Representation and Ruination under a Soviet Shadow: Wajda, History, and Chris Marker's Re-thinking of Tarkovsky's 'Zone'

PAUL COATES, Western University, Canada; email: pcoates2@uwo.ca

ABSTRACT

Following the recent death of Andrzej Wajda, a reconsideration of his work is timely, and all the more so because he provides a reference point for many East Central European *cinéastes*. Thus this article uses his work as a main switching point between meditations on the issues his films raise. It theorises the status accorded History in them, and in Marxism in general, in relation to Walter Benjamin's work on allegory and ruin, as well as to questions of characterisation. Also considered is the degree and nature of existentialism's influence on this cinema, with blockages of choice foregrounded as necessarily entailing a thematics of doubling, contradiction and masking, and a reworking of the meaning of accusations of 'treachery' that have been a leitmotif of oppressed cultures, particularly when – as in cinema – access to the means of production depends on real or apparent collaboration with state authorities. The particular meaning of certain delays in production will also be considered, as will certain figures from the Polish culture (this writer's primary specialisation) with an obvious 'Baltic connection', i.e. a Lithuanian origin, such as Tadeusz Konwicki and Czesław Miłosz. The thematics of doubling will finally be related to notions of ruination and of a filmic language adequate to it, which it will be argued may be seen prototypically in 'the Zone', Chris Marker's name for a particular method of image-presentation, named in homage to that great Soviet film shot in Estonia, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (*Сталкер*, Russia, 1979). To revert to the title of Wajda's final film *Afterimage* (*Powidoki*, Poland, 2016), and invoke Miłosz also, the Zone may be called the native realm, not only melancholic but also surprisingly utopian, of the after-image that is the ruin.

INTRODUCTION

If the films of Andrzej Wajda inspired film-makers throughout the countries comprising the post-war Soviet sphere of influence and control, they did so in part because their eclecticism, even syncretism, drawing in particular on American and Soviet cinema, surrealism and neo-realism, offers a highly representative sample of the repertoire of paradigms, opportunities and constraints under which directors worked throughout this spatio-temporal area. After all, Wajda's career spanned most of the period, and even at its close was still dissecting the Soviet-imposed system, in a final film appropriately titled *Afterimage* (*Powidoki*, Poland, 2016), about the travails of the abstract painter Wladysław Strzemiński (Bogusław Linda) under Stalinist socialist realism. Wajda's death two years ago offers an opportunity to consider the extent of this paradigmatic status in homage as well as analysis. This move is not intended to impose the template of a 'Polish', and hence relatively 'large' cinematic culture upon ones stemming from smaller populations and industries, as it is worth noting that all Soviet-influenced cultures shared the status of victims of wartime and post-war colonisation, while the definition of 'Poland' itself has long been complicated by graftings in, detachments, and reattachments, operations including its historic coupling with Lithuania – a one-time attachment reflected particularly powerfully in the final chapter of a widely-acknowledged reference point for interpretation of the Soviet empire, *The Captive Mind* (*Zniewolony umysł*, 1953; see Miłosz [1953] 1981), whose author, Czesław Miłosz, himself from Lithuania, entitled it 'The Lesson of the Baltics'. An image from near the end of Wajda's *Kanał* (Poland, 1957), showing Stokrotka (Daisy) (Teresa Iżewska) staring through bars across the Vistula, towards its opposite shore, could arguably even be the Varsovian equivalent of a Lithuanian, Latvian or Estonian gaze across the Baltic towards freer, luckier, more northerly states. My analysis will focus on allegory, history, and the representation of war, taking as its starting point Walter Benjamin's theorisation of allegory in terms of the ruin. Using Wajda as my central example, but also drawing on such figures as Miłosz, Tadeusz Konwicki and Leonīds Leimanis, I will also trace the interlocking of themes of ruination, contradiction, doubling, treachery and suicide in the work of artists growing up in the Soviet sphere in the aftermath of war. The question of the adequacy of representations of war and its memory – one central to Wajda's oeuvre – meanwhile raises issues of filmic language, which will be central to my argument's final recruitment of another exemplary, recently-deceased figure, Chris Marker, whose travels arguably rendered him the first director of world cinema.

WAR, HISTORY AND ALLEGORY

The period immediately after that devastating occasion of ruination, World War II – one whose representation in the arts of all the countries in question has proved extremely contentious, and centres Wajda's best-known film, *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament*, Poland, 1958) – suggests that one may speak of a phony war after as well as before the 'real' one. The Hungarian novelist Sándor Márai described just such a post-war phony war, one uncannily akin to the pre-war one, as the spinning of a spider's web, before the newly-installed authorities enforced their demands most insistently,

> What was so natural yesterday – political parties, freedom of the press, life without fear, freedom of individual opinion – still existed the next day, but more anaemically, the way the elements of everyday reality continue to live on more pallidly in anguished dreams during the night.
> (Márai [1972] 2005: 306)

Ashes and Diamonds is true to this sensation of dream, of a post-traumatic surfacing of nightmares long after their original occasion, still trailing signs of their nocturnal origin. In a personification of Márai's more

abstract analysis, the democratic press still haunts the official banquet that dominates the latter stages of *Ashes and Diamonds*, but its defeat and phantomisation is anticipated in the work's caricaturing of its representative, Editor Pieniążek (Stanisław Milski). Indeed, the whole film swarms with phantoms, with figures doubling one another and functioning as each other's afterimages or prefigurations, its protagonist, underground fighter Maciek Chelmicki (Zbigniew Cybulski), eventually becoming a ghost surprised to find itself bleeding and touching and smelling the blood to test its reality (the haptic in cinema seeming to attempt to subject the screen's visual image, whose distance renders it possibly hallucinatory, to a reality-test). **(Figure 1)** In one form of a contradictoriness in Wajda's work to which I will return, Maciek's action collapses end of life and afterlife into an image both supernatural and materialist.

