

INSTITUTIONAL CENSORSHIP OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILMS DURING MARTIAL LAW IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND (1981-1983) – A LEGAL AND A HISTORICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: *This article analyses source documents in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw regarding the creative freedom of documentary film directors. The author of the text reviewed the documents prepared by the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances during the martial law in Poland in the years 1981-1983, taking into account the historical context (breakthrough events in Poland related primarily to the birth of Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", with Lech Wałęsa as its leader) and the legal context (the issue of fundamental rights declared in the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic adopted by the Legislative Sejm on 22 July 1952). The text also considers the ideological framework and the conditions of the Polish political system during the period under review. The article fills a gap in the scholarly literature on the history of Polish cinema in the early 1980s, with particular emphasis on the period of martial law.*

Keywords: *censorship, Polish People's Republic, the July Constitution of 1952, martial law in Poland (1981-1983), Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity"*

Rezumat: *Cenzura instituțională a filmelor documentare în timpul Leii Marțiale în Republica Populară Polonă (1981-1983) – o abordare juridică și istorică. Scopul acestui articol este de a prezenta o analiză a materialelor documentare din Arhivele Noilor Documente din Varșovia privind libertatea creativă a realizatorilor de filme documentare. Autorul examinează documentele elaborate de Oficiul Principal pentru*

Controlul Publicațiilor și Spectacolelor în perioada legii marțiale din Polonia (1981–1983), luând în considerare atât contextul istoric – evenimentele de cotitură din Polonia, asociate în special cu apariția Sindicatului Liber Autonom „Solidaritatea”, condus de Lech Wałęsa – cât și contextul juridic, inclusiv drepturile fundamentale declarate în Constituția Republicii Populare Polone, adoptată de Seimul Legislativ la 22 iulie 1952. Articolul abordează, de asemenea, cadrul ideologic și condițiile sistemului politic din Polonia în perioada analizată. Lucrarea umple un gol în literatura de specialitate privind istoria cinematografului polonez din prima parte a anilor 1980, cu accent special pe perioada legii marțiale.

INTRODUCTION

Documentary film is one of the three basic types of film (along with feature film and animated film) that should present a fragment of reality with the least possible interference from the director.¹ The term ‘documentary’ used by John Grierson (for the first time in February 1926 in a review written for the New York “Sun”) means giving “a creative treatment of actuality,”² therefore, the documentary film uses rhetorical techniques to convince the viewer of the vision of the world promoted by the filmmaker. Documentary films can thus be described as a living art form. According to Bolesław Matuszewski (Polish pioneer of cinematography), celluloid film is much more than a historical document; it is part of history – a history that, thanks to recording, does not die.³

Sebastian Ligarski, associated with the Institute of National Remembrance (a Polish state research institute whose one of the tasks is to investigate crimes committed, among others, during the communist period) in Szczecin, in his publication noted that the regime that gained power in Poland after World War II with the support of the USSR intended to use culture to achieve the so-called “government of souls” among the average people (the masses). Scientist

¹ Mirosław Przyłipiak, *Poetyka kina dokumentalnego* [The Poetics of Documentary Cinema], Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Wydawnictwo Pomorskiej Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004, p. 49-50.

² Ann S. Utterback, *The Voices of the Documentarist*, in "Journal of the University Film Association", 1977, Vol. 29, no. 3, p. 31.

³ Grażyna Szelągowska, *Film w warsztacie historyka: uwagi na marginesie pracy Piotra Witka, Kultura, film, historia: metodologiczne problemy doświadczenia audiowizualnego* [Film in the historian's technique: remarks on the margins of Piotr Witek's work, Culture, film, history: methodological problems of audiovisual experience], in "Kwartalnik Historyczny", 2008, Vol. CXV, no. 1, p. 63.

expressed the opinion that many scholarly publications concerning film in the People's Republic of Poland have appeared in recent years. However, according to Ligarski, there is a particular gap in scientific research. There is a lack of scientific literature on the cinema of the 1980s, especially the period of martial law.⁴ Censorship existed throughout the Soviet Bloc.⁵ Still, in the Polish People's Republic, it was put to a particular test due to the numerous dissidents (at a time when the countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance were experiencing severe economic crises).

It's important to remember the significance of the events of the first half of the 1980s (so-called "carnival of Solidarity" and martial law),⁶ for Poland, and ultimately for the world. Therefore, the history recorded on film by Polish documentary filmmakers has a broader cultural significance. There is no doubt that events in Poland directly influenced political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. After a wave of worker strikes in August 1980, the Polish authorities began to consider imposing martial law. The regime intended to suppress social tensions, including in creative circles, which sensed they were witnessing an inevitable turning point (this feeling also undermined self-censorship). Above all, the authorities feared the democratic movement. The symbol of the changes became the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", in which Lech Wałęsa played a leading role.⁷ Martial law (officially in effect from 13 December

⁴ Sebastian Ligarski, *Twórcy, władze PRL, безпеka. Raport o stanie badań 2014–2022* [The Creators, the PRL Authorities, the Security Service. Report on the State of Research, 2014–2022], in "Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość", 2022, Vol. 40, no. 2, p. 31–34.

⁵ Amei Wallach, *Censorship in the Soviet Bloc*, in "Art Journal", 1991, Vol. 50, no. 3, p. 75–83; Ágnes Kiss, *Censorship Revisited*, in Florian Kühner-Wielach, Michaela Nowotnick (Eds.), *Aus den Giftschränken des Kommunismus. Methodische Fragen zum Umgang mit Überwachungsakten in Zentral- und Südosteuropa* [From the Poison Cabinets of Communism. Methodological Questions on Dealing with Surveillance Records in Central and Southeastern Europe], Regensburg, Friedrich Pustet Verlag, 2018, p. 233–270; Catriona Kelly, *Beyond Censorship: Goskino USSR and the Management of Soviet Film, 1963–1985*, in "Slavonic and East European Review", 2021, Vol. 99, no. 3, p. 432–463; Janis Sapiets, *Extolling the Party: Soviet broadcasting – censorship or responsibility?*, in "Index on Censorship", 1982, No. 11 (5), p. 14–15; Ionuț Suciu, *Censorship and Mystification in the Romanian Documentary During the Communist Era*, in "Social Sciences and Education Research Review", 2017, No. 1 (4), p. 136–148.

