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Kmicic's Cut. The Hidden Anal History of Polish Cinema

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1.

In November 2000, the actor Daniel Olbrychski burst into the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, to Piotr Uklański's exhibition *Naziści* [The Nazis], consisting of photographs of actors playing the roles of Nazi officers. He took out Kmicic's saber hidden under his coat, a prop from Jerzy Hoffman's film *Potop* [The deluge] (1973–1974), and cut to pieces a still photo from Claude Lelouche's *Les uns et les autres* [The ones and the others] (1981), in which Olbrychski appears in a Nazi uniform. This cut was recorded by a Polish Television camera. Jacek Balcer, reporting on the channel's news program, said, "the actor was late. He was very agitated. He talked about what he thought of the exhibition. We started filming it. He really boiled over."¹ The reason for Olbrychski's fury was that he thought that his image had been used to promote fascism. He found it strange that the exhibition was called *The Nazis* when he thought it should have been entitled *Actors Playing Nazis*

1 Iwona Leończuk and Tomasz Kuzia, "Kmicic porząbał nazistów" [Kmicic chopped up the Nazis], *Super Express*, November 18–19, 2000. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

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because the stills used were from anti-Nazi films.² The star's performance was widely commented on in the media; questions were raised as to where art ends and propaganda begins, or where happening ends and marketing begins. The press wrote, on the one hand, that Olbrychski had only copied the gesture of the Nazis destroying avant-garde works considered by them to be "degenerate art," but on the other hand, that he was symbolically annihilating Poland's eternal enemy, that is Germany, which was seen as a general public approval of his action.³ The controversy surrounding the exhibition led to its closure by the culture minister, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski [Solidarity Electoral Action, AWS]. It seems that the cut at Zachęta was hiding something rather than revealing. Olbrychski's hysterical act of cutting himself off from his own seductive image⁴ compels us to ask about cuts of a different kind, that is anal, editorial and censorial.

A cut always points to that which is concealed. D. A. Miller, in his analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), associates cuts with the anus.⁵ The anus, unlike the phallus associated with the social field, is deeply hidden. An anal cut thus signifies the place where that which cannot be revealed and seen is stored. It indicates a concealment that nevertheless invariably attracts attention.⁶ That which is hidden in the communal discourse founded on national

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- 2 Daniel Olbrychski, "Szabla Kmicica" [Kmicic's sabre], interview by Aleksander Kropiwnicki, *Wprost*, December 3, 2000.
 - 3 Jarosław Jakimczyk, "Daniel ikonoklasta" [Daniel the iconoclast], *Życie*, December 6, 2000. In the TVN program *Pod napięciem* [Live voltage] on November 19, 2000, more than 7,000 viewers backed the actor, while only just over 1,000 sided with Zachęta.
 - 4 As Olbrychski himself said, "in the exhibition booklet you can read that actors are seduced by the Nazi uniform; that they willingly put it on. Some rubbish about fascination with Nazism!" (Daniel Olbrychski, "Zorro, syn Tuhaj-beja?" [Zorro, son of Tugai Bey?], interview by Bogdan Maciejewski, *Super Express*, November 24, 2000). And likewise in another place: "it said in the booklet that there was something alluring about the Nazi uniform so seduced by this, the artists donned it frequently. I'm very sorry, but that is rubbish!" (Daniel Olbrychski, "Nadal jestem nieobliczalny" [I'm still unpredictable], interview by Małgorzata Puczyłowska, *Przyjaciółka*, January 6–12, 2001). Olbrychski was clearly disturbed by the (homo)erotic aura – as much of the Nazi uniform itself as of the men who wore it. Incidentally, at the same time he was starring in an openly gay production of Charles Dyer's play *Staircase*, directed by Piotr Łazarkiewicz, in which he and Jerzy Radziwiłowicz portrayed a gay couple.
 - 5 D. A. Miller, "Anal Rope," *Representations* 32 (1990): 114–133. See Lee Edelman, "Rear Window's Glasshole," in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 72–96.
 - 6 See Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