In another, perhaps even more memorable evocation of the surreptitious change suggesting a phony war, Márai again uses the day-night contrast, this time in terms of differences in those shifting, accidental and highly cinematic qualities of day and night known as lighting:

> Such changes don't have names. I can't say it was as if 'night had suddenly fallen.' Rather, it was like the parts of the day when it was still bright, but the light which had till then illuminated the region cheerfully and vividly suddenly becomes more solemn, turns, so to say, gloomy. People took notice and, like the light, like the landscape, grew somber. (Márai [1972] 2005: 304)

Language falters as qualities associated with daytime come to seem accidental, in the sense that word has in Aristotelean medieval scholasticism. Losing the sharpness of light-dark distinctions threatens cinema particularly acutely, as its brightness feeds on the blackness the projector-beam brushes aside. Márai's preoccupation

with day and night is echoed in the surrealist texture of Wajda's film, much of whose imagery seeks a material and socio-political ground or alibi for surrealism's interest in dreams; not surprisingly, in an interview of the period Wajda would praise Luis Buñuel (Wajda 1967: 235). The ontology of political marginalisation becomes a hauntology. Maciek has only apparently emerged from the underground crawlspace he moved through, like the protagonists of *Kanał*, during the Warsaw Uprising.

Conceptualising historical developments in such sinister terms, Márai's ideas parallel – albeit following a very different, liberal humanist trajectory – Walter Benjamin's description of the allegorical face of history in his theorisation of the German *Trauerspiel*:

> When, as is the case in the *Trauerspiel*, history becomes part of the setting, it does so as script. The word 'history' stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. (Benjamin [1925/1928] 1998: 177–178)

History here may be capitalised not simply because the German language requires it, but rather like so many allegorical figures. The personification involved (perhaps personification in general itself) is also a mortification, as Benjamin deems that face of history skull-like. That sense of an identification with history as a reduction is apparent also in Svetlana Alexievich's statement,

in *The Unwomanly Face of War* (*У вайны не жаночае абліча*, 1984), that '[a] human being is guided by something stronger than history' (Alexievich [1984] 2017: xix). Some later words by Alexievich could even be used as a review of Wajda's War Trilogy, from within the wartime experience shared by both the Soviets and the countries they would occupy:

> A human being is most visible and open in war, and maybe also in love. To the depths, to the sub-cutaneous layers. In the face of death all ideas pale, and inconceivable eternity opens up, for which no-one is prepared. We still lie in history, not the cosmos. (Alexievich [1984] 2017: xxiv–xxv)

Maciek's astonishment at the reality of his own blood expresses that unpreparedness, the very thing Freud deems a precondition of trauma.

History capitalised, as if it were indeed the cosmos, of course controlled Marxism's master narrative even as its positive History clearly also displayed a negative, skull-like shadow in the work of the most important directors of the post-war Sovietised countries; little surprise that Wajda criticism often cites History as a, if not the, major protagonist of his works, and the curse of its upper-case may be fused with a geography, the landscape of flat fields open to neighbours' incursions. A concern with History can lead also to one with film language, something apparent in Chris Marker's *Sans soleil* (France, 1983), to which I will turn more fully later, History and its failures being one of its central protagonists. Marker in the end establishes an alternative imaginary geography that is also the seed-bed of a history that has not happened, one privileged in the version of speculative fiction he calls the Zone. Here history perhaps 'becomes history' indeed, rephrased in a new visual language, in the ruined site near Tallinn in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (*Сталкер*, Russia, 1979) that inspired Marker's idea.

If allegories can relate to thought as ruins do to things, as Benjamin argues, it is because the allegory is like the brick chimney that alone remains standing after a conflagration, as in the US South both as traversed by Mary Chesnut during the Civil War and as it still is, ironically preserved from burning, as it were homeopathically, by its past hosting of fire. And here I return to the question of personification to argue that this solitary, charred persistence is that of a single quality left after loss of the complexity of the human – just as in *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, USA, 1915) war momentarily turns Mae Marsh's Little Sister into the embodiment of Hatred, or in *Die Nibelungen: Kriemhild's Revenge* (*Kriemhilds Rache*, Germany, 1924), after the death of Siegfried (Paul Richter), Kriemhild (Margarete Schön) comes to personify Revenge. In the extremity of experience that characterises melodrama, a single emotion overwhelms one. If the result may seem like a dehumanisation, that one remaining quality represents a backbone, the sign that the ravaged human is still standing, albeit only after a fashion. Thus although Benjamin may have resisted this theoretical move, the inherent loss of complexity of the allegorised person aligns his advocacy of allegory with the Romantic critique of its ostensible poverty. This suggests a twinning of Romanticism with its contemporary rival, the Realism that so valued complexity, its own version of the rich interiority that seduced the Romantic, unaware that complexity was a luxury, that history's impoverishment of humanity has been a norm only briefly and partially abrogated during the nineteenth century, Realism's heyday. Allegorical thoughts and ruins are indeed consubstantial in the imagery of stone haunting the Eastern European post-war imagination.

Benjamin's idea allows one to read the allegorical quality of socialist realist characters (each clearly aligned with a Vice or Virtue, all lacking the complexity sought by the traditional, mostly nineteenth-century realism taken as a yardstick by György Lukács [Lukács [1938] 1977: 57])

FIGURE 1. Andrzej Wajda, *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament,* **Poland, 1958).
Half-way to becoming a ghost, Maciek (Zbigniew Cybulski) smells his own blood.**

as testifying to the ruin underlying them. Their enforced positivity compensates repressed awareness of the ruins out of which Socialist construction arises, be they material or the mental ones of a devastated inter-war bourgeois humanist ideological order. Socialist realism's setting of so many works on building sites is not just hopeful realism but also seeks to repress knowledge of the uncanny and persistent psychological aftereffects of the ruination on which it depends: it presents it only as a loosening of bricks, the extent of whose re-use also allegorises a pre-war-style human's happy cementing into a good, non-bourgeois order. Thus the official Marxist opposition to psychoanalysis becomes one to the archaeology to which Freud so often likened his enterprise (Freud [1896] 1950: 184–185, Møller 1991: 31–35) – in this case, an archaeology of the mentality of the present. More apposite than Lukács' advocacy of realism therefore is his own ironically allegorical reading of Benjamin's theory of the Baroque as really one of modernism (Lukács [1955] 1963: 40–43), though he cannot see the extent to which it represents realism's afterlife, as the amputation of human beings into personifications and shadows that is particularly prevalent in expressionism, the German form of modernism, really indicates a mind's break-up into conflicting qualities in the face of real traumas.

