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Introduction

The story of Andrzej Wajda's famous and celebrated movie *Man of Marble*¹ has been told many times before by critics and the director himself, but the voices of the censors, who undoubtedly played an important part in the fate of the movie have, to date, not been heard. This article explores these previously unheard voices by investigating the unpublished memoirs by Stanisław Kosicki, Chairman of the Main Office of Press, Publications and Public Performances Control (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy i Widowisk) from 1973 to 1990 as well as unique documents from his private archive.

Censorship tends to be described as an outcome of the weakness of the totalitarian system which is established by the ruling minority in order to maintain power. Therefore, censorship is portrayed as a desperate means of oppression; typical for the countries in the state of decline. This was not the case in either post-war Poland or the post-revolution Soviet Union. In both cases censorship was established along with the new political system and from its start was an integral part of it. However Jane Leftwich Curry (1982, p.116) argues that the most developed system of external control existed in Poland, where the Communist Party was the weakest among the countries in Eastern Bloc. Curry's argument does

¹ *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*), dir. Andrzej Wajda, screenplay Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski, 1976, Poland.

not question the fact that censorship had accompanied the establishment of the Communist system from the beginning, but rather undermines the effectiveness of propaganda and censorship as one of its instruments. In Poland and the USSR censorship should be seen as a forecast of political changes. Censorship was established when new governments were in an initial phase of gaining the power, but did not disappear when they become more stable. The process that took place seems to be the opposite of the common belief presented above: along with the strengthening of the state came more severe censorship and at times of relative liberalization the censorship was less oppressive. Therefore the existence of the censorship is not a sign of the system's weakness, but its integral aspect. Censorship was a part of the political system both in Poland and the USSR and the significant changes in that system were accompanied by changes in censorship. Any change in government or change in the policy required an alteration in the directives that influenced censorship and its decisions; hence the state controlled censorship was a very precise and accurate mechanism that was sensitive to even very minor change. Stalinism, Khrushchev's thaw, Brezhnev's freeze and Gorbachev's glasnost as well as the 'Polish months' of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1980 and 1981 influenced censorship and the way it operated.

Censorship in Poland and the USSR originated from the totalitarian nature of the state that attempted to control every aspect of social life and so the life of every citizen. Although officially censorship was institutionalised, in reality it was not limited to one administrative body but was overwhelming and omnipresent and could be detected in any aspect of cultural and artistic life. The significant place of censorship in the system of oppression is described by Martin Dewhirst when he refers to the 'three headed

monster' that controlled Soviet society, whereby Glavlit (the Soviet office responsible for the censorship) was situated next to the Communist Party and KGB (Dewhirst 2001, p.186).

Film censorship in the post-war Poland

The introduction of post-war Communist censorship in Poland had many stages. From the beginning the idea of its existence and the way it was supposed to operate was copied from the Soviet Union. As early as November 1944, Piotr Gladin and Kazimierz Jarmuż, two employees of Glavlit, arrived from Moscow to advise the Polish Committee of National Liberation (proclaimed in a Manifesto on 22 July 1944) on the matters of censorship (Nałęcz 1994). The Committee was established with the help of the Soviet government and consisted mainly of Polish Communists. In August 1944 the Censorship Department in the Ministry of Public Security was established and in January 1945 it was renamed as the Central Office for Press, Publications and Public Performances Control. In November 1945 the office received yet another new name and a different classification in the administration: it became known as the Main Office for Press, Publication and Public Performances Control (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, GUKPPIW) and was under the authority of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. The official decree that specified the role of censorship was issued on 5 July, 1946. GUKPPIW, subordinate to the Council of Ministers, was responsible for the implementation of law that was created by the Central Committee of the Party. Although GUKPPIW appeared to be the most important organ of state censorship, in reality it had no power to introduce or change any directives. Officially, GUKPPIW was the final authority on the

ensorship matters, but in practice important decisions were reached at the level of the Central Committee of the Party.

In the beginning Polish censorship was organized similarly to Glavlit, that is it was closely connected with the Ministry of Public Security (which was in charge of the political police and internal intelligence unit- Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, renamed in 1956: Służba Bezpieczeństwa -III Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). However it was advised by the authorities that the regional branches would be established in the regional Party Committee offices rather than the political police buildings. This was done in order to avoid possible connotations with the police, which might otherwise have suggested that censorship belonged to the apparatus of oppression. For the same reason the GUKPPiW was officially subordinate to the Council of Ministers. At the end of the 1970s, when the first unofficial publications started to circulate in Poland, closer cooperation between the political police and the GUKPPiW was again suggested as those who organized illegal printing were under close police surveillance. But this raised adverse criticism of the GUKPPiW. This undoubtedly shows, however, that although censorship *was* a part of the oppression system and helped to maintain control over the nation, it was important for the authorities to maintain the GUKPPiW's image of being a 'regular' administrative body. Furthermore, censorship was not limited to the GUKPPiW and as the fate of Andrzej Wajda's film *Man of Marble* proves, censorship implemented in a less official way could be regarded as equally severe.

