

The Parallax Memory. Notes on the “Solidarity... Solidarity..” collection

Do you remember how in one of the scenes of *Casa-blanca* Bogart says to Ingrid Bergman: “We will always have Paris?” Well, you will always have Gdansk.[1]

It is in the present that we make a memory, in order to make use of it in the future when the present will be past.[2]

The term “parallax” has several meanings, each of which is related to looking, observing, to the angle of looking and the ensuing consequences. In short: parallax is an error of optical incoherence – although this term has, obviously enough, a more precise definition. In metrology – the science of measurement – parallax denotes the phenomenon of an incorrect reading of the indication of the measuring tool, which results from an improper eye position against the scale. In optics, parallax signifies the process of simultaneous observation of objects which are situated in different distances from the observer and it manifests itself thus: the objects in both images are distanced from each other by a different angular distance or overlap each other on those two images to a different degree. Finally, in photography, the error of parallax denotes the incongruence of the image visible in the lens with the image on the photograph. In each of those instances, parallax itself is elusive – it is only its consequences that are visible. One can merely demonstrate how the phenomena subject to observation move or even vanish.

A parallax quality could be ascribed to memory – some phenomena are preserved by it, other tend to conversion or obliteration. When an event is recalled, it diffracts into several individual reminiscences which could hardly form a coherent story. It is not surprising that contemporary culture – with its predilection to diversity and ambiguity – promotes discourses of memory. More often than not they are intended to undermine “closed” historical judgements – nowadays history no longer possesses ultimate knowledge about the past.

Searching for the application of both categories (history versus memory), Aleida Assman concluded that it is possible to enumerate several differences, which are worth quoting as they will serve as the

Parallax and Memory

[1] Wywiad z Marshalllem Bermanem. *Jak zostać romantycznym marksistą w Ameryce* [Interview with Marshall Berman: *How to Become a Romantic Marxist in America*], “Europa. Dodatek do dziennika Fakt” 2005, no. 47 (23.02.2005).

[2] G. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, Minneapolis 1989, p. 52.

basis for the following analysis. First of all, as far as historiography is concerned, the object of research is the most significant, whereas memory has a clearly determined subject. Secondly, history strictly distinguishes between the present and the past while memory makes no such clear distinction (according to the classical definition of memory, it is the present of the past). Finally, whereas history attempts to be impartial, memory values things.^[3] Even if the above-mentioned distinctions should not raise any objections, some problems appear (one could add: traditionally when memory is discussed) when the concept of “collective memory” – popularised by Maurice Halbwachs in his classic work *On Collective Memory*^[4] – is mentioned.

Paul Ricoeur – who has written extensively on this concept^[5] – believes that collective memory should be used as an operative term, devoid of substantial content. Simultaneously, the author of *Temps et récit* notes that the common understanding of collective memory – supported by institutionalised social practices, such as celebrating anniversaries or public commemorations of crucial events – influences our ethnic and religious sense of identity. Here one of the basic problems related to collective memory arises: the process of its coagulation, the way a certain narrative obtains the status of the dominating or “official” history. Cultural representations of history – such as movies depicting turning points in history – play an important role in this process.

The Movement (Solidarity) and the Movie (Solidarity... Solidarity...)

It could be argued that in the Polish society the memory of Solidarity^[6] exists in two parallel spheres: in the sphere of privacy (via intergenerational storytelling) and in the socio-cultural sphere, as one of the central points in contemporary public debate, which is so entangled in political conflicts and disputes, as well as entrapped in the spider-web of mutual suspicions and accusations. The conflict concerning the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Solidarity, where matters of historical importance were confused with personal conflicts, is a telling example of this state of affairs. The ecumenical character of the official celebrations, which included also artistic performances (commenced with the concert of Jean-Michelle Jarre at the dockyards of Gdansk and crowned with the concert of Jan A.P. Kaczmarek under

[3] I am referring here to her numerous works, especially: A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 1999.

[4] M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago 1992.

[5] P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, Chicago 2004.

