

Andrzej Wajda on Censorship and Filmmaking

“As well known, there are two kinds of censorship. One is an internal censorship, which the artist imposes on himself, generally out of fear of the unknown. The other is an external censorship imposed by the various institutions in a country that see it as part of their role to keep order and uphold moral standards.

Too often censorship is thought of in terms of the restrictions imposed on artists and creators by the state, especially if the state finances their projects, which makes them in a sense state employees. That is an oversimplification. True censorship derives from the fear of exceeding the boundaries of decency, the tastes of the time, the social and moral prejudices.” (119)

“This is exactly what the authorities fear: that the artist will portray the world according to his own vision without taking into account historical necessity, the dilemmas of power, the “extremely complex” political circumstances. In order to avoid this “problem,” the Socialist state finances every kind of artistic production—from literature to film.

As I made my films throughout the years, I always had to submit them to the censors. I cut scenes, and above all dialogues, because for the censors the word is privileged channel of ideology. Fortunately for people in my profession, film is image, or more precisely that impalpable “something” between image and sound which is the soul of film. Of course cuts can be made in *Ashes and Diamonds*, the words or exchanges of this character or that, but there is no way anyone can censor Zbyszek Cybulski’s performance. It is precisely the way he is that contains that certain “something” representing political obscenity, the freedom of the boy in dark glasses confronting the reality imposed upon him. The same is true for *Man of Marble*. The film was inadmissible everywhere in the world. What could a few cuts do to it?

The main problem with political cinema is not whether you accept the meddling of the censors or not. The real problem is how to conceive of a work that will render them inoperative. No one can censor what he cannot understand, what transcends the imagination. Create something truly original and the censors will be completely lost; they will have to hang up their scissors and go home.” (121-122)

“That is why throughout this book I keep claiming kinship with the “public,” why I continually want to identify with others. Satre’s phrase “Hell is other people” is not right for me. The others and I together represent the only strength, the only hope. I am dead set against the idea that the art of filmmaking is a mystery and the public a necessary evil, an element the true artist must endure.

That is why I joined the Polish union, Solidarity. I remain faithful to my ideal, for in that ideal I see the only remedy to our sterile solitude, to the emptiness that threatens so many people who seem ready and willing to sacrifice the common good for the sake of their own immediate comfort, people for whom the word “peace” seems nothing more than “leave me in peace,” or “don’t bother me.” (132)

--from *Wajda on Film: A Master’s Notes*. Venice: Acrobat Books, 1991.