

Elżbieta Wiącek
Instytut Studiów Regionalnych
Uniwersytet Jagielloński

IN THE LABYRINTH OF MEMORY. IMAGES OF THE WARSAW UPRISING OF 1944

Abstract

The Warsaw Uprising is one of the key events for understanding not only the history of Warsaw and Poland but also Central Europe. Memory is a phenomenon that is directly related to the present; our perception of the past is always influenced by the present. The aim of the presentation is to examine how the images of Warsaw in the time of Uprising of 1944 have been changing.

Key words: The Warsaw Uprising, Warsaw, city-text, inhabitants, cultural memory, museum, memorialism, narration

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Powstanie warszawskie jest jednym z kluczowych wydarzeń pozwalających zrozumieć nie tylko historię Warszawy czy Polski, ale również Europy Środkowej. Pamięć jest fenomenem bezpośrednio związanym z teraźniejszością; na naszą percepcję przeszłości zawsze wpływają obecne okoliczności. Celem artykułu jest zbadanie, jak zmieniały się obrazy Warszawy w czasie Powstania.

Słowa kluczowe: powstanie warszawskie, Warszawa, miasto–tekst, mieszkańcy, muzeum, memorializm, narracja.

From the repressed memory to the cult of the Warsaw Rising

The Warsaw Uprising was a dramatic effort to reclaim national sovereignty. It always stirs a lot of controversy among historians. Firstly, the decision of armed struggle is questioned. In the unequal struggle against the German occupier, close to 200 000 people died on the Polish side, mostly civilians. What about collective memory about The Warsaw Rising? Opinion poll conducted in 2003 among the Polish people¹ on their knowledge and feelings about the Warsaw Uprising shows that their connotations are generally positive (even having in mind the fact that this revolt failed). The result of the poll conducted by Polish Public Opinion Center (Polski Instytut Badania Opinii Publicznej abbr. CBOS) in 2009 showed that in the opinion of the majority of the Polish people (68%) is that the Warsaw Uprising was necessary². Such declarations prevail in Warsaw as well, although they are less frequent than in the rest of the country. The most common argument justifying the necessity of the rising was the need to fight the occupier and try to liberate Warsaw. Smaller group of respondents spoke about the need for resistance in the context of manifestation of certain attitudes or values: patriotism, heroism,

¹ The poll was conducted among 1028 of adult inhabitants of Poland.

² Roguska (ed.) 2009, p. 1.

and sacrifice for the mother country. Among the Warsaw residents these arguments were raised more frequently than in the rest of the country. Some respondents expressed the opinion that the rising contributed to the heroic image of Poles around the world, it “showed the West how to fight”. Relatively few respondents (5%) said that struggle was necessary to recapture Warsaw before Soviets would do so, thus assuring independence from USSR³.

The opinion that the Uprising was unnecessary was usually justified (both in Warsaw and in the national sample) with the excessive number of victims who fell in its consequence. Residents of Warsaw (31%) much more frequently spoke about material losses suffered by the city. Relatively often they claimed that losses surpassed benefits from the uprising. In the national sample respondents relatively frequently mentioned bad preparation, strategic mistakes and incompetence of the command⁴. Despite this criticism, at present subsequent anniversaries of the rising are celebrated.

In the post-war Poland ruled by the Communists, during the People’s Polish Republic, the sense of armed struggle was downplayed and memory about the Uprising was suppressed. Why was it a delicate issue for the Communist authorities? The memory about the Uprising was the reminds of the fact that there had been two resistances: one led by the Communists and another by the Home Army (Polish: *Armia Krajowa*). Home Army was loyal to the Polish government in exile⁵ and constituted the armed wing of what became known as the “Polish Underground State”. Despite the occupation of Poland by hostile powers, the government-in-exile exerted considerable influence in Poland through the structures of the Polish Underground State and its military arm. The most widely known operation of the Home Army was the failed Warsaw Uprising. Due to its ties with the Polish government-in-exile, the Home Army was viewed by the Soviet Union as a major obstacle to its takeover of the country. There was an increasing conflict between the Home Army and Soviet forces both during and after the war.

The memory about the Uprising raised also other inconvenient questions in the public mind, foremost of which was why no effective support had been available obtained from the advancing Russians. The insurrection was timed to coincide with the Soviet Union’s Red Army approaching the city and the retreat of German forces. Unexpectedly, the Soviet advance stopped at the city limits, enabling the Germans to take the city back from the Polish resistance. Communist propaganda repressed all forbidden criticism of the political goals of the Soviet strategy. From the end of the war until 1956, official propaganda attempted to erase the Uprising from social memory or to distort the truth about these days.

Nowadays, a vast majority of Poles consider the Warsaw Rising to be personally important for themselves⁶. One could even speak about the cult of the Warsaw Uprising, which has become an element of formation of national identity of few generations of Poles, especially

³ Ibidem, p. 2.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ The Polish government-in-exile, formally known as the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile, was formed in the aftermath of the German Invasion of Poland of September 1939, and the subsequent occupation of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which brought to an end the Second Polish Republic founded in 1918. The government-in-exile was based in France during 1939 and 1940, first in Paris and then in Angers. From 1940, following the fall of France, the government moved to London, and remained in the United Kingdom until its dissolution in 1990.

