detainees, Lt. Szpakowski and Lt. Kurzawa discover military tradition and protocol still governs the lives of the detainees. Idealism and the duty of self-sacrifice is maintained by the career officers in *Ostinato Lugubre*, who bide their time by obsessively returning to their defeat after Germany invaded in September of 1939, and by training for an eventual uprising of their own. Because of the Geneva Convention and their outranking the camp’s other detainees, the career officers live somewhat comfortably. The new arrivals have seen the horrors of war, and they want little to do with the duty of which the career officers speak. By drawing upon the memory of Poland’s defeat in 1939, and the Warsaw uprising in 1944, Munk uses *Eroica* in order to criticize heroism and meditate on the tension between objective and subjective heroism. In *Scherzo alla Polacca*, Ninny’s involvement

with the uprising can scarcely be characterized as heroic. He nurses a drunken headache and urinates from behind a tree while all around him his countrymen perish. After discovering his mission was in fact futile, Ninny rejects the focal points of national heroism, the family and the home, by choosing an inevitable death over staying with his wife, whom he knows has been sleeping with high members of the Hungarian military.¹¹⁴

The titles of the two acts come from musical terminology and provide significant insight to the film's overall theme. *Scherzo alla Polacca* refers to a slow Polish dance in triple measure, and part one displays a dance of sorts between Poland and two of its three occupiers; The Soviet Union and Hungary. At the outset of the war, the Soviet Union and Hungary were allied with Germany, and in the case of the Soviet Union, invaded and occupied eastern Poland. It was not until 1944, when it became clear that Germany would lose the war that both nations offered their support to the Allies. In *Scherzo alla Polacca* Poland's two Allies use Poland as a pawn against the Germans, but offer little assistance. The occupational presence is another example of Poland's history of being led by the will's of other nations, not their own.

The musical term *Ostinato* is short rhythmic pattern repeated throughout a work, while *Lugubre*, of French and Italian origin, refers to a regretful and dismal situation. Combining the terms speaks to the Polish condition of Romantic fatalism, or *bohaterszczyzna*, critiqued throughout the second act. Throughout *Ostinato Lugubre*, the career officers speak of a Lt. Zawistowski, the only detainee to escape from the camp. However, it is soon discovered by Kurzawa that two officers, the pious Lt. Marianek and the group's resident artist, Lt. Turek, have been hiding the ailing and delusional Zawistowski in an upstairs boiler room to propagate the myth of his escape and keep up

camp morale. After Zawistowski dies, his body is secretly removed and Kurzawa is faced with the option of either informing the camp of the ruse, or propagating the myth. The film concludes before his decision is revealed, however, as the title *Ostinato Lugubre* suggests, the myth of the *bohaterszczyzna* will continue to circulate.

Spaces of Internalized Exile: Prison, Occupation and National Mythology

Munk's treatment of subjective heroism is first introduced by the score during the film's introduction. The three-part melody opens with a trumpet theme reminiscent of a cavalry charge before shifting into a slapstick theme and finally disseminating into atonal absurdity. Munk begins the sequence with a low angle, medium close up of Ninny with his back to the camera. An off screen voice barks an order to face forward, and Ninny awkwardly complies while casting apprehensive glances towards the sky. When the command is given to march, the camera pulls back and cranes up, and Ninny's unit of citizen soldiers marches from foreground to background. Here, viewers see the Warsaw these men attempt to defend. Burned out automobile shells litter the street on which they march. Black smoke shrouds the horizon and piles of debris and broken furniture are scattered about the street. The camera cranes down as the unit enters the foreground and stops at a high angle when Ninny sees a plane. Here, Munk's use of a high angle shot underscores the hopelessness of the situation and how the hero is suppressed by his environment. The drill instructor first ignores Ninny's concern for the approaching aircraft, but then gives the order to find shelter when bombs begin exploding all around them. Ninny takes cover amidst the rubble next to a gutted tenement building where, within, a man pedaling on a stationary bicycle works to provide the tenants with power.

This opening sequence establishes domestic and urban areas functioning as spaces of internalized exile, and much in the same way Izabela Kalinowski, Katarzyna Marciniak, and Melinda Szaloky discuss housing units and hotels as symbols of deterritorialization, displacement and collective homelessness.¹¹⁵ For example, in the first act of *Eroica*, Munk emphasizes that domestic and urban spaces are not immune to the atrocities of warfare, and these places function as spaces of internalized exile. After Ninny sees the man generating electricity, he realizes the futility of the Uprising and decides to flee. While climbing over walls, through the streets, and through the countryside of the chaos that is Warsaw, he's attacked by playing children who pretend to be soldiers and he speaks to a woman doing laundry about areas in the city still under German command. Upon arriving to his village 20 kilometers outside of Warsaw, Ninny discovers it has been occupied by the Hungarian military and his home has been requisitioned by this new occupation.

Throughout this sequence, where Ninny walks from one occupied zone to another, the war is illustrated as affecting many facets of domestic and urban life as well as how a litany of occupiers suppresses the lives of Warsaw's denizens. As with the trains and depots in *Man on the Tracks*, here housing units are cramped representations of the public sphere in exile. One example of this is viewed in the apartment building requisitioned by the resistance for use as their command center in the scene when Ninny waits in the apartment's narrow hallway to speak to the commander about the offer of support from the Hungarians. Ninny occupies the mid-ground, the commander's secretary is in the background, a woman knitting is in the foreground, and on the stairs to the left a man and a woman are kissing. The camera pulls back and pans left, following

Ninny as he takes a seat next to a teenage boy in the foreground of the kissing couple who enthusiastically talks of his impending transfer to one of the cities most treacherous war zones. An off camera voice shouts an order and the man kissing the woman grabs his rifle and exits the frame.

In the opening sequence, Munk shows a burning and decimated Warsaw in order to create a sense of homelessness and internalized exile. The Polish state does not exist in either of the film's vignettes. Even though Ninny has a home it has been requisitioned by Hungarians. During the Uprising, an intoxicated Ninny talks to a stray dog about the homelessness they share in common while their city continues to burn.

Kalinowski notes that during times of threatened national sovereignty, the concept of the nation is often displaced onto other units and individuals, such as the family or a woman.¹¹⁶ Munk ridicules the futility of such displacement twice during *Scherzo alla Polacca*. This first occurs while Ninny is wading in a pond and is confronted by a German tank. He pleads with the Germans who laugh at him from inside the tank not to shoot in the name of "my wife" whom he despises, "my children" of which he has none, "my mother" whom is most likely dead, and "Warsaw," which is occupied by three nations and has nearly been burned to the ground. The second instance occurs while the Hungarian army is pulling out of his village and the officer who had requisitioned his home and is sleeping with his wife, mockingly calls out to Ninny, "Long Live Poland."

Because the prison camp in *Ostinato Lugubre* is located in the Alps, it is a poignant space of exile able to deconstruct the symbols and notions of Polish nationalism. Because they are physically removed from the nation, the prisoners maintain prewar sentiments of duty and sacrifice by orchestrating an escape plan, conducting courses on

military strategy, and romanticizing their defeat in the opening days of the war. Munk uses the prison camp to set up a conversation revealing the Polish nation is defined by its deterritorialization, and in this way, Munk also extends his critique of Polish nationalism. In a scene where career officers discuss the German invasion in 1939 as though they still possess historical agency, they glorify their defeat, discussing the insurmountable odds they faced with a sense of honor and sacrifice. The officers' discussion functions as a microcosm of the history of defeat, occupation, and self-sacrifice, integral elements of Polish identity.¹¹⁷ By using character types who traditionally had represented the Polish nation in times of occupation, such as artists, Catholics, and heroes, Munk criticizes the tropes and traditions of the imagined Poland as counterproductive to political agency.

For example, Lt. Marianek is the camp's zealot and self-ordained Catholic priest.¹¹⁸ Polish literature and later films bolstered the notion of heroic, Christ-like Polish-Catholics who willfully sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their nations and others,¹¹⁹ and because of this Lt. Marianek is the focal point of Polish Nationalism.¹²⁰ However, three years into his internment, Lt. Marianek suffered a nervous breakdown, making it difficult to ascertain whether or not his devotion is sincere.

