

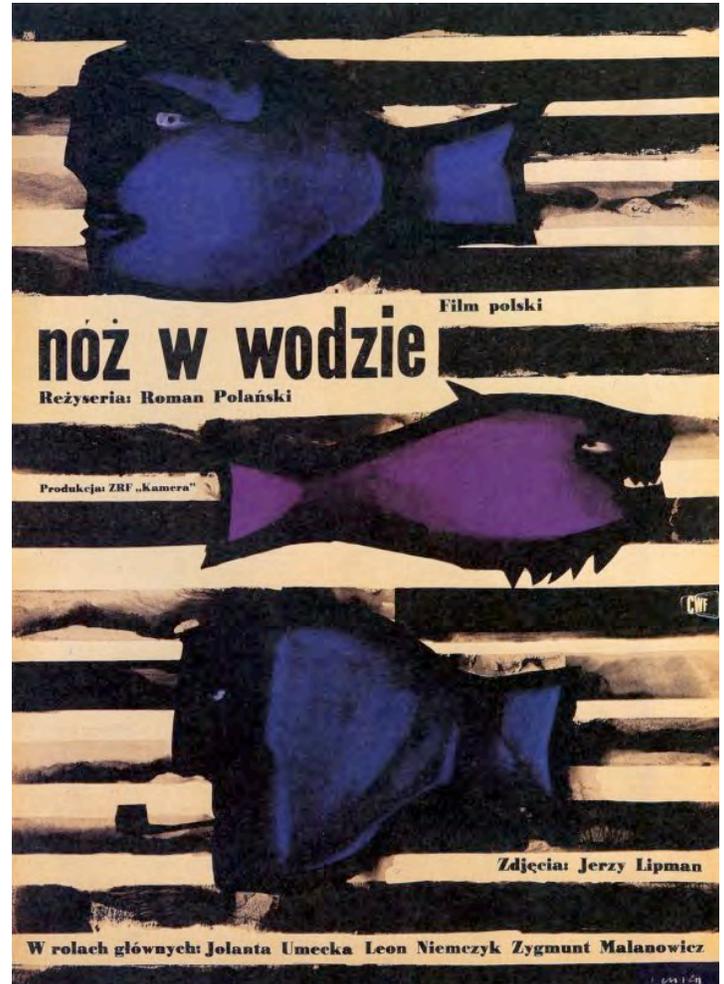
Directed by Roman Polanski
Screenplay by Jerzy Skolimowski
Produced by Stanislaw Zylewicz
Original Music by Krzysztof Komeda
Cinematography by Jerzy Lipman

Leon Niemczyk...Andrzej
 Jolanta Umecka...Krystyna
 Zygmunt Malanowicz...Young Boy
 Anna Ciepielewska...Krystyna (voice)
 Roman Polanski...Young Boy (voice)

Nominated Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture

ROMAN POLANSKI (18 August 1933, Paris, France—) has **acted in 36 films**, some of which are *Caos calmo* (2008), *Zemsta/The Revenge* (2002), *Una pura formalità/A Pure Formality* (1994), *En attendant Godot* (1989), *Le locataire/The Tenant* (1976), *Chinatown* (1974), *Dracula cerca sangue di vergine... e morì di sete!!!/Andy Warhol's Dracula* (1974), *The Magic Christian* (1969), *Dance of the Vampires/The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962), *Le gros et le maigre/The Fat and the Lean* (1961), *Zeżowate szczęście/Bad Luck* (1960), *Gdy spadają anioły/When Angels Fall Down* (1959), *Lampa/The Lamp* (1959), *Dwaj ludzie z szafa/Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958), *Zaczarowany rower/Magical Bicycle* (1955). He has **directed 29 films**, including *The Ghost* (2010), *Oliver Twist* (2005), *The Pianist* (2002), *Death and the Maiden* (1994), *Frantic* (1988), *Pirates* (1986), *Tess* (1979), *Le locataire/The Tenant* (1976), *Chinatown* (1974), *Che?/Diary of Forbidden Dreams* (1972), *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1971), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Dance of the Vampires/The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), *Cul-de-sac* (1966), *Repulsion* (1965), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962), *Le gros et le maigre/The Fat and the Lean* (1961), *Gdy spadają anioły/When Angels Fall* (1959), *Lampa/The Lamp* (1959), *Dwaj ludzie z szafa/Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958), *Morderstwo/A Murderer/A Murder* (1957), *Rower/Bicycle* (1955). He won a Best Director Oscar for *The Pianist* (2003); and was nominated Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium- *Rosemary's Baby* (1969); Best Director- *Chinatown* (1975); Best Director- *Tess* (1981); and Best Picture- *The Pianist* (2003).

JERZY SKOLIMOWSKI (5 May 1938, Łódź, Poland—) wrote 23 films, direct 22, acted in 17, produced 4 and was art director for 2.



Some of his writing credits are: *Cztery noce z Anna/Four Nights with Anna* (2008), *30 Door Key* (1991), *Torrents of Spring* (1989), *Mesmerized* (1986), *Success Is the Best Revenge* (1984), *Moonlighting* (1982), *Rece do gory/Hands Up!* (1981), *The Shout* (1978), *Poslizg/A Slip-up* (1972), *Deep End* (1971), *Le départ* (1967), *Bariera/Barrier* (1966), *Walkower* (1965), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962), *Pieniadze albo życie/Your Money or Your Life* (1961), *Niewinni czarodzieje/Innocent Sorcerers* (1960), *Hamles/Little Hamlet* (1960).