⁶ Andrzej Paczkowski, Malcolm Byrne (Eds.), *From Solidarity to Martial Law: The Polish Crisis of 1980–1981*, Budapest, New York, Central European University Press, 2007.

⁷ Andrzej Paczkowski, *Stan wojenny i "powojenny": od grudnia 1981 do stycznia 1989* [Martial law and "post-martial": from December 1981 to January 1989], in Krzysztof

1981 to 22 July 1983, although suspended on 31 December 1982) – introduced in violation of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic – was a dark period for Poland's cultural creators.

This was felt primarily by documentary filmmakers, whether they were associated with state studios (The Documentary Film Studios in Warsaw, The Educational Film Studio in Łódź, The Karol Irzykowski Film Studio) or independent student groups (e.g., The Academic Film Club “Small Palace” in Wrocław). This was important because censorship prevented the screening of documentary films, which often depicted the activities of workers' and agricultural movements, i.e., those representing social classes whose interests the authorities of the Polish People's Republic allegedly cared for.

In preparing the text, the primary method was the analysis of archival files. A review of the documentation (from the period of martial law) collected in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw (Poland) allowed for the formulation of critical remarks regarding the alleged creative freedom in the Polish People's Republic. The author also analysed the content of official journals issued by administrative bodies (primarily the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland and The Polish Monitor) to show the law in force during martial law. To bring Poland's history closer to a foreign recipient, a literature review was necessary.

This article aims to show how state authorities interpreted the rights of citizens enshrined in the July Constitution, guaranteeing creative freedom – specifically in documentary filmmaking – while highlighting breakthrough moments in Poland's history. It is also vital to examine how the law enacted in the Polish People's Republic affected the dissemination of documentary films. It may also be interesting to know what content the censorship tried to eliminate in the first place. The results of the archive research presented in this text clearly confirm the topics that institutional censorship primarily sought to destroy. By analysing monthly institutional censorship reports, the author sought to fill the gap identified by Sebastian Ligarski.

The Polish People's Republic is often viewed by Poles who lived in this country as “the happiest barrack in the socialist bloc”. Many people think that the regime wasn't that bad. Filmmakers have used cinema as a tool to mock reality (especially director Stanisław Bareja in his comedy films and series), and censorship accepted this. This suggests that, in the Polish People's Republic, the

artistic community had limited autonomy.⁸ However, it seems that the documentary was a more serious category. Perhaps Jarosław Jakimczyk is right with his critical approach, suggesting that the regime's apparatus of repression was in fact an "art critic and curator of art in the Polish People's Republic."⁹ In this context, the motivations of the creators of the documentary films that were subject to censorship, including the intentions of the directors, are essential. This text sheds some light on the discussion on this matter.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF CITIZENS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND – IDEOLOGY VERSUS REALITY

The Constitution of the Polish People's Republic, adopted on 22 July 1952 following the Soviet model, has been amended many times, including in 1976.¹⁰ The general law was written in Newspeak, i.e. the artificial language of propaganda. The Constitution did not precisely define the manner of exercising power in the state, nor did it provide appropriate mechanisms (institutions) to guarantee freedom and civil rights.¹¹ Due to the place that fundamental rights and obligations of citizens were given in the supreme law of the 1950s, there is no doubt that they were of secondary importance to the principles of the socialist state.¹² As indicated in Article 73 of the July Constitution (as

⁸ Ewa Toniak, *Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe "Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych" jako narracja o PRL* [The 'Fine Arts Workshops' State Enterprise as a narrative about PRL (People's Poland)], in "Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych", 2015, No. 9, p. 107.

⁹ Jarosław Jakimczyk, *Najweselszy barak w obozie: tajna policja komunistyczna jako krytyk artystyczny i kurator sztuki w PRL* [The happiest barrack in the camp: the communist secret police as art critic and curator in the Polish People's Republic], Warszawa, Agencja Wydawnicza i Reklamowa "Akces" Robert Nowicki, 2015.

¹⁰ Zbigniew Witkowski, *Konstytucja – zbiór dogmatów ideologicznych czy zarys granic sprawowania władzy w państwie: wagi w kontekście pojęć konstytucji pisanej i faktycznej* [Constitution – a set of ideological dogmas or an outline of the limits of exercising power in the state: importance in the context of the concepts of a written and actual constitution], in Hanna Suchocka, Rafał Świergiel, Michał Przychodźki (Eds.), *Konstytucja rzeczywista a konstytucja pisana w Polsce* [The actual constitution and the written constitution in Poland], Toruń, Towarzystwo Naukowe Organizacji i Kierownictwa – Stowarzyszenie Wyższej Użyteczności "Dom Organizatora", 2022, p. 10-13.

¹¹ Paweł Borecki, *Tworzenie Konstytucji PRL* [Drafting of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic of 22. July 1952], in "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne", 2008, Vol. LX, no. 1, p. 164.

¹² Adam Szymaniak, *Prawa obywatelskie w konstytucjach z 1952 r. i 1997 r. Analiza*

amended), citizens of the Polish People's Republic had the right to use "cultural achievements and to participate in the development of national culture creatively."¹³ It was to be implemented through the development and provision of access to cinemas, community centres, and clubs, and through comprehensive support and stimulation of the cultural creativity of the masses and the development of creative talents in cities and villages for working people.¹⁴ According to Article 75 of the July Constitution, the Polish People's Republic was to foster the development of art that expressed the nation's needs and aspirations and corresponded to the best progressive traditions of Polish creativity.¹⁵

However, "progressive traditions" were implicitly linked to the regime's ideology, which viewed creativity primarily through the prism of class struggle. For this reason, freedom was illusory, as it was possible only as long as it did not conflict with the ideology in force at the time. In cases of violations of fundamental freedoms and rights of citizens by state authorities, the supreme law did not even provide for appropriate formal guarantees, i.e., procedures, institutions, or mechanisms that could be activated in such situations.¹⁶ The Polish People's Republic supposedly guaranteed its citizens freedom of speech, and the realisation of this freedom was to be achieved by providing the working people and their organisations with, among other things, means of communication and other necessary material resources (Article 83 of the July Constitution).¹⁷

porównawcza [Comparative analysis of civic rights in the Constitutions of 1952 and 1997], in "Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny", 2001, Vol. LXIII, no. 3, p. 32; Andrzej Bisztyga, *Wolności i prawa jednostki w stuletniej perspektywie polskiego konstytucjonalizmu* [Freedoms and rights of the individual in the hundredyear perspective of Polish constitutionalism], in "Przegląd Prawa Konstytucyjnego", 2021, No. 4 (62), p. 162-163.