Munk criticizes the notion that Polish artists have a duty to preserve the nation during national crises. The officers' barracks are adorned with sketches of barbed wires, mountains and German guards drawn by Lt. Turek, the camp's resident artist.¹²¹ Once a talented artist, Turek remarks that his drawings have become crude and amateurish and can no longer reflect an existence outside imprisonment. No longer able to represent the nation through his art, Lt. Turek perpetuates the myth of the escaped prisoner by telling the other officers his contacts in London have assured him of Lt. Zawistowski's safe

arrival. When Lt. Zawistowski is heard coughing from the upstairs boiler room, Lt. Turek picks at a makeshift guitar to drown out the noise. Lt. Turek later explains to Lt. Kurzawa the importance of perpetuating Lt. Zawistowski's myth, saying his escape myth keeps the camp hopeful.

Lt. Turek is the only stable man among the career officers who know the truth behind Lt. Zawistowski's whereabouts. Lt. Turek sleeps during the day in order to stay up at nights to feed and care for Lt. Zawistowski while Lt. Marianek keeps watch. Lt. Turek keeps Lt. Zawistowski's existence from the other men because he understands the myth of his escape provides moral support to all of the camp's prisoners. Munk uses the relationship between these characters to further express how the nation is imagined by using national symbols and tradition for political means. Lt. Turek and Lt. Marianek know Lt. Zawistowski's myth helps establish a relative level of order and contentment among the men in the camp. The officers praise Zawistowski as a symbol of Polish heroism over dinner on the first evening of the new detainee's arrival. At one point Lt. Turek says to himself that their lives from now on will always be like the camp. Knowing what the future holds for Poles, Lt. Turek feels indebted to his exiled countrymen and wants to keep the illusion of their nation state alive.

Munk also criticizes the concept of Romantic heroism through his on screen depictions of the famed escapee, Lt. Zawistowski. The officers in the camp maintain that Zawistowski's heroic escape not only exposes the enemy's weakness, but provides a valuable focal point for camp morale. However, the reality of the situation is that Lt. Zawistowski is dying in the boiler room above the officers' barracks. When Lt. Zawistowski first appears onscreen, his appearance is the antithesis of what one should

expect from the officers' descriptions. Zawistowski is mentally and physically deteriorated; his eyes water, he has a chronic cough and his body hangs limp over the lip of the boiler pipe. By placing Zawistowski in such a crippled state, Munk subverts the notion of Romantic heroism by exposing a more accurate depiction of a hero's death, which is slow, agonizing, and lonely. Later, when Zawistowski's dies, Turek makes a deal with a German officer to ensure the body is removed without the knowledge of the other prisoners. The boiler pipe containing Lt. Zawistowski's corpse is carried out of the prison yard by a white horse, which is a reference to the contemporary myth of the Polish Horse brigade's suicidal charge of the German Panzer divisions, an event depicted by Andrzej Wadja in his 1959 film, *Lotna*.¹²²

Near the film's conclusion, a man who introduces himself as a doctor moves into the officers' quarters. Knowing Lt. Zawistowski hasn't much time to live, Lt. Kurzawa eagerly asks the man if he's a physician, and is disappointed to find out he's a doctor of philosophy. Representation of Catholicism as schizophrenic, the artist or *wieszcz* as a fraud, the hero as a pawn, and now the intelligentsia¹²³ as impractical, reveals that national symbols have become stripped of their importance during periods of exile, and the men in the camp who cling to the baggage of national symbols and concepts have no agency because their symbols are hollow and ineffective. Throughout *Eroica*, the only characters in the film that have agency are those who separate themselves from any and all national allegiances.

Inaccessible International Spaces

Eroica's only mobile characters are those who attempt to elevate themselves above national spaces by rejecting Polish nationalism. In *Scherzo alla Polacca*, Ninny moves smoothly through the obstructions set up throughout Warsaw because of his neutrality. He brazenly walks through the streets of Warsaw waving a white cloth over his head. When he comes to a check point, he tries to win the guards' sympathy by saying he's trying to reach his dying mother and when that doesn't work, he simply bribes the guards. Ninny is a conman, an opportunist and a self serving hedonist. In *Ostinato Lugubre*, Lt. Szpakowski and Lt. Kurzawa's arrival at the camp is to them, a joyous experience. They are tired of fighting for what they know is a lost cause. They vow to live out the remainder of the war in relative comfort. When asked by the career officers to join the camp's resistance movement, Lt. Kurzawa refuses and vows to never put on a uniform again.

Also in *Ostinato Lugubre*, the characters Krygier and Zak are the only career officers who do not refer to themselves by rank. Free of his duties as an officer, Krygier is able to become the camp's booking agent and impresario of the black market. When the officers discuss Lt. Zawistowski's escape as indicative of an officer's duty, Zak angrily interjects that military procedure had nothing to do with it, and that Lt. Zawistowski's escape would be expected of anyone faced with a miserable situation. Zak distances himself from his fellow officers by spending a majority of his time hidden within a large Red Cross supply crate. Like Ninny, whose rejection of nationality allows him access throughout Warsaw, Zak demonstrates his agency to the men by one day simply making his way through the barbed wire fence that surrounds the camp, and

casually walking a few hundred yards until apprehended. Though the men congratulate him for boosting camp morale, Zak points out that even if he's made it further, he'd still be in Germany, and unable to return home because of the occupation. Munk uses Zak's pessimistic response to underscore the idea that international spaces are not necessarily liberating.

Iordanova writes that after The Yalta Conference, there was a consensus across the newly formed Soviet Bloc that the international community had given Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe up to the Soviet Bloc.¹²⁴ In *Ostinato Lugubre*, the first command given by the Germans to the new detainees is to hand over their American currency, stripping them of international agency. However, in *Eroica*, similar to *Man on the Tracks*, international space is an illusive and imaginary concept. The Polish nation, as a political body, is located in London and is therefore unattainable to Zak and the rest of the officers and in this way, international spaces and representations are understood to be just as stifling and unfulfilling as those of the national.

At the beginning of *Eroica's* two acts, Munk represents the international as a place in which to escape the atrocities of war time Europe. In *Scherzo alla Polacca*, the arrival of the Hungarian military to Ninny's village transforms the community into a utopian resort town. Unlike in Warsaw, where the people must live among chaos, denizens of Ninny's village live in a world of leisure. Women and children walk the streets in bathing suits while the men enjoy fine liqueurs and dining. The village is multicultural and multilingual, reinforcing the sense of international cooperation the Hungarian officers eagerly espouse. In *Ostinato Lugubre*, the young and war weary Lt. Szapakowski is thrilled by the opportunity to spend the remainder of the war in the camp,

a space he refers to as paradise. Because of the Geneva Convention, Lt. Szapakowski has been given in captivity what he was denied on the front, monthly rations of food, cigarettes, warm showers and a safe place to sleep.

Although these spaces of internationalism may appear liberating, Munk proves otherwise, gradually revealing that the international is an illusion that the characters in his films are denied access to. One indication of the characters' removal from the international comes at a moment in *Scherzo alla Polacca* when Ninny overhears that orders to commanders of the Resistance are coming from London via radio transmissions. Ninny is visually perplexed by this realization and is not sure how such a detached entity can still make claims of leadership. Later, when Lt. Turek perpetuates the myth of Lt. Zawistowski assisting the Uprising from London, the distance between the characters and the international then crosses over into the realm of illusion.

Munk creates tension between the characters and representations of international space. Though the Hungarians speak of international brotherhood, they are seen through the eyes of Ninny as another in a long string of occupations. While waiting to speak to the Hungarian living in his home, Ninny relaxes on the porch of his neighbor's home which has been requisitioned as a command center. In the background, Hungarian officers exit through his front door and climb out the window as another guard stands watch. Moments later, Ninny's wife appears on the upper balcony wearing nothing but a robe. Ninny's reaction is not one of surprise, but acceptance of the fact Hungarians have replaced Germans, for the time being.