LEON NIEMCZYK (15 December 1923, Warsaw, Poland—29 November 2006, Łódź, Poland, lung cancer) acted in 247 films and tv series, among them, "Ranczo" (18 episodes, 2006-2007), *Szatan z siódmej klasy* (2006), *Inland Empire* (2006), "Na dobre i na złe" (37 episodes, 1999-2003), *Ubu król/King Ubu* (2003), *Nienasyceńie/Insatiability* (2003), *Chłopaki nie płaczą/Boys Don't Cry* (2000), *Polska śmierć/Polish Death* (1995), *Blood of the Innocent* (1994), *Straszny sen Dwidziusia Górkiewicza/The Terrible Dream of Babyface Gorkiewicz* (1993), "W labiryncie" (42 episodes, 1988-1991), *Zabic na koncu/To Kill at the End* (1990), *Ostatni prom/The Last Ferry* (1989), *Epizod Berlin West/Episode in West Berlin* (1986), *Odwet/Revenge* (1983), "Archiv des Todes" (13 episodes, 1980), *Wyrok śmierci/The Death Sentence* (1980), *Anton, der Zauberer/Anton the Magician* (1978), *Potop/The Deluge* (1974), *Dziadek do orzechów/The Nutcracker* (1967), *Bicz boży/God's Whip* (1967), *Panienska z okienka/A Lady from the Window* (1964), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962), *Dzis w*

nocy umrze miasto/Tonight a City Will Die (1961), *Szklana góra/The Glass Mountain* (1960), *Krzyzacy/Black Cross* (1960), *Baza ludzi umarlych/The Depot of the Dead* (1959), *Eroica* (1958), *Godziny nadziei/The Hours of Hope* (1955), *Zaczarowany rower/Magical Bicycle* (1955), *Celuloza/Cellulose* (1954).

JOLANTA UMECKA (no birth/death information given) acted in only 5 films: *Panna zázracnica/Miraculous Virgin* (1967), *Pieciu/Five* (1964), *Echo* (1964), *Czerwone berety/Red Berets* (1963), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962).

ZYGMUNT MALANOWICZ (4 February 1938, Wilno, Poland—) appeared in 37 films and TV series, among them "Londynczycy" (2 episodes, 2009), "Na dobre i na zle" (2 episodes, 2005), *Tulipany/Tulips* (2004), *Kanal* (2002), *Penelopy/Three Penelopes* (1988), *Pobojowisko/Battlefield* (1985), *Katastrofa w Gibraltarze/The Crash Off Gibraltar* (1984), *Gdzie woda czysta i trawa zielona/Where the Water Is Pure and the Grass Is Green* (1977), *Hazardzisci/The Gamblers* (1976), *Ciemna rzeka/Dark River* (1974), *Na krawedzi/On the Edge* (1973), *Kopernik/Copernicus* (1973), *Trad/Leprosy* (1971), *Znaki na drodze/Signs on the Road* (1970), *Polowanie na muchy/Hunting Flies* (1969), *Bariera/Barrier* (1966), *Nackt unter Wölfen/Naked Among Wolves* (1963), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962).

JERZY LIPMAN (10 April 1922, Brzesc, Poland— 10 November 1983, London, England, UK) *Der Tod in der Waschstraße* (1982), *Charlotte/Charlotte S.* (1981), *Kudenow oder An fremden Wassern weinen* (1981), *Der Poltergeist* (1981), "Die Koblanks" (13 episodes, 1979), *Und der Regen verwischt jede Spur/Tears of Blood* (1972), *Das Paradies auf der anderen Seite* (1972), *Psychologie des Orgasmus/Psychology of the Orgasm* (1970), *Dzien oczyszczenia/The Day of Purification* (1970), *Das Bastardzeichen/Bend Sinister* (1970), *Popioly/The Ashes* (1965), *Prawo i piesc/The Law and the Fist* (1964), *Rozwodów nie bedzie/No More Divorces* (1964), *Gangsterzy i filantropi/Gangsters and Philanthropists* (1963), *Zbrodniarz i panna/The Criminal and the Lady* (1963), *Nóż w wodzie/Knife in the Water* (1962), *Zezowate szczescie/Bad Luck/The Eighth Day of the Week* (1960), *Kanal* (1957), *Cien/Shadow* (1956), *Pokolenie/A Generation* (1955), *Kiedy ty spisz/While You're Asleep* (1952).



Roman Polanski from *World Film Directors*, v. II, ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co., NY 1988

Director, scenarist and actor, born in Paris where his father, a Polish Jew, was working for a phonograph record company. His mother, also a Polish citizen, was of Russian descent. The family moved to Krakow when Polanski was three. The war began a few years later and in 1940 the child watched uncomprehendingly as German soldiers built a wall across the end of the street he lived in; they were sealing off the ghetto. The following year, shortly before both parents were taken off to concentration camps, his father led him to the edge of the ghetto: "He cut the wire and told me to run."