Control over films in Poland after War World II was officially established in 1945, with the set up of the National Enterprise of Polish Film (Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe Film Polski) [see Machwitz, 1999]. In the 1940s and 1950s, until the 'thaw' in 1956,

the Party's Central Committee was in charge of cinematography and, just as in the Moscow Kremlin, films were watched attentively by members of the Politburo themselves, sometimes along with the First Secretary. At that time, censorship was concentrated on screenplays and scripts, so that the production of potentially controversial pictures was difficult, if not entirely impossible. However, starting from the mid-1950s the situation began to change and the deputy minister of the Ministry of Culture was in charge of cinematography.

The first required stage of control was the acceptance of a twenty-page treatment; next came the finished screenplay (like the treatment, this was submitted to the Ministry of Culture); third, supervised production took place; the final stage was *kolaudacja* – the pre-release screening of the film.² Only at this final stage were there official representatives of the main censor's office present and only here were they allowed to make comments. Bodies, such as film units (all of those involved in the film industry were grouped into film units), could also be involved in the process of the unofficial censorship and managed the censorship process prior to the final stage. The transcript of the *kolaudacja* meeting, where the movies *Palace Hotel* (*Palace Hotel*, 1977) by Ewa Kruk and *Co mi zrobisz jak mnie złapiesz* (*What Will You Do When You Catch Me?*, 1978) by Stanisław Bareja, were discussed, appeared in the underground journal *Zapis* (A.B 1979). This document gives fascinating accounts

² The commission consisted of: Ministry of Culture representatives, where necessary representatives of the Ministry of Education; representatives of artistic societies; writers, critics and censors. All parties were equally entitled to express an opinion about the movie, and the censors were charged with recommending whether and what kind of changes should be made, if the movie should be released without restrictions or with restrictions – for example, in a limited number of copies, for a limited time, only in so called art houses (*kina studyjne*). In charge of the commission was the deputy minister in the Ministry of Culture, which had oversight of cinematography. His decision was final. After his decision, and based on the commission report, the Main Office of Press, Publications and Public Performances Control was obliged to issue an authorization for release, or what became known as the 'censor's visa' (*wiza cenzorska*).

of how movies were criticised and assessed and how ideology and artistic aspects of creative work were juxtaposed in order to justify the decision of rejecting the movie and condemning it, more often than not, to oblivion.

Man of Marble vs. authorities

Man of Marble (*Człowiek z marmuru*, 1977) tells the story of the stachanovite worker, bricklayer Mateusz Birkut, who becomes disillusioned with the political and social system in the post-war Poland and simultaneously the film describes the art of making movies in the 1970s. It is achieved by narration conducted on two levels: Birkut's life story is told in retrospect by a young film school graduate, Agnieszka, who is conducting research for her documentary. Agnieszka meets people who knew Birkut, discovers his life story and at the same time begins to understand the difficult truth about Stalinist Poland. Mateusz Birkut, a simple young man from the country, gets a job as a bricklayer, but as he starts to be more and more effective in his job he is also used for propaganda and becomes the symbol of the new era. After the accident on the building site, he becomes disillusioned with the new reality and gradually loses his privileged position as well as his family.

The film dealt with historical issues, which could be controversial in the eyes of the authorities. First of all, *Man of Marble* was a brave attempt to describe the history of Poland in the 1950s and, most importantly, the story of the working class without the common propaganda simplifications. Second of all, the movie described the struggle of the filmmaker trying to convey his creative ideas in spite the net of unofficial censorship and overwhelming bureaucracy.