After his first escape, Zak wins 1,000 American cigarettes from Krygier. The cigarettes function as another symbol of how the men are removed from and can expect

little assistance from the international community. Zak refuses to accept the cigarettes, saying that his bravery was nothing compared to that of Lt. Zawistowski, he demands the cigarettes, which are used as currency, be added to a fund to support other officers who plan to escape. A stockpile of so many cigarettes could have purchased for the men a nearly endless supply of food and medicine for themselves, but more importantly for the steadily ailing Lt. Zawistowski. However, because Lt. Turek refused to reveal the true whereabouts of Lt. Zawistowski, the cigarettes were unable to be put to good use, and they are instead stolen, presumably by Krygier.

Lt. Szapakowski's notion that international spaces provide freedom is challenged however when he receives monthly rations from the Red Cross. After making a wager with Krygier that he can eat his entire kit in one sitting, his attempt to devour his kit leads to him becoming violently ill. We can read Lt. Szapakowski's actions as having been seduced by two symbols of internationalism, The Red Cross and Krygier, who as previously mentioned has rejected any national loyalty.

Internationalism plays a destructive role in the men's lives, as demonstrated when Szapakowski loses his bet when allied planes are heard overhead bombing the camp. The men, used to such drills, simply ignore the bombs and begin laughing at Lt. Szapakowski's vomiting. Munk then cuts to a tight, low angle shot of Zak in his Red Cross box holding his ears and then suddenly exiting the box. As he leaves the officers barracks, the camera is placed behind the stairs leading to the enlisted men's quarters. The bombing raid has ended and Zak walks slowly, approaching the circular path in the middle of the courtyard to where all paths from the barracks lead. Munk cuts to a shot of the officers as they helplessly watch and a non-diegetic drum roll rises as Munk cuts back

to a low angle shot of Zak, defiantly standing in the middle of the yard. A single shot is heard and from the same low angle, Munk pans down as Zak falls lifeless to the ground. Munk's use of a low angle shots to show Zak as a bold and commanding figure at the moment of his death/suicide reminds the viewer of the film's opening scene, when Ninny abandons the Resistance.

Protagonists in *Eroica* live in state of internalized exile because they occupy the void between the unfulfilling national spaces, and privileged international spaces. In *Eroica*, Warsaw has been destroyed and all of Poland is a geographic area contested by Hungarians, German, and Russians. Poles have no agency, their uprising is futile and their leadership is in exile. National symbols are either corrupt, in the case of Lt. Marianek and Lt. Turek, or sick and mentally unbalanced, in the case of Lt. Zawistowski. Through Zak's suicide, Munk shows the international is unattainable, in the case of Krygier, as corrupt as the national.

Fatalism and the Condition of Internalized Exile

In *Eroica*, Munk links the Polish condition of occupation and fatalism to the condition of internalized exile. After receiving his orders, Ninny must pose as a refugee in order to move between Warsaw and his village. While Ninny is sitting in a ditch on the side of a road with a Major, who is also disguised as a refugee, the left portion of the frame is occupied by refugees, while in the right portion of the frame; an armed German soldier stands guard. When Ninny asks why the Russians have not arrived, the Major responds that they don't recognize members of the Resistance as allies. When Ninny ask

who will drive the Germans from Warsaw, to which the Major bitterly replies, “They [the Russians] will, that’s the Polish tragedy, don’t you read history books?”

The officers in the camp are both physically and figuratively removed from their nation. Like in *Man on the Tracks*, Munk uses vertical and horizontal bars and shadows to articulate a sense of claustrophobia. In *Ostinato Lugubre*, Munk reinforces his characters’ isolation by frequently returning to the same low angle interior shot of a window with a searchlight shining through and casting a reflection of the bars over the entire room. Turek’s sketching of mountain peaks and barbed wire fences on the walls of the barracks are used by Munk to bring a sense of isolation into a space that according to the men, is an extension of the Polish nation. When Lt. Kurzawa discovers Lt. Turek and Lt. Marianek sneaking food into the attic, Munk uses a low angle to make prominent the cross beams on the ceiling that have the appearance of bars.

One recurring motif in *Eroica* that best articulates the sense of internalized exile occurs in the first shot in *Ostinato Lugubre* where there is a long shot of the empty exercise yard, and that of a large circular path which has been worn down in the middle. A tracking shot crosses through the yard, and passes by a German guard in a watchtower and to the line of new arrivals. Later, when Lt. Kurzawa and Lt. Szapakowski look through the bars of their window, they see dozens of men methodically walking around the circle. When Zak is killed, or commits suicide, it occurs within this circle. Interestingly, all paths from the dozen or so barracks in the camp lead to this same circle. This circle is the path all the prisoners must follow and the path that the zealot Marianek says he is proud and eager to walk everyday. From his attic cell, Lt. Kurzawa witnesses Zak’s death within the circle. The next morning, Lt. Kurzawa returns from the attic and

informs Lt. Turek that Lt. Zawistowski is dead, all the while eyeing an empty bottle of pills. Like Orzechowski's death in *Man on the Tracks*, Lt. Zaistowski's fate is left partially ambiguous. However, this does not indicate that his death was in some way avoidable, because as the hero of the story, he had to die. Munk uses this circle as a didactic reminder of the fatalistic Polish condition and the cyclical nature of Polish history.

In the case of *Eroica*, internalized exile, is not only a removal from national and international bodies but is also a condition in which an individual is denied agency by a pre-ordained history. This extension of the concept will be explored at length in the next chapter which covers Munk's dark and sometimes hysterical comedy about a Polish everyman on the wrong side of history, *Bad Luck*.

Chapter Three: *Bad Luck*

Introduction

Bad Luck (1960) is Munk's cinematic revision of 20th Century Polish history as seen through the darkly humorous life of a Keaton-esque¹²⁵ protagonist, Jan Piszczyk. Through the film, Munk uses the tribulations of a lovable but pathetic everyman in order to de-romanticize the notion of Polish fatalism. *Bad Luck* begins with a middle-aged Jan, speaking to an unseen authority figure to reconsider his dismissal, explaining that the misfortunes previously synonymous to his life have ceased upon his arrival to the yet unnamed institution. A series of six flashbacks follows, each detailing the events of Jan's miserable life. Munk's flashbacks examine the nature of Polish history as being not only cyclical but also fatalistic. Munk also references cinema as a medium to suggest that the narratology of Polish history affects individual agency. In effect, history is Jan's prison - Munk illustrates this visually by using elements such as claustrophobic blocking and the recurrence of bars incarcerating Jan in the mis-en-scene. One such technique discussed in this chapter is Munk's technique of framing Jan in the foreground of a deep composition, in order to make apparent that Jan is not the controlling force in his life and instead, outside factors appear imposing and threaten to either contain or consume him.

Playing War: Historical Narration and Medium Manipulation

Munk references the film medium by incorporating a variety of stylistic and genre tropes to portray Jan's life and by extension the Polish condition, as a narrative from which there is no escape. In the sequences of Jan in elementary school, Munk undercranks the camera and uses non-diegetic sound inserts to give the film the look and feel of

a silent picture in order to indicate Jan's voice has been repressed since an early age. While attending school, Jan is perpetually tormented and physically abused by his classmates. His teachers do nothing to abate the torment, and Jan is too frail and outnumbered to defend himself. These sequences contain no dialogue, and Munk uses non-diegetic sounds of horns in place of spoken dialogue.

Munk denies Jan even a pseudo-voice until the day Jan decides to join a nationalist youth brigade and take up the bugle. With his newly discovered voice, Jan appears to no longer be in a state of isolation. As part of the brigade, he is given the chance to march and play the bugle in a nationalist parade in which high ranking members of the Polish army are in attendance. However, his relentless tormentors, his fellow brigade members, sprinkle pepper in Jan's bugle, taking from him his only mode of expression.