⁶ Roguska (ed.) 2009, p. 1.

young residents of Warsaw. Moreover, the opinion poll conducted in 2003 among Poles showed that in their consciousness the memory of this armed struggle was tightly bound with the Polish culture, literature and film. The poll showed also the range of the images connected with the Uprising. The most common is the image of destruction – ruined houses and streets. The youngest respondents spoke about barricades and anti-German slogans on walls. The middle-aged respondents spoke about the Warsaw sewers while the oldest recalled tanks and dead bodies in streets. Most respondents of any age taking part in this poll identified the Warsaw Uprising with the film *Kanał* directed by Andrzej Wajda (59,8%). The respondents above 30 years old identified the Uprising with the book *Kamienie na szaniec* written by Aleksander Kamiński which is obligatory in school. For the people of 50 and older the image of the Uprising was connected with another book – *Kolumbowie 20* (first published in 1957) by Roman Bratny⁷. The reason is that for these generations it was the first novel on these events published in Poland. Connections with the film adaptation of this book in the TV series *Kolumbowie* (1970) by Janusz Morgenstern are also common (35,1%). 23% of the Poles identified the rising with the film *Akcja pod Arsenalem* (*Operation Arsenal*, 1978) by Jan Łomnicki based on the novel *Kamienie na szaniec*. Set during World War II, it tells the story of the Operation Arsenal, in which boyscouts of the underground Polish Scouting Association “Grey Ranks” freed a truck carrying prisoners, among whom was Jan Bytnar. Other respondents (5,9%) pointed at another film by Wajda – *Pierścionek z orłem w koronie*, released in 1992.

The results presented above show strong bonds of historical events with their cultural representation. Because references to the Wajda’s film are predominant, I decided to focus my attention on this film. Despite the fact that only 3,9% of the respondents spoke about *Eroica* directed by Andrzej Munk, I decided to compare the image of Warsaw at the time of rising in these movies. The main reason is that Munk has often been compared to Wajda and contrasted with him.

The lived-city and the city-text

A number of volumes and essays have established the pair city/cinema as an object of scientific inquiry⁸. Though different approaches are adopted, the existing (and expanding) literature on the relationship between city and cinema is dominated by study of **the city as a text and as a representation**, a perspective that is common in much contemporary writing⁹. This is because “city” is not only a built-up environment, but also the space produced by the historically specific institutions, social relation, practices of government and so forth¹⁰. Furthermore, the same built-up environment can hardly be conceived independently from the concept of representation, since “spatial, building and architectural practices are representations, as also are the material, physical and spatial forms that result”¹¹. In the introductory notes to a special issue

⁷ For the poll result see: Biskup (ed.) 2004, 21.07.2013.

⁸ See, for instance: Donald 1995, special issue on “Cityscapes” 1997, special issue on “Space/Place/City” 1999, Konstantarakos (ed.), 2000.

⁹ Mazierska, Rascaroli 2003, p. 2.

¹⁰ Donald 1992, p. 422.

¹¹ King (ed.) 1996, p. 5.

of “Screen” on “Space/Place/City” published in 1999, editor Karen Lury pointed to the emphasis on the concept of “space” and “place” that has emerged in film and television studies in recent years. Lury noticed that works on the relationship between the cinema and the city attempt to understand the representation of the city by cinema as a fundamental part of the construction of actual cities themselves, and the lived experience of individuals who inhabit these particular places. The “city”, or the characteristic city life, then becomes a way of interpreting identity and living practices within the modern and/or postmodern world¹².

This article addresses the “city” of Warsaw in the time of the Uprising as an ever-shifting text. I will examine two movies: *Kanał* (*The Sewer*, 1956) by Andrzej Wajda, *Eroica* (1956) by Andrzej Munk and the narrative exhibition of The Warsaw Uprising Museum. I refer not only to the “real” city, (semi)permanently sited and described by its map, but also and more interestingly, to the city-text, and to the lived-city. **City-text** is the product of countless and intermingled instances of representation, while **the lived-city** is the experience of urban life and of its representation that an inhabitant may have¹³. Adopting these perspectives, I hope to find myself between the edges of the map of Warsaw. This “city” is the mutating product of a complex series of relations and of representations, one that can be investigated by means of specific discursive regimes. In my opinion, all aspects of the *mise-en-scène* (not only in the movies but also in The Warsaw Uprising Museum) contribute to the construction of city-text. One of my questions is: do these films and museum construct city-texts that carefully try to reflect the social, human and geographical “reality” of a place, or they tend to forge cinematic urban habitats that have little in common with an inhabitant’s or a visitor’s perception of “reality”?

Warsaw’s Presence in Polish Cinematography

As the majority of Polish films made before 1945 were set either in a studio or on location in rural Poland, Warsaw was hardly ever featured in the cinema till the end of the II World War. Since the end of the war, Warsaw had served not only as a film location, but also as an important element of the narrative, almost a character in its own right. The elevation of Warsaw in Polish cinema stemmed from its tragic fate during the last stages of the war, particularly in the Warsaw Uprising, when it was completely destroyed¹⁴. This elevation of the capital city of Poland was also matched by its prominent presence in poetry and fine arts of the postwar period. By 1945 over 90% of its buildings were razed to the ground and fewer than 20 000 inhabitants remained. After the war, Warsaw “rose like phoenix from the ashes”. An extensive program of rebuilding was introduced, leading to the reconstruction of the Old City and almost all other monumental buildings.

Between 1945 and the early 1960s Warsaw was featured in over forty films. According to Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, these films can be divided into three main types. The first celebrated the city resurrection after the wartime devastation, the most famous being *Skarb* (*The Treasure*, 1948) and *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* (*The Adventure in Mariensztat*,

¹² Lury, Masey 1999, p. 229–238.

¹³ Mazierska, Rascaroli 2003, p. 2.

¹⁴ Mazierska, Rascaroli 2003, p. 96.