Bearing in mind the situation described above and the many stages of official and unofficial control and censorship at work, it is no surprise that the story of the movie *Man of Marble* started many years before its official release. The *Man of Marble* screenplay waited for fourteen years to become a feature film – the script was first published in the literary journal *Kultura* in August 1963 but, because of the Party officials' disapproval, it could not be produced immediately. It must, however, be stressed that it was not an official body, such as the Main Office of Press, Publication and Public Performances Control, that banned the production. Rather, the movie was doomed to failure by unofficial 'friendly' advice and interference from the authorities. As has been mentioned above, GUKPPiW was the final and only official stage of the censorship, but unofficial censorship operated at the earlier stages of film control, such as editorial boards, artistic societies or simply amongst colleagues. Censors also noted this phenomenon and sometimes just the very fact of the existence of censorship triggered either self-censorship or other unofficial 'advice' given to the filmmaker before his work reached GUKPPiW. Just being aware of the censorship was in many cases enough and so works which reached censors often required minimal interventions. This phenomenon of the many stages of the unofficial censorship was also noted by Stanisław Kosicki, who was in charge of the Main Office for almost twenty years. Kosicki argues that watching almost every movie produced caused problems for his office, and he insisted on introducing a change whereby censors were only required to read screenplays instead of watching the film, but '[...] leading filmmakers were unwilling to agree to this change. For them censorship was less unbearable than bureaucracy in the Ministry' (Kosicki 2005). Feliks Falk, one of the leading directors of the Cinema of Moral Concern

confirms Kosicki's opinion that the Ministry was much stricter and more bureaucratic than the actual censors (Rubenstein 1984).

However, censorship's role was not limited to censoring the finished film but also operated after its release. Censors sought to influence public opinion about the film by banning unwanted reviews, yet encouraging those which would help to secure the desired reception. The difficult social existence of the *Man of Marble* was described by Andrzej Drawicz in the underground literary journal *Zapis* (Drawicz 1978). The movie was officially ignored by the critics and newspapers but triggered strong interest from the audience. Drawicz was interested in the phenomenon of Wajda's work – the film that received 'special attention' from the authorities and yet contrary to their demands and efforts to minimize the range of the audiences, became a 'must see movie' before its release and was soon elevated to legendary status.

Nevertheless giving suggestions to critics on positive or negative reactions was not the only the role of censorship. As Józef Tejchma, Minister of Culture between 1974-1978 and then 1980-1982 noted in his memoirs from 10 December 1976 regarding the reception of the *Man of Marble*: 'Suggestions to critics: outline that the main character – stachanovite, in spite of all harms, does not turn his back on Poland as it is, but continues to work for it' (Tejchma 1991). This does not mean that Józef Tejchma objected to the production of the film. On the contrary, he was simply searching for a reason that would be acceptable by the authorities as to why the movie *should* be released. Andrzej Wajda, on his official website, confirms that the movie owed its success to the enthusiastic and persistent behaviour of the viewers as well as open-minded Józef Tejchma:

Fourteen years passed. What follows sounds like a fairy-tale, but it was true. The generally hated Gomulka was

deprived of his position as First Secretary, taking the cult of the fifties with him. His successors were younger politicians, former ZMP members, and we began negotiations with them from scratch. Józef Tejchma took full responsibility for *Man of Marble*, and it is only owing to his influence that the film was made and, more importantly, released. In spite of protests from various rungs on the decision-making ladder, *Man of Marble* was released (Wajda 2000).

The audience did the rest. Quotes from Tejchma's memoirs and Wajda's internet site describe the complex situation of artists in post-war Poland. The authorities, in general, were unable to deal with their art and struggled to place it in the political system of propaganda. It is true that Józef Tejchma supported the making of the *Man of Marble* and its release, but at the same time he played the role of the Party's official, trying to influence critics and the reception of the film so as to potentially minimise its real meaning and significance. In this situation Tejchma acted in a dual role: as a person truly capable of understanding the art and the artists' need for, however relative, creative freedom, and as a state official, struggling to secure his own and his superiors' interests, in this case to prevent an already turbulent social situation from being exacerbated.

The positive decision allowing the movie to be produced was announced to the director himself by Minister Tejchma on 03 February 1976 and *Man of Marble's* premiere took place on 22 February the following year (Tejchma 1991). Mieczysław Wojtczak, deputy Minister in the Ministry of Culture in charge of cinematography (from 1973 to 1977), saw the film for the first time in 1976 and started to negotiate changes with Wajda and Ścibor-Rylski (author of the screen play) in order to make it more 'bearable' for the censors. The artists nevertheless were reluctant to consider any possible changes (Wojtczak 2005). Before the pre-screening Wojtczak had a private conversation with Stanisław Kosicki who

confirmed that the censors would be critical towards the film, but would allow it to be realised (Wojtczak 2004). Also Minister Tejchma had the possibility to see *Man of Marble* on 2nd November before the official premiere (Tejchma 1991).

Another interesting fact worth mentioning can be found in the memoirs of Stanisław Wojtczak, where he describes briefly a screening of *Man of Marble* organized exclusively for the employees of the Soviet Embassy in Warsaw. The goal of this special screening was to present the film before it became a politically sensitive subject that might even cause political and international scandal. After the screening a telegram with a positive opinion about the movie was sent to Moscow and it stopped possible future negative reactions from the Soviet authorities regarding the movie (Wojtczak 2004). As mentioned, the interest of the authorities was exceptional and even unusual measures were taken in order to eventually make the first public screening possible.