and religious values, of which Olbrychski, Kmicic's saber in hand, became a defender, is revealed in Tomasz Kozak's video *Klasztor Inversus* [Cloister Inversus] (2003). In various artistic projects, for example multimedia installations (*Zmurzylenie 1. Krótka historia pewnej metafory* [Negroization 1. A short history of a certain metaphor, 2006]), his found footage films (*Lekcja Lucyferyczna* [Luciferian lesson, 2006]), or essay-manifestos (*Późna polskość: pamięć nie/naturalnie trawersująca* [Late Polishness: (Un)naturally traversing memory, 2017]), Kozak boldly explores the boundaries of Polishness. He rewrites those images and narratives that seem suspicious, troublesome, discredited in the public discourse, seeing in them a chance to critically, that is ironically and autoerotically, overcome the ossified and empty Polishness. His strategy, like Ukiłański's, is to capture and appropriate other people's images; on the one hand, those most sacred in society, and on the other, those most condemned. In *Cloister Inversus*, he juxtaposes selected scenes from the communist-era adaptations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Trilogia*, *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Colonel Wołodyjowski] (1969) and *The Deluge*, both directed by Hoffman, with a gay hardcore pornographic film. The editing cuts make it possible to show that which is not visible in Sienkiewicz's overly religious and patriotic adaptations, but which is, after all, still present there; that which has been deeply hidden in body cuts and film cuts. Kozak enables us, as Jean-Luc Godard would say, to see what cannot be seen.

This violation of a prohibition provokes a different kind of cutting, that is a censorious cutting that makes it possible to remove (i.e. conceal) offensive, obscene images. Lou Andreas-Salomé calls the moment of renunciation of anal pleasure the "first prohibition" that leads to the constitution of the individual as subject.⁷ The anal prohibition introduces a clear cut causing separation between genital and anal sexuality. The former is privileged, associated with what can be seen (the penis) while obscuring what cannot be seen (the anus). Judith Butler argues that the subject is performatively produced through a series of hidden and explicit norms and prohibitions, referring to this process, the process of censoring, as the "primary cut."⁸ Kozak sets images in motion, multiplies and loops them, all in order to violate the permanent connection between God and the Nation in Polish culture through, as he puts it, "sadistic anality." In *Cloister Inversus*, anality means the negating of the compulsion to reproduce the traditional, that is national, religious

7 Lou Andreas-Salomé, "Anal und Sexual," *Imago* 4 (1916). See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, vol. 7, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 104.

8 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 138.

and patriarchal codes of Polish culture, in which lies the transformative and liberating power. The anal cut thus becomes a way of radically breaking the social contract, on which the national community is founded, and opening up to the creative work of others, that is non-traditional, non-patriarchal and non-heteronormative social practices.

2.

Colonel Wołodyjowski and Kmicic, the main protagonists of the communist-era film adaptations of Sienkiewicz's books, became identifying figures in the 1970s and reflected social hopes and desires. These films reinforced the image of national, religious, and patriarchal Polishness, and moved society away from emancipatory experiences. A few years later, in the period of Solidarity, they would contribute to the restoration of the code, disrupted as a result of the "dreamed-through revolution" (1939–1956) and founded on the noble ideology of the code on which the post-1989 identity of the community would be based. This code was built on patriotism, Catholicism, the sacred patriarchal family, the marginalization of Others, and Sarmatian morals.⁹ The myths of the Sarmatians, the nobility and national unity would return with renewed strength in the late 1990s. In 1999, cinema adaptations of Sienkiewicz's *Ogniem i mieczem* [With fire and sword] directed by Hoffman and Wajda's film adaptation of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* [Sir Tadeusz] were released. Like *Colonel Wołodyjowski* and *The Deluge*, they were spectacular box office successes; in the year of their premiere, they were watched by more than 13 million viewers. Why such great popularity for adaptations of school set texts? These films did well in implementing the conservative ideology that prevailed in the public sphere at the time and in reinforcing the stereotypical, overly religious and patriotic image of Polishness. Through identification with heroic protagonists, they effectively cured collective, post-turning-point frustrations and complexes, while at the same time expressing a longing for what was supposedly permanent and unchangeable (the noble tradition). The great need for patriotic and nationalist affects was also linked to the fear of Polishness being dissolved into Europeanness in connection with Poland's efforts to join the European Union.¹⁰

9 See Przemysław Czapliński, "Plebejski, populistyczny, posthistoryczny: Formy polityczności sarmatyzmu masowego" [Plebeian, populist, posthistorical: Forms of politics of mass Sarmatism], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2015): 21–45.