¹³ *Constitution of the Polish People's Republic adopted by the Legislative Diet on July 22, 1952*, transl. by Barbara Kielar, Warszawa, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1978, in <https://biblioteka.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1976-r8.html> (Accessed on 05.11.2024).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Anna Frankiewicz, *Wolność w sferze sztuki i nauki według Konstytucji Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej z 1952 r. oraz Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 1997 r.* [Freedom of expression in the realms of art and science according to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland of 1952 and the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997], in "Studia Erasmiana Wratislaviensia", 2010, No. 4, p. 234.

¹⁷ *Constitution of the Polish People's Republic adopted by the Legislative Diet...*

The Decree of 12 December 1981 on the introduction of martial law provided for the temporary suspension or restriction of fundamental rights of citizens defined in the July Constitution and in other laws or international treaties.¹⁸ The regime's authorities no longer intended to maintain even a pretence. According to the decree mentioned above, the distribution of the image (film) required, as a rule, permission from the authority's controlling publications and performances. The President of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances – with the consent of the Chairman of the Council of State and the Prime Minister – could issue an ordinance specifying the principles and procedure for granting permits, and also had the right to exempt certain shows from the obligation to obtain the required permit (Art. 17 sec. 3 of the Decree on the introduction of martial law).¹⁹

It should be strongly emphasised that the decree on martial law was issued by the Council of State, which in December 1981 had no authority to do so, even under the law in force at that time.²⁰ Furthermore, in a genuinely democratic state governed by the rule of law, the principles of operation of public authorities and the extent to which the freedoms and rights of persons and citizens may be restricted during martial law shall be specified by statute. For this reason, the Decree of 12 December 1981 on the introduction of martial law and its implementing act (one of many), i.e. the Ordinance of the President of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances of 12 December 1981 on the rules and procedure for granting permissions for the distribution of publications and performances and the procedure for using printing plants, devices and apparatus during martial law were repealed by the Act of 29 August 2002²¹ that entered into force on 26 October 2002. Only then, after more than 20 years, were the issues surrounding martial law resolved democratically.

¹⁸ Aleksandra Bagińska-Masiota, *Prawne podstawy cenzury prasy w okresie stanu wojennego w Polsce (1981-1983)* [Legal grounds of press censorship during martial law in Poland (1981-1983)], in "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne", 2014, Vol. LXVI, no. 2, p. 192-193.

¹⁹ Dekret z dnia 12 grudnia 1981 r. o stanie wojennym (Dz.U. 1981 nr 29 poz. 154) [Decree of 12 December 1981 on the introduction of martial law (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 1981 no. 29 item 154)].

²⁰ Janina Zakrzewska, *Ocena podstaw prawnych stanu wojennego* [Assessment of the legal basis of martial law], Katowice, Śląski Instytut Naukowy, 1990, p. 8-10.

²¹ Ustawa z dnia 29 sierpnia 2002 r. o stanie wojennym oraz o kompetencjach Naczelnego Dowódcy Sił Zbrojnych i zasadach jego podległości konstytucyjnym organom Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz.U. 2002 nr 156 poz. 1301) [Act of 29 August 2002 on

INFORMAL AND FORMAL CENSORSHIP

Censorship in the Polish lands undoubtedly existed during the partitions before 1918.²² Forms of interference by state authorities were also present in the Second Polish Republic,²³ especially after the May Coup in 1926.²⁴ As a result of World War II, political forces came to power in Poland that criticised the Second Polish Republic but also referred to the Soviet model (people's democracy). In fact, the citizens of the People's Republic of Poland were prevented from exercising their constitutional rights and freedoms. This was reflected in the activities of the control authorities, which, in many cases, limited citizens' rights to use the achievements of culture and freedom of speech. It is also difficult to recognise that the censorship bodies were guided by concern for the development of literature and art.

Censorship, which was under state control in Poland, took the form of state authorities' supervision of information (including cultural and artistic) intended for dissemination. Censorship – during the period of an oppressive political system striving to introduce Soviet-style communism in Poland – was preventive, i. e. it eliminated undesirable content even before it was played on television or cinema or at any other event.

The regime-controlled film production, beginning with interventions at the project submission stage and extending to shaping the finished films, particularly in the sensitive section of documentaries.²⁵ The work had to carry the right tone and ideological message. The authorities were therefore afraid of

martial law and on the competences of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the principles of his subordination to the constitutional bodies of the Republic of Poland [Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2002 no. 156 item 1301]].

²² Jerzy Bafia, *Prawo o cenzurze* [Censorship Law], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1983, p. 14.

²³ Barbara Majewska, *Analiza interesariuszy polskiego rynku filmowego* [Analysis of stakeholders Polish film industry], in "Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Częstochowskiej. Zarządzanie", 2017, Vol. 25, no. 1, p. 143-144.

²⁴ Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Meandry i paradoksy międzywojennej cenzury filmowej w Polsce* [Meanders and paradoxes of interwar film censorship in Poland], in "Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication", 2016, Vol. XVIII, no. 27, p. 63-86; Michał Pietrzak, *Reglamentacja wolności prasy w Polsce: 1918-1939* [Rationing of press freedom in Poland: 1918-1939], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1963.