Stripped of the complexity of the human, the allegorical figure is either sub- or super-human (if one likes, either pre-dating or succeeding the bourgeois order); it thus functions like a mask and serves just such a form of melodrama as socialist realism proposes. At the same time, in its political unconscious it also cryptically tells another uncomfortable truth about the system, as it corresponds to a reality – the one many would call totalitarian – in which all must wear masks. The figures' apparent reality itself masks their status as masks, blocking the expression of impulses inconsistent with the requirements of the increasingly fully internalised system monitoring them. Inasmuch as the masks' rigor mortis is that of death, the deathliness they express is concealed by its particular association with the melodramatic and sacrificial villain (above all else, the saboteur) who merits consignment, like Maciek, to the dustbin of history. Insofar as the death embodied in masks – all of which can become death masks – anticipates transformation, ironically enough it is indeed lit superhumanly by a radiant future. In socialist realism, as in all melodrama, the Last Judgement is executed on earth, among humans, with any driving transcendent principle itself masked as the verdict of a History whose paradoxically immanent transcendence is just as essentially sacrificial as any previous system.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND BELATEDNESS

One way of writing history – one indebted to G. W. F. Hegel's well-worn notion of the zeitgeist (Hegel [1837] 1956: 54–79) – casts it in terms of what (descending the ladder of consciousness) is thinkable, sayable and even dreamable at particular times. This issue is also of relevance to possible differences in what can be said in particular media, as evidenced in the time-lags between certain issues' airings in literature and film, and their degree of proximity to a verbal language usually – though not always, as the Lacanian example indicates (Lacan [1957] 1966) – associated with consciousness. Given the totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian regime's lack of mechanisms for non-violent transfers of power, regime changes tended to occur in near-catastrophic circumstances followed by rituals of official repudiation of the norms of the preceding period. Thus very often works shelved or simply not produced in one period were then instrumentalised in an effort to legitimate the next. The political issue of new rulers' use of shelved works was sometimes masked by the socio-aesthetic one of whether the right time for confrontation of certain issues had really come or actually passed, an inability to speak at the right time being one of the curses suffered by these regimes' artists.

Despite such fears, in certain cases the delay in production clearly could, somewhat surprisingly, serve all parties. The delayed making of a film about the Warsaw Uprising until after 1956 could both permit the arrival of a filmmaker sufficiently talented to confront the issue seriously and credibly and also mute the reverberations of an underground trauma that seemed to render artistic representation all-but-impossible, even indecent, according to the rhythm of trauma representation summed up in the Freudian term *Nachträglichkeit* ('belatedness') (Caruth 1996: 16–18, 91–95). No wonder representation plays out underground even when the theme sees the light of day.

Apart from *Kanał* and *Ashes and Diamonds*, the implicit subjects of my previous sentences, Wajda's career would furnish other examples, such as the decade-long delays between the proposal and the shooting of *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z marmuru*, Poland, 1977) and, later, of *The Horse-Hair Ring* (*Pierścionek z orłem w koronie*, Poland, 1993). In all these cases, the delay was also mapped onto the time-differential between the original text's publication and the film's making. In three of the cases – *Kanał*, *Ashes and Diamonds* and *Man of Marble* – there is no evidence that a film shot earlier would have been superior to the one actually made, though it may be argued that the extra time that elapsed in the case of the *Man of Marble* script (finally approved only because a particular Minister of Culture, Józef Tejchma, hankered after a filmic monument to Nowa Huta's construction [Tejchma 1991]) permitted an epic extension of its subject-matter to the 1970s that also, more problematically, allowed a rather cartoonish, both semi-modernistically and partly generationally alienated presentation of the frustrated young film-maker, Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda). If Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski's novella that formed the script's starting-point was published officially in the early 1960s, long before its filming's approval, this also raises the issue of the degree to which topics could be broached more easily in literary form than in the more heavily-policed 'most important art', despite (or perhaps even because of?) literature's apparently greater openness to conscious scrutiny than the images Wajda always insisted could smuggle content 'between the frames' (Wajda 2003: xvi). *The Horse-Hair Ring*, by way of contrast, also from a Ścibor-Rylski work, lacked the resonance Wajda sought, probably because the time-differential between text and film straddled the passing of the *soi-disant* Socialist system to which it had been obviously relevant, rendering it something of a postscript to urgently dissident discourse. Somewhat piquantly, this issue could even affect films about the Socialist counties made outside them, as Pauline Kael mused whether *The Confession* (*L'aveu*, France/Italy, 1970), Costa-Gavras's film based on Artur London's book about the Slansky trial, would have been most relevant during the period of debate about the mentalities of Communist true believers sparked by Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (*Sonnenfinsternis*, 1940) (Kael 1973: 200–205). Internal Warsaw Pact convulsion affected that film's making, of course, as the Prague Spring's approval of its shooting in Czechoslovakia was rescinded by the Soviet invasion, and Costa-Gavras ended up shooting it in Lille. Chris Marker's *The Last Bolshevik* (*Le tombeau d'Alexandre*, France/Finland, 1993) offers a telling footnote to the film's history by noting its later screening in a Soviet Union in the process of disintegration. The question of the role of delay in the shooting of a script recurs in the case of *Rock and Splinters* (*Akmens un šķembas*, Rolands Kalniņš, Latvia, 1966), whose first script dated from the mid-1950s but – as Inga Pērkone-Redoviča has noted when discussing Wajda's influence on Latvian cinema – could not be filmed until 1964, following a Latvian Communist Party Central Committee call for 'new and engaging historical films' (Pērkone-Redoviča 2017: 199). If this delay owed a good deal to the work's controversial focus on the Latvian Legionist divisions formed under Nazi rule to combat Soviet forces, its approval surely owes something to *Ashes and Diamonds*'s

creation of a template for conceptualising anti-Soviet fighters as not simply fascists (as in Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel and earlier proposed scripts based upon it) but as youthful, forgivably misled by superiors, and caught up in a struggle whose definition as 'fratricidal' restored dignity to all parties and brought black sheep back into the family through its quality of tragedy.

