

“Towards the viewer”. About the cinema audience in reviews and feature articles by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska in the papers of the Kielce “Słowo Ludu”

„W stronę widza”. O publiczności kinowej w recenzjach i felietonach Stefanii Heymanowej-Majewskiej na łamach kieleckiego „Słowa Ludu”

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Słowa kluczowe

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Abstract

In this article I would like to outline a picture of the provincial cinema audience, which emerges from the reviews and feature articles by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska, published in the “Słowo Ludu” in the 50s and in the first half of the 60s of the 20th century, that is, when this excellent pre-war columnist was employed on a full-time basis in the Kielce newspaper. I am interested in finding answers to the questions: What was – according to Heymanowa – the specifics of the Kielce audience? And what was the role of a film critic in a medium-sized (although the provincial one) city in the province?

Abstrakt

Chciałabym w niniejszym artykule nakreślić obraz prowincjonalnej publiczności kinowej, jaki wyłania się z recenzji i felietonów Stefanii Heymanowej-Majewskiej, publikowanych w „Słowie Ludu” w l. 50 i w pierwszej połowie l. 60 XX wieku, czyli wtedy, kiedy ta znakomita przedwojenna publicystka pracowała na etacie w kieleckiej gazecie. Interesuje mnie znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytania: Jaka była – wg Heymanowej – specyfika kieleckiej publiczności? I na czym polegała rola krytyka filmowego w średniej wielkości (choć wojewódzkim) mieście na prowincji?

“Towards the viewer”. About the cinema audience in reviews and feature articles by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska in the papers of the Kielce “Słowo Ludu” [“Word of the Peoples” newspaper]

In 1954, on a wave of the beginning thaw in the magazine “Film” a discussion of cinema audience was started. It was attempted to diagnose what viewers expect from the cinema, how far filmmakers’ thinking coincides with the needs of the recipients, whether the “educational-ideological” function to which the cinema of the first half of the 50s was subordinated, should continue to be dominant, or whether there are other important aspects? And what is the role of the film criticism?¹

Not accidentally, this debate was started by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska with a text with the significant title *Towards the viewer*. This excellent critic, translator, one of the pioneers of pre-war film journalism, associated with the START environment², who after the Second World War found herself in Kielce, in a kind of “exile”, and co-created there the local environment of cinema lovers, among others, working as a film reviewer and columnist in Kielce “Word of the Peoples”, was particularly sensitive to the viewer. On the one hand, she saw the need to educate the public, to train its audiovisual sensitivity, she showed what were the artistic, aesthetic, ideological values in the cinema, but on the other hand – she was aware of the fact that the cinema “was neither TWP [Society for Popularisation of Culture and Knowledge] nor a training course, but cultural entertainment”³ and could not get the audience bored. This competent, educated journalist and critic had a lot of respect and understanding for the choices of so-called casual viewer.

She was also aware of the fact that the opinions of critics and audience do not always meet. The latter group sometimes have their own criteria and do not mention them in the so-called. “»official« discussions, in which the state-

¹ The discussion was started in „Film” in 1954 with the texts by Stefania Heymanowa, *Towards the viewer* and by Stefan Morawski *Towards the viewer, but not in that way*, „Film” 1954, no. 31, pp. 6-7. The next opinions are, among others, S. Grzelecki, *What the viewer seeks at the cinema. Discussion article*, „Film” 1954, no. 33, p. 10; J. Koenig-Olszewski, J. Prusiewicz, *Double voice of the viewer*, „Film” 1954, no. 35, p. 6; T. Tarnowiecki, *Let’s remember about the difference in tastes*, „Film” 1954, no. 36, p. 6; Ed., *The ongoing matter of the viewer*, „Film” 1954, no. 45, pp. 4-5.

² Acting in Warsaw in the first half of the 30s of the twentieth century, the Association of Art Film Lovers START focused a group of people from intellectual environments with the leftist orientation interested in film and looking for prospects for its creative development. M. Hendrykowska, *Chronicle of Polish cinema 1895-1997*, Poznań 1999, p. 113.

³ S. Heymanowa, *Towards the viewer*, op. cit., p. 7.

ments are a reflection of critics read or tend to take this high ground, which for the given film is considered to be... binding. Only open discussions and reaction of the audience express themselves in attendance, give an adequate picture of the audience attitude with respect to this or another film”⁴.