[6] Solidarity (*Solidarność*) was an anti-communist social movement which was formed originally as the trade union in 1980. On August 14, the shipyard

workers in Gdańsk began their strike, demanded the rehiring of Anna Walentynowicz (a popular crane operator and social activist), as well as the according of respect to workers' rights and other social concerns). Within days, over 200 factories and enterprises in the whole country had joined the strike committee. Lech Wałęsa – an electrician and a former shipyard worker – has been elected the leader of the trade union and it was he who signed an agreement with the government ratifying many of the workers' demands, including the right to strike; this agreement

the monument commemorating the killed dockyard workers) was supposed to revive the status of August 1980 as national sanctity. Critics claimed that the celebrations tried to encapsulate Solidarity in a dignified, yet lifeless, “museum of national traditions”. They argued that it would be important to the vitality of the events of 1980 not only to recall them, but also to pinpoint all the conflicting issues. In consequence, a group of former delegates of the First Rally of the Trade Union refused to participate in the official jubilee, which evoked resentment of numerous former opposition members. Yet another group organised alternative celebrations, emphasising that the legends of Solidarity allegedly collaborated with political police as secret agents.

The film *Solidarity... Solidarity...* constructed of several shorts, commissioned by Polish Television and conceived by Andrzej Wajda, fitted well with the commemoration festivity. It is a rare instance both in the history of Polish cinematography and in the history of Polish television that a film had its premiere simultaneously on the big screen (31 August 2005, after Jan A. P. Kaczmarek's concert) and on television (TVP – public network). The film has not been widely discussed by critics (the press has published a mere few short mentions) and there appeared no larger publication about it. Shortly speaking, it has been treated as yet another commemorating work which has a chance to be shown once again during another anniversary, but is not worth pondering.

Another reason why the film has been ignored by critics might have been the uneven artistic level of the 13 novellas. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating work in its totality for it is a hybrid – what the stories have in common is the imposed subject. The development of the latter allows one to see the variety of ideas. Some of the authors decided to speak about a single event, somehow connected with the events of August 1980 (for example, an interesting idea on Piotr Trzaskalski's part, who created a story about a craftsman who sells ball-pens, which unexpectedly become extremely popular and desirable on account of the fact that one of those giant pens was used to sign the famous agreement). Other co-authors decided to draw a wider panorama of Polish post-war history. Certain practical exercises made by young authors

came to be known as the August Agreement (*Porozumienia sierpniowe*). Though concerned with labor-union matters, the agreement enabled citizens to introduce democratic changes within the communist political structure and was regarded as a first step toward dismantling the ruling Party's monopoly of power. The government attempted to destroy the union with the martial law of 1981 and several years of repressions, but in the end it had to start negotiations. The Roundtable Talks (*Okrągły stół*) between the weakened communist Party and Solidarity led to

semi-free elections in 1989. Soon a Solidarity-led coalition government was formed and Wałęsa became the first president of Poland ever to be elected by popular vote. Having defeated the communist Party, Solidarity found itself in a role it was much less prepared for — that of a political party — and soon began to lose popularity, mostly because of the government's financial “shock therapy” (*plan Balcerowicza*) which generated much opposition. As of 2006, the Solidarity trade union has some 1.5 million members, but little political clout.

were included in the film – some of them with narrative shortcomings, others presenting the ability to build a coherent story around a simple anecdote. There are also several shorts made by accomplished masters; however, they give the impression of being “notes taken out of a drawer”. There are also documentaries and operations effected on archival materials, as well as interesting experiments involving digital technology.

The formal diversity of particular shorts is, undoubtedly, one of the film’s merits. However, is it accompanied by a diversity of views on history? The fact that as many as thirteen shorts were included in the film allowed one to hope that numerous evaluations and questions would be presented. However, interpretations which can be inferred from them are astonishingly similar, although not identical; apparently we “see the same” but with subtle differences. Are we, then, dealing with “the effect of parallax” here, since it implies a lack of congruence between images which seem to be the same but observed from different perspectives do not overlap?