Behind the closed doors

The fascinating behind-the-scenes account is given by Stanisław Kosicki in an unpublished statement written in 1990.³ This can be supplemented with documents from Kosicki's private archive which includes the classified letter sent by Stanisław Kosicki to the Polish Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz, in which he explains the problems concerning the release of Wajda's film.

³ Stanisław Kosicki wrote this document as a letter to the editor of the weekly journal *Polityka*, inspired by the critical commentary preceding the presentation of *Man of Marble* on television. The editor promised to publish Kosicki's text if he agreed to make some changes to it. Kosicki refused. In 2003 he tried to send this text to another weekly, *Przegląd* – again no one was interested in this fascinating document and its author, who had remained silent since 1990. Ironically, Kosicki himself was censored twice – both times after the collapse of Communism in Poland.

In general, the censors, as such, made a few minor comments, leading to amendments on *Man of Marble*. One involved cutting out one frame, in which a monument to Lenin could be spotted among other monuments in the National Museum's warehouse. Some minor changes were also made to the dialogue. After these changes had been made, official permission (censor's visa) to release the movie was issued. Some amendments were also suggested by Minister Tejchma. In his opinion the final scene involving the Gdansk cemetery (where the main character's grave is located) needed to be changed as it could be obviously associated with commemorating tragic events that took place in the December of 1970. Furthermore, scenes involving state security police were to be toned down and the sentence 'what hideous architecture,' referring to Nowa Huta city but easily associated with Lenin's monument standing in this town, should be removed. The scene where Birkut, the film's protagonist, breaks the state security police office window with a brick that he had earlier received as an award for his achievements, should also be changed. As a result this particular scene remained, but was cut short (Tejchma 1991).

According to Stanisław Kosicki, before the film was presented to a wider audience, a rather unusual thing happened. Kosicki received a telephone call from the Prime Minister, who asked what decision had been made regarding *Man of Marble*. The Prime Minister had watched the film along with a number of other officials, and he expressed clearly to Kosicki his opinion that film should be banned. According to Kosicki, the Prime Minister seemed very firm on the matter (Kosicki 1990). Kosicki organized a further showing in his office, and afterwards wrote an official letter to the Prime Minister in which he defended his earlier decision. In response, the Prime Minister accused Kosicki of insubordination and disrespect

towards a superior (in formal terms the censor was directly subordinate to the Prime Minister). A few days after their first conversation the Prime Minister called Kosicki again, but this time signalling a change of mind. He no longer wished to ban *Man of Marble*. His change of mind may have been influenced by Kosicki's argument. However, Wojtczak suggests that the Prime Minister's opinion was changed by the influence of his wife (a journalist) who had more liberal approach (Wojtczak 2004).

Stanisław Kosicki had argued in his letter that all possibilities of pushing Wajda to make further changes had been exhausted, and that, therefore, banning the film in the existing political climate would do more harm than allowing its restricted release. Kosicki gives the impression of being not so much in favour of the film as anxious about the consequences of stricter action on the part of the censors. The ideological and social content of the movie was unacceptable for the authorities within the existing political climate. It was released just a few months after the 'Radom events' of June 1976 (general strikes) and the establishment of the first open opposition organization, the Workers' Defence Committee in September of the same year. In the letter Kosicki assured the Prime Minister that reviews of the movie would be thoroughly checked, and only those of which guaranteed the desired reception would be published. The evidence of the moves made to ensure this can be found in the New Act Archives: a classified document dated 17th February 1977 (AAN) stipulated that all reviews must be approved by the Party's Central Committee Office for Press, Radio and TV, and that no detailed information about the premiere be allowed. Such high-level approval – rather unusual in itself – proves how important *Man of Marble* was for the authorities.

The consequences which followed the release of the movie were not only suffered by the director but also by the authorities involved in supporting the film. Minister of Culture, Józef Tejcma, was dismissed and his deputy in charge of cinematography, Stanisław Wojtczak, was accused of losing control over the film industry (Wojtczak 2005). This demonstrates that the case of *Man of Marble* was not an artistic but a truly political matter.