1953), both directed by Leonard Buczkowski¹⁵. *The Treasure*, showed the tragicomical trials and tribulations of young couple after the war trying to find a place to live. The end of their story is marked by receiving the keys to their own apartment in a new communal house. Responding to official line of communist propaganda the film presented the end of war as the victory and the beginning of hopeful future for Poland. Directors of the Polish Film School such as Andrzej Wajda in *Pokolenie* (*The Generation*, 1954) and *Kanał*, or Andrzej Munk in *Eroica* (1957), concentrated, on the other hand, not on the communal efforts to rebuild the capital, but on the tragic situation of Warsaw during the war. The films of Wajda are particularly important, because they contributed in a major way to the myth of Warsaw as an ultimate martyr, sacrificed for the life and freedom of the whole country¹⁶. A notable exception to this rule was Wajda's *Niewinni czarodzieje* (*The Innocent Conjurers*, 1960), which focuses on young, hedonistic Warsawians, who seem to forget the horrors of the war and enjoy the pleasures of cafés, jazz clubs and strolling in the Old City. Piotr Lis describes *The Innocent Conjurers* as a film that captures the *genius loci* of the Old City, being an almost perfect portrayal of Warsaw¹⁷. There is also a handful of films that referred to Warsaw's more distant past, such as *Warszawska premiera* (*The Warsaw's Premiere*, 1950) by Jan Rybkowski, set in the middle of the XIX century, or Tadeusz Makarczynski's *Warszawska syrenka* (*The Warsaw Mermaid*, 1955) about Warsaw's mythical beginnings. They served a similar function to *The Treasure* or *The Adventure in Mariensztat* – boosting the morale of those who lived in Warsaw under difficult postwar conditions¹⁸.

Searching for the Truth in the Sewers

The fall of Stalinist regime following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 led to relaxing of media control, and in 1956 the first film about the Warsaw Uprising was allowed to be made. *Kanał* (*The Sewer*, 1956)¹⁹ was the second film by Andrzej Wajda. Wajda, controversially, made the non-Communist resistance the subject of film. The Sewer depicts the last days of a Polish Home Army company, fighting to the death against the Germans. How did he manage to get the permission to make a movie based on such a premise? He presented the censors a script that showed the inevitable failure of the Home Army's resistance. However, what he filmed, without deviating from the script, emerges as something rather different.

The plot of the film, based on true events, tells the story of a group of Home Army fighters moving from the outskirts of the city into the center through the sewer system. They slowly die, one by one. The script was written by Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, who took part in the Uprising. He had to cross Warsaw using the sewer system surviving this seventeen hours ordeal. Andrzej Wajda, himself an ex-combatant of the Home Army, could relate the experience to his own memories. He knew that he would not be able to tell the whole truth, but he decided to try

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 97

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 97.

¹⁷ Lis 1989, p. 275.

¹⁸ Mazierska, Rascaroli 2003, p. 97.

¹⁹ The title usually goes untranslated, in the Polish language version.

to recall his memories in a powerful and convincing way. He claims that he wanted to make a movie which would be important for him personally²⁰.

The story opens on the 56th day of the Uprising; the detachment of 43 men and women, around whom the story of the film is woven, is forced to give up its defensive position in Mokotów, a district of Warsaw. By this time, the Home Army forces in Mokotów had been cut off by the Germans from those in Downtown area, then still in the hands of the Home Army. Rather than surrendering, the detachment is ordered to proceed to Downtown by crawling through miles of stinking sewers crisscrossing the town below its surface. Death awaits each one of them. Wajda creates a mosaic of narratives, following the paths of characters who once belonged to the same squad. The darkness of the canals is contrasted to the blinding brightness of the outside world, bringing instant death to those daring to leave the underground canals and exposing the futility of their hopes.

Wajda settles accounts with history in his own way, omits the courage, and instead presents the nightmare and the debasement of the fighters. Additionally, he intensifies the effect of pain and hopelessness, by moving the main plot to the bottom of the sewer. The image of Warsaw, consists of two main levels – fights in the ruins and attempts to escape from the sewers. The film truly begins with the moment of descending into the sewers. The insurgents are presented as people stripped of hope, without any realistic goal to follow, apart from an apocalyptic journey through the sewers. Even the two who eventually reach the sewers' outlet at the Vistula River, only to find their way barred by a sturdy iron grating.

The official Polish press at the time claimed that *The Sewer* “shows the tragic fate of those who followed the wrong orders”²¹. What about the opinions of the participants of Uprising themselves? When the film was first released in 1957, one of the reviewers, Stanislaw Grzelecki who followed the same underground route downtown from Mokotów as Jerzy Stawinski, commented: “(...) I saw and experienced enough to confirm that Wajda's film is telling the truth. The overall tone and mood of that part of the film and also the individual episodes are in keeping with what really happened. Indeed, I myself and many of those who followed that route, could recall examples of specific persons whose fates confirm almost every minute of this part of the film”²².

The fact that all the leading characters in the film are members of the Home Army may seem incidental. *The Sewer* does not touch questions of ideology or political loyalty. It is the study of the heroes' psyche painted in heavy, fatalistic colors. For the members of the Polish Underground State, that defeat became final. It meant the end of the kind of Poland they were committed to²³. *The Sewer* paved the way for the restoration-oriented trend in Polish cinema, dubbed the “Polish school”. The “Polish school” developed first of all out of the need to shed the burden of the socialist-realist aesthetic model, and secondly, out of a need to settle accounts with the national myths.

²⁰ Official website of Andrzej Wajda.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Gessner 2000.

²³ *Excerpts from the Introduction by Boleslaw Sulik to Andrzej Wajda: 3 Films* (p. 15–18).

Kanał / *The Sewer* – Wajda's abroad coming-out

To Wajda's surprise, the regime's powers-that-be decided to show the film at the Cannes film festival. *The Sewer* (1956) won the Silver Palm at Cannes in 1957, *ex equo* with Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. However, the award did not protect the film from the negative opinion of the Polish audiences. For Wajda this reaction was not surprising. These viewers were mostly the families of the insurgents who had lost their loved ones. This pessimistic film could not satisfy them because it showed the absurdity of struggle: "They had licked their wounds, mourned their dead, and now they wanted to see their moral and spiritual victory, and not death in the sewers"²⁴. Meanwhile, Wajda paid homage, but in a topsy-turvy way, pushing the insurgents into the stench and darkness and reducing the city to the sewers. But the director's attitude to this self-destructing position remains ambiguous. He bestows upon the Home Army a sense of nobility in defeat, which the critic Frank Bren believes gives the film the air of a "modern Greek tragedy"²⁵. It is possible to see *The Sewer* as a tragedy, with the representative heroic group meeting the inevitable judgment of history. However, it is also possible to say that this "fate" is really of human origin.

