

Research Article

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“Exquisite cadaver” according to Stanisław Lem and Andrzej Wajda

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Abstract: The article examines Andrzej Wajda’s *Roly Poly* (*Przekładaniec*, 1968), a 35-minute film made for Polish public television, that is an expanded version of Stanisław Lem’s short grotesque play *Do You Exist Mister Johns?* (*Czy Pan istnieje Panie Johns?*) published in 1955. *Roly Poly* tells a story of a car race driver, Ryszard Fox. A victim of several car crashes, he gets so many transplants from other victims of these collisions, with his brother being a first donor, that eventually he becomes a mix of different organisms, including female and animal parts. Wajda presents the whole story in brief scenes and episodes using an aesthetic mix of black humor, grotesque, absurdism, surrealism, and pop art imagery. The author argues that with its narrative focus on transplant experiments and aesthetic concoction of different styles, *Roly Poly* becomes a cinematic variant of the surrealist parlor-game of *exquisite cadaver*, where an often accidental collection of words or images is assembled into a new entity. Furthermore, the article claims that the film presents a dystopian variant of Bakhtinian grotesque body and as such it opposes the concept of ideal, uniform, and homogenized communist/national body. Eventually, the body of transplants displays a transgressive potential of trespassing different divisions and hierarchies and as such it indirectly subverts the main premises of nationalistic politics led by Polish communist party in the late 1960s.

Keywords: Andrzej Wajda, sci-fi, *exquisite cadaver*, body, surrealism, Stanisław Lem

After completing *Gates to Paradise* (1967), a British-Yugoslavian coproduction, Andrzej Wajda returned to Poland to work on his next project *Everything for Sale* (*Wszystko na sprzedaż*, 1968), a self-reflexive meditation on cinema located in contemporary Poland. Before the film was completed, he had already embarked on a small-scale production for Polish television, a 35-minute film *Roly Poly* (*Przekładaniec*, 1968) which explores various possibilities for the future. Film critics and historians do not consider the film to be an important achievement of the director.¹ Most likely this is because a short sci-fi film broadcast on Polish television does not fit with Wajda’s critically acclaimed persona of “the essential Pole” who is mostly concerned with the national historical traumas (Michałek and Turaj 129). In her recently published essay on the film, Malgorzata Bugaj admits that *Roly Poly* is “a frequently overlooked oddity in Wajda’s body of work,” yet in her opinion “The film can be considered amongst the boldest of the film-maker’s experiments: his first TV production, first attempt at comedy and his only science-fiction work as well as a unique collaboration with Lem” (131). Furthermore, she claims that the film reflects Wajda’s own artistic struggle at that time. A film about an identity crisis and the gradual substitution of the self, as Bugaj argues, is a manifestation of Wajda’s search for a new muse and possibly marks an artistic break which liberated the filmmaker from the sharp critical scrutiny he was subject to during the 1960s (132).

While agreeing with Bugaj’s general opinion that *Roly Poly* is a significant part of Wajda’s oeuvre as well as a typical product of popular culture in the socialist Poland of that time, I will argue that the film manifests not only “an artistic break” but also represents continuities with the director’s earlier works.

1 The only extensive examination of *Roly Poly* is presented in recently published article by Malgorzata Bugaj (2017).

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Although its fictional world is located in a distant future, *Roly Poly* focuses on the issue of individual identity that was central to his earlier films as well. Furthermore, the film significantly renegotiates various structures of Polish national cinema in that it exemplifies changes in the mode of film production as well as new developments in vernacular popular cinema. Finally, *Roly Poly* lends itself to being interpreted as linked to then current political situation, specifically the upsurge of anti-Semitism in 1968.

The film presents an expanded version of Stanisław Lem's short grotesque play *Do You Exist Mister Johns? (Czy Pan istnieje Panie Johns?)* published in 1955. More than ten years later, the writer used it as a source for a film script for Wajda. *Roly Poly* tells the story of a racing car driver, Ryszard Fox. A victim of several car crashes, he receives so many transplants from fellow victims of these collisions, his brother being the first donor, that eventually he becomes a mixture of different organisms, including female and animal parts. Wajda presents the whole story in brief scenes and episodes using an aesthetic mix of black humour, grotesque, absurdism, surrealism, and pop art imagery. I will argue that with its narrative focus on transplant experiments and aesthetic concoction of different styles, *Roly Poly* becomes a cinematic variant of the surrealist parlour-game of *exquisite cadaver*,² in which an often accidental collection of words or images is assembled into a new entity. The authors of a collection of essays *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game* describe its origins:

At a 1935 meeting of their Surrealist group, Victor Brauner, André Breton, Jacques Hérold, and Yves Tanguy engaged in one of their many parlour games. They folded a sheet of paper in fours, across a horizontal axis, and, taking turns, made their marks in the respective quadrants. In the resulting construction, Brauner's many-eyed 'head' gives way to Breton's distorted upper torso, hands fondling two swollen breasts, which in turn gives way to Hérold's egg-shaped mid-section nestled in the upper cone of Tanguy's snarling, reptilian dog feet. The composite figure, as one of some two hundred similar drawings and collages produced between 1924–1949, is both a marker of the historical avant-garde and an epistemological apparatus that lives beyond its initial historical moment. (Kochhar-Lindgren et al. xix)

Admittedly, Wajda, whose affinities with surrealism are frequently acknowledged (see for example Coates), develops Lem's futuristic character of Ryszard Fox into a figure that echoes the first "exquisite corpse" created by Breton and his fellows. With its protagonist, whose bodily identity is in constant flux due to technological progress, *Roly Poly* offers a truly surrealist expedition into the future.

"We need entertainment"—the Production Contexts

In June 1960, the Central Committee of the Polish Workers Party issued the document "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC w sprawie kinematografii" (Resolution of the Secretary of the Central Committee in the Matter of Cinematography, Miczka 27-34) which proffered a vehement criticism of Polish films produced after 1956. As stated in the document, these works (of the Polish Film School) presented a pessimistic picture of both the Polish war experience and its aftermath. The communist party authorities called for engagement with the present achievements of state socialism instead of looking back to the past failures and uncertainties. They also demanded increased presence of Eastern Bloc films in movie theatres and investing in production of popular genres. Polish film historians univocally consider this document as an enforced end of the Polish Film School, a film movement of which Wajda was one of the most important representatives (see Miczka, Haltof, Lubelski).

The cinema of the 1960s commonly called "cinema of small stabilization" developed mostly into popular genres presenting an optimistic picture of everyday life in socialist Poland. During this decade, Polish public television initiated its own film production to effectively meet the audience's demand for popular fiction. In 1960, the Radio and Television Committee established a special unit for film production. On January 10, 1964, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Culture, National Film Board and the Radio and Television Committee that decreed collaboration between film industry and television.³ However,

² In his book, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema*, Mark Betz compares omnibus films, i.e. films that are made by several directors to exquisite cadavers (91)

³ For more details see: Pokorna-Ignatowicz (60)

the purpose of this agreement was not only to increase film production. For, as Aniko Imre emphasises in her book *TV Socialism*, television in socialist countries

was meant to function as a massive school for the masses. Every program was imbued with the intention to educate. Tele-education was seen as a key to the citizenry’s erudition, from political training through gaining a variety of political skills to that all-important but most contradictory goal “taste cultivation”—something rooted in the Kantian idea of aesthetic education. (41)

Roly Poly belongs to a series of short sci-fi films commissioned in the 1960s by Polish Television.⁴ Although these films represented the realm of popular entertainment, they nevertheless fulfilled the socialist television’s role of cultural educator. As Bugaj notes, “These short TV productions were concerned less with a spectacle and more with moral and social questions of individuals: a lack of substantial budgets was compensated by original ideas” (138). As television was considered a medium of cultural education, it was crucial to attract renowned artists who would be able to fulfil the task.⁵ In the late 1960s, Wajda’s artistic position was already solid which was mostly due to international successes of his Polish School films. Even critical controversies regarding his adaptation of Stefan Żeromski’s *Ashes* (*Popioły*, 1965) did not overshadow his status as an *auteur*. Likewise, Stanisław Lem was the only then contemporary Polish sci-fi writer of international reputation whose work was appreciated by ordinary readers as well as by a more specialised audience of scientists and philosophers. The artistic encounter of these two renowned artists in Polish public television solidified its cultural capital and proved the television medium to be a modern space in which the popular meets high art.

Roly Poly was broadcast on March 17, 1968, which happened to be only nine days after the Warsaw University students’ demonstration against the anti-Semitic politics of the Polish communist government. Whether the decision to broadcast this short sci-fi film at that particular time was deliberate and its merit was to provide the viewer with an escapist, even if of high aesthetic value, entertainment will remain an open question. The fact that television news did not cover the “March events,” except for few brief mentions of social unrest amongst isolated groups of youth, condones such a hypothesis, yet there are no official records to support this. For the first time, Wajda’s film was presented not as a self-contained screening taking place in the public space of a movie theatre but was exhibited as a part of daily and weekly TV schedule and programming.