“Movement-Image” and “Time-Image”

Each of the novellas included in the collection *Solidarity...* *Solidarity...* is a variation on the theme of memory. Thus, it is more than justified to apply to the analysis of this particular film the Deleuzian notion of “time-image” cinema – the concept that could be interpreted twofold: in terms of philosophical inquiry into the nature of human perception of space and time (with references to Spinoza, Bergson, Leibniz and Nietzsche) but also as a set of conceptual tools to rethink aesthetic paradigms of the cinema itself. The latter understanding has been most often applied to the European cinema of the 1960s, with evidence drawn from Godard, Resnais, Marker et al. (the Eurocentrism of the Deleuzian notion as well as its disregard to popular genre films have been thoroughly commented on).

In recent years, however, the “time-image” notion has apparently been treated less literally and utilized to frame so-called “post-classical narration” in world cinematography. David Martin-Jones’ book on the contemporary cinematography serves as an example of that approach[7]. Here, the Deleuzian “time-image” concept is called up to show how certain contemporary films use unusual narrative schemes to negotiate national identity in a time of crisis or transformation (in Martin-Jones’ study, each film is examined in light of a major historical event – including 9/11, German reunification, and the Asian economic crisis) and its impact on individual nations. In this paper, I shall follow this approach by bringing Deleuze’s conclusions into interaction with the current Polish debate on the heritage of Solidarity movement.

[7] D. Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in Narrative Contexts*, Edinburgh 2006.

In spite of the potential opportunities the “time-image” approach offers the subject of memory, *Solidarity... Solidarity...* (taken as a whole) is surprisingly linear in its narrative development. The directors participating in the project shaped their novellas according to the dominant mode of classical narration and thus follow – in most cases – the sensorimotor schema of the “movement-image”. Its figures of imagination (flash-backs, dream sequences, et. al.) were deployed in some novellas, but it is the “spatial” and “linear” image of time that dominates the collection. Only a few contributors decided to give way to devices characteristic of the “time-image”, thus mixing the two forms and passing subtly from “organic” to “crystalline” images.

Among the common features of all the shorts, let us first mention those which are determined by the criterion of absence – and thus certain topics which none of the stories tackles. First of all, an astonishing feature of nearly all the shorts (I am ascertaining a fact here; the following statement is not of opinionative nature) is the fact that they are not ready – or willing – to comment on those aspects of the debate about Solidarity which were being more and more audible in the time preceding the premiere of the film (in particular: the conflicts among former leaders of the union and its alleged failure to introduce social laws once promised). In this respect, it is hardly surprising that the film *Solidarity... Solidarity...* was screened during the official celebrations of the jubilee, although it was boycotted by the organisers of another gathering – the reunion of former workers – which was referred to as “independent”. Second of all, taking the number of shorts into consideration, it is striking that so many elements or experiences of the time of Solidarity are missing, e.g. the emigration of the 1980s; (in Jan Jakub Kolski’s short the protagonists hear about the August events, while in Italy – however, they are on holiday and not in emigration. The protagonist of Jacek Bromski’s short speaks about his wife’s emigration, but after a while it turns out that his story was a lie). Moreover, nearly all the shorts show the “Solidarity carnival” exclusively from the Polish perspective, Krzysztof Zanussi’s short being the only exception (he mentions the uneasiness of the American Ambassador caused by the information that tanks had appeared on the market square in Krakow – it turns out that it was just a staging prepared for a biographical film about Karol Wojtyla *From a Far Country*, 1981).

When comparing the novellas, three criteria seem particularly significant – I will describe them within the aforementioned semantic frames of the concept of “memory”. The first criterion applies to the relationship between the author and the audience – particularly to the questions which determine this relationship: what is the role of the author and does the short film assume the existence of an ideal, “the appropriate” audience, to whom the story is addressed. Secondly, I will ponder over the historiographic frame – the realm of events, which support the memory. Finally, the third criterion applies to the axio-

logical sphere, which reveals the evaluating attitude to Solidarity and to the changes initiated by it. In the case of each of the criteria thus expressed, we are dealing with diverse functions – and diverse aspects – of evoking the past.