10 See Marek Haltof, "Narodowe nostalgje: Uwagi o współczesnych adaptacjach klasyki literackiej" [National nostalgies: Remarks on contemporary adaptations of literary classics], in *Polskie kino popularne*, ed. Piotr Zwierchowski and Daria Mazur (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo

Only a few years after the success of *With Fire and Sword*, Kozak proposed in *Cloister Inversus* a shocking deconstruction of Sienkiewiczian notions that had been organizing the symbolic framework of the collective for decades. Above all, however, he recklessly exposed their perverse potential. This can be illustrated with two excerpts from the two parts of *The Trilogy*: in *Colonel Wołodyjowski*, the writer associates the impaling of Azja Tuhajbejowicz with the bliss penetrating the body of the convict. In *The Deluge*, meanwhile, he describes the scene in which Kuklinowski, before touching Kmicic's body with a tar brush, has him stripped completely naked as if he wanted not only to shame and humiliate him, but perhaps also to take pleasure in the sight of the naked, tormented male body.¹¹ Kozak reveals this sadomasochistic pornography of Sienkiewicz's using the found-footage technique. The editing makes it possible to combine fragmented and separated images to show what cannot be seen in a single frame. Georges Didi-Huberman, writing about Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988) in *Images in Spite of All*, noted that "what we cannot see must therefore be made into a montage." This, in turn, will make it possible to "know in spite of all even that which remains impossible to see entirely, that which even remains inaccessible as an all."¹² To be able to make a montage, however, one must first dissect.

In *Cloister Inversus*, images that would otherwise never have met come together and influence each other. In the opening section of the film, Kmicic does not defend the Jasna Góra Monastery, but is in charge of the siege thereof. "Time to assault the monastery! Time to assault God!" he blasphemes. The first shot exposes the unveiling of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, while the next shot shows a series of looped explosions turning the monastery into rubble. Yet it is not the Jasna Góra Monastery, revered by Polish Catholics, that is at the center of the frames, but the phallic cannons being laboriously rolled up the hill by some men, from which a series of bullets will be fired like male semen ejaculated at sexual climax. Kozak consistently uses these sexual references in the film; where the symbol of the first part is the phallus, the male anus becomes the sign of the second part. As a result of the injuries sustained during the attack on the monastery, Kmicic is delirious with fever. He dreams, and this state is distinguished by

UKW, 2011); Ewa Mazierska, "In the Land of Noble Knights and Mute Princesses: Polish Heritage Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 2 (2001): 167–182.

11 See Ryszard Koziotek, *Ciała Sienkiewicza: Studia o płci i przemocy* [Sienkiewicz's bodies: Studies on gender and violence] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2018), 358–378.

12 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 137–138.

different colors in the images; as if on a tropical island, a strange man fishes him out of the sea. From then on, the sadomasochistic images of *The Deluge* seamlessly intermingle with gay hardcore porn. Kmicic's double scorches his body suspended from a beam with a flaming torch, which is juxtaposed with huge close-ups of a penis penetrating a man's anus. In turn, the image of Azja's burnt-out eye symbolizing castration is combined with a scene of brutal anal fisting. Kozak mocks the nightmares of the right-wing and Catholic reason; here anal sex is associated with hellfire, and the difficult-to-bear scream of Azja being impaled on a wooden stake seamlessly merges with the sound of church bells. The third part of the film, entitled *Duchu tajemniczy wprowadź mnie do tych bez wyjścia polskich otchłani* [Mysterious spirit, lead me into these exitless Polish abysses], shows Kmicic's transformation into Azja. Here we have a metamorphosis of a national hero into an ethnically alien anti-hero. Kmicic and his companions look into the orifice of a well just as a porn actor would look into an anus in a rimming scene. Then we see, from Azja's point of view, the point of the stake plunging into his anus. This shocking spectacle of suffering is watched by the men around him as if it were staged for them, for their pleasure. In the background we hear: "Your Grace" (literally, "Your Love"), and on the screen we see the caption: "My love." Kozak emphasizes that this torment sends Azja into ecstasy, which faithfully illustrates Sienkiewicz's words. He wrote that the impalement caused Azja pain "so terrible that it almost bordered on monstrous pleasure."¹³ This brings to mind Freud's reflections on sexual pleasure. As Leo Bersani put it, "the sexual emerges as the *jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is 'pressed' beyond a certain threshold of endurance."¹⁴ It is significant that the sexual is revealed in *Colonel Wołodyjowski* not only by the suggestion that the impalement gave Azja painful pleasure (*jouissance*), but also by the explicit linking of this act, which is in fact a death sentence, with an act "contrary to nature," which, according to religious doctrine, signifies sodomy.