Political Allegory?

Lem and Wajda’s grotesque story about a man whose identity undergoes radical transformation due to multiple transplantation surgeries lends itself to be read as related, albeit implicitly, to the anti-Semitic politics campaigned for at that time by the nationalist wing of the Polish communist party. In her essay, Marta Bryś claims that under the disguise rubric of the sci-fi genre, *Roly Poly* scrutinises the 1968 politics of ethnic exclusion and anti-Semitism that forced many Polish Jews to leave the country. She suggests that in his film, “Wajda portrays [Polish] society in the end of the 1960s as a body consisting of many separate layers that cannot be put together to make an entity” (40). While I agree with Bryś’s claim that the film can be interpreted as implicitly (and most likely unintentionally) reflecting upon the political situation in Poland, I question her reading that *Roly Poly* suggests the impossibility of creating a homogenous Polish society. Such an interpretation would imply that the film has a pro-nationalistic stance that cannot be supported with textual evidence. Instead, I contend that Lem and Wajda’s story about bodily transformations due to

⁴ As Bugaj reports the following films were made within the series: *Awatar, czyli zamiana dusz/Avatar: The Exchange of Souls* (dir. Janusz Majewski, 1964), *Docent H./Professor Hamler* (dir. Janusz Majewski, 1965), *Guwernator/The Governor* (dir. Stanisław Kokesz, 1965); *Gdzie jesteś, Luizo?/Where are you, Louise* (dir. Janusz Kubik, 1965); *Pierwszy pawilon/The First Pavilion* (dir. Janusz Majewski, 1965), *Professor Zazul and Przyjaciel/The Friend. Poprzez piąty wymiar/Through the Fifth Dimension* (dir. Marek Nowakowski, 1973); *Stacja bezsenność/Insomnia Station* (dir. Piotr Wojciechowski, 1973), *Biohazard* (dir. Janusz Kubik, 1977) (Bugaj 138).

⁵ See: Pokorna-Ignatowicz (61-2)

transplant surgeries demonstrates how this newly emerging hybrid identity cannot be accommodated within various legal, ethical, and cultural discourses. If the film is a political allegory, this hybrid transplanted body would stand for a society that cannot be embedded within a nation-state framework. Consequently, the body of the Other is questioned, deprived of legal rights, and, ultimately, subjectivity. In this article, I will examine the body politics in *Roly Poly* as it is presented by means of both the narrative and the visual in order to explore the theme of identity and its various political and cultural implications.

“What a strange self!”

The narrative of *Roly Poly* focuses on a car racer, Ryszard Fox. We first encounter him as he prepares along with his brother and navigator, Tomasz, for a race. After several quick shots of driving cars, a brief cartoon insert appears on screen informing the viewer that a crash has happened. This is followed by a short scene of Ryszard in a hospital as he talks with a lawyer. He complains that the insurance company refuses to pay his sister-in-law full compensation for his brother’s death. The institution claims that Tomasz’s organs were transplanted into Ryszard’s and other people’s bodies and only thirty percent of his body have been buried and, thus, they would pay accordingly. Among the organs that were transplanted to Ryszard’s body were also his brother’s genitals, which implies that he is now in some way father to his brother’s children and should pay them alimony. At some point, Ryszard says with his brother’s voice “A band of lunatics” and then bursts into hysterical laughter, just as Tomasz did in the first episode of the film. Now it becomes clear that the transplantation surgery not only resulted in Ryszard obtaining some of his brother’s bodily organs but also in taking over some of his behavioural tics and speech mannerisms.

Ryszard’s next visit to the lawyer takes place after another crash and corresponding transplant surgery. This time there were more victims: Salomea Tintel, Nancy Quine and a Man with a dog. Ryszard gets some organs from each of them as required and, in consequence, the descendants of the victims sue him in order to pay them various compensations. When he visits the lawyer’s office, he wears men’s clothing and haircut, yet he also has make-up, uses a purse (as it is “more comfy and pockets do not get baggy”), and behaves in a way that fits a normative pattern of femininity. When, finally, Ryszard tries to get some help from a psychoanalyst, he responds to the word “bone” with a snarl and bites his therapist. Now it is apparent, that Ryszard’s body is a polymorphous hybrid of human and non-human, male and female, and in addition, all these organs are of a different age. The dilemma of Ryszard’s identity proves irresolvable in the last scene when he visits the lawyer and introduces himself as Arie Stevens, his co-driver. As he explains, there was another crash in which Ryszard died, yet apparently, his body was donated to Arie.