The First Parallax: the Author

From among thirteen directors participating in the project, three had decided to appear on the screen. Andrzej Wajda talks about his *Man of Iron* (1981) with Krystyna Janda, Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz (both of whom starred in the movie) and Lech Wałęsa; their conversation intertwines with excerpts from the original film. A similar concept was employed by Zanussi; his novella is composed of shots of the director himself (in a television-like manner – facing the camera – he reminisces about the events of 1980), several shots from his movie *From a Far Country* and scenes showing its production (archival footage from the set, as well as documentary reconstructions). The strategy applied by Zanussi is a classic example of recreating the past by means of procedures that belong to the regime of the movement-image: the flashbacks detour time only to restore a linear causality with even greater effectiveness. As Rodowick notes:

The recollection-image is not the proper subjective correlate for the direct image of time because actual and the virtual are contrasted and discernible. It «actualizes virtuality» by plumbing strata of pure memory, seeking out an image from the past through which to represent itself. In this manner, the recollection-image is discernible from the actual image inspiring it. It is itself an actual image, or rather, an image in the process of an actualization inspired by and completing a search initiated by the originating image. The flashback describes a circle of memory restored – an originally actual image dives into the past to restore the sequence of images that led ineluctably to it.[8]

In Zanussi's novella this impression of linearity – and the definite completion of past events – is intensified by the director's voice-over: from the first scene it reminds the spectator that subsequent images will illustrate actual events that were successfully completed in the past.

The physical presence is marked differently in a novella directed by Kolski. His short story – showing three young cave miners trapped in Italian mountains in August 1980 – concludes with a significant coda. It consists of several short takes which show the actual participants of the incident (among them – the director himself) 25 years after it occurred. The resemblance between the protagonists of the story and their “prototypes” (emphasised by costumes) reveals that the “present” is in fact repeating the events of the previous segment. Autobiographical hints appear in Andrzej Jakimowicz's short as well – the viewer's attention is drawn to a kid who witnesses the illegal distribution of leaflets from a speeding train; here the intergenera-

[8] D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, Durham 1997, p. 91.

tional connection between the author and his protagonist is suggested by means of a simple trick (a long close-up taken at the end of the novella).

Amongst the novellas gathered in the collection, it is Małgorzata Szumowska's contribution that most consistently resembles the "time-image" concept. In Szumowska's short, time keeps on forking and stretching, and thus forming itself into a "recollection-image" – an actualisation of a virtuality that does not give us the past "but only represents the former present that the past «was»." [9] Here, the flow of female protagonist's memory – images of childhood stability: the garden, the father, the neighbours – is blended with recollections from the post-1989 period, the time when she entered adulthood. The actual (the "objective" world) and the virtual (images of memory) interweave: "at the level of descriptions, the actual refers to the states of things – the physical and the real – as described in space through perception. The virtual is subjective, that is, mental and imaginary, sought out in time through memory." [10] Yet the effect of indiscernibility – the inability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary – is disrupted by the protagonist's voice-over. It appears as an act of memory whose will is to link past and present and thus unravel the vagueness that should have remained unexplained.

Merely a few authors participating in the project "Solidarity... Solidarity..." decided to include some information concerning historical events after August 1980 in their shorts. Presenting the genesis and evolution of this social phenomenon in ten minutes, and at the same time avoiding the danger of using the poetics of a popularised scientific essay, is a daring enterprise indeed. Ryszard Bugajski faced this risk in his contribution, which took the form of a video-clip to a song whose lyrics, delivered in rap aesthetics, utilise simple rhymes, as if taken out of a rhymester's notebook. The visual side of the video-clip is much more interesting; it comprises two independent narrative lines. The first of them is constructed of archival materials and constitutes a kind of *curriculum vitae* of Solidarity, an account of Polish history from the 1960 up to the present. The clip presents fragments of speeches given by Władysław Gomułka and Edward Gierek (the Polish communist party leaders), recognisable images representing Martial Law, intermingled with the photographs of the opposition leaders, such as Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Bronisław Geremek, but also their future opponents: Antoni Macierewicz, Andrzej Gwiazda, and Anna Walentynowicz. Despite this fact, Bugajski's short can be incorporated into the established canon of depicting Solidarity: there is no mention of conflicts or fractions – yet the lyrics of the song indicate that the unity of the movement already belongs to the past.

The Second Parallax: the Events

[9] Deleuze, op. cit., p. 54.