Kozak exposes the male body being opened with a pointed stake, penis, hand or tongue. And this body is only penetrated by other men. The violation of the corporeal boundaries of masculinity in patriarchal culture is seen as the most profound threat to gender stability. The male body, unlike the female body, should be tightly sealed as any attempt to penetrate its orifices

13 Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Colonel Wołodyjowski] (Warszawa: Ex Libris-Galeria Polskiej Książki, 1999), 485–488.

14 Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 24.

risks losing the stability and coherence of the phallic (patriarchal) subject. In the development of the libido, the genital stage is preceded by a pre-genital organization in which it is not the genital partial drives, but the sadistic and anal drives that turn out to be crucial. Andreas-Salomé, cited by Freud in his *Three Treatises on Sexual Theory*, noted that the event that decisively influences our entry into the world as subjects is not the castration complex, but the renunciation of the anus as an erogenous zone.

The history of the first prohibition which a child comes across – the prohibition against getting pleasure from anal activity and its products – has a decisive effect on his whole development...the infant has a glimpse of an environment hostile to his instinctual impulses, on which he learns to separate his own entity from this alien one and on which he carries out the first “repression” of his possibilities for pleasure. From that time on, what is “anal” remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life.¹⁵

Analinity is henceforth associated with what is abject, and genitalia with what is vital and life-giving. Freud added elsewhere that the child must relinquish anal pleasure in favor of their “social dignity.”¹⁶ If the only distributor of identity is the phallus, linked to the social field, then the public use made of the anus, linked to the private, entails the danger of disintegration of the tight boundaries of identity. This is what Guy Hocquenghem wrote about it; homosexual anal desire “is related in particular to the pre-personal state of desire. To this is linked the fear of loss of identity, as it is state of desire.”¹⁷

It is the anal impulses that are the subversive power behind Kozak's interference with Sienkiewicz's patriotic fantasy. He returns to analinity as a source of pleasure and, at the same time, to the first prohibition that compels one to see the anal as the abhorrent. The mix-up of the images of Azja and Kmicic leaves the audience perplexed; who is actually behind the destruction of the Sarmatian world? In the finale, Kmicic, transformed into the resurrected Azja, that is, into that which is repulsive and has to be removed from the social space, returns as an ethnic one-eyed monster. In other words, the otherness excluded from the national body manifests itself in the form of an erratic abject being. Kozak argues that he becomes the “personification of

15 Andreas-Salomé, “Anal und Sexual.” See Freud, *On Sexuality*, 104.

16 Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. Stanley Hall (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1920), 272.

17 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 106.

transgression” which “consumes, digests and destroys the overly religious and patriotic discourse” in order to open society to change and renewal.¹⁸ Kmicic-Azja, transformed into a monster, turns out to be a queer subject, a figure of the death drive of the social order “opposed to every form of social viability.”¹⁹ This hard-to-articulate excess, writes Lee Edelman, “names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.”²⁰ Instead of fighting against associating queer subjects with nihilism, destruction and negativity, he proposes to accept this affinity, distancing himself ostentatiously from the “heterofuturism” investing in the child. In a similar, anti-community spirit, Kozak wrote of his film, “The sodomitic negation of general norms also has an emancipatory dimension as it signifies the liberation of the individual from the constraints imposed on them by repressive social and cultural institutions.”²¹ This liberation can be achieved by breaking with the “first prohibition,” and thus by incorporating repressed anal pleasure into the social field.