²⁵ Marek Hendrykowski, *Jak likwidowano polską szkołę filmową* [How the Polish Film School was liquidated], in "Kwartalnik Filmowy", 2018, No. 103, p. 128.

images that showed not only history but also the present (as shown in the following part of this text). Censorship in the People's Republic of Poland became a broad concept. The regime's state created an entire system of institutions and individuals, linked and collaborating with each other in formal and informal ways. In reality, according to Zbigniew Romek, the front lines of censorship included editors, internal reviewers of artistic enterprises, various commissions or programming committees, scientific councils, qualification committees, and other such bodies. Their task was to plan film production and evaluate submitted productions, not only in terms of their content.²⁶

The authorities expected these groups to critically examine the work and issue an opinion on its socio-political implications within the prevailing ideology. The state government required the film community to engage and actively participate in the process of censoring free speech. If a group refused to fulfil its role as the primary censor (self-censorship), the office or relevant party organs issued warnings. If this did not bring the desired result, the leadership of the film institution was replaced, and the offending individuals were dismissed.²⁷ Therefore, films were subject to multi-level scrutiny and oversight by various bodies,²⁸ with the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances (commonly abbreviated to: GUKPiW) often serving as the last resort.

The Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances (commonly abbreviated to GUKPPiW) was established by a 1946 decree.²⁹ The name of GUKPPiW was changed in July 1981 to the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances. The GUKPiW was subordinated to the Council of State, which also created district offices for one or more voivodeships. The

²⁶ Zbigniew Romek, *Kilka uwag o aktach cenzury jako źródle historycznym* [Some remarks on censorship acts as a historical source], in "Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały", 2004, Vol. VI, p. 194.

²⁷ Emil Sowiński, *Pod upadającym nadzorem. Cenzura filmów polskich w latach 1986–1989* [Under Collapsing Supervision: Censorship of Polish Films 1986–1989], in "Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication", 2024, Vol. XXXVII, no. 46, p. 262–263.

²⁸ Mariusz Mazur, *Cenzor jako współautor* [Censor as a Co-author], in "Kwartalnik Filmowy", 2008, No. 62–63, p. 335.

²⁹ *Dekret z dnia 5 lipca 1946 r. o utworzeniu Głównego Urzędu Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk* (Dz.U. 1946 nr 34 poz. 210) [Decree of 5 July 1946 establishing the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 1946 no. 34 item 210)].

district offices were headed by directors appointed and dismissed by the President of the Main Office.³⁰ This article was written, among other sources, based on monthly reports from GUKPiW, which also took into account information from district offices.

Since 1981, it has been possible to appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court against the decision of the GUKPiW.³¹ However, in the course of the proceedings before the administrative court, only the legality of the decision was examined by the Supreme Administrative Court, which assessed the compliance of the contested decision with the content of the act and with other legal provisions to the extent specified in the Code of Administrative Procedure. The judges did not verify the substance of a case; only the procedure – i.e., compliance with the applicable rules for issuing such decisions – could be assessed. The court was unable to carry out evidence in this regard. It should be emphasised that during martial law, the basis for interference in documentary films was the Act of 31 July 1981 on the control of publications and performances, as well as the legal acts of 12 December 1981: the decree on martial law and the ordinance of the President of the GUKPiW.³² The latter of these legal acts provided, inter alia, that the decision to refuse a permit was final and could not be appealed to the administrative court. In practice, this provision changed the content of the applicable Act of 31 July 1981, especially Article. 15 sec. 1-4. In fact, this meant repealing part of the applicable act by the ordinance, i.e., a lower-level legal act issued by the state censorship body in the Polish People's Republic. Censorship most often referred to the above-mentioned Act of

³⁰ *Ustawa z dnia 31 lipca 1981 r. o kontroli publikacji i widowisk* (Dz.U. 1981 nr 20 poz. 99) [Act of 31 July 1981 on the control of publications and performances (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 1981 no. 20 item 99)].

³¹ *Ibid.*; Kamila Kamińska-Chełminiak, *Institutional Censorship in Relation to Catholic Press during the Decline of People's Republic of Poland (1989–1990)*, in "Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica", 2016, Vol. 37, no. 7, p. 222.

³² *Zarządzenie Prezesa Głównego Urzędu Kontroli Publikacji i Widowisk z dnia 12 grudnia 1981 r. w sprawie zasad i trybu udzielania zezwoleń na rozpowszechnianie publikacji i widowisk oraz postępowania przy użytkowaniu zakładów, urzędzeń i aparatów poligraficznych w czasie obowiązywania stanu wojennego* (M.P. 1981 nr 30 poz. 278) [Ordinance of the President of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances of 12 December 1981 on the rules and procedure for granting permissions for the distribution of publications and performances and the procedure for using printing plants, devices and apparatus during martial law (The Polish Monitor 1981 no. 30 item 278)].

July 1981, which stated, among other things, that using the freedom of speech and printing in publications and performances, it was not possible to:

- call for the overthrow, insult, ridicule, or humiliate the constitutional system of the Polish People's Republic;
- violate the constitutional principles of the foreign policy of the Polish People's Republic and its alliances;
- engage in war propaganda;
- incitement to commit a crime or praise it.³³

As Bolesław Michałek stated in the early 1970s, the Polish school of documentary films, compared to the rest of the world's production, had become a unique collection of artistic works because it was able to combine social commitment with poetic value.³⁴ Less than ten years later, the same Polish screenwriter and film critic expressed the opinion that: "documentary art (...) is an instrument of searching for significant themes, dramas and social situations in the grey, fuzzy reality that surrounds us. To find them, it's not enough to have just a camera and photosensitive tape. Sensitivity, commitment, and worldview are essential."³⁵

However, in the People's Republic of Poland, especially during the period of martial law, filmmakers were hindered by the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances, which interfered with the production of documents, significantly restricting the freedom of culture and art. The activities of the control body affected directors regardless of the organisational form in which they implemented their projects.