Polanski was then eight years old. He made his way to the country where he survived the war, living outdoors on his own sometimes but mostly staying with a succession of Catholic peasant families. He sold newspapers and did odd jobs for pocket money, spending most of it at the movies, where he watched anti-Jewish propaganda films and dubbed Hollywood pictures indiscriminately: "I didn't care, so long as it moved." His precocious awareness of life's randomness was sharpened one summer afternoon when he was gathering blackberries on a hill and some lounging German soldiers loosed off a round at him, apparently by way of target practice. His peasant guardians tried to raise him as a Catholic but it is perhaps not surprising that he became an atheist in his early teens.

Returning to Krakow just before the end of the war, Polanski was blown through a door in one of the last of the German air raids, and seriously injured. His mother, he learned, had died in Auschwitz. His father survived and returned to Krakow, but after he remarried Polanski moved into lodgings. He continued to haunt the movies and says he was much influenced by two films he saw then: Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* and Olivier's *Hamlet*—both about loners in a hostile world. Another of the violent episodes he attracts like a lightning conductor occurred when he was sixteen: lured into an underground bunker with the promise of a cheap racing bike, he was nearly killed by a man who had already murdered three people.

At about this time his father enrolled him in a Krakow technical school, hoping to make an electrician of him. Polanski demurred, in 1950 transferring himself to an art school. Meanwhile he had become interested in acting. He talked his way into a job with a local radio station and went on to act with the Krakow Theatre and, beginning in 1953, in films (including Wajda's *A Generation*). Rejected by the State Acting School (partly, he says, because he was "too cocky"), and anxious to avoid the draft, Polanski then applied for entry to the famous State Film School at Lodz. After ten days of rigorous tests he was one of the six applicants accepted in 1954 for the five-year directors' course,

Apart from the rigorous training it provided, the Lodz school offered virtually continuous screenings of an immense variety of films from all periods and countries. In the heated student debates about the relative merits of these films Polanski says he allied himself with "the school of *Citizen Kane*." The first of his own student films to attract attention was *Rozbijemy Zabawe* (*Break Up the Dance*, 1957), for which Polanski recruited local toughs to wreck a school party and filmed the result, narrowly escaping expulsion.

In his fourth year he made the extraordinary fifteen-minute surrealist fable *Dwaj ludzie z szafa* (*Two Men and a Wardrobe*, 1958). A large, old-fashioned wardrobe rises slowly out of the sea. It is being carried by two men (Henry Kluba and Jakub Goldberg) who stagger with it to the beach. They dance with joy at their accomplishment and then lug their prize into the city. But the world they find there is full of deceit, theft, and mindless brutality, and no one wants them or the wardrobe. A gang of young thugs about to attack a pretty girl are foiled when she sees them in the wardrobe

mirror, and in revenge they break the mirror and beat up the two men. In the end the latter carry their burden sadly back to the beach and, moving carefully so as not to damage a little boy's sand castles, walk with it into the sea.

Polanski (who appears as one of the thugs) has called this “the only film I've made that ‘means’ something. It was about the intolerance of society towards someone who is different.” It introduced a number of elements that were to recur in his movies—the circular plot, the isolation of the central characters in an indifferent society, the use of visual tricks to undermine the viewer's sense of “reality.” The score is by Krzysztof Komeda, who provided the music for all of Polanski's films except *Repulsion* until his death in 1969....

The following year Polanski made his diploma film, *Gdy spadaja anioły* (*When Angels Fall*). Filmed in color, it tells the story of an old woman who works as an attendant in a men's public lavatory but whose thoughts take her back into the past—to her love affair with a young soldier, her son, and his death in war. From time to time her reveries are interrupted by the squalid realities of her job, but finally her lover returns to reclaim her, crashing through the skylight in the form of an angel. Some saw the film as an attack on the sentimentalism inspired by religion and the Polish genre paintings to which it refers, but most found it a surprising and touching piece. Polanski, Goldberg, and Kluba all have parts in the film, as does Barbara Kwiatkowska-Lass, to whom the director was briefly married in 1960-1961.

Leaving the Lodz school in 1959, Polanski joined Kamera, one of the eight Polish production units, as an assistant director, working with the French documentarist J.M. Drot and with Andrzej Munk on *Bad Luck*. In 1961 Polanski directed a short of his own in Paris, *Le Gros et le maigre* (*The Fat and the Lean*), in which he plays the groveling slave of a gross and filthy tyrant (André Katelbach). This savage allegory about governments and governed is played as a slapstick comedy, a fact which only accentuates its brutality. Polanski's last short feature, *Ssaki* (*Mammals*, 1962), is another Beckettian parable about the power game in which two friends frantically cheat, lie, and mangle in a struggle to decide which is to ride in and which is to pull their sleigh. Less savage than its predecessor, and beautifully photographed in a snowy landscape, it won the Grand Prix at the Tours Short Film Festival.

Polanski's international reputation was established at once by his first feature film, *Nóż w wodzie* (*Knife in the Water*, 1962), which he wrote (reportedly in three days and three nights) in collaboration with Jerzy Skolimowski and Jakub Goldberg. It concerns Andrzej, a successful sports writer in his mid-thirties (Leon Niemczyk) and his beautiful wife Krystyna (Jolanta Umecka) who pick up a young hitchhiker (Zygmunt Malanawicz) and Andrzej, on an impulse, invites him to join them on their boat for a sailing weekend.