Even in the early 1970s, Guy Hocquenghem noted that male homosexuality gives life to a different, non-hierarchical, non-phallic and non-vertical type of social bond. He refers to these new social relations and practices as anal grouping, “homosexual desire is a group desire” for it restores to the anus “its functions as a desiring bond, and by collectively reinvesting it against a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret.”²² In *Cloister Inversus*, sadomasochistic anal fantasies are mixed with images of crucifixion. Together with his companions, Kmicic gazes into the orifice of a well as if looking at a projection screen, where he sees his double, Azja, being impaled. Other men watch fascinated as the orifices of his body – the anus and the mouth – open up under the painful sensation. This choreography is reminiscent of an arrangement known from the sexual practice of gangbang, where multiple partners take turns to penetrate one person. And this obscene image becomes associated with Christ nailed to the cross. Kozak clearly provokes these associations; in one of the earlier

18 Tomasz Kozak, “Jak filozofować szablą (Kmicica)” [How to philosophize with a saber (of Kmicic’s)], in Kozak, *Wytępić te wszystkie bestie: Rozmowy i eseje* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, 2010), 452.

19 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

20 Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

21 Kozak, “Jak filozofować szablą (Kmicica),” 449.

22 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

scenes, we see a sculpture depicting Jesus on the cross, as a voice off-camera is heard saying: "suck my breast, touch me." Moreover, he juxtaposes the scene of Azja's "crucifixion" with a shot in which Zagłoba recites the Christian prayer *Eternal Rest* and Basia prays in front of a holy image. The spectator gets the impression that Azja has become an object of worship. Through these shocking displacements, the anus gains a symbolic representation and becomes public and not just private. The phallic and vaginal symbolism has a permanent representation in culture, while the anal one is not recognized and thematized. Kozak spectacularly exposes it to the public in his film.

3.

The aesthetic rule used in *Cloister Inversus* is reminiscent of the contraction-dilation principle adopted by Godard in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Sudden images, bursting in an accelerated rhythm, such as cannon shots, an inverted cross or anal fisting are combined with slow-motion shots of a gay utopia (naked men and a paradise island). The emphasis shifts from representation to affective impact; Kozak condenses and contrastingly sharpens the images to bring them into violent collision and an explosion of pent-up energy. These image-explosions form a visual excess. In film theory, excess is a sign of surplus, or anything that exceeds the needs of the film narrative. It is a significant textual "failure," a gap or rupture in the fabric of the film narrative. The concept of excess emerged in film theory in the 1970s through Roland Barthes's essay *The Third Sense*. Barthes analyzes several still photographs from Sergei Eisenstein's 1944 film *Ivan the Terrible*. The third, open-ended sense, stands for that which is excessive. Barthes describes it through a series of dividing cuts:

It is clear that the obtuse meaning is the epitome of a counternarrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative) – an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet "true."²³

Barthes later developed this concept further in his work on the photographic *punctum*, which means a small cut, a hole or a wound. The author of *Camera Lucida* describes this concept as if he were writing about penetration: "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."²⁴ Punctum is a "mark

23 Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 63.

24 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 26.

made by a pointed instrument”²⁵ like the sharpened stake piercing or opening Azja’s body. Kozak repeats this gesture on the film material, cutting Hoffman’s films to pieces and reassembling them. He highlights their aesthetic, affective and corporeal intensity and reveals the perverse and iconoclastic nature of national culture insidiously hidden in them, in the bodies of the films.

However, the opening of what should remain tightly closed is never unpunished. In the word “excess” we hear not only an echo of the third sense or *punctum* from Barthes’s essays, but also that which violates and transgresses social norms. Excess signifies both a method of dismantling the structures of film narrative and a strategy of political resistance. It brings to light, through the excessively corporeal, the shocking or the provocative, the various ruptures and fissures within the dominant ideological, cultural, social or political structures, while at the same time revealing what these structures conceal and exclude.²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that *Cloister Inversus* fell victim to censorship before it was even presented to the audience. In 2004, Kozak’s debut solo exhibition, *Wprowadź mnie do głębszych nocy* [Lead me into deeper nights], took place, including *Cloister Inversus*. As a result of the objection of Wojciech Krukowski, director of the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, the film was only shown at the opening. According to Kozak’s account, Krukowski said that it was his “Catholic conscience” that did not allow him to include this piece in the exhibition.²⁷ What is more, after the Law and Justice party regained power in 2015, that is during a period of further national-religious intensification, the film was removed from the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw where Kozak’s works were collected. The works and activities of the critical avant-garde, which explored the tension between nationalism, Catholicism and sexuality, were perceived by the extremely conservative authorities (Law and Justice, League of Polish Families) as an attack on things of national sacredness. This “sacredness” therefore had to be defended at all costs. The most emblematic example was the case of Dorota Nieznalska, who in 2003, the same year when Kozak made *Cloister Inversus*, was sentenced to six months’ community service for offending religious feelings with her installation *Pasja* [Passion]. What offended the faithful was a color picture of a large penis placed on a metal cross.²⁸

25 *Ibid.*, 26.