THE ART OF COMPROMISE

There are of course differences between the artistic options for states accorded some independence of the Soviet empire and those grafted wholesale into it – a difference in the degree of leg-room within the chains. Thus Miłosz would distinguish states where 'certain valuable cultural activities went on that were impossible in such countries as, for example, the Baltic states which were directly incorporated into the Union' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 167). When considering artists' reactions to political state approval, censorship and self-censorship one may wonder to what degree it may be said of them, as Miłosz did of Gamma (aka Jerzy Putrament), in *The Captive Mind*, that certain artists 'thrived on a strict diet of the doctrine, for "socialist realism" strengthens weak talents and undermines great ones' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 161). Would only the greater talent strongly feel the force of the 'repressed feelings' Miłosz said 'poison[ed] every work' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 238)? Perhaps every other artist within the Soviet sphere inhabited a dilemma that blossomed most acutely in Sergei Eisenstein when making *Ivan the Terrible* (*Иван Грозный*, Russia, 1944/1958), regarding which James Agee speculated that

> he may ... be split between a compulsion to choose the most dangerous theme possible, and virtual paralysis in its development: a paralysis which might be a natural effect of being unable, on pain of death, to say honestly, or even surreptitiously, what you really believe. (Agee 1964: 249)

Such a double consciousness may be one source of the doubling I will discuss shortly. Might inner rebellion, splitting, and hence duality, particularly affect artists in the Baltics, unlikely to be able to adopt Gamma's submission to the 'socialist realist' discipline, as Miłosz also remarks, having grown up there pre-war, that 'there were so few communists in these countries' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 228)? The historically stronger Communist Party presence in a country like Poland rendered possible there a career such as that of Aleksander Ford, in whom any duality was less ideological than aesthetic, taking the form of a move from a pre-war proximity to the avant-garde to post-war realism.

In the case of filmmaking, of course, the likelihood of compromise generating guilt shrinks with the dissipation of individual responsibility, and the proliferation of mythological attributions, within the collectivity authoring any film. One may wonder therefore to what extent Roland Barthes' famous 'death of the Author' (Barthes [1967] 2011) responds unconsciously to the conception of authorship introduced by the cinematic studio, whose resemblance to the Medieval and Renaissance artistic one discloses a paradoxicality and even undecidability in the relationship between collectivism and individualism in the ideology of late modernity. In this context, a mea culpa such as Wajda's post-1989 *The Horse-Hair Ring*, which revisits, revises, and even quotes *Ashes and Diamonds*, is as unusual as his particular power of authorship, though it was arguably particularly fostered by a film unit-based production system such as the Polish one. Otherwise, filmmaking's reduction of individual responsibility could well preclude the more demanding self-criticism voiced in the literary context by Christa Wolf, who critiqued her own début, *Moskauer Novelle* (1961), in a public response to Gerhard Schneider's request for authors' accounts of the genesis of their first works (Wolf 1991). All the same, Wolf's auto-critique, unlike Wajda's, may well presuppose or be haunted by the habit of performing that required

Marxist exercise, the public self-criticism, and hence in a sense still lie within the charmed circle it seeks to escape, albeit inhabiting its outer edges. In either case, a work's redeemability might depend upon a Cabbalistic, Benjaminian reading between the lines whose extreme form is the one Miłosz performs on a letter sent him 'from a family deported from one of the Baltic states in March 1949', whose individual lines' last letters could be read vertically to reveal the message 'Eternal Slave' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 232). As Miłosz's example indicates, such redemption may require not just the allegorical reading so dear to Benjamin and so widely practised by audiences in Soviet-ruled states but a privileging of something on the verge of disappearing, the line-end that could so easily sink into the margin's oblivious snow and not really be seen, simply because readers' knowledge of the word's beginning completed it in advance, hindering attention to its very last element; while all but the most zealous censors could ignore it because it was so near to not being, and such proximity to non-existence acknowledged the system's verdict upon it. Miłosz's mention of 'the spiritual death of people condemned to work hard all day and to swallow the poison of films and television at night' (Miłosz [1953] 1981: 234), indicates that for him at least quite a few texts, particularly ones of the kind concerning us, would need quite a lot to redeem them.

At the same time, though, the multiplicity of the elements comprising a film, however compromised it may be, means that almost every and any one may contain something redeemable, something it is worth digging into the rubble of archives or images to unearth. Just how much may be buried is suggested by Miłosz's own particularly bitter experience with filmmaking in Poland in the immediate aftermath of the war: *Robinson warszawski*, a script he co-wrote with Jerzy Andrzejewski (subsequently, of course, author of *Ashes and Diamonds*) on the basis of Władysław Szpilman's description of his experience in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, underwent

such thoroughgoing changes during production that the result could be called an unmaking or ruination of a scenario the authorities considered too focussed on post-war ruin and not enough on Socialist construction. Indeed, the presence of ruins may be the main lode of truthfulness running through immediately post-war films right up into the late 1950s, providing implicit recognition of a key presupposition of the post-war period's most influential movement, neo-realism, whose abandonment of the studio reflected not only distrust of the realities studios and professional actors can fabricate, but also the physical studio's initially ruined post-war state. The extent of the disparity between the Miłosz-Andrzejewski script and the work that emerged eventually can be inspected through its documentation by Barbara Mruklik (1974: 223–226). Only after 1989, and the collapse of the institutions of politico-aesthetic censorship, could Szpilman's work – though not the Miłosz-Andrzejewski screenplay – be filmed, as Roman Polański's *The Pianist* (France/Poland/Germany/UK/USA, 2002).