Ryszard’s multiple transplantation surgeries lead to various consequences. First and foremost, his body gradually loses its erstwhile integrity and becomes an assemblage of incompatible components as is demonstrated when his steady mode of speech is interrupted with the hysterical laughter of his brother or when his gentle and somehow feminine conduct rapidly changes into an aggressive, animalistic reaction. Moreover, his body parts are of different ages and hence, despite his youthful look, his legs are old and suffer from arthritis. This fictional age confusion is reminiscent of the real one expressed by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy who commented on consequences of personally having transplant surgery: “So having at the same time become younger and older, I no longer have an age proper, just as, properly speaking, I am no longer my own age” (12). Unlike Nancy, Wajda, following Lem’s ideas, presents these dilemmas in an absurdist fashion in that there is no viable option to recover an erstwhile “bodily logic” or to replace it with a new one. The ending specifically implies that life and death cannot be conceived of as a binary opposition any longer, therefore, it defies the commonly accepted “logic of life.”

Absurdly presented bodily frictions and inconsistencies pose several questions. Who is the character that appears in the last episode of the film? He introduces himself as Arie Stevens; however, he looks like Ryszard Fox and laughs like Tomasz Fox. Is Ryszard still alive? Is Tomasz alive? Are all the other characters whose organs were transplanted into Ryszard’s body alive? As previously mentioned, after the first transplant surgery is performed on Ryszard, he also manifests several of his brother Tomasz’s behavioural mannerisms, the most evident of these being a characteristic laugh. More importantly, Ryszard bursts into

this characteristic laughter at rather inappropriate moments, which proves that he is unable to control it. It is as if his brother has intruded into his body. The protagonist of *Roly Poly* could repeat after Jean-Luc Nancy pondering on his own heart transplant “What a strange self!” (10). As the next transplant surgeries follow, this “strangeness” accrues. When Ryszard’s body becomes an assemblage of both human and non-human organs, it again parallels the French philosopher’s observation “‘I’ has clearly become the formal striking index of an unverifiable and impalpable system of linkages” (10). Finally, when Ryszard makes his final appearance as Arie, he can be seen as an exemplification of Nancy’s conclusion: “The *intrus* is no other than me, my self; none other than man himself. No other than the one, the same, always identical to itself and yet that is never done with altering itself” (13). Notwithstanding the substantial difference between a short sci-fi film and a philosophical essay as well as the disparity between fiction and real life experience, there are points of convergence that are worth of note. For, indeed in Ryszard/Arie’s persona it is no longer possible to identify a donor and a recipient, a host organism and its intruder, an “I” and a “S/he.” Although both Nancy and Wajda/Lem communicate in different codes and from different positions, they all suggest that the traditional notion of identity is no longer operational or perhaps it is even altogether obsolete. Instead, a hybrid identity emerges echoing the exquisite cadaver “a surrealist figure of contingency and chance” (Lee 26).

Wajda and Lem: From the Past to the Future

The theme of crisis in both collective and individual identity permeates Wajda’s films since his feature debut *A Generation* (*Pokolenie*, 1955). Arguably, the director sees the WWII experience as the main cause of this crisis. As I have claimed elsewhere,

[d]ue to various political and cultural circumstances ... the Polish masculine subject has constantly been questioned or deprived of its agency ... [it] responded to the ambiguities and uncertainties regarding itself with its hysterical body which emerged during the period of Romanticism and continued throughout the twentieth century. (Ostrowska 46-7)

Although Ryszard Fox’s body is not a hysterical body (even though a reflexive laughter of Tomasz that is passed to Ryszard can be considered as a symptom of hysteria), it nevertheless serves as a main locus of ambivalent self. Thus, *Roly Poly* is not such an “oddity” in Wajda’s work as it may seem.