Underground Warsaw – Dante's Inferno

Which way of looking at the representation of Warsaw has been chosen in *The Sewer*? Wajda did not want direct description. He was searching for a suitably grand parallel, something that would make images transcend the limitations of subject matter. He found it in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The descent into the Warsaw sewers is likened to Dante's descent into hell. From the opening four-minute tracking-shot, it feels as if Wajda's ultimate ambition is to entrap the viewer in a single, feature-long take. This produces a pervasive identification of the camera's passage with the sewer walls. The reference to Dante is made explicit through the character of the composer. He loses his mind and wanders through the sewers playing an ocarina and quoting appropriate verses from the *Divine Comedy*. However, Dante's characters in hell all carried a burden of individual guilt, while Wajda does not attach any blame to his heroes. The apocalyptic dimension of Jerzy Lipman's photography and Jan Krenz's musical score also enhanced the poetic sense of hopelessness, the unsettling, nightmarish vision of Warsaw which dominates Wajda's cinematic narrative.

Wajda admitted that aside from political reservations, there were also artistic doubts: "A film set in the darkness of the sewers wasn't likely to be a cinematic success, but I was not afraid of this. From my first contact with the text of *Kanał* it was clear that I was making a film which would be important for me personally. My only doubts concerned my ability to create a sufficiently powerful and convincing picture on the screen"²⁶.

Wajda's visual style was described by Raymond Durnant as "tormented baroque"²⁷ while in Poland his style was compared to Expressionism. German Expressionism epitomizes the changed attitude towards the city and urban life. Film such as Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Doktor*

²⁴ Official website of Andrzej Wajda.

²⁵ Horton 2000.

²⁶ Official website of Andrzej Wajda.

²⁷ Durnant 1967, p. 114.

Caligari (*The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, 1919), with its uncanny and distorted architectures and Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), with its dystopian cityscape, reflect an era's "haunted, darkened atmosphere of apocalypse and unchained fear"²⁸. In these movies enthusiasm for the exhilarating spectacle of modernity vanished rapidly. After 1918, the metropolis is no longer a place for the idler searching for amusement, excitement and diversion, but a horror-scenario for its frightened and threatened inhabitants²⁹.

In this dark dystopian urban vision, it is also possible to find some traces of film noir – typically an urban genre that has consistently been discussed with reference to the representation of the city. In this specific genre, narratives and characters stem from a particular urban milieu – that of night, crime-plagued streets, and of city's underworld. Wajda applied expressionist urban iconography which is an essential component of film noir. Sewers remind us dark and wet streets, reflecting surfaces – the trademark of film noir. The damp darkness of the sewers and the blinding brightness of the surface world support each other in creating an indescribable horror³⁰. In these movies enthusiasm for the exhilarating spectacle of modernity vanished rapidly.

Scherzo Alla Pollacca – To fight or not to fight? That is the question

The second important film narration on the Warsaw Uprising – *Eroica* (1958) – was made one year later by Andrzej Munk, also participant of the this event. Together with Andrzej Wajda, Munk was one of the main authors of the "Polish Film School". His film about this time borrows its title from Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3* (aka *Eroica*). It shows two separate stories, retitled by co-author-screenwriter Jerzy Stawiński for the film, which are like two distinct musical rhythms (*Scherzo Alla Polacca* and *Ostinato Lugubre*, respectively). Boasting the mordant subtitle *A Heroic Symphony In Two Parts*, Munk's film is a pitch-black comedy which concisely subverts the romantic notion that dire circumstances – World War II in this instance – can bring out the best in people. While the subtitle underlines the skeptical and ironic tone of the movie, its external form – the yoking together of two World War II "short stories" – correlates with the film's "split" attitude, its ambiguity and skepticism.

The film's first half *Scherzo Alla Pollacca* concerns a black market dealer Dżidziuś Górkiewicz. This was surely the role Edward Dziewoński was born to play. He is initially seen on the fringes of the Uprising ("those poor downtowners", he mutters when hearing the explosions) before reluctantly joining the fight. He is a street-wise bon-vivant, drunkard and coward who is not eager to take part in military confrontation. He has a wife named "Zosia", amusingly played by Barbara Połomska. Górkiewicz is just trying to save his skin and initially attempts to avoid military training for the Warsaw Uprising. It all changes when a Hungarian officer engages him in wartime opportunistic endeavor by employing him as a black market dealer selling arms to Poles. Then, Górkiewicz becomes fully involved in the war shaking off his indifference to his nation's fate. He becomes a reluctant link between the city's true underground patriots and some smartly uniformed Hungarian soldiers who might be able to aid their resistance,

²⁸ Weihsmann 1997, p. 12.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 12.

³⁰ Martin 1958.

despite being nominally allied with the occupying German troops. Górkiewicz knows that the handsome Hungarian officer has taken an interest in his wife and that they probably have love affair but he ignores this fact. To complete his mission, Górkiewicz makes his way from Zalesie – a village situated 9 km south of Warsaw to the city's district Mokotów.

Bombing and drinking

The history of Warsaw Uprising seems to offer a wellspring of tragedy rather than comedy but, in the hands of Munk, this is not necessarily the case. The director's ability to find grotesque elements even in tragic events enabled him to catch some of the paradoxes and absurdities of the Uprising. According to Martin Esslin, absurdism is "the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose"³¹. Esslin makes a distinction between the dictionary definition of absurd ("out of harmony" in the musical sense) and drama's understanding of the Absurd: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless"³². French playwright Alfred Jarry introduced his stage farce *Ubu Roi ou les Polonais*, pioneering work of the Theatre of the Absurd, thus: "The action [...] takes place in Poland, that is to say Nowhere"³³. Plays within this group are absurd in that they focus not on logical acts, or traditional character development; they, instead, focus on human beings trapped in an incomprehensible world subjected to circumstances. Similar features we can find in *Eroica*. If it means that Warsaw show in this movie is Nowhereland?