EXISTENTIALISM, SELF-DIVISION AND DOUBLING

It is not just the engagement with Marxist thought signalled by a prominent discourse about History that renders Wajda paradigmatic for post-war Eastern bloc cinema; it is also his work's simultaneous dialogue with existentialism, as defined by Michael Hamburger: 'the point at which "the strange institution that is this world" – to use Kleist's words – ceases to tally with any of the systems that have been designed to explain it' (Hamburger 1957: 110). Existentialism became pointedly oppositional by privileging individual choice over collective identification (the collective identification rivalling Marxism, nationalism, being officially forbidden, except as what psychoanalysts would call 'identification with the aggressor', i.e. the Soviet taskmaster, while co-productions with other Warsaw Pact states might be assigned to what Juliet Flower MacCannell calls 'the

regime of the brother' [MacCannell 1991]). Artists' existentialist leanings are hardly surprising, of course, as the writings of the key existentialists (Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus) all included art-works, while Martin Heidegger forged a neologistic and quasi-artistic language Theodor W. Adorno derided as a pseudo-poetic 'jargon of authenticity' (Adorno 1964). Pertinent both to Wajda and other artists influenced by existentialism is the requirement to define the self through a conscious choice of project, the concomitant cancelling of the unconscious becoming officially acceptable by chiming with Soviet Marxism's anti-psychoanalytic thrust. In his case, as in that of other East Central European artists, a desire for a Sartrean choice expressing freedom collides with the State's signposting of one particular road. What results is a traumatic splitting variously haunted at some level by the road not taken, a disposition continually mindful of the self not chosen, a double walking other roads but whose difference can be embodied only implicitly, in others who have chosen differently and whom the State compels one to seem to condemn. Its relation to the self may be suggested implicitly yet explicitly denied. (Consider *Ashes and Diamonds* again.) One's self-condemnation for seeming to condemn will usually be denied consciously, in which case the other may haunt one as an hallucinatory embodiment of conscience, much as in Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson* (1839). If any attempted self-divesting of part of the self can never succeed entirely, any reunification with the other, disavowed, wandering self becomes stunningly problematic in Mirosław Kijowicz's paradigmatic animation *Droga* (Poland, 1971), where the other self left at the crossroads finally converges with the one that went another way to yield a disappointingly misshapen body, its halves now of disparate size.

DOUBLING AND SUICIDE

The double is a shadow that has put on flesh and assumed partial independence of the self it confronts, to which it once was tied. If folklore associates its appearance with imminent death, its contemplation can be one of suicide, which offers the possibility of being outside one's body, looking back on it, asserting an existential freedom by choosing the necessity that is death. The question of suicide had of course been posed by Camus as the primary existential one (Camus 1983: 3) (one surely linked to his own double identity as a French writer from Algeria), while the oeuvre of Kierkegaard poises agonisingly on the verge of a suicide of the aesthetic self in the name of a projected religious one. A relationship between self-splitting, suicide and implicit doubling is apparent in the powerful Latvian melodrama *The Frost in Spring* (*Salna pavasarī*, Latvia, 1955), by Leonīds Leimanis and Pāvels Armands. Although its central female protagonist, the orphaned Madara (Zigrīda Stungure), does not commit suicide until the work's end, when she realises the impossibility of winning back her first love Andrs (Oļģerts Krastiņš), her early agreement to become the second wife of an old landowner places her in the existentially threatened position of doubling another woman, and she herself is doubled later in life by Liena (Mudīte Šneidere), who grows up during the film and wins Andrs' affections. Here it is the passage of time that renders doubling implicit. However, Madara's self-splitting is apparent not only in her vacillation before accepting the rich farmer's (Žanis Kopštāls) hand, but also in her frozen expression during the marriage ceremony, as if she has seen the Medusa, as the sense of death associated with the double enwraps her, as well as in her later tearing apart between love for her son and for Andrs, who she believes will return to her if the son is removed and Andrs can become master of the house. Her disastrous early choice may be conceptualised, in terms of the allegory that is one of my subjects, as one of Ambition over Love; the dividing of the self's house presages *its* ruin. During the wedding ceremony the farmer's order to Andrs to dance with her recognises the doubling between

these two men and seeks to control the threat of death hanging over himself as the older. Here, as in a film such as the German *The Student of Prague* (*Der Student von Prag*, 1913, 1926, 1935), which features an impoverished virtuoso duelling student whose reflection is appropriated by a diabolical intermediary offering him wealth, the duel and the double form one complex, and the killing of the double reveals itself as a suicide.

Suicidal ends of individual and collective military action pervade Wajda's war films in particular, the most obvious examples appearing in *A Generation* (*Pokolenie*, Poland, 1955), and *Samson* (Poland, 1961). Doubling can, of course, be implicit or explicit. In *Ashes and Diamonds*, the doubles remain implicit by virtue of their plurality, partly to reflect the self's paralysis before choice (at the two extremes: should one be a time-server like Drewnowski (Bogumił Kobiela), or intransigently militant, like Szczuka's son?). **(Figure 2)** When implicit, such status indicates that the self has not yet chosen definitively, and may not be able to, underlining the work's own self-chosen primary identity as a realist text, without the element of the fantastic explicit doubling introduces. The temptation of suicide is itself double: despair at the lack of acceptable options is also a weighing of an ending of the tension of prevarication. If even explicit doubling postpones suicide by keeping a self-alienated self hovering within its own orbit, its edge the jagged one of its own shattered reflection, implicit doubling, which obscures the threat to the self and the necessity of choice, does so to an even greater extent. (In Wajda's own case, of course, the last double is Władysław Strzemiński, who clearly represents roads not taken: the painting career eschewed because Andrzej Wróblewski seemed the more effective double, and the abstraction most cinema has eschewed.)