THE DOCUMENTARY FILM STUDIOS IN WARSAW

According to the information contained in the Polish censorship materials for February 1982, after repeated verification, the following short films, made by the state-run company, Documentary Film Studios in Warsaw (in Polish:

³³ Ustawa z dnia 31 lipca 1981 r....

³⁴ Anna Sobolewska, *Paradoksy dokumentu kreacyjnego. Fikcja i niefikcja we współczesnym filmie dokumentalnym* [The paradox of documentary filmmaking. Fiction and nonfiction in contemporary documentary], in Maryla Hopfinger, Zygmunt Ziątek, Tomasz Żukowski (Eds.), *Między sztuką a codziennością w stronę nowej syntezy (1)* [Between art and everyday life towards a new synthesis (1)], Warszawa, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016, p. 138.

³⁵ Bolesław Michałek, *Notes filmowy* [Film notes], Warszawa, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1981, p. 150.

Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych w Warszawie), were not allowed to be shown during the period of martial law:

- “Od Nowa” (in English: “Renewal”) directed by Marek Drażewski (born Andrzej Marek Drażewski). The film presents reality through the events in the shipyard, in the context of “Solidarity” activities. The Polish censors did not like the fact that the director recorded conversations and discussions, during which, among other things, it was stated that there were nurseries, but above all for the children of militiamen and military men. In addition, the 1981 film quoted workers who felt deceived and claimed that the Polish United Workers' Party “had promised the moon.” However, after one “renewal,” another comes. After every revolution of the workers, another comes. Thus, the film titled “Od Nowa” posed a particular threat to the regime, especially during martial law;
- “Hokus-pokus”³⁶ (in English: “Hocus-pocus”) directed by Witold Starecki. The main protagonist of the documentary film (1981) is a prestidigitator who discusses his life experiences. Speaking of the mechanisms of recruitment to the communist party (persuading, agitation, etc.), he compares these activities to prestidigitation manipulations;³⁷
- “Narodziny Solidarności”³⁸ (in English: “The Birth of the Solidarity”) directed by Bohdan Kosiński. The documentary film shows the climate, the preparatory activities and the organisation of the strike. The action takes place, among other places, at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980. The director also presents the last stage of the workers'

³⁶ The film is available at: <https://35mm.online/en/vod/documentary/hocus-pocus> (Accessed on 10.11.2024).

³⁷ Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982 w czasopiśmie, publikacjach nieperiodycznych, utworach literackich, programach estradowych i rozrywkowych, filmach, serialach, wystawach. Opracowania, rozdzielniki. Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, sygn. 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3914 [Monthly information on interferences made in the period of January-December 1982 in magazines, non-periodic publications, literary works, stage and entertainment programmes, films, series, exhibitions. Studies, distributions. The Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances, the Archives of New Records in Warsaw, ref. no.2/1102/0/7.4.5/3914], p. 21.

³⁸ The film is available at: <https://35mm.online/en/vod/documentary/the-birth-of-the-solidarity> (Accessed on 10.11.2024).

struggle for the registration of Independent Self-Governing Trade Unions "Solidarity" (in the Voivodeship Court in Warsaw);³⁹

- "Wzywamy Was"⁴⁰ (in English: "We summon you") directed by Bohdan Kosiński. The film is a report on the ceremony in December 1980 to unveil the Monument to the fallen Shipyard Workers 1970, near the entrance no. 2 of the Vladimir Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. Witnesses of the December 1970 events (workers' protests in Poland caused by an increase in the retail prices of meat, meat products and other foodstuffs, brutally suppressed by the militia and the army, which led to several dozen victims among the protesting workers) talk about their experiences. One of the main accents is the calling of a roll of honour read out by Daniel Olbrychski (Polish film and theatre actor);⁴¹
- "Fragment większej całości" (in English: "A fragment of a larger whole") directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska. The documentary film shows the complete inertia, indolence and state of incapacity of the crew and management of one of the large, state-owned socialist agricultural enterprises in Poland, like a Soviet sovkhoz. Gryczelowska originated from the so-called "Kazimierz Karabasz's school", so it was related to the practice and theory of the objective documentaries;⁴²
- "Teraz" (in English: "Now") directed by Tadeusz Pałka. The documentary film presents the greyness, dullness, and hopeless existence of a family that cannot have or pursue any aspirations in the absence of any perspective.⁴³

On the other hand, the information of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances for March 1982 shows that from the documentary film "Gospodarstwo" (in English: "The Farm"), directed by Tadeusz Pałka, presenting the image of the village from the early 1980s, fragments promoting the organization of Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers "Solidarity" were removed⁴⁴. Everything indicates that, in fact, it was about the documentary film "The Farm II", i.e., the second part of "The Farm", made by Tadeusz Pałka in 1979.

³⁹ Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982...

⁴⁰ The film is available at: <https://35mm.online/en/vod/documentary/we-summon-you> (Accessed on 10.11.2024).

⁴¹ Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982...

⁴² Anna Sobolewska, *Paradoksy dokumentu kreacyjnego...*, p. 140.

⁴³ Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982..., p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

As a result of the verification of permits for the distribution of films made before the introduction of martial law, the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances questioned in March 1983 the documentary film directed by Zbigniew Raplewski and entitled "Tego nie da się zatrzymać" (in English: "It Can't Be Stopped"), presenting the course of the workers' strike at the Warsaw Steelworks in 1981.⁴⁵

During martial law, the distribution of a film titled "Robotnicy '80"⁴⁶ (in English: "Workers '80"), directed by Andrzej Chodakowski and Andrzej Zajączkowski, was also suspended.⁴⁷ The feature-length documentary film tells the story of the Gdańsk Shipyard workers who went on strike in 1980. The film contains interviews with important participants in the strike, such as Anna Walentynowicz, Andrzej Gwiazda, and Lech Bądkowski (born Leszek Mieczysław Zygmunt Buntkowski), as well as Lech Wałęsa, who undoubtedly played a significant and leading role in the events presented.