26 See Sebastian Jagielski, *Przerwane emancypacje: Polityka ekscesu w kinie polskim lat 1968–1982* [Interrupted emancipations: The politics of excess in Polish cinema, 1968–1982] (Kraków: Universitas, 2021).

27 Tomasz Kozak, email message to author, October 11, 2021.

28 At that time, the defenders of religious values, who were attached to patriotic art, fiercely attacked the works of critical artists who referred to religious symbols. These attacks

Significantly, Azja's body opened with a stake aroused concern in both capitalist and communist Poland; it bothered not only art historians invoking Catholic conscience, but also communist officials. This is evidenced by the reactions of decision-makers to the scene of anal penetration with a stake during the pre-approval screening of *Colonel Wołodziejowski*. Film critic Zbigniew Klaczyński said that *Colonel Wołodziejowski* is "a very valuable film and it is in our interest that it be watched by schoolchildren," and for this reason he insisted that the scene of the impaling of Azja be shortened. "Perhaps leave out a little bit... I think you need to be rather careful,"²⁹ he added. Although the figure of the child, as Edelman notes, continues to serve to establish and stabilize traditional and often oppressive social norms, it seems that it was not only the fear of depraving young people that was behind Klaczyński's words. After March '68, the party had to return the favor to the Church for maintaining a passive attitude towards the "March events," which helped stabilize the tense situation in Poland. Therefore, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the authorities blocked and censored absolutely everything that might irritate the Church hierarchy. This meant not only openly anti-Catholic films, but also those that broke with the puritanical approach to carnality and sexuality. Censors explicitly invoked Catholic morality when removing erotic scenes from films such as *Gra* [The game] (1968) by Jerzy Kawalerowicz or definitively blocking the distribution of works such as *Przeprowadzka* [Moving] (1972, premiere 1982) by Jerzy Gruza or *Diabeł* [The devil] (1972, premiere 1988) by Andrzej Żuławski. If anything could irritate the Church hierarchs in *Colonel Wołodziejowski*, it was only the scene of Azja being impaled. Hoffman tried to defend this scene, noting, firstly, that the audience knew *The Trilogy* very well so they would not

were catalogued by Jakub Dąbrowski in his work *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku: Artyści, sztuka, polityka* [Censorship in Polish Art after 1989], vol. 2 (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014).

- 29 Zbigniew Klaczyński, "Protokół z posiedzenia kolaudacyjnego filmu *Pan Wołodziejowski* w dniu 31 stycznia 1969 r." [Minutes of the screening meeting for the film *Pan Wołodziejowski* on January 31, 1969], National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute, ref. no. A-344, item 455, 5. During the pre-approval screening, however, there were also voices defending the extended version of the scene of the impaling of Azja. "This was an era of great passions and cruelty," said the journalist Stanisław Kuszewski, "this is a historical truth that does not need to be varnished. It is a very functional scene and it was shown very tactfully. The image of cruelty [...] will remain in the viewer's imagination" (Klaczyński, "Protokół," 6). And Wojciech Żukrowski added: "this is just a severe punishment inflicted at the time. After all, they also burned at the stake and showed the burning of Joan of Arc. The impalement scene is done very discreetly, it is very subtle, there are no moans, screams, etc." (Klaczyński, "Protokół," 9). Żukrowski must not have remembered this scene very accurately, because during the impalement a shrill scream comes out of Azja's wide-open mouth.