Andrzej is both attracted and challenged by the boy's audacity and independence. He gives him a series of arduous or difficult tasks to perform, demonstrating (not least for Krystyna's benefit) his own superior strength and skill and his mastery of assorted status symbols. The boy grows increasingly resentful and on the second day, when Andrzej drops his knife into the lake there is a brief struggle. The boy falls into the water and, believing that he

has drowned, Andrzej goes off to the police. The boy returns, makes love to Krystyna and leaves, accounts square. When he gets back, Andrzej admits that he has not been to the police and Krystyna eventually tells him what has happened. Andrzej refuses to believe her and they drive off as far as a road junction. One road leads to the police and a confession of manslaughter, the other home (and the tacit acknowledgement of Krystyna's infidelity). The car waits at the road junction....

There is a minimum of dialogue in the film, which makes its points visually and with great economy—the emptiness of the couple's marriage is sketched in at the outset without a word being spoken when Andrzej takes over the wheel from Krystyna with a loveless kiss to which she makes no attempt to respond. It is significant that the man's first action in the movie is to regain control of his car, since he is not much more than the sum of his status-conferring possessions (among which he includes his wife). Objects are used throughout the film with great symbolic force—like the boy's phallic knife, all he has to set against the older man's array of power symbols.

The rivalry between the two men is not only sexual—it is also a contest between youth and encroaching age and between Andrzej's smug materialism and the boy's rejection of these values. However, it is surely simplistic to see the film as a political parable, as some critics did—Polanski himself has said that “the young man, had he been in the husband's place, would have struck the same attitude” and indeed the two have much in common (which partly accounts for the hint of paternal affection in Andrzej's complex attitude towards his rival). The claustrophobic pettiness of the triangular relationship on the little boat is thrown into relief by the beauty and spaciousness of the Mazury Lakes, magnificently photographed in black and white by Jerzy Lipman.

There were rumors of “orgies” during the filming, which was on that account halted for a time by Warsaw officials. Nevertheless, the picture was warmly received in Poland until the party chief Władysław Gomułka denounced it as a vehicle for corrupt Western standards. In the West it was highly successful and much honored, taking the main prize and the international critics' award at Venice, and receiving an Oscar nomination as best foreign film. However, Gomułka's denunciation meant that Polanski could not hope to make another film in Poland. He went to Paris, where he directed an episode in the compilation film *Les Plus*

belles escroqueries du monde (*The Beautiful Swindlers*, 1963), and co-authored the screenplay for Jean Leon's *Aimez-Vous les Femmes?*, about a group of gourmet cannibals with a taste for young girls. Gérard Brach, his collaborator on both scripts, joined him in England to work on Polanski's own next feature, *Repulsion* (1965), and co-authored most of his subsequent scenarios....

The world of *Repulsion* is an ugly and lonely one, in which there is lust and fear but no love, voyeurism (including the audience's) but no understanding. Here, as in his previous film, Polanski uses objects with great skill, this time to reflect Carol's (Catherine Deneuve) mounting disorientation, which causes her to murder brutally both her boyfriend Colin (John Fraser) and the landlord. The terrifying visual distortions she experiences in the apartment were achieved by building duplicate sets of furniture,



larger than normal and misshapen, and photographing with a wide-angle lens....

Repulsion received the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and was greatly admired by most critics, even those who disliked it....Bosley Crowther, for whom it was one of the best pictures of the year, commended its “haunting concept of the pain and pathos of the mentally deranged.” There were comparisons to Hitchcock’s *Psycho* but Ivan Butler thought it fundamentally different—“even if both are masterpieces of horror”—because Polanski takes us into the mind of the killer and in this way demonstrates his compassion....

After *Cul-de-Sac* (1966)—said to be the director’s own favorite among his films, but not successful at the box office—Polanski entered into a contract with the American producer Martin Ransohoff to make three films, only one of which was completed. This was *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967; called *Dance of the Vampires* in Britain), which was distributed in by MGM. It is a blackly funny Polanskian variation on the Dracula theme, which ends with the vampires set to take over the world. Jack MacGowran plays the

learned vampire-hunter Professor Abronsius, Polanski himself appears as the Professor’s faithful assistant Alfred, and Ferdy Mayne is the defanged Count von Krolock. Sarah, beautiful daughter of the local innkeeper, is played by Sharon Tate, who became Polanski’s wife in 1968....

Bosley Crowther found the picture “superbly scenic and excitingly photographed,” but thought it a “dismal” spoof on the genre. Most American critics shared this view and the movie failed in the United States—in Polanski’s opinion because of the cuts and other changes imposed there by Martin Ransohoff. The director denounced this version, and tried to have his name removed from the credits. There was a very different response in France, where Claude Michel Cluny wrote that the picture “attains real perfection” and Michel Delahaye called it “a great experimental film, and a great comedy.”

Invited to Hollywood by William Castle to screen Ira Levin’s best-selling novel *Rosemary’s Baby*, Polanski made the adaptation himself. ...*Rosemary’s Baby* (Paramount-William Castle Enterprises, 1968) was the first of Polanski’s movies not based on an original script of his own, but he was from the outset excited by the possibilities of Levin’s novel. Indeed, the story has much in

common with some of his own earlier scripts—especially the loneliness of the heroine, a lapsed Catholic, as she tries to convince an unbelieving world of her mad story. As in *Repulsion* the apartment, as Paul Meyersburg points out, “is the human body in disguise. And, of course, it has a sexual identity formed by the door which must not be opened for fear of what it will reveal, and by the passage which must not, yet has to be, entered and negotiated.”