Munk's referencing of the film medium continues in the portion of the film that deals with Jan's wartime experience. While waiting in line to see a film, Jan runs into a former classmate named Jelonek who is on leave from a military appointment at the Polish artillery academy. According to Jan's voice-over narration, Jelonek was once the laughing stock of their high school, so appropriately, Jan is surprised to see him escorting two attractive women.

After making small talk with Jan, Jelonek purchases the last of the tickets for him and his dates, and leaves Jan in front of the theater. A tracking shot follows Jan walking from the theater while his voice-over narration explains how he has always been fascinated by, and in awe of, military figures and tradition. He remarks that Jelonek's uniform must have had something to do with his ability to attract women. After this

remark, Jan stops walking and stands mid-frame between the theater's marquee and a movie poster depicting a Polish soldier on horseback, brandishing his saber. Having previously been employed as a trigonometry tutor for the daughter of a Polish Major, Jan decides to approach the Major about joining the service.

In order to express Jan's eagerness to join the military, Munk accelerates the film speed and adds non-diegetic sound inserts of film winding on a reel while Jan runs to the Major's house. According to Jan's voiceover, he waited several hours outside the home of the Major, a span of time Munk covers in a matter of seconds by playing the film at even a more accelerated speed. By manipulating the film stock, Munk also brings Jan closer to his, and Poland's inevitable fate, the Second World War.

Munk's characterization of Poland's history as a narrative is then extended to Poland's destruction by the German *Blitzkrieg*. Regardless of German invasion, which occurs hours after the Major agrees to write Jan a letter of support and orders him to report to the military academy in Zegre, Jan, determined to be a soldier, leaves Warsaw for the academy. Munk incorporates elements of slapstick comedy in a scene when Jan is attacked by the German Luftwaffe while walking through a cabbage field. Jan, who has only a gas mask to defend himself, zig zags through the field avoiding the bombardment that wreaks havoc upon the nearby crops. Munk again under cranks the film stock in order to underscore the scene's comic absurdity.

Upon reaching his post in Zegre, Jan discovers it has been abandoned and looks more like a tomb than a military base. Munk's first shot from within the academy from a high angle at the top of a staircase is reminiscent of an expressionist horror film. A railing cuts diagonally through the frame while Jan's shadow emerges slowly, and foregrounded

by the railing's bars and disrupted by the shadows cast through the railing. A slight and eerie score accentuates the scene's tension as an apprehensive Jan enters the frame. The camera tilts to the left as Jan reaches the landing in the middle portion of the frame and several dogs rush barking by the already skittish protagonist.

The impending doom suggested by Munk in this sequence is extended in the next shot where Jan stands in the foreground of an expansive and disheveled hallway. A shadow, cast from the light of an adjacent window creates the appearance of a cage to Jan's right, within which his shadow seems incarcerated. Munk then cuts to Jan standing in the doorway of a disheveled office. With a great deal of apprehension, Jan enters the office of an assumedly dead or captured military officer. The camera tilts from left to right, passing over a hanging crucifix, and follows Jan as he makes his way towards a military uniform which hangs conspicuously in the closet. After donning the uniform, Jan stares adoringly at his reflection in a nearby mirror. As he admires himself from head to toe, his posture becomes more rigid, his shoulders square, and his jaw tightens. He salutes himself, clicks his heels and meticulously smooths, and adjusts the uniform. Much like the Polish Cavalryman depicted in the movie poster during the scene when Jan decided to join the military, Jan is an actor playing the part of a hero.

Although he is soon captured and interned in a POW camp, Jan continues to play the part of a soldier and befriends an officer named Sawicki, from whom he takes cues on how to walk, talk, and speak like a soldier. Because much of the Polish army was destroyed, Jan is able to lie about his involvement in the defense of Poland. Soon, Jan's lies become more elaborate to the point where he is barely able to contain his excitement when explaining to the others the glory of Poland's magnificent defeat. Jan's acting

career is cut short when a Zegre Academy cadet enters the camp and reveals Jan is an imposter.

After this humiliating experience, Jan is transferred from the POW camp to a munitions factory in the Rhineland. Unlike the scene in the cabbage field, this time Jan is on the production and not the receiving end of the German war machine, and once again Munk returns to the slapstick comedy motif to show Jan toiling and crafting the means to destroy his own nation. The camera pans from left to right as Jan high steps from one portion of the frame to another, carrying a different bomb during each pass.

Jan's tenure as a "war hero" and a "POW" end when, according to his narration, he is released from the munitions plant for incompetence and allowed to return to Warsaw. Jan soon falls in love with a young resistance fighter named Basia,¹²⁶ and joins the resistance movement in order to win her affection. At Jan's first meeting with the Resistance, a young and attractive man tells him about a recent raid in which he and other insurgents attacked and killed several Germans. The German military boots he wears, which are displayed prominently upon a bench, are his apparent trophy. Not to be outdone, Jan indulges the group with his own stories of military glory, claiming to have fought in several fronts of the war before being captured in a particularly bloody battle in which all but he perished. Basia is taken in by Jan's apparent heroism and soon the two become close.

Munk again returns to generic tropes – this time romantic melodrama – as a means to discuss narrative aspects of Polish history, in this instance the Warsaw Uprising. One evening as Jan and Basia walk through the streets of Warsaw, the clamor of the insurgency fighting the Germans is heard throughout the city. While waiting

beneath a stairwell for the gunfire to cease, Jan and Basia hold each other close, and above them a man holds a match which casts light upon their faces, while in the distance someone softly plays the piano. Though terrified of the gunfire, Jan once again takes on the persona of a soldier, hoping Basia will in turn fall in love with him.

Jan uses his stories of military bravery throughout much of the middle of the film in order to escape from his otherwise miserable existence. He relies upon narrative for agency, however, as Munk demonstrates, these narratives eventually lead to Jan being humiliated or ostracized. Inspired by a movie poster and a desire to impress women, Jan joins the military, only to be almost killed and then imprisoned. Through his impersonating an officer, he was again ostracized by a peer group and eventually enlisted for slave labor in a munitions plant. For a time, he managed to convince members of the Resistance of his stature as a soldier and a patriot, however, when his former block-mate, Sawicki, returns to Warsaw and enlists in the Resistance, once again Jan's act is revealed as a farce. Jan decides he's had enough of playing soldier, and opts to live out the remainder of the war hiding in the countryside.

History as Prison

Throughout *Bad Luck*, Jan is presented as a victim of, rather than a participant in, history. The various chapters of his life are most often spent fleeing one repressive space only to end up in another. Jan's apparent imprisonment by fate and history is visualized through Munk's mise-en-scene, which at times literally builds cages around him.

Jan's elementary school classroom is one significant space. While his peers bombard him with spitballs, the light shining through the windows casts long shadows

across the walls and blackboard, creating the appearance of bars throughout the classroom. Similar to the interrogation room in *Man on the Tracks*, the classroom's window takes on the appearance of a cage. The right side of the frame is occupied by two symbols of nationalism, a crucifix and the Polish coat of arms. Munk's framing alludes to Jan's fate, as seen when the low, fixed angle shows Jan from behind, as the teacher stands over him. Munk's low angle composition and use of shadows creates an atmosphere of confinement while the dominance of the authority figure and Polish national symbols repress Jan's agency.

Jan's first day in the University, parallels that of his elementary school days in both theme and composition. Where, in the elementary school sequence, Jan is seated among his tormentors as the teacher looms over him, in the university sequence, his peers still torment him, but the authority figure, represented by the teacher in elementary school, has been replaced by a collective of students seated in a panoptical lecture hall.

Jan is confronted by two students who suspect him of being Jewish. They order him to sit apart from the non-Jewish students and assault him in plain view of dozens of students. The men apologize when Jan shows his identification card, and the men recommend he wear it on his coat to avoid future misunderstandings. Through the composition, Munk demonstrates Jan's displacement as well as alludes to a life of public scrutiny. First, the framing favors the right-hand portion of the class and by extension, the non-Jewish students who occupy it. Although the dialogue indicates there is a reserved place for Jews, that space is never shown, indicating that a space for Jews and outsiders is non-existent. Second, the lecture hall is shot from a low, fixed angle, where Jan, in the

bottom portion of the frame, is overshadowed by the students who bully him, as dozens of faces in the background sit in silent judgment.