Whilst Wajda’s work until *Roly Poly* was mostly concerned with the national past, Lem’s oeuvre ostensibly engages with a universal (perhaps it could be called post-national) future. Whilst the director asks in his films what it means to be a Pole, the writer in his work asks what it means to be a human being. Whilst Wajda was seen as “an essential Pole,” Lem was frequently accused of “cosmic escapism” (Tighe 758). Whilst Wajda depicts the historical or contemporary reality of Poland, Lem creates dystopian futuristic universes. Carl Tighe acknowledges Lem’s universalism: “Virtually all Lem’s novels may be read as parables” (758); however, he also claims that his work can be interpreted as a serious critique of communism (763). Ultimately, he identifies himself as “a science-fiction writer with a taste for political commentary” (773). With this interpretive trope, Lem’s work proves not as distant from Wajda’s films as it may appear. Moreover, recent critical and biographical writings on Lem reveal further affinities. In 2016 Agnieszka Gajewska published a fascinating monograph of Lem entitled *Holocaust and the Stars. The Past in Stanisław Lem’s Writing* (*Zagłada i gwiazdy. Przeszłość w prozie Stanisława Lema*). The author locates Lem’s work in a close proximity to main strands of Polish post-war literature examining historical past. She extensively discusses Lem’s Jewishness that he has only occasionally mentioned in his autobiography and various interviews. Supporting her interpretation with a ground breaking archival material, Gajewska argues that in his work Lem has left many traces of his own Holocaust experience that he had silenced during his life (2016). Following Gajewska’s interpretation, in his biography of Stanisław Lem, *Lem, Life From Not This Earth* (*Lem, życie nie z tej ziemi*), Wojciech Orliński attentively examines the writer’s life and his work in search of traces of the otherwise erased Holocaust experience. For example, he points out that in various interviews, Lem generously spoke about his relatives, yet he never called them by their names as these would reveal their Jewish origins. In *His Master’s Voice*, one of the characters, the mathematician

Rappaport, rather unexpectedly, recollects his war experience of a mass execution which he miraculously survived as Lem did a *pogrom* in Lviv in 1941. If one accepts Gajewska and Orliński's reading of Lem's work, his artistic encounter with Wajda does not appear as odd as it might be deemed. Ultimately, both artists work within post-traumatic art. Interestingly, the figure of the surrealist game, the exquisite cadaver, that as I argue permeates Wajda's film on various levels is frequently associated with historical trauma. As Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren claims: "The figure of the Exquisite Corpse ... acts a device to mark the traumas of early twentieth-century Europe, to revise bodies and social configurations" (250). She also comments on ironic distance to the past characteristic of this aesthetic form:

In the pastiche of bodily re-figuration, there is a soundless cry than erupts along the seams, the folding into and out of *meaning*, which is not the same as *sensibility*. It emerges in the midst of the articulated disarticulation of the body, meaning, and orientation, in this place that simultaneously embraces the ruptures of the past and the eruptions of the future. (250)

Although not explicitly present in *Roly Poly*, this twisted temporality organises both its narrative content and its formal structure. As a result, the film offers a unique in Polish culture attempt to work through the past trauma by extrapolating it in the future.

The dilemmas of Ryszard Fox and his inability to keep on with his "original" identity echoes, albeit in a grotesquely absurd form, the murderous racist politics practised during the era of the Holocaust. Jewish genocide, like all ethnic cleansing actions, operated within a pre-determined collective identity project intended to remove all traces of individual difference and subjectivity. Interestingly, the character of Ryszard Fox is not presented only as a victim of social pressure to fulfil a singular model of identity, for he also benefits from it. In her article discussing *Roly Poly* in the context of the 1968 upsurge of anti-Semitism in Poland, Bryś claims that a thematic motif of golden teeth directly links the film with the Holocaust experience (40). Specifically, she refers to the episode in which Ryszard Fox visits his lawyer to obtain legal advice of how to respond to a request to return the golden teeth that were transplanted to him from the body of Nancy Quine. The author connects the motif of golden teeth with Poles sizing Jewish properties in post-war Poland as well as with the common practice of removing golden teeth from the gassed bodies of Jews in death camps. In this scene, Ryszard Fox says: "I haven't stolen it [golden teeth] from anyone and, thus, why shall I return it now?" and in that, as Bryś argues, he can be seen as representing attitudes of some Poles who after WWII refused to return Jewish possessions to their legal owners (40). Although neither *Roly Poly* or Bryś's analysis provide solid textual evidence supporting this interpretation, it cannot be easily discarded especially in the context of recent findings related to Lem's Jewish origins and publication of Jan Tomasz Gross and Helena Grudzińska-Gross's *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (2012) which describes Poles digging around the terrain of the death camp at Treblinka in search of the gold buried with gassed Jewish bodies. Regardless of debates concerning the validity of these claims, it is difficult, if indeed possible, to ignore this context while examining the motif of golden teeth in *Roly Poly*. Arguably, recent publications on Lem and the Holocaust provide a rather different interpretive framework to the one of the late 1960's which emerged when the film was made.