THE EDUCATIONAL FILM STUDIO IN ŁÓDŹ

The Educational Film Studio in Łódź (in Polish: Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych w Łodzi) was established as a state-owned enterprise based on the Ordinance of the Minister of Culture and Art of 29 December 1949. This legal act indicates that the subject of its activity was the production of scientific, educational and instructional films.⁴⁸ However, this was not the only area of

⁴⁵ *Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-VI 1983 w czasopiśmie, publikacjach nieperiodycznych, utworach literackich, programach estradowych i rozrywkowych, filmach, serialach, wystawach. Opracowania.* Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, sygn. 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3916 [Monthly information on interferences made in the period of January-June 1983 in magazines, non-periodic publications, literary works, stage and entertainment programmes, films, series, exhibitions. Studies]. The Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances, ref. no. 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3916], p. 64.

⁴⁶ The film is available at: <https://35mm.online/en/vod/documentary/workers-80> or <http://tyg23.pbox.pl/pl/18400/65/c/robotnicy-80---film-dokumentalny-o-ludziach-strajku-w-stoczni-gdanskiej-video-.html> (Accessed on 10.11.2024).

⁴⁷ Anna Misiak, *Kinematograf kontrolowany: cenzura filmowa w kraju socjalistycznym i demokratycznym (PRL i USA) – analiza socjologiczna* [Controlled Cinematograph: Film Censorship in a Socialist and Democratic Country (Polish People's Republic and USA) – Sociological Analysis], Kraków, Universitas, 2006, p. 312.

⁴⁸ *Zarządzenie Ministra Kultury i Sztuki z dnia 29 grudnia 1949 r. o utworzeniu*

activity of the Educational Film Studio in Łódź. The studio also made documentaries. At least two of them were not allowed to be distributed during martial law.

In July 1982, Polish censorship prohibited the distribution of the film "Pomnik wielkiej nadziei" (in English: "Monument of Great Hope"), directed by Andrzej Szczygieł. It is a report from the unveiling of the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers 1970 in Gdańsk, showing selected elements of the ceremony, such as the roll of honour, the blessing of the banner of "Solidarity", the holy mass, etc. The film ends with the display of Czesław Miłosz's poem "Który skrzywdziłeś" (in English: "You Who Wronged") against the background of the monument.⁴⁹ It should be mentioned that a fragment of this poem was placed on the memorial dedicated to the shipyard workers murdered in December 1970 in the Polish northern Baltic coastal area by the militia and the army.

The documentary film entitled "I zaczęli mówić chłopci" (in English: "And the peasants began to talk"), directed by Lubomir Zajac, was also prohibited from public screening. The film shows the process of creating the Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers "Solidarity" in one village, presenting many critical statements by peasants about the socialist system, people's democracy, the way power is exercised, and agricultural policy.⁵⁰ Thus, the film depicts the social mood in the countryside, the level of awareness among the rural population, and the peasants' attitudes towards the socio-political and economic changes taking place in Poland in the early 1980s.

THE KAROL IRZYKOWSKI FILM STUDIO

The Karol Irzykowski Film Studio (in Polish: Studio Filmowe im. Karola Irzykowskiego) was founded in 1981 by a group of young filmmakers. Films debuts were to be produced as part of this initiative. The studio was part of the official structures of Polish cinematography, so it was formally subordinated directly to the Ministry of Culture and Art. The authorities of

przedsiębiorstwa państwowego pod nazwą: "Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych" (M.P. 1950 nr 10 poz. 98) [The Ordinance of the Minister of Culture and Art of 29 December 1949 on the establishment of a state-owned enterprise under the name: "The Educational Film Studio" (The Polish Monitor 1950 no. 10 item 98)].

⁴⁹ *Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982...*, p. 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the film studio were democratically elected and made independent decisions regarding the production of films. The film studio, to some extent, operated outside official state structures to be more independent than the existing film units at the time.⁵¹ This does not mean that the Karol Irzykowski Film Studio was outside the jurisdiction of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances.

This is evidenced by information from the control authority's materials for July 1983. It follows from them that the documentary film entitled "Jeszcze czekam" (in English: "I'm still waiting...")⁵² – directed by Marek Drązewski (born Andrzej Marek Drązewski) – was not allowed to be distributed. The film's plot is based on events in 1956 (the first mass general strike in the People's Republic of Poland and street demonstrations at the end of June 1956 in Poznań, which were bloodily suppressed). The director, trying to present the circumstances of the death of 13-year-old Romek Strzałkowski, uses the testimonies of witnesses to the event, representatives of the prosecutor's office, the militia and journalists. A boy was killed during a demonstration.⁵³ The documentary film is not about the reality of the 1980s; instead, it refers to the late modern period that the authorities ignored. The regime was unable to account for its crimes against its own nation.

THE ACADEMIC FILM CLUB "SMALL PALACE" IN WROCLAW

The activities of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances also affected students' independent artistic creation. It is worth mentioning that university students played an essential role in the anti-regime

⁵¹ Emil Sowiński, *Działalność producencka Studia Filmowego im. Karola Irzykowskiego w latach 1981-1989* [Film Production in the Karol Irzykowski Film Studio in 1981-1989], in "Kwartalnik Filmowy", 2022, No. 117, p. 184.

⁵² The film is available at: <https://35mm.online/en/vod/documentary/i-m-still-waiting> (Accessed on 10.11.2024).

⁵³ *Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie VII-XII 1983 w czasopiśmie, publikacjach nieperiodycznych, utworach literackich, programach estradowych i rozrywkowych, filmach, serialach, wystawach. Opracowania*. Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, sygn. 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3917 [Monthly information on interferences made in the period of July-December 1983 in magazines, non-periodic publications, literary works, stage and entertainment programmes, films, series, exhibitions. Studies]. The Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances, the Archives of New Records in Warsaw, ref. no. 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3917], p. 17.

movement. One of the key academic centres was Wrocław, where the anti-regime resistance movement "The Orange Alternative" (in Polish: "Pomarańczowa Alternatywa") originated in the student community.