In order to escape repressive environments and isolation, Jan seeks agency through nationalism and national pageantry. When Jan takes up the bugle in elementary school, it appears as if he's found a voice, and through his association with the nationalist brigade, a place to belong. However, Jan's father hates the bugle and relegates his son to the cellar of their apartment complex. From the cramped cellar, Jan plays the bugle amidst the clutter while through a small window near the ceiling, his father looms over him. Munk then cuts to a low angle shot from the courtyard outside the cellar window, showing angry tenets shaking their fist and throwing objects in the direction of Jan's bugling.

While attending University, Jan looks to nationalist groups as well. He joins a student organization, The National Unity Party, through which he finds employment as a tutor to the daughter of a Polish major. The major's home functions as a microcosm for the order and pride Jan assumes is derived from national agency and inclusion. The Major's home is secluded from the rest of the city and surrounded by a large gate accessible only from a buzzer within the house, suggesting one must be embedded with a degree of privilege in order to occupy elite and national spaces. The Major's home is adorned with lavish paintings, sculptures and a vast collection of literature.

Jan's tutoring position puts him in good favor with the Major, and his membership in the National Unity Party makes the prospect of romance between he and the Major's daughter, Lola, seem likely. Momentarily, Jan is a part of this elite national

community, but the situation quickly devolves into another chaotic episode in Jan's life, his involvement with nationalist politics.

At one point, Jan is persuaded by members of his student organization to participate in a pro-government rally. At first the rally is shown from a high angle position, indicating that Jan's inclusion in national pageantry provides him agency. In this scene, Munk parallels Polish nationalism as fatalistic self-sacrifice by fixing the camera on a statue of Christ's crucifixion and then slowly tilting down to the passing crowd of marching Polish nationalists.

Here, nationalism can be seen merely as a defense mechanism, such as when Jan begins shouting phrases in opposition to the government in order to appease the fury of nearby anti-government demonstrators. Fearing reprisals by nationalists, Jan begins to once again shout pro-government slogans and a riot ensues. After Jan is thrown to the ground amidst the chaos, Munk uses a low angle POV shot of several uniformed policemen wielding their batons to rearticulate Jan's suppression and abuse at the hands of authority figures.

In *Bad Luck*, Warsaw is represented as an occupied space where its denizens live in a state of occupation and internalized exile. A high angle shot shows a railroad bridge where, to the left of the tracks a river is seen below. The camera tilts up and holds for a moment on a visibly aged Jan and then pans to the left in order to show hundreds of people standing on the shore of the Vistula River below. Although one can assume that the hundreds of people on the banks of the Vistula are there for recreational purposes, there is too much distance between the camera and the people to discern any activity. In this scene, the Vistula functions as a natural barrier that contains the people of Warsaw. It

was on this very River that the Soviet Red Army waited for the fighting between the Polish Resistance and the Nazis to wear one another down so that the Soviets could take Warsaw with little resistance, making the Vistula River an appropriate metaphor for Poland's history of partition.

Extending from the function of trains in *Man on the Tracks* as spaces of internalized exile,¹²⁷ Munk uses the train motif, coupled with the shot of the faceless mob impeded by the Vistula, in order to create an atmosphere of a populace under siege. Furthermore, the train depot, which functions as a site of national identity in exile in a previously analyzed scene in *Man on the Tracks*, now functions as a site of occupation.

The first shot from the depot is a tight, low angle close-up of a German soldier firing his weapon in the air while a cacophony of shouting guards, barking dogs and screeching brakes establish a feeling of chaos. As the German soldier walks into the frames horizontal axis, the camera tilts from a low angle to a straight shot of a line of armed German soldiers with dogs, each standing about four feet apart from one another and extending deep into the frame's composition. The passengers flee the train and are knocked about by the Germans who treat the multitude of men and woman of all ages as though they're prisoners.

Jan's return to Warsaw demonstrates Poland's condition of occupation and internalized exile as an omnipresent, timeless and an ultimately cyclical phenomenon. This phenomenon is expressed in one particular scene inside a clock repair shop, where the chaos and destruction of Warsaw has been good for the owner's business; however the owner lacks the supplies to adequately fulfill work orders. Jan enters the shop and

walks to the center of the frame while in the background in the cell-like windows, Warsaw citizens are seen drudging through the streets. Jan remarks that the sound of ticking clocks is noticeably absent.

In the right portion of the frame, the pendulum of a large grandfather clock remains motionless, its face frozen in time. Similar to the function of the clocks at the train depot, this grandfather clock, in addition to framing the passers by, denotes that they, the citizens of Warsaw are, like Jan, imprisoned by both history and occupation. Regardless of time and place, Poland's cyclical history of continuous bad luck is ever-present.

Occupied Warsaw is presented in a way that articulates how both Jan and the state of Poland are subject to perpetual ill fate. Munk shows how Jan is unable to escape the fate that in his own words has chosen to harass him, while simultaneously the occupation of the Polish state is seen as a trans-historical condition. The final shot from this segment of the film is especially interesting in that after his true identity is discovered by the Resistance, Jan escapes the building by going down a spiral staircase. The camera is fixed on the floor looking straight up the center of the staircase. The spiral pattern tapers off towards the ceiling and creates a small circular frame around the familiar bar window motif on the ceiling. Jan's rapid descent down this spiral is punctuated by the confining nature of the overhead bars, and the frenetic nature of this scene articulates his rapidly declining mental state brought on by his living in period in which history has seemingly ended.

Deep Composition and Internalized Exile

Stylistically, the condition of internalized exile is expressed using motifs such as shadows, bars, train depots and prisons to illustrate the control national apparatuses have over Jan. Earlier, when Jan arrives at the military academy, he is in the foreground of a ransacked hallway in which shadows create the appearance of prison bars on the wall, where Jan's silhouette appears to be imprisoned. Throughout *Bad Luck*, Munk's framing often places Jan in the foreground of a deep composition, and in comparison to the daunting stretch of his surroundings, Jan appears diminutive and ineffective; through this framing technique, Munk illustrates the condition of feeling both claustrophobic and lost.

During the elementary school sequence, when Jan's tormenters gang up on him in the hallway, the deep composition motif emphasizes Jan's predetermined fate of torment and exclusion by showing in the foreground an unseen authority figure that does nothing to stop Jan's classmates from beating him. Jan moves in unison within a mob of his tormentors through the long hallway which is covered by shadows resembling bars. A final kick to his back sends Jan into a window through which he witnesses a youth brigade drilling in the exercise yard. In the exercise yard, several paths lead to a circle where the youths march, and the composition is similar to that of the yard in *Eroica*. Equally in *Bad Luck*, this motif foreshadows that misfortunate elements in Jan's life will continue to resurface.

While on his way into the depot, Jan runs into Jelonek who catches him up on the Warsaw occupation. Munk uses the deep composition motif when Jan and Jelonek reach the depot's main corridor in order to denote internalized exile. Munk positions Jan and Jelonek in the foreground of the composition, while the horizontal axis is

occupied by a dimly lit corridor which seems to taper off into oblivion. The right portion of the middle ground is occupied by German soldiers, wounded Polish veterans and a large German propaganda poster depicting a mass of individuals brimming from an overcrowded train. To the left, a long line of citizens seemingly disappear into the background of the faint lighting of the frame.

This composition, like the aforementioned deep frame compositions, depicts Jan's fate as he is surrounded with symbols of exile, and occupation. However, in this particular composition Munk includes several new and interesting elements. Munk dehistoricizes the space represented by the depot. Two clocks, each displaying a different time, hang prominently overhead, as Jan and Jelonek discuss the state of the Warsaw occupation. In the train depot where time and space appear to have lost all meaning, Munk articulates the eternal nature of occupation that is indicative to Polish identity, while also depicting the wounded and displaced denizens of Warsaw living in a space of homelessness at home, or internalized exile.