What was really so dangerous about the *Man of Marble*, the simple story about devoted and then later disillusioned workers? Why did it take such a long time to finalize the release of a film about one man's fate that symbolically portrayed the fate of the troubled nation? Was the subject inherently rebellious or did it just tackle inconvenient social and historical problems? Is the story of the *Man of Marble* an example of typical director-censor-authorities relations in Poland after War World II? First of all, as has been mentioned, the political circumstances and social climate at the time of its production and release added a new dimension to the film. More importantly it is not only a film about 1950s Poland seen from a distance of more than 20 years, it is a film about making a film in the late 1970s. *Man of Marble* indirectly tells its own story of the meanderings of unofficial censorship, the direct and indirect relations between the people involved in making the film, and their struggle to tell the truth about reality. And in this respect *Man of Marble* was not acceptable to the authorities – it revealed one aspect of the political system, the problem of the limitation on artistic freedom and of the turbulent relationship between the artist and the state. That is why its release had direct and serious political consequences.

The example of the fate of *Man of Marble* shows how the mechanism's of official and unofficial censorship co-operated, and that the Main Office of Press, Publication and Public Performances

Control, nominally the only body in charge of censorship, was technically the ultimate or penultimate (before Central Committee of the Party) link in a chain of repression, the main responsibility of which was to sanction and execute decisions already reached elsewhere.

Conclusion

Preconceptions about film censorship in Central European countries should be revised. Only a small amount of the censors' activity involved the cutting out of scenes, an activity which, otherwise, seemed to be their principal business. To a far greater extent censorship was engaged in attempts to influence and fabricate public opinion. Therefore the question remains: is it possible to research the reception of art in Poland if the opinions expressed publicly, and reviews in general, were subject to actions on the part of the censor? Are they in any sense a reliable source of information? Unpublished documents written by Stanisław Kosicki show how sensitive and difficult the position was for the censorship authorities, especially in the case of Wajda's film. However, while there were no clear, explicit reasons to ban the film, the atmosphere surrounding topics raised by *Man of Marble* was sensitive and controversial. The censorship office was a place where many interests collided; hence it is very difficult to judge and condemn the office and its employees. The ambiguity of the state patronage system manifested itself in the context of Wajda's film. One could argue that in many ways this was rewarding for the artist as he was allowed to develop his artistic ideas and was not obliged to limit the budget or take future profits into consideration (as long as his ideas were 'politically correct,' or at least their lack of correctness was not revealed until the pre-release

screening).⁴ Undoubtedly, in this difficult situation Polish cinema in the 1970s and 1980s was able to achieve very high intellectual and artistic standards, but at the same time, as Andrzej Wajda put it in 1975, 'the art of making a film in Poland is the art of constantly giving up' (Hammer 1975).

Jerzy Fedorowicz in his satirical essay 'Let us love the censor' challenges the concept that censorship can in any way be beneficial for artists (1985). He admits that it can help to maintain the standards of satire, but argues that, in general, it is its worst enemy. In the situation where censorship exists the audience is concentrated on the task of solving the puzzle, therefore the satire does not have to be funny but has to give pleasure in the task of deciphering 'subtexts' (Fedorowicz 1985). It creates a very dangerous situation: what is being expected from literature or film is not a real artistic quality. Quality, therefore, is measured by the amounts of tricks that are employed to deceive the censor. For that reason, an audience may value the art less than the political subtexts contained therein. The representatives of censorship not only fulfil their professional duties of cutting out certain parts of a text, but try to look at a text in the way it might be interpreted by a reader, in an attempt to foresee public reaction. It proves that the divide between the reader and the censor is not, in fact, so sharp. Furthermore, when the artist thinks about the reception of his work he includes both the reader or spectator *and* the censor into his consideration, hence it can be said that the author takes his pleasure in outwitting the censor. The censor, at the same time, tries to outwit the author by discovering his veiled intentions and also the reader/viewer as he anticipates the possible reception. In the situation described above, the destructive

⁴ Marek Piwowski's legendary debut in 1970, *The Cruise (Rejs)*, was not based on a submitted script, and rumour had it that there was no script at all, but that this was no obstacle to the film's production.

influence of censorship on art is evident, because the artistic quality is no longer the most important notion. In some situations, any communication between the writer and the reader through the agency of the censor yields additional information about censorship. The writer communicates the existence of censorship and the limitations it imposes through having to apply various artistic devices and techniques, such as Aesopian language, to 'smuggle' in the meaning of his work. In 1988 Wajda described this struggle as such:

The crucial problem of political cinema is not to accept or reject interference by the censor but to create work that makes the censor's methods inoperable! Only what stays within the range of the censor's imagination can be censored. Create something really original and censors will throw away all their scissors and mumbo jumbo (Wajda 1988) .

And that is the fact: in *Man of Marble* Andrzej Wajda definitely succeeded in outwitting censorship, making a film that has remained a true masterpiece of Polish cinema.

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