[10] Rodowick, op. cit., p. 92.

The other narrative line consists of images of the main railway station in Warsaw – the passengers are waiting for the departure of a permanently delayed train called “Solidarity”. In Bugajski’s novella, the space of the railway station has been transformed into a stage where an allegorical performance dealing with contemporary (post-1989) Polish history is being held, while the past is evoked by found-footage film clips inserted into the narration. Yet, this dichotomy is torn apart in an ambiguous shot revealing a group of miners on an escalator – the diegetic status of that shot seems unclear: a realistic motivation could be identified (for instance: “a delegation of workers has arrived in Warsaw”), but it is also possible to read these images as unexpected flashbacks that blend with the present. This impression is intensified by the specific lighting effects: some of the anonymous characters (as we can guess: those who were engaged in the Solidarity movement in the year 1980) are distinguished by Bugajski with a visual stigma – milky light surrounding their silhouettes. In this way, though perhaps too blatantly, Bugajski implies a historical division within Polish society: whereas “the angels of Solidarity” are clearly wronged – therefore, Bugajski draws our attention to the fact that the commitments of “Solidarity” concerning the defence of the rights of workers have not been fulfilled as well as to the disintegration of the community, whose matters were supposed to be taken care of by “the invisible hand of the market”. The singer confesses: “I don’t know what I was fighting for, and time does not heal this wound/ I don’t know what I had played for/ but I feel I have lost”. The meanings encapsulated in this short might be summarised in the following way: Solidarity had fulfilled its historical role, as it became the spur of change. However, the changes acquired their own new dynamics and, as a result, Solidarity degenerated. It grew out of the authentic protest of the working people, and it started a fight on their behalf. With time, it departed from its noble mission and became a convenient starting point for cynical activists and politicians.

In Bugajski’s novella, the noble dignity of the first years of Solidarity intermingles with the bitterness of disillusionment evoked by its dissolution after 1989. A different, although equally critical vision is to be found in Jacek Bromski’s short. While Bugajski models his novella so that it resembles a chronicle of the opposition against the communist state, Bromski fails to provide concrete facts enriched by found footage, but instead revises the historical process (commonly known as “enfranchisement of nomenclature”), which can be reconstructed thanks to the information included in the dialogues. Here the participants of the transformations are contrasted more firmly: the protagonist is a start-up entrepreneur, a former oppositionist who wants to use the argument of “long-time friendship” in order to get a credit from a bank president – his former prosecutor, who previously demanded strict sentences for political defendants. The president is a Mephistophelian character, indeed; he tempts, but also mocks the

former oppositionist – now a petitioner, who is filmed in such a way as if he was being interrogated again. The message is clear: those who spurred all the changes are still dependant on those whom they attempted to restrain. Polish cinematography has covered this variant of the story about the changes after “the Round Table” several times. “The revision of trauma” undertaken by Bromski – the repetitive ritual of humiliation – seems to acquire the form of a peculiar masochism. For the protagonist of this story humiliation is not only something remembered, but also experienced again and again, this time in post-1989 Poland.

A different approach to the changes after the year 1989 is best visible if we compare two shorts (by Jerzy Domaradzki and Feliks Falk) which both make use of distinctive symbols of the movement: In Domaradzki’s novella the wooden plates with the strikers’ postulates written on them have been chosen as the construction line of the story; Falk uses the board with the word “Solidarity” inscribed on it. They both staged historical events and they both, though differently, decide to show the manifestations of the former events.

In the case of Domaradzki’s short, the need to affirm the myth and romanticise “the founding period” of Solidarity is evident. The affirmation seems obvious in a scene which resembles the style of classic propaganda films, where the August postulates (however, symptomatically, only some of them!) are delivered by actors, who play workers, but are subsequently substituted by the actual participants of those events: Arkadiusz Rybicki and Maciej Grzywaczewski (on account of the smooth texture of the image, as well as of a characteristic *mise-en-scène*, the scenes in which they appear resemble an election spot). It is in this novella that the “official” mythology of Solidarity has been reflected in the most obvious manner – the past has become institutionalised and subject to a pedagogical treatment (shots depicting a history lesson in an elementary school).