This notion of an omnipresent occupation is presented in the scene where Jan and a young resistance member named Basia are trailed by German soldiers. A tracking shot follows the two walking along a broad avenue in the foreground of several large apartment complexes. In the background a horse drawn cart emerges from the left hand portion of the frame and moves at the same rate as the walking couple, who at this point discuss with great zeal the prospective aims of the uprising.

When the cart disappears into an alley, three German soldiers appear. The sound of the cart's squeaking is replaced by the steady drum of the soldiers' boots striking the pavement. Jan and Basia continue their conversation while the Germans slowly approach

the foreground, always occupying the same space once occupied by the cart. The sound of the boots intensifies and the pace of the Germans quickens at the moment Jan mentions the escape plot within the POW camp that he had once been privy to. The German soldiers enter the foreground while Jan and Basia frantically reach for their identification cards, but the soldiers eventually exit through the right portion of the frame without incident.

This scene, similar to the Luftwaffe's decimation of the cabbage field, contrasts agrarian and industrial symbols to punctuate the hopelessness of the Resistance. It also rearticulates that's Polish occupation predates modernity, and that Jan is unable to escape Poland's experience of historically continuous destruction.

In the film's final segment, postwar Poland is characterized as devoid of time and space. When Jan applies for a position at a government office, he leaves the personal biography section blank. Specific cities, such as Warsaw, Zegre and Cracow which had previously been crucial to the film's narrative, no longer seem to exist. The city where Jan settles after the war is nameless. The lush and meticulous mise-en-scene shifts to flatly lit grey buildings. The interior of the office building where Jan finds employment as a copy editor and supervisor of employee efficiency is devoid of character.

For the first time in Jan's life, he appears content. With the successful vanquishing of history, he is able to live in peace and relative prosperity. Once promoted to head supervisor, the deep composition motif returns, which was previously used to articulate Jan's victimization by history. Jan sits in the foreground of the composition, happily calculating the number of paper clips each of his coworkers use on a given day. The background is occupied by dozens of his coworkers' desks, at which they pull the

crank of their adding machines in unison. Munk shows Jan's liberation from historical fatalism by alternating a motif constant throughout his cinema, the appearance of shadows through the windows. Up until now, Munk uses shadows of bars to create a mise-en-scene of isolation and claustrophobia, but in the office scene, the patterns from the windows are now circular, indicating a perpetual sense of order and balance.

However, even in this drab and seemingly predictable new space, history manages to have the final word. Jan is fired from his job and sent to prison after a rival coworker forged his handwriting to insult the company director. Although Jan has been essentially a prisoner his entire life, it is only after a long stint in an actual prison, where he is able to be entirely removed from national spaces, history, symbols, traditions and memory that his misfortune finally dissipates. After Jan finishes his life story, he begs again not to be released from prison.

Munk's final use of deep composition motif foreshadows Jan's fate. During Jan's plea, Munk places him in the center of the frame between a barred window and a deeply composed series of barred doorways, behind which, soldiers stand guard. Munk's final articulation of internalized exile is seen as he draws parallels between prison life and life in Poland contemporary to the film's release, and Munk suggest that the former is more desirable than the latter. Although the film concludes without revealing what awaits Jan outside the prison walls, the final shot within the prison's watchtower looks out over a city of plain apartment complexes and empty streets. Whether the emergence of the word *Konac* (Polish for "the end") moving out forward through the horizontal axis of the frame, should be read as a standard ending to the film, or Munk's final reference to the cyclical narrative of the Polish condition, is certainly up for debate.

Chapter Four: *Passenger*

Introduction

Passenger (1961/63), Munk's examination of historical amnesia and the Holocaust was still in production when he was killed in an automobile accident in 1961. What existed of the unfinished film was arranged and edited by Munk's colleague, Witold Lesiewicz. No additional footage was shot, nothing was speculated at moments in the film where gaps appeared, and no unanswered questions were pondered. The film is set in two places, on a cruise ship during the present day and in Auschwitz in 1943. At the time of Munk's death, filming at Auschwitz was near completion, but little footage aboard the cruise ship existed. Similar to the technique later used by Chris Marker in *La Jetee* (1962),¹²⁸ Lesiewicz used stills from Munk's incomplete footage to narrate the events of the present day.¹²⁹

The narrative begins when Liza, a former guard at Auschwitz, who upon returning to Europe after years of living with her American husband in the West, crosses paths with a woman she believes to be Marta, a Polish political prisoner once under her command. In a still shot of Liza's point of view, from the deck of the ocean liner, Marta stands motionless on the ramp leading to the deck between a port in England and a rootless ocean liner. The strip of water between the liner and the dock cuts the frame in half at the horizontal axis, thus removing Marta from the portion of the frame dominated by the boat. This image creates the sense that Marta is in a perpetual state of transit. The fact that she is in a port in England indicates she is living in exile from Poland, while her framing on the steps is such that it appears she is denied access to the international space of the ocean liner.

Liza is shocked by this sudden return to the history she had believed was behind her, and here Munk inserts a jump-cut to grainy, pseudo-newsreel footage of Auschwitz to articulate Liza's shock. The final clip is of an inmate's arm receiving a tattoo, before returning to a still shot of Liza's husband holding her arm. Liza's memory draws a commonality between the victim, Marta, and the perpetrator something Liza maintains through the entire film.

Through voiceover narration, Liza tells two versions of she and Marta's relationship, first to her husband and then to herself. In her first version, Liza protects and comforts Marta, going so far as to have Marta's fiancée, Tadeusz assigned to their work unit. Liza tells her husband that before she was reassigned to a post in Germany, Marta and Tadeusz were arrested and sent to death for reasons unknown to her. Before Liza returns to the Reich, she visits Marta, claiming it was the first instance in which she was made aware of the atrocities taking place at Auschwitz. In the second version of her story, Liza admits any kindness she extended to Marta was only in order to control her. Liza claims that she, not Marta was the victim, though she never says why.

Like *Man on the Tracks*, *Passenger* uses flashbacks as a means of subjective deposition. Though Munk limits Liza's screen time throughout the first sequence, he uses POV to serve as both Liza's and the spectator's perspective, for instance, when Liza visits the death block Munk uses extreme close-up POV shots of prisoners packed into cramped cells. Like Resnais' *Night and Fog*, Munk's subjective camera puts the spectator in the position of the perpetrator. By intermingling spectator and protagonist points of view, Munk forces the audience to look upon his stark and matter-of-fact depiction of the camp in order that the audience may question its own acquiescence.

The POV shot in the sequence where Liza looks for an assistant among a group of political prisoners is captured in a single tracking shot from left to right, throughout which Munk pans the camera back and forth to create the illusion of walking and head movement. The women of various ages each stand erect, their eyes fiercely locked on the passing mobile frame. The tight framing brings the women, who stand three to a row, uncomfortably close to the spectator.

Memory Loss and Mise-En-Scene

The mise-en-scene in *Passenger* creates an atmosphere of claustrophobia and denies victims historical agency. The first part of Auschwitz we see is the gate. The train tracks, positioned between piles of luggage, split the frame through its horizontal axis towards the camp and through the massive gate, before disappearing into the fog shrouding the camp. The shot is held for several seconds, and over it is heard a non-diegetic sound insert of a slowly moving train. A slow right pan follows the guards as they pedal bicycles on a path in between piles of discarded luggage. A heavy, barbed wire fence appears almost translucent in the background. The bicyclists exit the right portion of the frame, riding past a large watchtower, in which two soldiers stand guard. The camera's pan moves with the bicyclists' and reveals the positions of the guards, establishing their dominance within the frame.