Whilst accepting the interpretation of *Roly Poly* as a latent form of post-Holocaust culture, I would also argue that the theme of problematic identity can also be related to Central European Jewry's ambiguous status as the Other that, as Milan Kundera claims, formed the basis of their regional identity. In his famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe," he writes "Aliens everywhere and everywhere at home, lifted above national quarrels, the Jews in the twentieth century were the principal cosmopolitan, integrating element in Central Europe. They were its intellectual cement, a condensed version of its spirit, creators of its spiritual unity" (221). Whilst Ryszard Fox somehow stoically or even positively responds to his constantly evolving self resulting from his assimilation of various bodily identities, he is accused of being an impostor who is appropriating something which does not belong to him. His readiness to assimilate with others is rejected or mistrusted by other people which makes him indeed an "alien[s] everywhere and everywhere at home" (Kundera 221).

Grotesque Body of the Future

Reading *Roly Poly* as a political allegory is only one interpretive possibility that can be actualised by referring to various extratextual contexts. Simultaneously, the film can be examined as employing certain generic formulas and conventions to generate specific meanings. As J.P. Telotte points out in his classical study *Science Fiction Film* the genre is preoccupied with three main themes: the human encounter with alien worlds, the impact of science and technology on society and culture, and technologically inflicted changes of the self (12). According to Telotte, “The third category looks at the human applications of science and technology, the reshaping of and modelling upon the self that have produced the various robots, androids, cyborgs and ‘enhanced’ beings” (14). The protagonist of *Roly Poly*, Ryszard Fox, does not embody any of these figures; nevertheless, his self evolves in the course of several transplant surgeries, even if it is not “enhanced” as Telotte describes it. Thus, Wajda’s film explores the main trope of sci-fi identified by Telotte as “the technological trope for the self” characteristic of the ‘types of uncanny texts’ (14). While elaborating on the uncanny type of these texts, Telotte points out that these frequently represent a generic overlap between horror and fantasy.⁶ Likewise, in his monograph of the sci-fi genre, Mark Bould notes that “sf typically portrays such somatic unboundedness as horrifying or dystopian” (92). In contrast to dominant generic conventions identified by both authors, Lem’s literary original and Wajda’s film adaptation, *Roly Poly*, overlap genres of comedy and sci-fi, hence a technologically altered body does not change into a robot or cyborg but emerges as a human hybrid body that I would describe as a utopian variant of the Bakhtinian grotesque body.

In his examination of sci-fi genre, Mark Bould discusses its use of grotesque as conceptualised by Mikhail Bakhtin who claimed that it blurs the borderlines “between the body and the world and between separate bodies” (qtd. in Bould 91). According to Bould, the Bakhtinian grotesque body offers a “utopian prefiguration” of potentially unfinished process of bodily transformation and transfiguration. Bakhtin defines grotesque body as being “not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limit” (26). Ryszard Fox’s hybrid body, resulting from several transplant surgeries, is everything but “a complete unit” and, as the ending suggests, it will never become one. Predictably, Arie Stevens, the last incarnation of Ryszard Fox featured at the end of the film, will continue his career of racing driver and most likely will undergo more transplant surgeries that will further transgress his bodily and identity limits. Consecutive appearances of Fox’s transplanted body consisting of parts provided by human and at some points non-human donors have the potential to produce a “grotesque shock” when one suddenly notices “that objects that appear to be familiar and under control are actually undergoing surprising transformation” (Csicsery-Ronay 146). As Bould explains: “The grotesque anomalousness stems from the inadequacy of rationalised systems to account for the material fullness of the universe, reminding us that the universe consists not of bounded objects—individual, monadic, distinct—but of endless processes and interrelations” (91). Bould’s application of the category of the grotesque body to the sci-fi genre emphasises bodily openness and permeability with a simultaneous rejection of traditional division into the beautiful and the ugly.

Ryszard Fox’s body with its constant circulation of various parts and organs is a utopian variant of Bakhtinian grotesque body that always transgresses its erstwhile limits and attached identities. Due to its perpetual fluctuations, it resists any form of control and discipline revealing its subversive potential as it questions the concept of an ideal, uniform, and homogenised communist/national body present in the Polish public discourse in the 1960s. In Fox’s grotesque body each transplant emerges as Nancy’s *intrus* that penetrates an erstwhile whole and closed oneness. Thus, the transplant becomes a metaphorical figure of otherness both endangering and saving the original body whether individual or collective. Eventually, the hybrid body of transplants displays a transgressive potential to trespass between different divisions and hierarchies and as such it indirectly subverts the main premises of nationalistic politics led by Polish communist party in the late 1960s.

⁶ This generic overlap is also noted by Bugaj in her article on *Roly-Poly* (143).