Since Wajda's basic strategies of self-preservation evolve during a period that heightened the danger of choices beyond the officially-sanctioned ones, the doubling (the other's status as a representative of a road not taken) is always implicit. The much later début enjoyed by a filmmaker such as Krzysztof Kieślowski, when the Stalinist danger had ebbed, may have enhanced his ability to practise a doubling that is explicit, even well before the Round Table talks and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the most startling example being *Blind Chance* (*Przypadek*, Poland, 1981, released 1987), which accords a single character parallel, radically different lives. The persistence of danger, however, is apparent in the lengthy shelving of that film, as well as of quite a few of his early documentaries. The difference between Wajda and Kieślowski, quite apart from any personal ones, is that of one and the same situation, but differently inflected by history.

Doubling therefore can be seen as an internalisation, by the eclectic Wajda, both of the different influences upon him and of the potential contradictions of the collective subject that is the author of a film, a feature of his work that may motivate his particular productivity in repeated efforts to resolve it.

DOUBLING, ALLEGORY AND HISTORY

Although Wajda's designation as an artist of the Baroque has long been a critical cliché, it can yield insight through pairing with the idea of doubling and with the Benjaminian account of the allegorical view of History, which in Baroque art always breathes the violence of contradiction, the Alexandrine's recurrent breaking in the middle arguably resembling a splitting of thought's atom to release the dynamism of such interest to both Baroque artists and Marxists. The prevalence of contradiction put the psyche on a war footing. In one intriguing early characterisation of Wajda as double agent, that of Eric Rhode, the tutor contradiction others discerned between a Marxist-socialist position and a nationalist-patriotic one (forget for the moment the potential contradictions within each of those pairings) becomes one between a Marxist and a courtier (Rhode 1966: 172–173). Transferring the idea of contradiction to

stylistics, and to the stylishness central to the courtly life, it may be seen in the way a panning camera movement (sideways or down, but in *Ashes and Diamonds* predominantly down) passes from life's locomotion to a form of death that freezes the image, perhaps thereby reminding Wajda of the dead painter within him, as when Maciek lifts the sheet in the ruined church and the gaze slides down to reveal the workers he assassinated while bungling the first attempt on Szczuka's (Wacław Zastrzeżyński) life. If this is a micro-textual form of the contradiction between Wajda's identities as filmmaker and as visual artist, it is revisited in *Afterimage*. Again and again horror arrests movement: in *A Generation* Jasio (Tadeusz Janczar) finds a barred window blocking his escape at the top of the spiral staircase; in *Kanał* similar bars block the exit from the sewers by Korab (Tadeusz Janczar) and Daisy. In each of these two cases, the assumed linearity of movement bends back to reveal a circular space preventing clear vision of what lies ahead, cutting the tie between vision and locomotion; the shape of movement here is that of History twisting into a futureless labyrinth, monsters stationed cruelly even at its exits. Although Wajda's central contradiction may be posed as one between Marxism and the Baroque (realism and ornament), each of those thought-formations privileges contradiction itself as an engine of dynamism. Meanwhile, the hero is of course chronically caught between opposites, as are the spectacles through which he is viewed, one lens belonging to irony, another to tragedy. This is, of course, the prototypical contradiction of East European cinema identified by Yvette Biró, though I would classify its two modes as co-existent, feeding and frustrating one another dialectically, and not simply successive, as she does (Biró 1983). It is the contradiction between disaster as it feels (from within the individual) and the way it appears from without, which feeds a quasi-existentialist sense of the absurd – doubling can be seeing oneself as the Other sees one. Insofar as this is a version of Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian 'Big Other',

looking down on one (the double as a shadow mockingly able to shrink or enlarge itself so as to elude attempts to grasp it) (cf. Žižek 1989: 92–95, 103–107), suicide may be the name of an attempt to escape its humiliating gaze: a crossing of the border to death.

DOUBLING AS BORDER CROSSING: THE CASE OF TADEUSZ KONWICKI

Doubling can also be cast in terms of a border crossing categorisable as 'going over to the other side', as the self crosses the axis of action and becomes visible to itself. Any hint of betrayal of the unified image of good national subject might be cast by others as treachery in general. In the Polish cultural sphere at least the question of 'treachery' is widely posed, and some of its literary manifestations have been documented by Stefan Chwin (1993). To some extent, such a traditional question is fed by Stalinist-era paranoia about espionage, exacerbated by a climate of thaws and freezes, of challenged, modified and re-established norms. The question 'To which side do you belong?' can also be glossed as 'Were you blown in by history's winds, or is this where you really want to be?' or 'Which (of these doubles) is the real you?'

In the case of Tadeusz Konwicki (born in Lithuania), it is worth noting his agreement to do an interview-book upon learning of its proposer's interest in *Wileńszczyzna*, as well as Jan Walc's contention that the landscapes of Konwicki's books in fact reproduce those around Vilnius (Wilno) (Bereś 2003: 13). Konwicki would tell Stanisław Bereś that although he lived in Kraków and Warsaw, these places meant nothing to him. Even though Konwicki confessed that, unlike his filmmaking colleague Stanisław Lenartowicz, he had lost the ability to speak Lithuanian in the course of his years in Poland, images of his Lithuanian youth and childhood pervade his novels and films. Might the addition of films to novels even follow logically in the course of time, as he begins to lose his Lithuanian, Vilnius becoming in his mind more an image, seen

FIGURE 2. Andrzej Wajda, *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament,* **Poland, 1958).
Maciek hides from his unacknowledged double, Drewnowski (Bogumił Kobiela), with ruins behind them.**