Next, there is a cut to a tracking shot that moves left over a long single-story brick complex. The non-diegetic sound insert of the train is still present, though there is no longer any indication of train tracks. Long slender trees occupy the background of the frame and together, with the heavy bars over the complexes' blackened windows, they

extend the atmosphere of constraint established by the previous sequence. The tracking shot comes to an end at the concrete roof of an underground room located in the complex. Six metal ventilation shafts in a zigzag formation jut out from the concrete ceiling. At this point, the sound of the train is considerably diminished by a high pitched industrial cacophony. This shot lingers for a few moments, before the camera slowly tilts up to reveal the source of the white noise, a massive chimney billowing with black smoke.

The crematorium's suppression of the train here is significant. Previously, Munk's use of trains denoted either a sense of a community in exile, such as in *Man on the Tracks* or a state of occupation, such as in *Eroica*. By overdubbing the sound of the crematory over the sound of the train, Munk indicates that there is no alternative space to internalized exile because space itself has ceased to exist. Munk returns to this motif later in the film, when the camp's prisoners gather for a performance by the camp's orchestra, and Marta and Tadeusz use this momentary distraction to move closer to one another through the rank and file. When they are almost within arm's length, their moment is cut short by the sound of an approaching train, followed by an abrupt jump-cut to a sequence in which new arrivals are selected for the gas chamber.

Selective Memory and Jewish Agency

Most compelling though, by focusing on the incarceration of political prisoners, Munk, himself Jewish, articulates the crisis of historical amnesia through his depiction of the Holocaust as a secondary component of the narrative. Because Liza's denies her accountability, Munk's film has been criticized as an apologist narrative.¹³⁰ However, by denying Marta of agency, certainly it's clear that Munk is commenting on how historic

memory ultimately determines victims' agency. By relegating the Holocaust to the background, Munk's film can be read as accusing both "passengers", and Polish filmmakers of historical amnesia.

Between the years 1939 and 1945, the Nazi occupation was responsible for the murder of three million Polish Jews, approximately 99% of the pre-war Jewish population. Film scholar Catherine Portuges writes that in the film cultures of the Soviet Bloc, films that confront the Holocaust using Jewish voices and perspectives are scarce. With the exceptions of Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stop* (1948) Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* (1949), and Jerzy Zarzycki's *White Bear* (1959), postwar Polish film through the time of Munk's death in 1961 dealt little with the Holocaust.¹³¹ According to Marek Haltof, Polish cinema's depictions of Jews during this period were preoccupied with "either nostalgic images of a lost past, of an almost harmonious world of multiplicity and peacefully coexisting cultures, or showing the martyrological aspect of Jewish history."¹³²

Polish Cinema and the Representation of "Non-Jewish Jews"

After the time of Munk, one trope used by directors in order to address Polish/Jewish issue is the concept of "Non-Jewish Jew." Isaac Deutscher, a Polish Jew who immigrated to Britain in 1939, defined a Non-Jewish Jew as someone who "transcends Jewishness to live on the edge of various religious and national cultural traditions."¹³³ Polish film scholars Paul Coates and Ewa Mazierska explain in their discussions of Wadja's *Samson* (1961), that the protagonist Jakub's Jewish identity is repressed in favor of his Polish identity.¹³⁴ Paul Coates and Ewa Mazierska also discuss

Wadja's *Landscape after the Battle* (1970), as an example of how Polish cinema often focuses upon the purges of Polish nationals, artists and intellectuals, with little regard for Jewish experiences.¹³⁵

Munk criticizes the dearth of Jewish representation in Polish cinema during the University scene in *Bad Luck*, where, ironically, Jewishness is displaced upon Jan and he is relegated to the Jewish section of the lecture hall, which remains out of the frame. In *Passenger*, Munk focuses upon the plight of the intelligentsia while ironically displacing the Jewish experience to the background of the mise-en-scene.

In *Passenger* the intelligentsia in exile indicates the abandonment of order and reason. In one particular sequence, Marta sits at a table with her head in her hands while in the background a variety of instruments hang motionlessly, and to the left of Marta, an abacus sits idle. In another sequence, Liza observes a drawing of Marta by Tadeusz. Liza is furious that Marta, though a prisoner still wins the affection of a man and in a jealous rage, Liza decides to begin mentally torturing Marta. Munk ironically "Christianizes" the victims of the Holocaust by showing inmates carrying an injured worker dressed like Christ on their shoulders, to the amusement of German overseers.

Throughout *Passenger*, Munk depicts the Holocaust as a background element of the mise-en-scene. When Liza takes orders from a superior officer, men bearing the Star of David hang from the gallows in a blurry and out of focus background. Moments later, as Liza stands at ease to accept a verbal commendation for her service to the Reich, an out of focus prisoner is beaten by an overseer. Though the Star of David is not apparent on this particular prisoner, Munk visually articulates the similarities between the anonymous prisoner and the hanging Jewish prisoners. Similarly, Munk uses the image of

dogs attacking anonymous Jews in an out of focus background to indicate such violence was a naturalized component of the camp's day to day proceedings.

After the two-shot introduction to Auschwitz, that Liza and the spectators must confront memories of atrocities, Munk cuts to a shot from within the storage facility in which Liza oversees. A slow tracking shot passes over a clothes line from which tattered coats, shirts, and dresses bearing the Star of David hang. The shot continues into the warehouse, passing over mounds of eyeglasses, combs, shoes, and various items. The very nature of Liza's task is to abet the disappearance of countless victims, yet she still maintains her innocence, and denies that she knew what the world now knows occurred at Auschwitz. Liza repeats her mantra, "I was only following orders."

Liza appears as an element of the mise-en-scene only twice during the version of the story she tells to her husband. In both instances, Munk captures only Liza's reflection, first, on a mirror in the storage warehouse where Liza oversees the sorting and cataloging of goods requisitioned from new detainees, and second, on the glass door to her office. Munk's removal of her from this concentration camp sequence suggests Liza feels that so long as she was following orders, she cannot be held responsible for her actions, or the actions of her fellow officers at Auschwitz.

However, despite her claim, Munk unambiguously shows that Liza was fully aware that Auschwitz was a death camp. Liza, by her own free will, approaches a barbed wire fence and stands for several moments looking at a yet to be seen object or event. Munk then cuts to a low angle shot of the crematorium's chimney, tilting down and panning left, the camera passes over guards unloading metal canisters from a Red Cross truck. Continuing the right pan, the camera passes over a line of children, each wearing

the Star of David, in a long s-shape line that extends far into the frame's composition, and stops on a young German guard with a dog. Liza watches the event with an unflinching resolve, neither angry nor sad, but merely indifferent. However, by looking at the scene within context of what Munk shows before, and what he shows after, offers insight into how Liza was affected by what she witnessed.

Immediately before the previous sequence, the aforementioned scene occurs in which Liza discovers Tadeusz's portrait of Marta, awakening in the overseer a tremendous sense of hatred and jealousy. Following the sequence of the children's execution, Liza observes Marta hiding something within a large pile of baskets. When confronted, Marta admits to having a bouquet of flowers, given to her by Tadeusz for the occasion of her birthday. Liza says nothing; she merely confiscates the flowers and walks away.

A low angle tracking shot follows Liza as she walks along the parameter of the fence impatiently beating the flowers into her hand. Angrily looking back over her shoulder, Liza flings the flowers into the barbed wire and exits the frame.

Munk's framing of Marta within the pile of baskets expresses the power Liza realizes she has over Marta's fate. The baskets are placed in the center of the frame while the background is occupied by a large barbed wire fence and a large watchtower. When Liza sees Marta, literally knee deep in the possessions of untold thousands, and confined by the guards and the barbed wire, she understands that Marta herself could disappear amidst such chaos, and no one would ever know why, or by whose hand. Because of what Munk shows us before and after the sequence involving the Jewish children, we know Liza's reaction to the atrocity is neither shock nor rage. Instead, the scene reflects

Liza's hatred of Marta, and Liza's realization of the power which she now possesses, and can use to control Marta.