Munk's film was set mostly in Warsaw but also in nearby villages: Zalesie and Konstancin. The representation of Warsaw in *Eroica* is closely related to the representation of a comical, sarcastic figure of anti-hero. This is quite exceptional as far as the Polish war films are concerned. The hero is not ready to sacrifice his life. He represents an opposite utilitarian attitude to the world, focused on greedy calculations of profits and losses. Ordered to carry an elderly woman's sack of belongings during the evacuation, he stumbles and falls under its weight. Later he pays her for her heavy belongings which he did not want to carry and which he had thrown away. In a drunk stupor, he shows complete disregard for his safety. In a stunning shot, Górkiewicz, stands barefoot on a river bank drinking wine straight from the bottle as a German tank slowly comes up behind him. Unaware of its presence, he throws the empty bottle into the tank like Molotov cocktail. The tank shoots. Górkiewicz frightened, falls into the water screaming: "Nicht schiessen! Frau! Kinder! Mutter! Warschau!...". This visual gag is a bold parody of resistance's martyrdom. The action takes place near Królikarnia – a Warsaw's historical palace built in the neoclassical style (English: Rabbit House)³⁴. The name "Królikarnia" is also used to describe the nearby neighborhood in the Mokotów district of Warsaw. Królikarnia was completely destroyed

³¹ Esslin 1961, p. 24.

³² Ibidem, p. 23.

³³ As the play was premiered in 1896 we can refer its words to Poland's disappearance from world maps between 1795 and 1918.

³⁴ The palace is named for its former role as a rabbit warren for King Augustus II the Strong. Królikarnia was erected for the King's Theatre Entrepreneur and Chamberlain – Charles Thomatis, count de Valéry, by Royal architect Domenico Merlini on the picturesque Vistula escarpment. The palace was built between 1782 and 1786. It was modelled on the famous Renaissance Villa Rotonda outside Vicenza, designed by Andrea Palladio.

during extensive bombing by the Germans in 1939 and 1944. The palace, intended to house the collection of sculptures by Xawery Dunikowski, was reconstructed in 1964.

Munk fills the screen with memorable images, juxtaposing his selfish wine-sodden anti-hero's indifference against the hair-raising urban destruction wreaked by the Nazi artillery. In most scenes, Munk evokes the contrast between the protagonist relaxed behaviour and the settings – ruined houses, abandoned streets and the sounds of bombing. On the remained walls we can see the “anchor” – a symbol by the Polish resistance and the National Army (*Armia Krajowa*, abbr. AK). While the insurgents are running to attack the enemy, our hero is sitting in ruins complaining about his hangover. Then he picks up a dog and uses his wagging tail as a fan. Fleeing a German assault, he stumbles in his drunken state and urinates behind a tree. This is a visual parody of the shooting behind a tree. While Wajda limited the image of the city to the sewers and to the fighting insurgents, Munk focused his attention on civilians and their everyday life. As it was mentioned before, Munk does show the war and its consequences but he also reminds us that at the same time life carried on. People were trading, women were doing washing in the pond and boys were playing soldiers in abandoned tanks. In the Mokotów district Polish people are fighting while in nearby summer resort of Zalesie people are relaxing. They are having parties, enjoying good food and alcohol. We can see not only ruins or the insurgents in dark hiding-places but also luxurious villas in the forest. While some women are active in the resistance, Górkiewicz wife is sunbathing and having love affair with the Hungarian officer. This contrast is almost surrealistic.

In *Eroica* there are two realities: the reality of war and so called “normal life” are simultaneous, often coexisting within one frame. During the evacuation of civilians from Warsaw the sun is shining, the birds are singing, the crop on the field is growing. Suddenly in this calm, idyllic landscape the tragedy occurs. One of the civilians tries to escape and he is shot immediately by one of the German soldiers.

In both parts of *Eroica* the camera focuses its attention on the ordinary objects: bottles, lamp and usual activities. Moreover, with this half realistic half grotesque stylistic corresponds with cinematic techniques: Munk prefers deep focus, long shots and slow cutting. In *Eroica* almost everything is fresh and innovative, also new technology was used. It was also the first Polish wide-screen movie. Sound recording Super Parvo and Éclair cameras permitted innovative use of light and sound. Cameraman Jerzy Wójcik took the advantage of these new possibilities especially in the use of deep focus and recording the sound on location.

It is worth to compare the role and meaning of the light in *Kanał* and *Eroica*. Taking this element into account we should ask about the amount of scenes taken on location (outside) and inside. This question is important because the use of light depends on director and cameramen only in the interiors. There are some possibilities of using artificial light on location but it hardly ever happens or it does not happen too often. The differences in the average brightness of frames along the whole length of both movies are visible at once. In *Kanał* the full daylight appears is only at the very beginning and at the very end. In the first part of *Eroica* most of the scenes are taken on location. Despite this fact, Wajda has much more to say in the field of light. He uses the light of choosen settings in a more expressive and symbolic way. Munk, on the contrary, follows his experiences as a director of documentaries – the use of light in his movie

is less creative and less symbolic. However, the fact that he uses mostly natural light does not mean that the brightness in every scene is the same. Shooting on the location he explores the whole range of daylight. The light is an important element of *Eroica* composition. The scenes where the heroes are uncertain about their future are shot in the shade which allows expressing a kind of tension. We also should pay attention to the shot transition. Except of using the most basic type of shot transition – the cut, Munk often uses the fade-in and the fade-out. The fade occurs when the picture gradually turns to a single color, usually black, or when a picture gradually appears on screen. In *Eroica* the fades are not only intervals or pauses. They are used in a creative, meaningful way. As Marek Hendrykowski noted, this element of narration opens the space of narration and gives the depth to the stories being told³⁵. Moreover, this element of narration enforces the episodic structure of the movie. In *Kanał* the tension and emotions are expressed by other stylistic means, like camera's movement or the composition of the frame.