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from a distance, than a soundscape still existing within the head, with the title of the film that resembles his novels most closely – *How Far from Here, How Near* (*Jak daleko stąd, jak blisko*, Poland, 1972) – recording not just a disjunction between Poland and Lithuania but intra-psychic ones between sight and sound and between images arriving unbidden, as in the dream to which film is so close, and ones summoned consciously? If the prominence his work accords Warsaw's unloved Stalinist gift, the Palace of Culture, suggests the city's identification as Bad Object, the not-home mockingly visible from his own balcony, that suggestion is complicated in *How Far from Here, How Near*, whose narrator describes Warsaw as 'our city, sometimes in the middle of Europe, sometimes East European'. When talking with Bereś, he would use the word *wy* (the plural 'you') for addressing Poles (Bereś 2003: 141). He was of course among the Poles transported from Vilnius to Kraków, perhaps part of a process Timothy Snyder has termed the 'ethnic cleansing' of that city by a Soviet regime eager to win Lithuanian loyalty, in the teeth of the primarily Polish and Jewish make-up of its inter-war population (Snyder 2003). One may wonder whether the question of literature/film relationships, one raised inevitably by Konwicki's dual career as both novelist and filmmaker, is relevant here. After all, a film's landscape, although fused with a sign, is also real, unlike a literary one, and so bound to differ from the imaginary one reproduced continually by nostalgic desire, while its studio versions will differ even more patently by admitting their quality of controlled, lucid dream. One may also take the delay in production mentioned earlier as prompting a form of doubling, one self looking back at another. Svetlana Alexievich gives a suggestively similar characterisation of the narratives of female Soviet soldiers she recorded in the 1980s: 'They study themselves, meet themselves anew. Most often it is already two persons – this one and that one, the young one and the old one' (Alexievich [1984] 2017: 131). The question of the recollection of war, accompanied by

an address of the self in and as the second person, is of course as central to Konwicki's works as it is to Wajda's early films, albeit more explicit in Konwicki's case. If the issue of fidelity or treachery may entail a self's questioning of its own narrative's truth to earlier experience, art's metaphorical nature may institutionalise a difference and so protect the storyteller from guilt feelings by making divergence seem inevitable, as may time itself, conceptualised as in T. S. Eliot's statement that 'time is no healer: the patient is no longer here' (Eliot 1970: 41).

Relations between literature and film also concern the question of the degree to which certain things can be aired in the Soviet sphere in the more limited circulation domain of literature, as opposed to that of 'the most important art' (though one should note as a complicating factor that the films of a Konwicki, drawing on art cinema conventions, have a relatively specialised appeal, while such cinema may be permitted officially, even where realist aesthetics are the state's desideratum, to demonstrate the non-oppressive nature of censorship. Inasmuch as Konwicki makes his film début long after his literary one, it can be argued that the mould for his work had been set by literature). Aleksander Jackiewicz, writing à propos *How Far from Here, How Near* (arguably the Konwicki film closest in ethos and aesthetic to his novels), declared that his films have more the aura of dream, his prose: that of reality. For Jackiewicz, given the status of these two arts (by which one presumes he means the relation between their sign-systems and reality), it ought to be the other way around (Jackiewicz 1983: 233). Could one not argue though that a trauma that is genuine may be represented more efficaciously through film than through literature, or experienced by audiences as more authentic in the form of images, as the use of words asserts a comprehensibility and control that sap the sense of helplessness and the overwhelming central to trauma? This contention might be borne out by noting how Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* met with more public affection than Jerzy Andrzejewski's

original novel. If so, does this mean that the time-lapse between the Polish prose dealing with the war, which comes out immediately after it, and the films that come later, determines the relative power of their representations of trauma? And is this why the Polish School in cinema becomes well-known internationally, whereas the novels and short stories had not been? And if the work of Tadeusz Borowski seems to be an exception to this possible rule, may it be because his prose practices a self-denying ordinance by mimicking the procedures of the document (one might say the same of Zofia Nałkowska's *Medallions* [*Medaliony*, 1946]), thereby displaying the features Jackiewicz associates with film? The fact that the novel Konwicki wrote first, about partisan warfare in the woods, *Rojsty* (1947), was not published until 1956, that year of 'Thaw' in Poland, also raises the issue of what can be said when.

AFTERIMAGES:
A LANGUAGE BUILT ON RUIN

In the light of the material considered above, one may well ask whether a viable literary or filmic language can be built upon trauma and ruination. Should this be possible, might that language be one of afterimages – to draw again on Wajda and Strzemiński –, deploying forms of real and imaginary superimposition to do justice to the phenomenon referenced in the English translation's version of the title of Wajda's autobiography: that of double vision (Wajda 1989)?

One example might be the project Chris Marker describes, in *Sans soleil*, as an insertion of images into 'the Zone', a term he chose in homage to Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, that great Soviet film shot in Estonia. Marker's Zone is a synthesiser within which the images of his film's earlier, relatively more conventionally documentary portion go to die and be reborn, rather like the visitors to the Zone in Tarkovsky's film, though in line with the secularism of the Soviet Union, and perhaps also with an intuition of the effects of that state's passing, Tarkovsky's protagonists fear the rebirth they

unconsciously crave. Marker's 'Zone' may be called also a machine for a ruination of images that is also their resurrection, allowing them to be seen doubly. Vision of the ruin is always therefore a double vision, holding it up to the light like a banknote, squinting at it to see within it the watermark that is history. And just as close perusal of the Eternal Slave letter mentioned by Miłosz allows a reading off of its hidden meaning, so earlier images' immersion in the synthesiser's developing fluid in *Sans soleil* demonstrates the possibility of building something else upon the ruined foundations of their documentary function. This is not the reductive transcendence concealed behind the melodramatic figures of socialist realism, but one that is open-ended, its results unpredictable. It is as if Marker subjects his images to a partly-controlled ruination to inoculate them against the less predictable ravages of the war whose past forms his film documents and whose future ones it fears. A double reading such as Marker's re-imagines images as redeemed by their ruination, which means: as always sparking thoughts both of what was and now is – and hence of what might yet be, reconjugation suggesting the redemption of history posited at the end of Walter Benjamin's famous 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' ('Über den Begriff der Geschichte'; Benjamin [1940] 1977). Rather as at the end of T. S. Eliot's
The Waste Land (1922), with its quick-fire assemblage of quotations, ruination becomes redemption, each old image the burst chrysalis of a new life-form (Eliot 1948: 65).