Falk employs different tactics. The conclusion of his novella can be inscribed into the tendency of presenting a “betrayed” and “relinquished” revolution and, simultaneously, retains the most significant ingredients of canonical thinking about Solidarity. Hence, history is presented in a similar way to Domaradzki’s short; however, the evaluation of the past is different. This discourse is conveyed with a help of props – a board with the inscription “S”, which, initially, is an involuntary witness of historical events and later is thrown away onto “the rubbish dump of history” (which is not only shown, but also highlighted by a commentary).

It has been extensively commented upon that the distinguishing mark of “movement-image” cinema is time spatialised and rendered to become a straight line by the mediating influence of the protagonist’s body and its sensory continuity, whereas the “time-image” conceives time as a virtual and expanding whole, which the protagon-

The Third Parallax: the Appraisal

nist has no power to influence. David Martin-Jones summarizes Deleuze's notion in the following words:

The cinema's previous privileging of the protagonist's motor reaction to sensory data is replaced in the time-image by an emphasis on the movement of time itself. Time now appears in a pure state, in a «pure optical situation», in which the protagonist can only visually record time's passing.[11]

Falk's novella exemplifies the deficiency of this formula – in the stories centered around objects which are becoming leitmotifs, the sensori-motor link is admittedly suspended, but it does not necessarily mean that the “protagonist” (the prop – in the analysed cases) becomes dislocated from the linear continuity of spatialised time.

Robert Gliński returns to the dockyard as to a symbolic space in, probably, the best short included in the film. The positive symbol of Solidarity is here degraded in a twofold sense: through institutionalisation of the space, which is here reduced to the rank of a tourist attraction, and via physical degeneration – we can see a world which congealed into permanent crisis, a devastated and neglected space. The ramshackle buildings, remnants of the dockyards, contrast with traces of the glorious past (a voice-over from archival materials) and inscriptions, ironically evoked by Gliński: “We shall not surrender” (on a wall) or “Solidarity today / success tomorrow” (on the door of a small grocery). Tourists visiting the dockyard are shown round by a uniformed security employee, who talks about the events of 25 years ago in his bad English. Few words are spoken, even fewer in Polish. The participants of the August events do not get their chance to speak about their complaints and expectations – they seem, therefore, to be “mute witnesses” of the narration. Such an interpretation is suggested by the closed structure of the short: in the first scene we can see a cyclist riding between the ramshackle factory buildings; his face is not visible (by the way, almost the entire short was made using panoramic frames); when in the closing scene a coach full of tourists leaves the dockyard, the cyclist rides in the opposite direction, with a can of milk hanging down the handle-bar.

The intruding sounds of August '80 in Gliński's contribution are neither imaginary nor purely objective:

[S]ince the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past.[12]

[11] Martin-Jones, op. cit., p. 22.

[12] Deleuze, op. cit., p. 81.

One can say the sounds in Gliński's novella are echoing the past and thus bringing it "back to the future", or rather: penetrating the present involuntarily and randomly in order to re-create the object. Similar to Deleuze's mnemosigns or recollection-images, they fall within the framework of the sensory-motor situation, whose interval they are content to fill, even though lengthening and distending it; they seize a former present in the past and thus respect the empirical progression of time, even though they introduce local regressions into it.[13]

Japanese tourists from Gliński's film are a trope which, obviously enough, might be read as an ironic allusion to "the second Japan", once promised by Lech Wałęsa. A similar allusion appears in Juliusz Machulski's auto-thematic short, which was rightly placed at the beginning of the film – it is distinguished not merely by its interesting, auto-thematic idea but also by the fact that it uses a different approach to history and evaluation criteria than the shorts mentioned earlier. A producer explains to his screenplay writers plans connected with a film project about Solidarity: "There's no money involved, but it's a prestigious assignment". The writers, though, specialise in TV commercials and are not willing to accept this commission. Desperately trying to convince his associates to get involved in the project, the producer poses the question: "Try to imagine how Poland would look like if Solidarity never occurred." An amusing vision from the sphere of "political fiction" follows: it shows Poland which still suffocates in the mist of communist absurdity. This vision, however, is interrupted by the entrance of an Asian take-away delivery boy. What he delivers is sushi, which turns out to be the answer to the question: "What did Solidarity give to Poland?" Therefore, Machulski simultaneously depicts various consequences of the changes: the cynical attitude of people who juggle with historical politics as well as the outcomes of the commercialisation of film culture, the possibility to take advantage of the blessings of globalisation, and economic polarity.