Conclusion

The film defines a "passenger" as someone without a society, nation, political affiliation, history, or biography. A passenger passes through life unconcerned with history or politics and remains indifferent to tomorrow or yesterday, concerning themselves only with the eternal present. The ability to forget, ignore, or simply disregard history makes it possible for oppression to flourish. Munk's final and unfinished statement has remained in relative obscurity for years, and even today, like Munk, *Passenger* is underrepresented in even current Polish film scholarship.¹³⁶

Throughout *Passenger*, conflicting points of view and reinterpretations of historic events, demonstrates how narratives can alter one's perception of an event. While Marta's omission from both official and unofficial history, make her an archetypal Munk protagonist, the faceless and nameless victims in *Passenger*, the Polish Jews, are those for whom Munk's cinema speaks.

Munk's cinema from 1957-1961 demonstrates that internalized exile is not merely alienation from history, but also disaffection from the metanarratives and national mythologies that create and sustain the nation in times of crisis. Objectivity is the casualty of historic cataclysms and each of Munk's films are cautionary reminders that the gaps left by history's purges are open to generic interpretation, through which opportunist can rely upon "official records" to ensconce subjectivity.

Conclusion

This thesis is the only one of its kind in English scholarship that analyzes and interprets Munk's cinema beyond simple plot analysis.¹³⁷ It examines the tension between, on one hand, Cold War English language scholarship, which uses national cinema and auteur models to conduct narrative analysis on spaces of resistance to Communism, and on the other hand post-Socialist applications of transnational cultural theories, such as internalized exile. This thesis draws from two assertions made by post-Socialist scholars; first, transnational and exilic concepts¹³⁸ are crucial to engagements with East European cinema texts, and second, textual readings are necessary to all prospective studies of these cinemas in order to enhance the thematic and narrative approaches taken by Cold War era scholarship.¹³⁹

Even as Polish film is reexamined with new historical and theoretical insights, gaps still remain. Coates mentions extensive studies on Poland's Wojciech Has, Agnieszka Holland, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Tadeusz Konwicki, Jerzy Skolimowski, Krzysztof Zanussi, Gregorz Krolikiewicz, Marek Piwowski, Witold Leszczynski and Andrzej Munk are long overdue.¹⁴⁰ While there is an abundance of English scholarship on Poland's most ascertainable auteurs, Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Kieslowski, apart from a handful of Cold War film reviews,¹⁴¹ Munk has by and large been overlooked.¹⁴²

¹ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11, 53.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁵ Melinda Szaloky, "Somewhere in Europe: Exile and Orphanage in Post-World War II Hungarian Cinema," in *East European Cinemas*, ed. Aniko Imre, 81-102 (New York, U.S.: Routledge, 2005), 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

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- ⁸ Ibid., 83, 87, 96.
- ⁹ Ibid., 83.
- ¹⁰ Dina Iordanova, Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 18-19.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 12-13.
- ¹² Naficy, 34.
- ¹³ Ibid., 21.
- ¹⁴ David Bordwell. Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 230 .
- ¹⁵ Iordanova, 64. Andrzej Wadja, Double Vision: My Life in Film. (New York: Henry Holt, 1986), 131-132.
- ¹⁶ Izabela Kalinowska, "Exile and Polish Cinema: From Mickiewicz and Slowacki to Kieslowski." in *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diasporas, and Eastern European Voices*, ed. Domnica Radulescu, 107-124 (Lanham, U.S.: Lexington Books, 2002), 107-114.
- ¹⁷ Izabela Kalinowska, "Changing meaning of Homeland and Exile: From Ashes and Diamonds to Pan Tadeusz," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wadja: The Art of Irony and Defiance*, ed. John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska, 64-75. (London, GB: Wallflower Press, 2003), 67.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 65.
- ¹⁹ Marek Haltof, Polish National Cinema (New York: Berghahn, 2002), (45-47).
- ²⁰ Ibid, 47.
- ²¹ Ronald Monticone, "The Catholic Church in Poland, 1945-1966," *The Polish Review*, 4 (1966): 75-100.
- ²² Paul Coates, The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 87-88.
- ²³ Izabela Kalinowska, "Changing meaning of Homeland and Exile," 67.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 68.
- ²⁵ Izabela Kalinowska. "Exile and Polish Cinema," 107-124.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 109.
- ²⁷ Katarzyna Marciniak, "Second Worldness and Transnational Feminist Practices: Agnieszka Holland's *A Woman Alone*" in *East European Cinemas*, ed Aniko Imre, 3-20 (New York, U.S.: Routledge, 2005),
- ²⁸ Ibid., 6-11
- ²⁹ Haltof, (xi-xii). Coates, 2-7.
- ³⁰ Norman Davies "Polish National Mythologies" in *Myths and Nationhood*, eds Geoffrey Hosking, George Schöpflin, 141-157 (New York, NY : Routledge, 1997), 141-142.
- ³¹ Coates, 6.
- ³² Izabela Kalinowska. "Exile and Polish Cinema," 114.
- ³³ Naficy, 153.
- ³⁴ Aniko Imre, "East European Cinemas in New Perspectives" *East European Cinemas*, ed Aniko Imre, xi-xxvi (New York, U.S.: Routledge, 2005), xi-xii.
- ³⁵ Ibid, xii.
- ³⁶ Michalek Boleslaw, and Frank Turaj, The Modern Cinema of Poland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988),129.
- ³⁷ Mira Liehm, Antonin J. Liehm, The most important art : Eastern European film after 1945 (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1977), 1-45.
- ³⁸ Haltof, 1-6, 10-11.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 15-19.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 6-11.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 56-73.
- ⁴² Ibid., 40-41.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 1-43.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., xi.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., x-xi. Joseph Kickasola, The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image (New York: Continuum, 2004) 4. Joseph Kickasola's identifies the Polish condition as one which "bears the mark of upheaval, devastation, and, for lack of a better phrase, identity crisis."

- ⁴⁶ Charles Ford and Robert Hammond, Polish Film: A Twentieth Century History (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005), 1-5. The authors devote the entire introduction to the centrality of the history of Polish occupation, to the study of Polish cinema. Coates, 3-4. Coates characterizes Polish history as “A Calendar of Pain”, writing “In the national memory of...the last two centuries...more than half of [the] months are shadowed...with the weight of the historic surrounding years they have ingested,” 3-4.
- ⁴⁷ Boleslaw and Turaj, xi.
- ⁴⁸ Boleslaw, and Turaj, xi.
- ⁴⁹ Coates, 46-47.
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- ¹²³ Andrzej Wadja, "Cinema: Past and Present," in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wadja: The Art of Irony and Defiance*. Eds. John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska, ix-xvii (New York, NY: Wallflower Press, 2003), xiv-xv.
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- ¹³⁰ Sight and Sound, December 1963, (12.)
- ¹³¹ Haltof, 224.
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- ¹³³ Ewa Mazierska, "Non Jewish Jews, Good Poles and Historical Truth in the Films of Andrzej Wadja" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 2000, 214.

- ¹³⁴ Mazierska, 214-218. Coates, 155-157.
- ¹³⁵ Mazierska, 214-218. Coates, 155-157.
- ¹³⁶ In Coates chapter on Jewish representations on Polish cinema, (155-187) *Passenger* is not mentioned. Iordanova discusses *Passenger* as a morality tale and for its use of flashbacks in relationship to other Eastern European films (79-82). Haltof mentions *Passenger* in his section on Jewish representations in Polish cinema and only in reference to its supposed lesbian undertones, (225).
- ¹³⁷ Boleslaw and Turaj, 114-125.
- ¹³⁸ Szaloky, 81-102. Izabela Kalinowska, "Changing meaning of Homeland and Exile," 64-75 and "Exile and Polish Cinema," 107-124. Iordanova 12-13, 18-19. Imre, "East European Cinemas," xi-xxvi. Haltof, x-xiv. Coates, vi-15.
- ¹³⁹ Iordanova, 17-18. Imre, 87.
- ¹⁴⁰ Coates, vi. Apart from Munk, Coates mentions Wojciech Has, Agnieszka Holland, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Tadeusz Konwicki, Jerzy Skolimowski, Krzysztof Zanussi, Gregorz Krolikiewicz, Marek Piwowski, and Witold Leszczynski.
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