Transplanting Genres, Modes, and Styles

Although film critics and historians agree that *Roly Poly* belongs to popular cinema, their generic classifications are by no means consistent. For example, Monika Talarczyk-Gubała and Iwona Sowińska call it a comedy (Talarczyk-Gubała 57; Sowińska 229), Janina Falkowska examines it as a science-fiction film (105-107), whereas Tadeusz Lubelski identifies it as both science-fiction and comedy which is the most accurate label (279). However, the film is not only a hybrid of popular genres as it also displays characteristics of art cinema. For example, the narrative structure of the film significantly departs from Wajda's earlier films that were rather traditional in terms of story presentation. *Roly Poly* employs chronological narrative structure, yet it is highly episodic, and the temporal relationships are not precise in terms of duration. The ellipses between consecutive episodes are indefinite, and it is only dialogue that provides this information. The episodes are often presented in a fragmentary fashion; for instance, the first episode of the race uses disjunctive rapid editing and random camera distances that, along with insufficient amount of lighting, prevent the event from being delivered in a complete and transparent way.

Roly Poly's mise-en-scène also displays an aesthetic inconsistency. On the one hand, there are the highly stylized white interiors of the hospital furnished with futuristic medical equipment, which follows the generic convention of sci-fi. On the other hand, the film also employs natural locations, yet these are used in collage-like sequences of Chicago and (most likely) contemporary Warsaw.⁷ The potential effect of realism is diminished due to fast editing and radical changes of camera angles. As a result, rather than spatio-temporal continuity, the viewer observes a mosaic of moving images. The dynamic and fragmentary outdoor episodes of car races and crashes contrast with the relatively static conversation scenes that occur in the interiors at the hospital, the lawyer's apartment, or the psychoanalyst's office. Admittedly, for the latter two, it is difficult to identify these as either private or professional space. Both the lawyer and the psychoanalyst seem to work and live in the same space which, therefore, cannot be conceptualised through the binary opposition of the public and the private.

Inconsistent space in *Roly Poly* is in parallel with similarly contradictory costuming that uses both the conventions of scenic realism and artificiality typical of sci-fi genres. For example, the lawyer wears a turtleneck sweater and a hat, garb that was popular at the end of the 1960s, yet not necessarily amongst professionals but rather Polish intelligentsia. For Ryszard Fox's character, costumes along with acting techniques signify his identity's permutations. In the first brief episode of the car race, we see him with his brother as they greet their fans. Instead of typical car racers' uniforms, they both wear unbuttoned shiny black jackets, revealing their chests adorned with golden chains which signifies both their celebrity status and mobilises the context of popular culture. Tomasz's wife, who arrives with their kids to wish good luck to her husband, wears a skimpy black dress and some futuristic jewellery: a shiny metallic tiara and a collar-like necklace. In contrast, her kids wear anachronistic clothes from various historical periods. After the opening race episode, there is a brief insert of an episode in a hospital in which we see nurses in their generic uniforms which evokes a realistic mode of representation. This mode continues with shots showing the lawyer in realistic attire arriving at the hospital. When he reaches the entrance we see a bunch of young people wearing what at the first glance looks like hippie garb typical of the 1960s, however, there is an obvious element of stylization to this; for example, almost all of them are wearing some kind of hunter hat and ornamental jewellery which disrupts this initial effect of realism. In addition, one of them is wearing bizarre make up of extra pair of eyes painted on his face which evokes surrealist imagery. It later transpires that these young people illegally sell organs and the way in which they behave is very reminiscent of black marketers in communist Poland. It is worthy of note that these hippie-like characters are played by the members of a then popular music group *Blue-and-Black* (*Niebiesko-Czarni*) which serves as self-reflexive reference to vernacular popular culture.

Once in the hospital, the lawyer meets the doctor who performed the transplant surgery on Ryszard Fox; like the nurses, he also wears a white uniform but its upper part is unbuttoned, and there is a golden chain adorning his bare chest. The surgeon is played by Jerzy Zelnik, one of the most handsome actors of the era

⁷ The same production strategy used Marek Pierstrak in his adaptation of another work by Lem *Pilot Pirx's Test*.

whose bare chest was also generously displayed in Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s *Pharaoh* (*Faraon*, 1966). In *Roly Poly* his costume connotes his dandyism rather than his medical professionalism. Likewise, in his tightly fitting suit and pointed shoes, the representative of the insurance company looks more like a pop singer than a professional. His female colleagues wear glittery skimpy dresses and big pop-art style glasses. To conclude, the costumes in *Roly Poly* are not only non-realistic as it is requested by the generic conventions but they also present an excessive collection of various styles. The futuristic mixes with the anachronistic that further emphasises spatio-temporal inconsistency demonstrated earlier.