The narrative premise of this novella is simple: the past and the present are implicated not only in terms of what actually happened, but what could have happened. The realms of the socialist state are presented neither as a flashback nor as a "time travel", but as an alternative vision of the present. These scenes constitute a "parallel universe" which exists in a virtual state, and become actual as a result of the political rejection of Solidarity. Of course, the consequences of this rejection have a profound influence on the protagonists' lives, especially on the heroine's (thus, the process of re-evaluating the social roles attributed to gender is underlined – in the "communist" version of the present, the female screenwriter is no longer the liberated woman from the opening of the novella).

The Inevitability and its Discontents

[13] Ibidem, p. 273.

According to Deleuze, the time-image destroys the dominance of a single, linear time – and thus counters the conception expressed by the movement-image, which marginalises or eradicates from the frame every notion of “not-necessarily-true” time:

The image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and the same time. The past does not follow the present that is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in the mirror.[14]

Is this reasoning sufficient enough to interpret Machulski’s novella in terms of the “time-image”? Not necessarily: while it is true that the narrative of this novella questions the “straight-line” idea of time, the viewer is not invited to challenge the labyrinth structure. As Rodowick points out, “beyond the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, falsifying narration poses inexplicable differences to the present and alternatives to the past whose truth or falsity are undecidable”[15] – whereas the narrative of Machulski’s novella is equipped with hints that suggest the minor importance (or: fictitious status) of the “parallel universe” sequence: the colour (blurred and grainy picture) and the performance (“overacting” at the verge of parody). These devices are more typical of the movement-image cinema which is founded on the presumption that the viewer needs to be fully informed about the status of the events: whether they constitute a coherent diegetic construct or are to be treated as a subjective “mind-screen” that should not be confused with the main plot.

Machulski’s novella may be viewed as evidence of the contemporary transformation of mainstream cinema which is more likely to deploy stylistic patterns once typical of the “time-image” narration. In *Sushi*, the potential of these devices has not been fully realized. Nevertheless Machulski’s novella sets in motion the possibility of a different approach to history – an approach which does not imply either closing history in archives or an obsequious account of events. Rejecting the teleology of history and the belief in the existence of finite facts, Machulski’s short makes us aware of the discrepancy between the “present” and its potential variant. If we place Machulski’s short within the debate about Solidarity, *Sushi* would serve an argument in favour of those historians who object to the dominance of a “canonical narration about Solidarity”. It is on this condition only that a vivid contact with history could be enabled and, as a result, new procedures of making sense of contemporary times might be established.

It would take a study ten times the size of this one to bring out the possibilities of each of the components of the *Solidarity... Solidarity...* collection. The comparison of the novellas proves that the events of August 1980 and its consequences have been approached as a stable, tightly-closed “age of martyrs” which is hardly susceptible to

[14] Ibidem, p. 79.

[15] Rodowick, op. cit., p. 86.

reinterpretations. The differences between each of the novellas are of a parallax – rather than substantial – nature. Surprisingly, only Szumowska chose to transfer her individual experiences into the sphere of public remembrance and simultaneously abandon the pattern of an “action-image”. It is even more striking that it was Machulski alone who decided to challenge the “straight-line” version of history. None of the novellas, however, revealed a willingness to fully open up to “past”, or – in other words – to apply the cinematic potential to re-create a memory. Therefore, if weariness with the subject of Solidarity, as well as the end of the debate concerning its socio-political results, is detectible on the horizon, it is only possible with a reminder that the horizon is, in fact, a parallax line, which recedes as we approach it.

The preliminary version of this paper
has been published in Polish in:
Kino polskie: reinterpretacje,
red. K. Klejsa, E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska,
Kraków: Rabid 2008.