In this article I would like to try to outline a picture of the provincial cinema audience, its preferences and tastes, which emerges from the reviews and film-oriented feature articles by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska, published in the “Word of the Peoples” in the 50s and in the first half of the 60s, that is when this excellent critic was employed on a full-time basis in the Kielce newspaper. I am interested in finding answers to the questions: What was – according to Heymanowa – the specifics of the Kielce audience? What did the contemporary audience expect from the cinema? And what was the role of a film critic, especially in a medium-sized (although the provincial one) city in the province?

It is hard to say, in this case, about a regular study of the film audience. Anyway – as Alicja Helman rightly notices – to carry out such a study back is actually almost impossible. “The audiences of that time, do not exist any longer, or if they are still live, they are other recipients than fifty or even thirty years ago. To obtain any reliable knowledge about them, you need to explore a huge amount of alternative sources” (including films from that period or written documents, that is, amongst others, “reviews with their inherent reference to the figure of “an ordinary viewer” who could “not understand” something or who could “uncritically undergo” something, etc.)”⁵.

Of course, it should be kept in mind that what we possibly get, it will be not an image of the actual recipient, but rather the image about him/her, which “the producers and distributors (...), directors (...) [and] critics had (who willingly used to write on behalf of the audience, although they put their knowledge and tastes of cinema higher) (...)”⁶.

Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska – as I have previously mentioned – had a lot of respect for the choices of so-called ordinary viewer, which she explicitly formulated in the specific critic’s decalogue in a settlement column with the period of socialist realism *Truth does not like fractions*⁷ in 1956:

Film culture can develop in a true manner only where the viewer is not suggested a priori peremptory judgment (positive or negative ones), based on the non-artistic premises. The spectators themselves, as thinking beings, must take some stand in relation to the film they are watching, and the reviewer’s

⁴ Ibid, p. 6

⁵ A. Helman, *Intellectuals and servants. The first ideas of the cinema recipients*, „Modern Culture” in 1994, no. 2, p. 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ S. Majewska, *Truth does not like fractions*, “Word of the Peoples” 1956, no. 95 – “The Word of the Week. Socio-Cultural Supplement” 1956, no. 15, p. 2.

and critic's duty is – based on the criteria adopted for the given art – to talk about its advantages and disadvantages, pay attention to what the viewer can miss imperceptibly, analyse the content and form, and finally enter into discussion with the viewer⁸.

The text concerned the misuse connected with the imposition in the film production and in the reception of films the political and ideological criteria, but it seems to fit the situation in which, for example, the financial criterion becomes important, that is the attempt to persuade viewers of the film quality, because the film producer has invested in it a lot and wants to earn some money.

Heymanowa-Majewska even in times of domination of schematic thinking, also in the space of culture, did not doubt in the intelligence of the viewer.

How it should be explained to people – she asked in the settlement column – that they wrongly have more fun watching, let us assume, French films that they directly “teach” them nothing, how to prove that dull saws are more “valuable”, and that they rapidly must try to “grow up” to delight in them, whereas the escape from these films was just self-defense of viewers against being treated as individuals not quite developed, to whom everything need to be clearly and simply explained⁹.

Interest in the film recipients, present in the journalism by Heymanowa-Majewska, can be, in a sense, considered as precursory as far as the Polish film thought is considered. “The so-called *audience studies* that deal with the audience treated as part of a broadly perceived social world of audiovisual culture communicators”, (...) and that are not “contrary to appearances, a new phenomenon, but rather a continuation of somewhat forgotten cinematographic thought, lushly flourished – the editors of *Film audience studies. Anthology of translations* write in the preface – mainly in English and German-language literature”¹⁰. In Poland “as well as abroad, in the first decades after 1945, the authors of the few studies on the audience were sociologists and educators mostly. Interest in the film audience appeared already in the 50s due to Adam Kulik and Janina Koblewska-Wróblowa, who concentrated mainly on the educational aspects of the cinema”¹¹.

Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska, who, nota bene, had in her biography pedagogical episode¹², showed great interest in these aspects of cinema. In

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Introduction to: *The study of the film audience. Anthology of translations*, Ed. K. Klejsa, M. Sayrusz-Wolska, Warsaw 2015, pp. 7-8.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

¹² She was a teacher of English in Primary School No. 5 in Kielce between 1945 and 1948, she also gave private lessons in English and French. Entry: *Heyman-Majewska Stefania*, in: J. Kępa-Mętrak, *Constantly vigilant ...about the journalists of the Kielce-Radom Region (and not only)*, Warsaw 2012, p. 89.

one of the columns of the early 60s, briefly outlining the state of film education in Europe and giving as a model primarily England, referred to published in the monthly "Film" interview with the aforementioned Janina Koblewska-Wróblowa¹³, the director of Research Center of Cinematography, the author of the *Film and children* book¹⁴. Young people in England, not only learn the history of film theoretically, but they have the possibility to make a film alone. A model, which combines the aesthetic knowledge with technical knowledge, was, according to the publicist, possible to apply also in our conditions¹⁵.

In many of her journalistic texts, she tried to convince the audience that the film really is "the most important of the arts"

because as a collective art, it includes elements of different genres of artistic creativity – art, music, drama, literature, poetry, ballet – that it converts them into new means of artistic expression, that with these means it can give a more complete picture of the world and, finally – that it is the most accessible and the most common¹⁶.

And therefore it [the film] should be used primarily as a "aid in teaching because nothing is fixed in the memory, as what is seen, and, what is more, the film can be repeated any number of times. Why do we need to propagate this type of aid? Would it be a general reluctance of the Kielce Region towards the achievements of technology?"¹⁷.

The excellent critic, Aleksander Jackiewicz, wrote in 1956 that "reading films should be learnt in the same way as reading books. Where? In the cinema, in writings, in the work of the new play, and in the future, probably just in the schools"¹⁸. However, in the educational circles – according to Heymanowa-Majewska – educational potential of the cinema is still ignored thinking about it in the category of entertainment, not appreciating the remarkable fact that the young people's attitude towards the cinema is enthusiastic, which makes the power of such a message to be a huge tool. And it does not concern only educational films, which "have some connection with the school, and these films in some schools are presented willingly, and in others by compulsion," but it concerns feature films, which are limited to marking

¹³ K. Garbień, *When knowledge about the film will be taught in Polish schools*, „Film” in 1961, no. 33, p. 7. The wider stance by J. Koblewska-Wróblowa can be found, among others, in the text: *Film as a subject taught in British schools*, „Ekran [Screen]” in 1960, no. 8, p. 15.

¹⁴ J. Koblewska-Wróblowa, *Film and children*, Warsaw 1961.

¹⁵ S. Majewska, /no title/, „Word of the Peoples. Sunday Magazine” 1961, no. 107, p. 7.

¹⁶ Eadem, *Talk with shadow*, „Word of the Peoples” 1964, no. 19–20, p. 4.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A. Jackiewicz, *Magic lantern*, Warsaw 1956, p. 32.

them “by a special central committee as films for the youth over some age, or – not allowed for them and... that is all”¹⁹.

The issue of that qualification was sometimes a bone of contention between parents and cinema staff. “Many fathers and mothers imagine that if a child is under their care, it can watch EVERY film and ALL film shows” (Author’s emphasis)²⁰. Although Heymanowa-Majewska postulated the need to revise the age indicators²¹, she was definitely for the observance of these limits in the case of young viewers just for their own good.

Educational aspect of cinema refers not only to school youth but also to adults who would like to become more aware viewers²². In this context, the journalist stressed the great role of “schools of taste and knowledge of film”, as she called the discussion film clubs. The movement of famous Discussion Film Clubs (DKF) was initiated in Poland about 1955. The Kielce club was formed a year later as one of the first clubs in the province, due to the initiative of journalists “Word of the Peoples”, that is Heymanowa-Majewska and Wiesław Barański²³. Unfortunately, after a few years it began to grapple with the attendance problems, which Majewska analysed fairly carefully, formulating strict conclusions for the Kielce community.

In retrospect, only today we know why the club was so successful: 1 – fashion; 2 – the opportunity to watch better films than those that appeared on the normal screens then; 3 – snobbery. There was only a small group of people – even today faithful to DKF – who sought there those values that constituted the sense of the existence of this institution. The belief that the Kielce society is quite culturally developed so that DKF could exist – and even thrive – turned out to be an illusion” – she concluded with a sneer²⁴.