The Academic Film Club "Small Palace" (in Polish: Akademicki Klub Filmowy "Pałac") was established in the largest city of Lower Silesia. A documentary film entitled "Oczekiwanie" (in English: "The Expectation"), directed by Marek Hamera, was made in 1981 at the club. The documentary film was even approved for distribution in 1981 – based on the criteria in force before the introduction of martial law – and was presented at the Festival "Publicystyka 81" (in English: "Opinion journalism 81") in Kraków (Cracow).⁵⁴

The documentary film entitled "Oczekiwanie" is a reporter's account of the hunger strike (Autumn 1980) by railwaymen – members of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" – at the Locomotive Depot of the Polish State Railways in Wrocław. Pictures from the strike are intertwined with frames from the "Solidarność Dolnośląska" (in English: "Lower Silesian Solidarity") magazine, from which subsequent messages from the course of the protest action and expressions of support from the society and representatives of the Polish Episcopate were highlighted. The musical illustration is the song "Boże nasz jak ten strajk długo trwa" (in English: "Our God, how long the strike lasts"). The final sequence of the film is the moment when representatives of the ministry take up talks with the strikers.⁵⁵

In November 1982, the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances decided not to allow the distribution of the documentary film entitled "Oczekiwanie"⁵⁶. Railway workers expressed their opposition to the regime and demanded fundamental freedoms; they also wanted the legalisation of Independent Self-Governing Trade Unions "Solidarity". The control body refused to allow screening of the documentary film, which depicted workers who undermined the principles of the political system in the People's Republic of Poland.

⁵⁴ *Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-XII 1982...*, p. 207.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207-208.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

THE INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL IN KRAKÓW

During martial law, the Polish censorship authorities prevented the distribution of many short documentaries showing current events in the People's Republic of Poland. Undoubtedly, this also affected the selection of films shown during various artistic events. Censorship had at least an indirect influence on the repertoire of the International Short Film Festival in Kraków.

According to the documents of the control body for June 1982, the publisher of the "Gazeta Festiwalowa" (in English: "Festival Newspaper") was ordered to remove a part of the statement of one of the members of the jury of the International Short Film Festival in Kraków. The juror suggested that the festival ran out of films about the drama of the miners in the "Ziemowit" mine (where the strike began after the imposition of martial law) and people interned by the regime. The jury member added that during the festival, there were no "portraits of people torn apart and relentlessly fighting for superior reasons."⁵⁷

Critical remarks about the International Short Film Festival in Kraków were formulated by journalists a year later. However, the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances did not allow inconvenient comments to be published in the press, such as that the festival's selection committee did not allow a review of the works: "showing certain situations and experiences resulting from the introduction of martial law" (a youth journal "Sztandar Młodych", in English: "Standard for the Young"); "We didn't see on the festival screen even a single film – after all – about this important period in the history of the country" (a socio-political weekly "Tu i Teraz", in English: "Here and Now"); "One of the distortions of the festival was «social, cultural exoticism that looked like a deliberately applied thematic selection»"; "It was not the first time that exoticism was the chosen programme «to distract attention from the present moment»" (a literary and social weekly "Życie Literackie", in English: "Literary Life"), and yet "closing the safety valve did not prevent anything from exploding" (a monthly "Kino", in English: "Cinema").⁵⁸

The organisers of artistic events in the People's Republic of Poland, including festivals, were well aware of the activities of the state censorship, in particular the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ *Informacje miesięczne o ingerencjach dokonywanych w okresie I-VI 1983...*, p. 132.

CONCLUSIONS

People from the environment of documentary filmmakers knew very well how undesirable the subject matter was by the regime, in particular from the party medium, such as the Polish Film Chronicle.⁵⁹ It could have led directly to self-censorship⁶⁰ – on many levels, starting with the filmmaker modifying the concept before it even begins to realise it, through the pressure of film studio management during the implementation of the idea, and through interference with documentary films during editing.

In summary, it is worth quoting the words of Polish director and screenwriter, Stanisław Zawisliński: "The documentary (...) can help in building identity, social bonds and creativity, in cultivating democracy and in understanding the situation of human beings, the world and approaching transformations."⁶¹

At the beginning of the 1980s, it became clear that there was a huge gap between the regime and society due to divergent perceptions of the current reality. Showing objective truth about socio-political changes and many aspects of the functioning of the Polish People's Republic was unacceptable to the state's ruling elites. Therefore, the authorities did not want documentaries about the brutal events incriminating the regime's leaders ("Jeszcze czekam"), the birth of Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers "Solidarity" ("I zaczęli mówić chłopci") and the Independent Self-Governing Trade Unions "Solidarity" ("Narodziny Solidarności"), the prominent leader of which was Lech Wałęsa, the inefficiency of the economy and poor management ("Fragment większej całości") or dullness and apathy felt in society ("Teraz").

⁵⁹ Justyna Kowalska, *Propaganda w Polskiej kronice Filmowej* [Propaganda in the Polish Film Chronicle], in "Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobiety", 2022, No. 2 (13), p. 207-228.

⁶⁰ Piotr Nowak, *Wybrane strategie walki z cenzurą w Polsce Ludowej 1944-1989* [Selected strategies of combating censorship in People's Poland (1944-1989)], in "Kultura – Media – Teologia", 2022, No. 52, p. 150-152.

⁶¹ Stanisław Zawisliński, *More, diverser, wider, profounder...*, in Marek Myszkowski (Ed.). *100/100 epoka polskiego filmu dokumentalnego: 6/7 kwietnia 2016, Kino Kultura, Kino Iluzjon* [100/100 era of Polish documentary film: 6/7 April 2016, Cinema "Kultura", Cinema "Iluzjon"] (transl. from the Polish by Caryl Swift, Krzysztof Zarek), Warszawa, Stowarzyszenie Filmowców Polskich, 2016, p. 66.