The film was cut by the British censors and condemned by the United States Roman Catholic Office for Motion Pictures because of “the perverted use which the film makes of fundamental beliefs and its mockery of religious persons and practices”—

charges which some critics have angrily disputed. It brought Polanski the David di Donatello Award at Taormina, while the screenplay received a Screen Writers Annual Award, an Edgar Allan Poe Special Award, and an Oscar nomination. It was enthusiastically praised by most critics, although one found it further evidence of a “worrying absence of purpose” in Polanski’s work since *Knife in the Water*. Financially it was the most successful of his films, one of the hits of the year.

Polanski has described it as

the happiest period of his life. He was gratified by the success of his first Hollywood movie and he was newly married to Sharon Tate—according to Kenneth Tynan “the only girl who ever moved into his life on equal terms.” He wrote and coproduced Simon Hesera’s *A Day at the Beach* and then went to London to work on the screenplay of *Day of the Dolphin*. On August 9, 1969, he learned that his pregnant wife and four of their friends had been murdered in California by members of the Manson cult. After that Polanski made no more films until 1971, when he directed a screen version of *Macbeth* for Playboy Productions.

Polanski’s *Macbeth* was adapted by the director and Kenneth Tynan. It deviates relatively little from Shakespeare’s text but puts on screen some extremely bloody scenes which in the original occur offstage, and differs from earlier version in portraying Macbeth (Jon Finch) and Lady Macbeth (Francesca Annis) as still young. The result was chosen by the National Board of Review in the United States as the best film of the year, but the reviews were mixed....

Financially, *Macbeth* was a failure and so was *Che?* (*What?*, 1973), which Polanski wrote and directed for Carlo Ponti. It is an anarchic version of *Alice in Wonderland* in which Nancy (Sydney Rome), a naive American girl



in Italy, is attacked by a gang of youths and takes refuge in a Mediterranean villa. She confides to her diary an account of her pursuit of knowledge among the crew of swingers, perverts, and assorted drop-outs she finds there. A reviewer in *Christian Century* found it a sensitive satire on contemporary decadence, “ironic, subtle, strangely surreal-ambiguous,” and others praised its visual beauty, but most critics shared the view of Hollis Alpert, who called it a “sneaky, dirty-minded little farce.”

After producing *Afternoon of a Champion* (1972), an excellent documentary about his friend the racing driver Jackie Stewart, Polanski returned to Hollywood to make *Chinatown* (1974) from a script by Robert Towne....Polanski has said that he was “very uncomfortable” working with a script he had not written, and which was obviously the work of “someone who had a great talent for the verbal side but none for the visual....I was somehow constantly bored with the material.” The director is also said to have had serious difficulties on the set with Faye Dunaway and with the cinematographer Stanley Cortez, who was eventually replaced by John Alonzo. None of these conflicts is evident in the completed film, which brought Polanski the Prix Raoul-Levy, among other awards, and was one of his greatest financial successes.

A number of critics discussed the movie’s water symbolism, and even more referred to its characteristically despairing conclusion that heroism is “futile and irrelevant”—that the baddies always win; it was a conclusion that seemed very much in tune with the national mood after Watergate. Jonathan Baumbach expressed the majority opinion when he called it “an elegantly stylized homage” to the private eye genre, presenting a “romantic vision of a murderously corrupt and impotent world,” and filled with “moment to moment pleasures.” Others hailed it as a return to the political and social concerns implicit in Polanski’s early pictures.

In 1974 Polanski directed a stage production of Berg’s opera *Lulu* at Spoleto. Various other projects fell through and his next film was *Le Locataire* (*The Tenant*, 1976), adapted by Polanski and Brach from a novel by Roland Topor, and filmed in Paris. It had Sven Nykvist as cinematographer and an extremely distinguished cast, headed by Polanski himself, and including Shelley Winters, Melvyn Douglas, Isabelle Adjani, Jo Van Fleet, Lila Kedrova, and Claude Dauphin....After *The Tenant* Polanski began work on other projects, notably a remake of *Hurricane* for Dino de Laurentiis. His plans were halted by the latest in a series of catastrophes that have marked the director’s life. In mid-1977 he was arrested and charged with sexual offenses against a thirteen-year-old girl. Polanski pleaded guilty and in December 1977 he was jailed for forty-two days for psychological examination. The day before he was due to return to court for sentencing he fled to Paris. *Hurricane* was assigned to another director and for some time Polanski could find no work.

When he did secure another assignment it was to make a screen adaptation of Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, a three-hour epic made simultaneously in French and English, and with a Dolby-Stereo soundtrack, which is said to be the most expensive film ever made in France....

Polanski has acknowledged the influence on his films of Kafka, Beckett, and Pinter. The principal complaint about his work is that he offers no “moral perspective” on what he shows us, sharing the absurdist conviction that “man is isolated in a meaningless decaying universe.” Given the circumstances of his life, it is perhaps not surprising that this should be so; he could be seen as a paradigm of the characteristic traumas of modern man, political and personal.