¹⁹ S. Majewska, *Cinema and youth*, „Word of the Peoples” 1958, no. 284, p. 4.

²⁰ SHM (Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska), *children film cinema*, „Word of the Peoples. Sunday Magazine” 1963, no. 264-5, p. 5.

²¹ “(...) they should be subject to some modification because they are often too schematic: eg., what is appropriate for the twelve-year-old, can still be watched by the 10-year-old, and the 12-year-old child will certainly not be moved by a kiss scene, and the cruelty of war scenes unnecessarily tames him/her both with death, as well as it causes unwanted emotions (hatred). And a large number of war films is allowed for children at this age” Ibid.

²² “An aware viewer has to distinguish between the basic components of a film; otherwise, he/she stares like a halfwit directing all the attention to the content, and that of the most primitive side (how will it all end? or will they get married?)”, S. Majewska, *Cinema and youth*, op. cit.

²³ W. Barański, *Beside the essence*, Warsaw 2001, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ S. Majewska, *Talk with shadow*, op. cit. Practical aspect associated with filming was also implemented in Kielce. In 1955, at Wojewódzki Dom Kultury [Provincial Centre of Culture] the Amateur Film Club (AKF) (do not confuse with DKF) under the name Gong was established in Kielce. The publicist strongly encouraged to implement the passion of an amateur-filmmaker, calling it a noble hobby. SHM, *Would*

She could see the educational aspects of cinema both in what is its essence, that is sensitising the audience (especially the one from the province, “suffering from – as she wrote – a chronic weakness of aesthetic sense in the most general sense of this word”²⁵) to a film image²⁶, but also in bringing him/her closer, through the screen, both to literature (“a filmed theater”, that is an adaptation of *Zemsta* [*The Revenge*], directed by Korzeniewski and Bohdziewicz with all of reviewers’ objections was accepted by the critic [Heymanowa-Majewska] due to the fact of “promoting culture”²⁷) as well as important social issues (as in the case of documentaries called “the black series” whose presence in Kielce cinemas was postulated by her in one of the columns²⁸).

Formulating in her texts postulates concerning the film education, the critic had no doubt, however, that the viewer comes to the cinema primarily for entertainment, which she did not deny. And that entertainment – she claimed – does not necessarily limit to chortling, for example, when they watch a comedy.

In the cinema, the viewer often looks for experience, emotion, looks for events and people, backgrounds and landscapes, other than those which he/she sees every day – looks for poetry and exoticism. The viewer will always find something of this in the film of good dramaturgy, in the film, in which “something is really happening”, where people are not added to problems, where the action is, and not declamation, where the next scenes are not guessed from the first scene, where the fates of heroes really evoke interest

you like to be a filmmaker?, “Word of the Peoples. Sunday Magazine” 1965, no. 93–94, pp. 6.

²⁵ S. Majewska, *Who is arts for?*, “Word of the Peoples. Sunday Magazine” 1963, no. 320–321, p. 6.

²⁶ Eg. In a review of the excellent film by Kawalerowicz *Matka Joanna od Aniołów* [*Mother Joan of the Angels*] (1961), she drew attention to the black-and-white colour scheme, which allowed filmmakers to bring out the strong contrasts in the best graphic: a dark inn and a white spot of Romanesque monastery, a black pile left after the burning of a priest and white dancing nuns. SHM, *From our screens. Matka Joanna od Aniołów* [*Mother Joan of the Angels*], the „Word of the Peoples” in 1961, no. 150, p. 3.

²⁷ “Judging from the reaction of the audience – writes Heymanowa – at the first film show, where I was, the content aroused the greatest interest, so it was probably unknown”. SHM, *From our screens. Zemsta* [*Revenge*], “Word of the Peoples” in 1957, no. 236, p. 5.

²⁸ „They were called „black series”, as they show sad issues – drunkenness, prostitution, hooliganism – without retouching and without indicating repair ways. But there is an optimistic fact that the filmmakers see these things and know how to show them so that the audience should be shocked”. SHM, *Documentary filmmakers rehabilitate Polish cinematography*, „Word of the Peoples” in 1957, no. 100 – „Word of the Week. Socio-Cultural Supplement” 1957, no. 18, p. 3.

and emotion. Living during the time of the film show other people's lives, the viewer finds rest, satisfaction, entertainment²⁹.