forgive him for this deviation from the literary original. Secondly, he argued, the scene had already been “muffled” anyway, because “Sienkiewicz provides multiple opportunities for sadistic exploits” from which the director chose only those that proved dramatically necessary.³⁰ Ultimately, however, Hoffman had to “speed up, shorten...the very moment of impaling [of Azja].”³¹ This censorial cut was justified by the chairman of the approval committee, deputy culture and arts minister Czesław Wiśniewski, stating that the sight of Azja being impaled arouses our sympathy, whereas this torture should be seen as a just revenge upon him for the murder of his future father-in-law and the attempted rape of Basia Wołodziejowska. It is therefore inappropriate, Wiśniewski continued, to expose this drastic act so “calmly and minutely.”³²

Why did this image torment communist and Catholic consciences? Why was it necessary to hide it, or at least crop it? It might seem that in *Cloister Inversus* Kozak is only showing what is still on the surface in Sienkiewicz’s and Hoffman’s works anyway, despite the cuts. Almost every primary- or secondary-school pupil has either read about how the impalement gave Azja “monstrous pleasure,” or at least seen on a TV or computer screen how the point of the stake plunges into his body, as Sienkiewicz wrote, “deeper and deeper.”³³ Interestingly, it turned out that this image, so disturbing to the censors and policymakers, passed unnoticed in the public discourse. As if the scene should never have appeared in a work that reinforced the image of conservative Polishness and steered Poles towards the patterns of noble ideology. It was unacceptable to assume that the strong masculinity of Sienkiewicz’s protagonists is haunted by an anal drive that indicates an unconscious need to escape from the patriarchal regime. Hoffman’s films bring this carnal excess to the surface, even if incompletely, and yet it remains unnamed. It must remain so in order for the national discourse to maintain its integrity and stability. The only trace of any violent public impact of the scene in which Azja is impaled is the affective reaction of the audience to the idea that Daniel Olbrychski, who played Azja in *Colonel Wołodziejowski*, should play the role of the brave Kmicic a few years later when Hoffman was working on a film adaptation of *The Deluge*. Viewers sent letters to *Kultura* and *Życie Warszawy* magazines asking the director to amend this unfortunate choice. Since the actor had played the demonic Azja in *Colonel Wołodziejowski*, it was argued, he could not now be Kmicic, who symbolizes Polishness. It seems that viewers were annoyed that in the national hero they would see

30 Ibid., 17.

31 Ibid., 21.

32 Ibid., 21.

33 Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodziejowski*.

an ethnically, racially and culturally alien enemy who tried to contaminate the ideal body of the nation (the attempted rape of Basia Wołodziejowska), or that in beautiful Kmicic they would see the anally “raped” Azja. That masculine Kmicic might have something in common with Azja, disinherited from masculinity and thus from power. As a matter of fact, the prevailing belief in patriarchal culture is that, as Bersani puts it, “to be penetrated is to abdicate power.”³⁴ In *Cloister Inversus*, Kozak goes after this irrational fear and takes it to the extreme. The artist himself associates the found footage technique, which enables him to combine the overly religious and patriotic works by Sienkiewicz and Hoffman with gay porn, with anality; first repressive one, then liberating. “If the anal character focuses on the fear of ‘intrusion’ (Fromm), then found footage makes it possible to overcome this fear by arranging a variety of ‘intrusions’ (exciting, satisfying).”³⁵ The editing cuts, therefore, not only make it possible to censor images, but also open up the possibility of creating other, disturbing and liberating, constellations, forms and meanings out of them by gluing the shots back together in surprising ways.

4.

As Hocquenghem notes, “to reinvest the anus collectively and libidinally would involve a proportional weakening of the great phallic signifier.”³⁶ It is worth considering what this reinvestment might mean in the case of (sexual-ity of) cinema. Cinema approached not from a phallic, but an anal perspective. In her famous essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, foundational for feminist film theory, Laura Mulvey argues that in classical narrative cinema the woman is a passive object for male contemplation, while the man turns out to be the all-powerful master of the male gaze. It is the male protagonist that the male viewer identifies with, that rules the action of the film and moves the narrative forward. Power in narrative cinema, being an emanation of the patriarchal system, inevitably accrues to the one who acts. And the woman, according to Mulvey, does not act. The female character, being an erotic performance, has no access to power. Her power, which evokes castration anxiety in men, is neutralized by the transformation of female subjects into harmless fetishes that bring solace to the male protagonist.³⁷ Thus, cinema analyzed

34 Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 19.

35 Tomasz Kozak, email message to author, October 11, 2021.

36 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 103.