It is above all the “aloneness” of his central characters that his films express, usually in profoundly claustrophobic settings. Ivan Butler writes that it “is this contrast of distance (between personalities) and confinement (of setting), resulting in a sort of atmospheric compression, that generates the tension he can build with such relentless persistence.” Paul Mayersburg says that “his films give the feeling that the stories they tell do actually arise out of the settings in which they take place,” and Polanski himself believes that “this is the most important thing in filmmaking; when you set your story somewhere it has to happen *there*....The more lies you tell, the more you have to pretend they are true.” Elsewhere he says it is not “the amount of violence I show in my films that disturbs people. It’s simply that I depict it with more care. It looks more real and what worries people is that it usually has an emotional content.”

This being so, it is not surprising that Polanski is a perfectionist, hard to satisfy and “not generous with his praise.” Kenneth Tynan said that “His knowledge of all branches of film making is daunting and encyclopedic,” and Douglass Slocombe told an interviewer that “no one can contradict Roman about any technical point. If the sound man says ‘We can’t get that,’ he’ll reply, ‘We’ll get such-and-such a microphone and you’ll get it that way.’” The producer Gene Gutkowski has commented that Polanski “sets himself almost impossible goals, personal and professional, on every level. Allied to an unusually sensitive intuition (knowing instinctively just how a scene should be handled, a camera angled, a piece of furniture placed in the set), is a most acute power of observation. He *observes* everything around him constantly and minutely: nothing escapes his attention. He is aware of an actor’s every smallest gesture, movement, expression.... It is an almost compulsive need of perfection. He can be a hard taskmaster, but he obtains what he wants by infinite patience.”

Polanski is a small man and has always looked many years younger than he is: he says he was almost denied entrance to the premiere of *Knife in the Water* because he was taken to be underage, and Shelley Winters thinks he must be a kind of Dorian Gray—“Somewhere there’s a really creepy picture of him in an attic.” Tynan said that “life schooled him and steeled him to be a one-man survival kit”: he is immensely fit and strong, and “holds himself with the compact, aggressive tension of a crossbow.” He enjoys skiing, fencing, and driving cars at high speed. He is more sympathetic to capitalism than to communism, is suspicious of trade unions, and has “a distaste for religion.” According to Tynan, “‘Women’s-lib’ arouses him to a high pitch of bewildered fury.”

from Roman Polanski Interviews. Ed. Paul Cronin. University of Mississippi, Jackson, 2005.

“I Was Part of the Welles Group” Piotr Kaminski, 1983.

K: *What did you think of the film school at Lodz?*

P: Making films had been my dream for a long time, but during that era of Polish Stalinism the chances of getting into such an elitist school—where the students enjoyed so many privileges—were very small. My social background didn’t really work in my favor as I was neither working class nor a peasant.

K: *But you still made it.*

P: Apparently it was less important than I thought. After graduating from high school I tried to get into the theater school in Krakow as an actor but they didn’t want me, and I went to Warsaw with the same result. Around this time Andrzej Wajda, who was a student at the film school, asked me to be in *A Generation*, his first full-length production. Because of this I felt a connection to Lodz—

I knew the students and I had worked with them, so it all seemed less inaccessible.

There was also the Young Spectators' Theater in Krakow where I acted and where Antoni Bohdziewicz, a film director and a professor at the film school, noticed me. He sometimes worked at the theater and gave me a job on movie produced by two film students. This was in 1952. Bohdziewicz was a very fashionable and sophisticated man and a big admirer of Western culture, something frowned upon by the ruling class. Yet he had an influential position at the school as he'd been one of its original founders.

When I failed my drama school examinations it was Bohdziewicz who encouraged me to try something else, saying, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Before sitting the exams at the Lodz film school there was a preliminary round where the professors sifted through the four hundred candidates from around the country and ruled out those who didn't stand a chance. Soon afterwards I found myself in Lodz with about a hundred other people taking the entrance exams which lasted ten days. There were screenings and different professors gave discussions about films that we'd seen, as well as acting and drawing exercises. At the end came the decisive exam before a committee. Of course the main subject was Marxist-Leninism, something I was terribly ignorant of—quite unacceptably so. But it seemed that Bohdziewicz—who must have strongly believed in my talent—had fought a battle with these committee members, these representatives of the state. He won and I got in. It goes without saying that I couldn't believe my luck. My studies there lasted five years and I graduated in 1959.

K: *Who else got in that same year?*

P: Only eight other students, among them two of my old friends from Krakow: Wieslaw Zubrzycki, a very cosmopolitan Catholic intellectual, and Janusz Majewski, an architect. Majewski eventually graduated and became a filmmaker. Wieslaw left after the second year.

The school consisted of three faculties: *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and production. The acting department wasn't established until later. For the first year all classes were taken together, then little by little we went our own ways. The school was very well-equipped, and there were actually more employees than students. We studied things directly related to the cinema, for example art direction and music, but also art history and literature. There was a complete filmmaking facility there and already in our third year we started to make films. There was a little studio outside town with electricians and mechanics, and a production office with editing and projection rooms. The most amazing thing is that even with all this there were some students who didn't do anything. They'd got into the school by pretending they wanted to make movies, but backed out when actually confronted with all these opportunities.

K: *How was such luxury possible in a country that had been so devastated by war?*

P: This is easy to explain. Lenin had said, "Amongst all the arts, cinema is the most important." Obviously in those days television didn't exist and fortunately comments like Lenin's were followed to the letter, which meant that the authorities were aware

of the political importance of documentaries and fiction films. That's why we had far more freedom at the school than students of other colleges and universities, and even the whole country.