Therefore, reviewing films, she tried to pay attention primarily to the film workshop, mindful of the fact that "when it comes to utility – political, social, moral – it can be found in a historical, action, travel, sports, etc. film, but always under the condition that its creators know »rules of the game« (»enjoy – learn«³⁰)³⁰.

It also allowed her for greater freedom in writing about films, even during the socialist period because she pointed out the mistakes not from the ideological perspective, but from the workshop perspective. "And how – she wrote sarcastically in her review of the weak film *Pościg* [*Chase*]³¹, for which the audience gave "the second or third place among the three ... the worst Polish films produced in the last year" (...) – can we require from the viewer to follow the action – as it is said – with bated breath, when the viewer, from the first moment, knows that the guy wearing the beret riding a motorcycle must be a saboteur, and a »demonic blond« ostentatiously fawning over a female vet, has no clear conscience"³². Summing up, she said it frankly:

In the creation of this film, there are two nasty things: the fact that its creators making their naive scenario "facilitated" the viewer to understand the action, assuming that otherwise the viewer would not understand it [action], and so – underestimating the viewer and the fact that people pursuing a film policy, are not familiar with what scenarios are worth implementing, which means that they waste money³³.

Sometimes, when the reviewer's opinion did not fully coincide with the public opinion, she was looking for, for the tastes of public opinion, some excuses. With the understanding she observed, for example, the audience enthusiasm concerning the film *Irena do domu* [*Irene, go home*]³⁴, "seeking not only comedy in general, but a »homely« comedy, where people and problems are familiar and close to the audience. Hence there is the broad credit of trust, which the audience gives to each Polish comedy, even less successful, is always ready to laugh »on credit« and turn a blind eye to the shortcomings and deficiencies"³⁵.

²⁹ S. Heymanowa, *Towards the viewer*, op. cit., p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Pościg* [*Chase*], dir. Stanisław Urbanowicz, Poland 1953. Action thriller: the struggle of the security forces and employees of the stud farm in Regle with a sabotage action of poisoning horses.

³² SHM, From our screens. *Pościg* [*Chase*], "Word of the Peoples" 1954, no. 282, p. 4.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Irena do domu!* [*Irene, go home!*], dir. Jan Fethke, Poland 1955.

³⁵ SHM, From our screens, *Irena do domu* [*Irene, go home*], „Word of the Peoples” 1955, no. 301, p. 4.

How did the publicist [SHM] investigate for her own purposes this film reception? The easiest to observe and perhaps the most authoritative was, of course, the attendance during each film. Her observations of the audience behaviour during the film show, conversations with the audience immediately after the film, and the comments sent to the address of the editorial office were very significant to her³⁶.

Observations and discussions with the audience of the outdoor film session of *Krzyżacy* [*The Teutonic Knights*] by Ford³⁷ in Gnojno near Chmielnik, thanks to the activity of the travelling cinema, allowed her to register the enormous enthusiasm of the audience (“First of all – a delight. There were people so fascinated that they paid for the second film session only to watch as much as possible. No weather could prevent from showing the film. The rain or storm happened, but the audience did not want to interrupt the session”³⁸), but also the need to educate it (“Other old man said that to receive this film, you have to know the history; the lack of this knowledge evidently bothered him”³⁹), even a brief lecture.

The measure of value very well received by the audience the American anti-western *High Noon* (1952) by Fred Zinnemann, showed in Poland until seven years after the premiere, was – according to her – a heated debate which flared up among viewers concerning the end⁴⁰.

One of the ways to mobilize “disputants” to formulate their own opinions about the films watched, was announced in 1955 in “Word of the Peoples” contest for the film review under the title *We are looking for a conscious viewer*.

³⁶ A similar postulate appeared two years later in an article by Adam Kulik in the „Film Quarterly”. Experience from previous years resulted in the schematic thinking in the cinema audience hence often their answers to the questionnaire (one of the basic methods for testing film preferences) can be – in his opinion – confusing. And „(despite the limited range) the observation of the behaviour of the audience during showing the film and immediately after it has a special value. I mean, among others, using shorthand notes or recording on an audio cassette tape spontaneous statements and assessments. Extremely important is the observation of the behaviour of the audience, especially facial expressions”. A. Kulik, *Studies on film receptivity in Poland*, „Film Quarterly” 1956, no. 1/2, pp. 85.