37 Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

from this perspective turns out to be a medium that enables the male (and heterosexual) part of the audience to satisfy their desire to rule over the female subject. It only stabilizes patriarchal power and controls the dominated female Others.

Gaylyn Studlar, in turn, writes that what attracts us to the film is not the desire for domination at all, but the masochistic desire to submit to the Other, for it is the pre-Oedipal masochistic desire rather than the later active desire for power that proves constitutive of the subject.³⁸ As Todd McGowan puts it, “rather than seeking power or mastery (the phallus), our desire is drawn to the opposite – the point at which power is entirely lacking, the point of traumatic enjoyment. This enjoyment is traumatic insofar as it deprives us of power but nonetheless compels us.”³⁹ Thus, the attractiveness of cinema lies in the promise of masochistic pleasure, that is, the combination of the pleasure of the sensual and affective experience of images with the pain of losing control as much over the cinematic objects as over one’s own body. As in the case of sexual pleasure, which is irrevocably intertwined with the loss of control over one’s own self (orgasm). The definition of sexuality formulated by Freud is recaptured by Bersani as “an aptitude for the defeat of power by pleasure, the human subject’s potential for a *jouissance* in which the subject is momentarily undone.”⁴⁰ In his view, *jouissance* is a masochistic self-shattering; “it disrupts the ego’s coherence and dissolves its boundaries.”⁴¹

In *Cloister Inversus*, proud men roll huge cannons up the Jasna Góra hill, taking great pains to place these “exploding phalluses” on the top. Under the mask of patriarchal fantasies of power, Kozak recognizes repressed anal impulses; he breaks with the “first prohibition” and makes the hitherto privatized anus public. Thus, instead of cannon-phalluses cutting through the screen, he exposes masochistic and spasmodic images of male bodies being opened and proposes a different way of experiencing cinema. Kozak’s viewer is a passive object of aggressive attack by the cinema, yet at the same time the cinema opens him up to other pleasures and new potentialities through transgressive representations, and thus paradoxically strengthens their position.

In an essay on Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* (1960) interpreted through the prism of anal film theory, Filippo Trentin writes that the desire for cinema

38 Gaylyn Studlar, “Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 616.

39 Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 10.

40 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 100.

41 *Ibid.*, 101.

is rooted in the latent need to be permeated or at least moved by the huge images shown in close-up; in the repressed desire to be penetrated, a desire that heterosexual masculinity must officially renounce in order to take its place at the top of the social hierarchy.⁴² The origins of the desire for cinema, the pleasure derived from watching moving and sensual images, should therefore be sought in the desire to return to the pre-genital stage of development. Jean-Louis Baudry wrote of cinema as a return to that relationship to reality that can be described as being melted into it, "in which the separation between one's own body and the exterior world is not well defined."⁴³ In this approach, cinema stimulates or at least allows one to imagine a repressed bodily memory of the time before the first prohibition. It enables a return to an anal, gender-undifferentiated stream of sensual experience. Thus, the pleasure of cinema is related perhaps not so much to the genital drive as to the censored anal drive, not to power and domination, as in Mulvey, but to an ecstatic blurring of the boundaries of one's own self, a masochistic *jouissance*, as precisely in Kozak. The open body of the queer monster, Kmicic-Azja, is an abject vestige of this painful pleasure.

42 Filippo Trentin, "The Queer Underside of *La Dolce Vita*: Towards an 'Anal Theory' of Looking," *Screen* 4 (2020): 545–567.

43 Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Film Theory & Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184.

Abstract

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Kmicic's Cut. The Hidden Anal History of Polish Cinema

The author analyzes Tomasz Kozak's video *Klasztor Inversus* [Cloister Inversus] (2003), in which selected scenes from the film adaptation of Sienkiewicz's *The Trilogy* mix with a gay pornographic film. In this way, Kozak exposes the perverse nature of national culture. It is anality that enables one to negate the obligation to reproduce the conservative codes of Polish culture, opening up to the creation of non-traditional, non-patriarchal, and non-heteronormative social practices. Viewing Kozak's video through the prism of various types of cuts – montage, anal, censorial – provokes reflection on cinema as a medium that not so much satisfies the desire for domination but rather promises masochistic jouissance.

Keywords

Tomasz Kozak, national culture, queer, jouissance, censorship