The process is rather like the activation of imagination by ruin described suggestively by Inara Verzemnieks, upon visiting a farmhouse in Latvia once inhabited by her grandmother:

> There's an awful beauty to this moment, arriving, finally, at the scene of one's past and discovering only ruin. And yet, ruin resists simple affirmation, forces us to place questions over certainties, to surrender what we had imagined

had always existed, to ask instead, what if.

What if: the most accurate resurrection of our histories depends not on their preservation, but on their constant, quiet disassembly.

What if: we told ourselves that ruin is really a reclaiming, a natural revision of what's always been assumed.

What if: I had come here sooner. There would have been more for me to see. But maybe less for me to find. (Verzemnieks 2017: 60)

The transformative doubling of images in the Zone suggests the inherent creativity of the memory that so preoccupied Marker (who in this respect appears as still the collaborator of the time- and memory-obsessed Alain Resnais). This creativity is also that of the temporality thematised in *Sans soleil*, so the ruination washing over his images can recall the blotches, scratches and striations coursing through such rescued images as the orphan silent films preserved in the ice of Dawson City and sampled so memorably in Bill Morrison's recent film of the same name (*Dawson City: Frozen Time*, USA, 2016), which at one point reads the striations along one side of the image as a natural outgrowth of the supernaturalist themes of the film on which it is found. **(Figure 3)** The ruin can become the material form of the ghosts haunting Verzemnieks' memoir, much as Wajda's Maciek becomes a ghost, haunting his own story and viewers' recollections, even before its end in his physical death.

One can consider this duality of vision, of temporality, of simultaneous absence and presence, by tapping Jonathan Crary's analysis, in a volume devoted to art and ruins, of the work of Vera Lutter, which he describes as having the effect of 'an uncanny aggregate of places in which we as spectators can never intuit any possibil-

ity of feeling "at home"' (Crary 2011: 170). Such an aggregated quality of place – like the 'double occupancy' Thomas Elsaesser ascribes to European cinema in general (Elsaesser 2005: 108–130) – is of course arguably the definition of the uncanny, the *heimlich* negated by the prefix 'un' unthinking it at birth. One memorable evocation of such aggregation is Rebecca Solnit's account of how she looked down a San Francisco street and

> with a shudder perceived, still present as a phantom, the steep natural landscape that underlay the city, the skin beneath the clothes, the landscape that reappeared amid the ruins of the 1906 earthquake and that someday will reassert itself again. (Solnit 2011: 150)

In the context of the historical shifts of consciousness within countries whose occupiers then left, the events that followed 1989, with the advent of globalisation and an increasing transnationalisation of film production, bespoke a slow dissipation of the briefly renewed belief that one could be fully at home in a national reality or ostensibly national image, a belief rendered even more delusional by these countries' haunting by the ghosts of their Jewish minorities. Assertions of at-homeness, in the teeth of the facts, could then assume a defensive, even hysterically neo-conservative quality. The colonisers' departure precluded the quiet self-confidence that would have flowed from knowing that one had thrown them out. The lack of the strength to do so meant that others could follow, be they those very neighbours themselves, physically departed but still present invasively in the virtuality of cyberspace, or ones as distant as the Yanks the youthful Wim Wenders once described as colonising the German unconscious in *Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf der Zeit*, West Germany, 1976). Amidst the traces, ruins and scars they left, the colonisers' shadow could even recall that of the object falling across the ego in

FIGURE 3. As often in the restored film featured in Bill Morrison's *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (USA, 2016), print damage gives the image an eerie other dimension. Here damage to *An Accidental Christmas* (1912) suggests that the accident the children witness is mysterious, even supernatural.

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the Freudian account of melancholia (Freud [1917] 1950).

Among other things that shadow stood for an impulse the self had hoped would have the insubstantiality conventionally accorded shadows, while its persistence suggested that some of the ideals animating the imposed order, however badly traduced in translation, had had an attractive force prompting some investments in them. For instance, the egalitarian passion associated with socialism had been more than just the youthful folly of pimply Stalinists identifying in imagination with a power their youth lacked, but also materialised after World War II in West European countries that chose it democratically, without Stalinism's rigging of votes. Thus models of 'the captive mind' are too simple, because too simply conservative, and Miłosz's famous title sells short the subtlety of his own convoluted analyses of test-cases who were in fact his contemporaries, sometimes his friends, and always (and not always acknowledged) distorted mirror images, like the doubles in the mirror maze that is *Ashes and Diamonds*. The mind could be captivated too with the duplicitously double lure of utopia and a less innocent Oedipal dethroning of fathers compromised by that unforgiving deity, History. Marxism's secular fusion of theological deities into History, that new super-deity and father of the gods, had the advantage of seeming to follow logically and dialectically, if usually unacknowledged, from the history-focussed religions of Judaism and Christianity, which it might have described as sublated (to use a taboo word, albeit Benjamin's preferred one, 'redeemed') within itself. Ironically, however, theology grew in attractiveness along with the system's inability to fulfil promises whose quasi-religious quality became more and more patent with the continual postponement of the arrival of Communism, permitting religion's later superimposition upon Marxism's ruins, albeit itself as spectral as a cinematic séance, as ectoplasm or the smoke that rises from ruins, as the 'post-secular', in a Zone haunted more by Tarkovsky than Wajda.

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