Inconsistent and frequently stylized costuming is reinforced by various styles of acting. In the car race episode Ryszard and Tomasz Foxes (played by real siblings the Kobiela brothers, with Bogumił being one of the most prominent actors of the 1960’s), use excessive body language and exaggerated facial expression. Tomasz’s hysterically loud laughter not only contributes to his grotesque characterisation but also foregrounds the process of acting. Likewise, the hospital personnel, the employees of the insurance company and other episodic characters use an exaggerated style of acting. Perhaps the most spectacular example of it provides Anna Prucnal who plays Tomasz’s wife. The actress, who made her name due to her role in Dušan Makavejev’s *Sweet Movie* (1974), created the grotesque character of Mrs Fox in Wajda’s film. She appears in only two brief episodes, yet both are of rare intensity. As Grzegorz Piotrowski and Karol Szymański describe, the actress is self-consciously using a very low pitch voice accompanied by simultaneous amplification of the volume. In addition, she delivers her lines at a very fast pace punctuating them with occasional animal-like shouts. Ultimately, her acting techniques produce a hybrid effect with the artificial becoming both natural and plausible (113). Her performance in *Roly Poly* resists the standard distinction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic acting techniques. Finally, Bogumił Kobiela performing the protagonist who constantly changes organs and identities, uses stylized gestures and movements, yet these never become a caricature. In effect, he produces a Brechtian type of self-ironic or alienating distance in presenting his ever changing persona. Juxtaposition of various acting styles in such a brief film inevitably foregrounds the performative aspect of all presented identities embodied in the characters.

Inconsistencies of mise-en-scène in *Roly Poly* accompany the variable visual styles. The opening credit sequence begins with a collage of Ryszard Fox’s photographic images displayed on several blocks which are erected upon one another. The blocks are constantly moving which results in the fragmentation of an otherwise realistic picture. The sequence’s design is reminiscent of the opening credits of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) as well as collages used by Věra Chytilová in *Daisies* (1966). More importantly, I would suggest that this opening collage of fragmented photographic images of the protagonist initiates the figure of the *exquisite cadaver*, the aforementioned surrealist parlour-game with its accidental collection of words or images, which serves as a primary formal structure organising both narrative content and its cinematic rendition. The opening credits sequence can be seen as a self-reflexive play upon the meaning of the film’s title *Roly Poly*.

The initial collage is soon replaced by seemingly more realistic images of the first car race, yet the highly stylized low-key lighting submerges the setting in a darkness that renders the fictional space somehow abstract. In the following episode depicting the primary crash, Wajda uses comic-like drawings evidently inspired by then contemporary pop art. The hospital episodes are illuminated with high-key fluorescent lighting, which makes these narrative segments the closest in style to the visual conventions of the sci-fi genre. Finally, there are several scenes that are filmed in standard realistic style, evoking ordinariness and everyday life. To conclude, *Roly Poly* employs a whole range of narrative and visual devices that represent various generic and aesthetic conventions which are intertwined in a rather whimsical fashion. This aesthetic inconsistency results in the body of the film itself becoming an “exquisite cadaver.” In *Roly Poly*, Wajda, as surrealist artists did many decades before him, plays with images dissecting them into parts and then assembling them into a new and often unexpected entity. Thus, the cinematic image loses its transparency and instead becomes a building block which turns the film as a whole into a self-reflexive frolic.

Conclusion

As many critics claim, *Roly Poly* occupies a marginal position in both Wajda's *oeuvre* and within Polish national cinema. However, this occupancy reveals important aspects of larger structures. First and foremost, the film exemplifies various tensions within Polish cinema and culture for that matter: art cinema vs popular/genre cinema, local vs global, Polish vs foreign as well as Polish vs universal. Furthermore, *Roly Poly* demonstrates how popular culture articulates, deliberately or not, then current political and ideological tensions. Specifically, the film implicitly subverts the rhetoric of a nationalistic socialism advocating for a unified national body in need of cleansing from its "foreign" (Jewish) parts. Finally, with its "foreign" aesthetic inspirations, *Roly Poly* disrupts, albeit incidentally, the solid body of Wajda's *auterism* centred around Polish romanticism. The suffering body of a Polish (male) nation permeating Wajda's *oeuvre* is replaced in *Roly Poly*, even if only briefly, with a playful cinematic "exquisite cadaver."

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