Narration – between relativism and objectivism

Despite the differences indicated above, there are some similarities between the films in question: in both movies the beginning is very important. It presets to us many information about the way the world will be shown to the viewers. In both cases, the beginnings have the function of a broad explanation and intensively immerse the viewer into previously unknown situation. We learn a lot about characters of protagonists, their behaviours and the world they live in. In the Wajda's movie the composition of the images and the voiceover introduce the atmosphere of seriousness and reflection. We can hear and see that all the protagonists are deeply involved in the resistance movement. The sense one may get from the beginning of *Eroica* – is completely different. In the first shot we can see the protagonist's head from the back, and then, in the same shot plan, we get the close up of his bored and irritated face. Both images give clear indication on his attitude to underground resistance. Firstly, we see him turning his back on the reality around him which is communicated by his refusal to participate in what is going on. Later, this message is enforced by the image of his face which visibly reflects the desire to escape the military drill. The opening scene is also very important for the sake of the position chosen by the director as a narrative point. It is not mechanically imposed, artificial subjectivism. We look at the Warsaw not only through his eyes but together with him – the protagonist peeping from behind his arm to the chaotic world around. Not only we are as close as possible to him from the very beginning, but also we participate in the events from his perspective. The aim of all the cinematic techniques used in *Eroica* is to show the protagonist continuously confronted with reality; especially the use of close-ups which illustrates Górkiewicz state of mind. Along with this relativity in the way of narration, Munk is also using the objective narration. He is able to find the balance between these two perspectives. Marek Hendrykowski argues that the modus of free indirect narrative applied by Munk engages the viewer and pulls him into a tempting and risky game³⁶.

³⁵ Hendrykowski 2010, p. 141.

³⁶ Hendrykowski 2010, p. 141–143.

When *Eroica* was released some people complained that the image of Warsaw in the time of the Uprising was far from reality. According to Marek Hendrykowski, it is possible to understand those complaints as – due to the specific way of narration – *Eroica* stands against common representations of the World War II. On the other hand, Hendrykowski claims that these objections are not justifiable. In his opinion, Munk's intention was not reconstructing the Uprising in the literal way – following only the facts. Instead, he wanted to **create** a series of moving images and scenes using deliberately chosen cinematic techniques.

Faces of heroism

Ever since *Kanał* and *Eroica* were released, the names of Wajda and Munk became marks representing two opposite trends within the Polish Film School. In opposition to Romantic realism, Munk offers provocative rationalism. Apart from Munk, no other filmmaker of the “Polish School” ever went beyond the Romantic model. In the words of Polish film historian, Aleksander Jackiewicz: “«Munk's style» is clearly dissociated from the lyricism of almost the entire «school»”. In terms of genre “his films evoke associations with an 18th century philosophical tale rather than, as Wajda's works do, with an epic poem. The substance of Munk's new films was a realistic texture, with a tendency for quasi-documentary figures”³⁷.

Both *Kanał* and *Eroica* have an anti-war theme, but they do it in a different way. Wajda shows the events in expressionistic style, while Munk in tragicomic and bitter style. Munk proved that the representation of Warsaw in the time of the Uprising cannot be limited to the “hero culture”. Górkiewicz is everyman. His behaviour represents sanity in the world that has gone mad. His will to survive is more acceptable than any desire for heroic death. The director's ability to find elements of the grotesque even in tragic events made possible to catch some of the paradoxes of the Warsaw Uprising. However, the film is not just a satire, as despite being labeled as such by some Polish critics. Munk deals with Polish national myths, but he does not mock his hero. He wanted to show how the overall atmosphere of foolhardy heroism influences a totally non-heroic individual and how it made him act. Dzidzius commits acts requiring great courage; despite his “rationalism” he is a hero. When he ultimately joins the Uprising, it is a sort of catharsis, a purifying factor³⁸.

In *Eroica*, Munk joins what can be considered the main theme of Polish Film School: the trauma of war and death, the common experience which had been suppressed or distorted by the communist authorities. The trauma that caused the disappointment in the values and the national tradition inherited from the 19th century and inculcated to this generation of directors during the interwar Polish Republic. This tradition had already been questioned during the 19th century itself (by authors referred to as “realists”, who believed in conciliation, and also by the positivist) and at the beginning of the 20th century, including Stefan Żeromski. Munk shows the transformation of the traditional Polish heroism – romantic and individualistic, into a new almost unknown type of heroism, heroism directed by reason. This type of heroism learns from experience. *Eroica* pretended, like the rest of the contemporary films belonging to Polish Film

³⁷ Nawój, undated.

³⁸ Ibidem.

School, to generate a debate, not to attack “pure heroism” but “the useless one”. This can be applied both to Munk and Wajda. The differences between them are more related to the form than the content. Munk does use irony in the first part of *Eroica*. However, in both films the disillusion is the same. In fact, both directors worked with the same scriptwriter for analyzing the Uprising. *Kanał* is based on Stawiński’s screenplay while *Eroica* upon Stawiński’s short stories – *Węgrzy* (*The Hungarians*) and *Ucieczka* (*The Escape*), based on real events. If nothing else, these two directors put different questions. Both ask about traditional heroism – Wajda: “who are we as Poles?”, and Munk “who am I as a Pole?”. Wajda addresses and analyzes the collective, Munk the individual. Munk sees the Uprising as absurdity, but finally he makes his protagonist to believe in it. He joins the Uprising convinced that there is no other option.