However, when producing a documentary, filmmakers should not interfere with reality. Their task is to record events according to a pre-prepared script. The period from August 1980 to the imposition of martial law undoubtedly saw a significant loosening of censorship. This allowed for a more open reflection on the history and principles of the Polish People's Republic. During this time, the regime permitted the unveiling of monuments commemorating the workers' uprisings against the government in June 1956 and December 1970 ("Jeszcze czekam", "Pomnik wielkiej nadziei", "Wzywamy Was"). In public consciousness, these monuments have become a symbol of the truth about how the regime exercised power ("Hokus-pokus", "Od Nowa"). The celebrations surrounding these events revealed the proper social mood. Documentary filmmakers could not ignore the multi-million-strong movement of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", which fought to restore fundamental truth and historical justice. Every creator, including documentary filmmakers, strives to make their work enjoyable. The average documentary viewer is interested in people in difficult life situations who must fight or overcome their own weaknesses and limitations. Documentary filmmakers also address critical social and political issues. The beginning of the 1980s in Poland was a goldmine of ready-made topics for documentary filmmakers. For documentary filmmakers, failing to portray certain events would have been a betrayal of their beliefs.

Stanisław Zawisliński, referring to Hannah Arendt, claimed that the greatest threat to democracy is a stultified, stupefied society. The good documentary film qualifies as a work neither stultifying nor stupefying. But the mediocre, the propagandist ... that is most excellently suited to the purpose of transformations.⁶²

The People's Republic of Poland was not a democratic state. It did not allow the distribution of good documentary films that showed the inconvenient face of the political and social system (which was in decline, mainly because of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", which gathered one-third of Poland's working-age population) and threatened the regime's interests. With the above in mind, the intervention of institutional censorship, including the prohibition of distribution, was often the best review for documentaries or a recommendation for potential recipients.

Therefore, given the above-mentioned archival sources, which certainly do not show the full extent and all forms of censorship, there is no doubt that

⁶² *Ibid.*

the fundamental rights of citizens enshrined in the July 1952 Constitution (as amended) were of little significance throughout the period of the regime rule in Poland, and particularly during martial law in the years 1981-1983. The authorities did not even hide the fact that the prospective rule of law was defined within a specific model of a socialist state.⁶³ The Polish People's Republic authorities introduced regulations in July 1981 that, to some extent, recognised the rights of those under control, imposed specific obligations, and clarified the basis for institutional censorship. However, the state's constitutional system was to remain protected by institutional censorship. Both freedom of speech and artistic creation continued to be controlled by a state body. Cultural creators were prohibited from challenging the existing system, as this was considered an "abuse" of freedom of speech. The ruling regime in Poland, therefore, viewed all forms of censorship as a necessary means of ensuring the implementation of constitutional law in a state subordinated to the USSR.⁶⁴

However, the documentaries whose distribution was banned during martial law are indeed a reflection of Polish society and also say a lot about the early 1980s and the Polish People's Republic, including the attitude of the censorship apparatus towards the opposition's attempts to introduce changes in Poland. The mechanisms of censorship, in relation to broadly understood cinematography⁶⁵, are also valuable material for interpreting history. Documentary film seems to have attracted greater interest at a time when filmmakers were subjected to direct or indirect censorship. Today, the Polish documentary classic is known rather superficially, even to film experts, although it should be an essential point of reference. Contemporary cinematography

⁶³ Jerzy Bafia, *Praworzędność* [Rule of law], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1985, p. 243; Wojciech Adam Święch, *Interferences of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances During Martial Law in Poland (1981-1983) in the Writing on the Rule of Law – Selected Selected Examples*, in "Italian Review of Legal History", No. 10/2, p. 330-332.

⁶⁴ Jerzy Bafia, *Prawo o wolności słowa* [Law on freedom of speech], Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1988, p. 239-244.

⁶⁵ Wojciech Adam Święch, *The censorship interference in television serials and series during martial law in Poland (1981-1983) – historical and legal context*, in "Arta", 2023, Vol. XXXII no. 2, p. 101-107; Wojciech Adam Święch, *Ingerencje Głównego Urzędu Kontroli Publikacji i Widowisk w czasie stanu wojennego w piśmiennictwo dotyczące polskiego filmu – wybrane przykłady* [Interferences of the Main Office of Control of Publications and Performances during martial law in the writing on Polish cinema – selected examples], in "Pleograf", 2023, No. 3, p. 59-81.

recipients should be inspired to seek information and deepen their knowledge of film classics and Polish history.⁶⁶

As shown in this article, in the Polish People's Republic, including during martial law, no legal regulations, nationalisation of film production, or censorship stopped some filmmakers from showing reality. However, in cinematography, there was no possibility of creating "a second circulation" on a large scale (as was the case with literature or the press). The film was expensive both in production and in broadcast. The distribution network and censorship shaped filmmakers' realities and influenced what reached the public (recipients).⁶⁷ By not allowing certain documentaries to be distributed, the authorities sought to silence the discussion that began in the period from August 1980 to December 1981 about the weaknesses of the political and economic system of the People's Republic of Poland. Most of these films were produced by state-owned companies, so allowing them to be shown to the public could be interpreted as an official admission of the mistakes and pathologies they depicted. It's difficult to agree with the claim that the Polish regime took a much more liberal approach to freedom of speech than those in other countries of the Soviet bloc. The repressive apparatus was critical of some film productions, and the government, through nationalisation of cinematography, sought to act as a curator of art, controlling all stages of creation. However, attempts at informal and formal censorship have made some documentary works classics of cinematography. The fact that these films were made and have an undisputed position in the film community shows that the regime did not achieve its goals. The regime did not survive, but the story recorded on film still lives on and evokes emotions. The films – mentioned in this article in the context of censorship – are undoubtedly representative of Polish filmography of the early 1980s. Therefore, this text fills the gap noted by Sebastian Ligarski. For this reason, it is necessary to appreciate Polish documentary films, which, during martial law, became victims of censorship.

⁶⁶ Jadwiga Hučková, *Dokąd ucieka polski dokument? Refleksje na początku drugiego stulecia jego historii* [Where is the Polish Documentary Film Escaping to? Reflections at the Beginning of the Second Century of Its History], in "Media, kultura, komunikacja społeczna", 2019, No. 3 (13), p. 12.

⁶⁷ Dobrochna Dabert, *Kino polskie z cenzurą w tle* [Polish cinema with censorship in the background], in "Polonistyka", 2006, No. 5, p. 7.

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