K: *Why was the school in Lodz and not Warsaw?*

P: Warsaw had been destroyed during the war and the authorities were in a hurry to establish a film school as quickly as possible. When deciding where to build production studios they opted for the city closest to Warsaw that wasn't in ruins. It was a logical choice as Lodz is only about a hundred kilometers away. Our classes took place as much within the confines of the school as on location, which meant we really got the best practical training possible. According to the regulations, during the five years of study every student had to make two silent films, two short documentaries, a short fiction movie, and a final work the length of which wasn't specified. But because there were so many directing students we all ended up writing and acting as much as we directed. We got through a vast amount of film stock. What was expected of us from the first year was complete familiarity with photographic

techniques, so we spent weeks taking still photographs which were, on the whole, not bad, though Zubrzycki's weren't great and he was thrown out.

K: *What kind of films did they show you?*

P: We saw lots of different things thanks to the elitist character of the school. We had access to the national archive and watched lots of films that the general public generally couldn't see. All we had to do was fill out a form and give a reason—any reason—and they would send us the film. Though some titles

weren't distributed, as was always the case in the Eastern countries, copies were always kept for use by party officials and as students we were able to make use of this source ourselves. So filmmakers in Poland never really felt as isolated as, for example, writers and painters did, most of whom had to wait until 1956 and even later before discovering the fruits of a decade of Western culture. For us, Orson Welles, Kurosawa, and Buñuel were common currency. Personally, I was part of the Welles group, but there were also groups of neorealists and students who liked the heroic Soviet cinema. A friend of mine, Roman Hajnberg, admits to having seen [the Vasilyev Brothers' 1934 film] *Chapayev* twenty-five times.

K: *The atmosphere of the school during those days is legendary.*

P: And for good reason. It really was unique and totally unprecedented. The school was a true haven, a refuge of peace—both politically and culturally. Putting aside the eternal lessons of Marxist-Leninism, everything was geared toward a single goal: the efficient schooling of professional filmmakers. Those were the only criteria, even if it meant savaging the system a little bit.

Instead of going to class, students often spent time in the projection rooms. There was also a huge wooden staircase which was the epicenter of the school. It's said that postwar Polish cinema was born on this staircase, though to complete the image I should add that there was a bar at the bottom. The life of the whole school revolved around these two monuments, and whenever there wasn't a screening—which wasn't often—you could always find us there, drinking beer, talking arguing. It just went on and on.

K: *You didn't feel the political presence of the regime?*



P: Well, of course. We had politicization lessons and even undertook military training like everybody else. This was, after all, at a time when “imperialistic forces” were preparing for the Third World War. Naturally our views on art were profoundly conditioned by the pervading ideology and we were constantly debating the virtues of “content” over the vices of “form.”

K: *How did the 1956 crisis affect the school?*

P: Like everywhere else. We burned party cards and stormed the personnel offices, taking confidential files which for a few days were a great source of amusement. The office head ended up running the canteen. He fit there perfectly—the man had found his true vocation.

K: *So today you would say that your experience at Lodz was a positive one.*

P: Yes, Extremely positive, though like most of the other students I wasn't aware of it at the time. We never stopped complaining about how much time we were wasting—and those five years did seem like a very long time. But I quickly realized how much I actually owe to the school. There's no doubt it's where I learned my job.

Roman Polanski. Charlie Rose, 2000.

R: *I hate to see that the fear of the media-trial fire prevents someone from closing the circle.*

P: But don't you realize that the media maybe took over the judicial system in your country? In any case it was all because of the media. The judge himself said at one point, “They will have what they want.” You know?

R: *Your head?*

P: Yes, they wanted my head. Look, it all started so long ago. It started after *Rosemary's Baby*, after the Manson murders. There was a long period before they found the culprit where they were clearly blaming the victims for their own deaths and me for somehow being involved. The absurdity of it was so awesome, that they could suggest it had something to do with black magic or that there was a Ouija board found on the property. I remember my astonishment. I was all right with the press before that. My real problems started with the murder of Sharon Tate and they wouldn't let it go. It's all somehow mixed up with the supernatural, with the Devil. “Why do you make so many films about the Devil? I made two: *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Ninth Gate*. My answer usually is, “Which one are you talking about? *Tess* or *Knife in the Water* or *Chinatown* or *Death and the Maiden*?”

R: *It goes back to what we said, “It's hard to make a good movie.”*

P: It's very hard to make a movie, period. To make a good movie, it's really a question of luck, I would say.

R: *Why is it so difficult to make a good movie?*

P: It's a tremendously complex form of art. It just doesn't depend only on your canvas and paint and paints and colors and brushes. You need an army around you, you need means of production and all the hardware. What's difficult about it? I'll tell you. It's made of pieces, and to maintain the coherence between those pieces is difficult. When a director intends to make a movie, he's got the model of it in his head and the making the movie consists of making that model available to others. There are a lot of people who imagine beautifully, except nobody knows what they're imagining. Directing is making this imagination physical, material. After all, at the end of the day, it's only a piece of film on a reel. When you start doing it there are so many elements that you are using that you get further and further away from the model you have in your head.