Memory resurfacing – Warsaw Uprising enters the world remembrance canon

After the fall of communism in Poland in 1989, knowledge about the Warsaw Uprising become gradually resurfaced. In the 1990s more or less the full story could be told. The 60th anniversary of the outbreak of fighting in Warsaw (2004) was marked by broad discussion in the media, both in Poland and also in other countries. The anniversary also coincided with the opening of The Warsaw Uprising Museum. The history of that project in itself is an interesting contribution the post-war history of Poland. It shows the attitude of successive governments toward collective memory. The idea of the commemoration had appeared already in the late 1940s, but it was impossible to establish the museum because of political reasons. Then the idea was revived in the times of the First Solidarity (1981) and the process of collecting the artifacts from the time of the Uprising started at the beginning of ’80s. The institution of the Museum was established in 1983, but no construction work took place for many years. Finally, in the time of the Third Polish Republic, the mayor of Warsaw, Lech Kaczyński, made in 2003 the decision about the location of the museum and selected the opening date – the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Uprising. The architectural project by Wojciech Obtulowicz³⁹, was located the exhibition in a former tram power station. The exhibition itself was designed by Jan Ołdakowski, together with Paweł Kowal, Lena Dąbkowska-Cichocka and Joanna Bojarska.

Telling the story of Warsaw: narrative museum – aims and strategies

The Museum’s stated goals include the creation of an archive of historical information on the Uprising and the recording of the stories and memories of its still living participants. How to talk about the past to make your message clear, accurate and reliable but at the same time convincing for contemporary recipients? According to Paweł Ukielski, historian and deputy director of The Warsaw Uprising Museum, planning the exhibition followed a few basic guidelines. Firstly, it was intended as a **narrative museum, fluently telling a story**⁴⁰. All the means of expression – photographs, films, text information, multimedia, interior design,

³⁹ Wojciech Obtulowicz was also the designer of Polish Pavilion Expo 2000 in Hanover.

⁴⁰ Ukielski 2011.

and objects were therefore subordinated to the narration, the multifaceted story about Warsaw at the time of the Uprising. Secondly, the exhibition should engage the viewer in the story it tells and use all the means to **recreate the atmosphere of fighting Warsaw**. And thirdly, nobody should leave the Museum indifferent. Instead, the visitors should **rethink the story they watched individually**⁴¹. In that sense, the Warsaw Uprising Museum is interactive – not because it applies modern multimedia, but because it engages the viewer in interaction with the history. For example, the visitors themselves can print the wartime leaflets or talk on telephone with insurgents. The visitors can have a feeling that they were moved back in time to the past of the city.

In recreating the image of Warsaw it was important to decide who should be the main audience of the exhibition. The designer addressed to young people who should be convinced that history can be interesting and not just a collection of dates and facts, and that those who fought in the Uprising were no different from what who they are. The second addressed group of visitors are foreigners, especially with a limited knowledge of the Polish history. The third important target group, having significantly different from the others, are veterans who took part in the Uprising.

After defining the main target groups, it had to be figured out how to reach them, how to “speak their language”. Having younger visitors in mind, new technologies are widely used as stimuli – sound, visuals and multimedia. To reach the foreigners, practically all text in the exhibitions is given in two languages – Polish and English. Audioguides in eighteen languages are available. The veterans are viewed as co-hosts of the Museum and are also responsible for the atmosphere of the place.

Everyday life in Warsaw during the Uprising

Founders of the Museum assumed that by linking history with modern exhibition techniques, the historical events will become ingrained in modern national awareness⁴². To design the exhibition they reached for proven foreign examples, such as The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the House of Terror Museum in Budapest. They wanted to show, not only the military struggle of those 63 days, but also **the life of civilians**. The Museum is full of testimonies on life in Warsaw in 1944. Exhibits includes written accounts, approximately 1500 photographs, films (more than six film hours) and audio records. Interactive displays with footage and videos combine to create a deep level of immersion. The exhibition depicts everyday life during the Uprising, keeping the occupation terror in the background. It collects and maintains hundreds of artifacts (about 12 000), not only weapons but also love letters, in order to present a full picture of the people involved. The Museum is designed to show all aspects of the Uprising and convey its significance.

The Museum creators made a replica of the Palladium Cinema theatre active in Warsaw during the war. In the Palladium Cinema the footage taken by the Polish insurgents’ own cameramen is presented. The same footage was originally shown at the original Palladium

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Official website of the Warsaw Rising Museum: http://www.1944.pl/about_museum/.

Cinema in Warsaw during the Uprising. The audience can also watch 3D film entitled *City of Ruins* (2010). This five-minute film was created by forty Polish historians and specialists, who used historical images to create a computer simulation of the city's wretched state in 1945. It took two years to create. There is also a simulation of Liberator plane flights designed to make audiences feel as though they are flying over Warsaw. From above we see destroyed bridges, roofless houses, and an obliterated ghetto. The film targets younger audiences who cannot imagine the extent Warsaw destruction.

Exhibitions begin from the days preceding the Uprising until the post-war years and terminate at the time of the Communist regime, portraying subsequent fates of insurgents. The second part of the permanent exhibition, presents the story of Allied airdrops. Its highlight is a replica of a Liberator B-24J bomber⁴³.

The Exhibition reconstructs the image of Warsaw during the war, appealing to both **sense of sight and sense of sound**. A good example of this strategy is a steel monument in the shape of wall passing through all the floors of the building. The monument was designed as the heart of the museum. On its walls the calendar of Uprising events is displayed. The sound of battle and heart beats emanating from inside symbolize the life of Warsaw in 1944. Exhibitions appeal also to senses other than what it is seen and heard. A scale model of the Warsaw sewer system (25 meters long) appeals **to the sense of touch and sense of space**. Identification with insurgents is enforced by proper acoustic effects. Walking through the reconstructed sewers arouses strong feeling of claustrophobia. We can even say that museum appeals to the sense of taste – there is a canteen with its interior designed in the style of the '20s.

Nationwide feature of the Warsaw Uprising Museum is **the Little Insurgent Room** – a portion of the exhibition dedicated especially to children. Here the youngest visitors can start their “adventure with the history” in the area adjusted to their physical and psychological needs, with toys and games related to the historical epoch, cared by well trained instructors. In a small theater they can play roles of scouts, postal carriers and couriers active at the time of the Uprising.

It is also possible to make an interactive visit to the exhibition rooms of the Warsaw Uprising Virtual Museum⁴⁴. This exhibition offers digital images of exhibits, documents, films, video and interactive sound installations.

Museum in process

The Warsaw Uprising Museum is not just an exhibition, however – it consists of many parts dealing with different types of activities. The recreation of the city past is a permanent, unfinished process. In the Freedom Park around the museum building there is the Memorial Wall with engraved names of more than 11 000 insurgents who died during the battle. The list is continuously complemented by new names. The names are being verified on the base of archives, Red Cross lists and other sources. A manifest of names is also available from the [museum website](#).

⁴³ Much of the exhibition has been devoted to the Germans and their allies, showing their actions in Warsaw, as documented in official texts from the time of the Uprising and in private notes.

⁴⁴ Official website of the Warsaw Rising Museum: http://www.1944.pl/about_museum/virtual_museum/.

Another audiovisual project is the Spoken History Archive. Its aim is to collect accounts of still living participants and eye witnesses of the Uprising, both from Poland and from abroad. The project, started in 2004, is still in process. Up to now, over 2 600 interviews have been recorded (the questionnaire was written by historians and sociologists). The records can be listened to in the Museum and some of them are accessible also on YouTube.

It should be mentioned that the work on insurgents' biograms, a kind of the Internet "encyclopedia". Everybody can take part in editing it. The information being sent by still living insurgents and their families is verified by historians. The way of creating the exhibition and on-line Museum as well, proves that we are witnessing what Nora called the "**democratization of history**"⁴⁵. In contrast to history and historiography, always directed by public authorities, scholars, and specialized peer groups, memory is gaining new privileges and prestige, as a popular protest movement. It responds to the demand for the truth more "truthful" than that in the official history, the truth deriving from experience and individual memory. History, although based on memory, being a discipline aspiring to scientific status remains in opposition to memory which is perceived as misleading, nothing more than private testimony.

History belongs to the sphere of the collective memory, while memory of people is individual. History is single, memory of people by definition plural. The idea that memory can be collective turns out the meaning of this term inside out⁴⁶. Individuals had memories, collectivities had histories. The idea that collectivities have a memory implies a far-reaching transformation of the status of individuals within society. Therein lies the secret of that shift in our understanding of identity, without which it is impossible to understand this **upsurge in memory**.

The Museum is a commemoration place, but it is also a live center on the cultural map of Warsaw, a part of its identity. It has also become a "must see" place for foreign tourists. The concept and popularity of the Museum proves that Pierre Nora is right claiming that we are witnessing the phenomena of "memorialism"⁴⁷. Nora pointed to the widespread and persistent criticism of official versions of history, discovering her forgotten fragments, obliterated or confiscated. This change has taken varieties of forms: recovery of areas of history previously repressed, demands for signs of a past that had been confiscated or suppressed, growing interest in "roots", new museums, and renewed sensitivity to the opening of archives for public consultation. It is also the case of The Warsaw Uprising Museum. The fact that still living veterans of the Uprising are encouraged to participate in shaping the memory of these dramatic days and that the souvenirs are still being collected makes the representation of Warsaw created in the Museum incomplete. It is a representation in process.

"Memorialism" and "democratization" of history are also present in the wide range of voluntary work offered by The Warsaw Uprising Museum. Voluntary aspects of this institution are intergenerational: the Museum cooperates with secondary school students and with seniors,

⁴⁵ Nora 2002.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ These trends together make up a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world, everywhere establishing closer ties between respect for the past and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity. Pierre Nora calls this phenomena "Memorialism". See: Nora 1989, p. 7–24.

witnesses to the history, who support with their knowledge and experience younger museum volunteers. People passionate about the history of the Warsaw Uprising have many possibilities to support the operations of the Museum. Volunteers looking for direct contact with visitors and opportunities to improve their knowledge of foreign languages by speaking with tourists, can join the Exhibition Department. After a few days of training they can guide the Museum visitors. Teaching Section – is a department where anyone enjoying working with children, under a careful supervision of specialists, can develop classes and games for children which help them to learn history. If anyone has a flair for journalism, extensive knowledge on the Uprising and skills how of talks with elderly persons and has ability to listen, is invited to join the Oral History Archives. As I have already mentioned, this special place is responsible for recording memories of the witnesses to history, mainly of participants of the Warsaw Uprising. The support of the volunteers in conducting the interviews is priceless – or how else to put that over 95% of the interviews have been conducted thanks to their great involvement?⁴⁸ Head of the Center recommends that persons interested in information on fates of the Warsaw Uprising participants and willing to support the work on the Biographic Almanac of the Warsaw Uprising Participants provide support in the Room of the Veteran – the place often visited by witnesses to the Uprising. Persons with a flair for photography will be able to pursue their interest in cooperation with the Iconography Department.

Concluding: the volunteers' contribution to continuous growth of The Warsaw Uprising Museum cannot be underestimated. Today's "memorialism" takes many different forms including performing city games⁴⁹ or promotional events. Everyone can find the right place for himself.

⁴⁸ Official website of the Warsaw Rising Museum: <http://www.1944.pl/donors/volunteership/>.

⁴⁹ One of the Museum Department, the Stefan Starzyński Institute is a place for the volunteers who would like to learn how to professionally organise cultural projects, or wish to take part in interesting events, lectures and city games. The Institute is known to organise a Niewinni Czarodzieje (Innocent Conjurers) Festival: Official website of the Warsaw Rising Museum: <http://www.1944.pl/donors/volunteership/>.

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