First there is the choice of the actors. You imagined certain characters, you're trying to be as close as possible, but there are other options that you come across which are not necessarily like the one you had. An actor is very popular at the moment, for example, and the studio wants him. But he's not what you thought. Sometimes when you're lucky enough you can be as close in reality to what you imagined. There is a physical reality in which the scene will happen, like a room. And that room, even if you build it in the studio, even according to your instructions and plans, is not exactly like the one you imagined. I personally try to concentrate and remember that first vision, that first conception which I liked so much, and see how it relates to this new reality that superimposes itself on my imagined movie. The closer I am to it, the better off I am in the end. And sometimes I literally stand on the set, close my eyes, and try to remember how I imagined the scene before the casting, before the arguing with the producers, before the talk about money, before hiring the actors.

When you're doing the film, you don't—as everyone knows—do it in continuity. You do it in pieces, and there are so many elements to distract you that, when you put it all together, it's not what it's supposed to be. Rushes always look great—even in mediocre films, everybody's always happy. The tragic moment is the rough cut when you put it all together for the first time. Usually the director goes to rest for a few weeks and leaves it with the editor to put it all together. Sometimes he goes to a clinic. Then he returns and sits, and he projection starts. This is the moment when he wants to hang himself because almost inevitably it looks terrible, even with all my experience—and I've been doing this for years and years. So that's why it's so difficult. It's difficult because it's a mosaic of things, because you don't see the whole thing. I went to art school and I know you're supposed to draft the whole thing and then go to the details. Filmmaking is the opposite. You start with the details and then you put it all together.



**from *The Cinema of Roman Polanski dark spaces of the world.*
Ed. by John Orr & Elzbieta Ostrowski. Wallflower Press,
London & NY, 2006. Foreword Polanski's *Fourth Wall Aesthetic.*
Mark Cousins.**

If the bleakness in Polanski's work comes from his life, it is surely the case that his interest in spatial confinement does too. But anti-modernism also derives directly from another element dealt to him by fortune: his technical talent. Whereas Truffaut and the like had their films shot roughly, with few lights, Polanski's collaborators on *Rosemary's Baby*, his first American film, were astonished at his exacting camera requirements and precise understanding of the optics and geometry of lenses. New Wave filmmakers loved the flickering aspect of films but the causticity of *Chinatown* (1974), *Cul-de-Sac*, *Repulsion* and *The Tenant*—and the reason they prevail—is that they do *not* flicker. At the human and technical level, they are devastatingly clear.

This, then, rather than his extraordinary biography, is the lasting significance of a director who is cited today as a major influence by filmmakers such as the brothers Coen and Wachowski....In the age of the Danish film movement Dogme95, of handheld shooting and digital imagery, he once again looks like one of the most distinctive filmmakers of the last half-century.

“Polanski: The Art of Perceiving” John Orr

His camera techniques are close to those praised by Bazin but the consequences are totally different. Perception does not naturally reveal a knowable world, a new undiscovered world of poverty or enchantment that we can lock into with a ready-made system of signs. In Polanski when we ‘see’ something new we are never sure what we see. For the framing of that uncertainty and of the tensions it creates Polanski uses the inspiration of Welles, a Bazin favourite, for staking out a post-mimetic form. Polanski often favours the use of a wide-angle lens with depth of field to encompass action in long takes and at the same time project the detail of the scene that is always, in his way of filming, precise and

meticulous. The celebrated triangles, or three-shots, of *Knife in the Water* and *Cul-de-Sac* seem Wellesian in origin, and owe their triadic frame to the famous snow sequence early in *Citizen Kane* (1941), a three-shot where the distant figure of the young Kane outside the window bisects the two adults inside the cabin who are deciding his future. (Such ‘triangles’ are also seen in the court sequences of Olivier’s *Hamlet*, where the camera films the distant hero in long shot from behind and between the near-field thrones of king and queen.) Shooting on location, Polanski constantly renews this deep-focus strategy to create a sense of uncertainty and mistrust between his characters. In the yacht sequences of *Knife in the Water* on the Mazurian Lakes his nameless student (Zygmunt Malanowicz) constantly bisects in middle distance the profiles of his bored married couple captured close-in, cueing his status as outsider but also his powers of disruptive intervention....

Unlike Welles and Zulawski, Polanski sticks to the human scale; he makes no attempt to outrun it and dazzle us in the process. Welles made space and time uncanny by constantly undermining it; Polanski makes space and time uncanny by establishing its fixity. In the age of relativity, we might say, these are two sides of the same coin....

Polanski is one of the great directors in exploring the dark spaces of the world. They often seem to loom out of nothing, out of the banal, the ordinary, the unthreatening. Hence the gothic is not normally the source of Polanski’s horror though often as in *Cul-de-Sac*, *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, and *The Ninth Gate* it can be a vital accompaniment, a source of dark humor and his mockery. But normally horror emerges out of the humdrum detail of everyday life.

COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XIX:

- Oct 20 Stanley Kubrick *Lolita* 1962
- Oct 27 Carl Theodor Dreyer *Gertrud* 1964
- Nov 3 Eric Rohmer *Ma nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maude's* 1969
- Nov 10 Andrei Tarkovsky *Solaris* 1972
- Nov 17 Arthur Penn *Night Moves* 1975
- Nov 24 Abbas Kiarostami *Nema-ye Nazdik/Close Up* 1990
- Dec 1 Bela Tarr *Werckmeister harmóniák/Werckmeister Harmonies* 2000
- Dec 8 Mike Leigh *Topsy-Turvy* 1999

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