³⁷ *Krzyżacy* [*The Teutonic Knights*], dir. Aleksander Ford, Poland 1960.

³⁸ S. Majewska, *Krzyżacy w plenerze* [*The Teutonic Knights in the open air*], “Word of the Peoples. Sunday Magazine” 1964, no. 207-8, p. 10.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Would the film have been better if Kane (a famous sheriff’ played by Gary Cooper – MB) had won without shooting? Would such a victory have been accepted by the town? What would the attitude have been to Kane? The audience “is writing” a new film. However, the reviewer must evaluate the film in such a form in which he/she sees, and I am doing it now. And the columns of our magazine are always open for the debaters”. SHM, From our screens. *High Noon*, “Word of the Peoples” in 1959, no. 350, p. 3.

It turned out, however, that even valuable prizes did not attract many participants, although in the mid-50s, before television became popular in Poland, the cinema had been still the most popular form of entertainment. However, some interesting opinions appeared and they allowed Heymanowa-Majewska to title the article summarising the contest: *We begin to know one another*⁴¹. The most important for the audience – one can easily guess – was the theme of the film (“The strongest impression is exerted on me by the films – one of the participants of the contest wrote – in which a man, a good man [author’s emphasis] aims at something, who wants to arrange a better life for themselves and other people”). Although – as the columnist [SHM] noted – there are a lot of “mass meeting formulations” in some statements, yet choosing by the audience in a kind of film ranking the images that require a certain intellectual effort (among others, Wajda’s debut *Pokolenie [A Generation]*⁴² or *Beauty of the Devil* by René Clair⁴³) is a good starting point for in-depth discussions on cinema, for example, as part of a discussion film club⁴⁴.

Also observation of the behaviour of Kielce audience brought some relevant information which expressed both approval for the film watched and its absence as well. During the above-mentioned film *High Noon* the audience reacted emotionally (which, as the reviewer notes, is rather unusual phenomenon if there are not sessions for young people), “with a spontaneous applause when Kane was successful and single loud sighs and comments in moments when his fate hangs in the balance”⁴⁵. During *Pokolenie [A Generation]*, she noted the impression that was made on the audience caused by the chasing scene for Jaś (Krone, one of the film characters by Tadeusz Janczar) and his death. “In Kielce cinema, where the audience is hardly able to concentrate during these scenes there is nothing but undisturbed silence, and as soon as they end, a collective sigh of the viewers can be heard”⁴⁶.

On the other hand, in the case of the film by Andrzej Munk⁴⁷, in which, as it is known, a discourse with a certain model of Polish heroism is taken, people bridled up at this “seditious” vision to such an extent that “even one person, very impetuous, reportedly spat ... and left the room”⁴⁸. The reason

⁴¹ S. Majewska, *We begin to know one another*, „Word of the Peoples” in 1955, no. 305 – „Word of the Week. The Socio-Cultural Supplement” no. 40, p. 2.

⁴² *Pokolenie [A Generation]*, dir. Andrzej Wajda, Poland 1954. SHM, From our screens. *Pokolenie [A Generation]*, “Word of the Peoples” 1955, no. 59, p. 4.

⁴³ *Beauty of the Devil (La beauté du diable)*, dir. René Clair, France, Italy 1950. An interesting variation on *Faust* by Gérard Philip.

⁴⁴ S. Majewska, *We begin to know one another*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ SHM, From our screens. *High Noon*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ SHM, From our screens. *Pokolenie [A Generation]*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ *Eroica*, dir. Andrzej Munk, Poland 1957.

⁴⁸ SHM, From our screens. *Eroica*, “Word of the Peoples” 1958, no. 11, p. 6.

for this behaviour could be a misunderstanding of the idea of the film resulting from the fact of being unprepared to receive it (the presence of irony) or unwillingness to deal with such a vision of Polish society of the war period⁴⁹.

Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska tried in her reviews to indicate at what type of the audience a specific image is targeted. It most often happened in a situation presenting ambitious titles for “viewers intelligent, prone to reflection and seeking in the film also intellectual stimuli”⁵⁰ or “lovers of good (SHM’s emphasis) film”⁵¹. Sometimes she could see, in connection with this categorisation of viewers, the errors in the repertoire policy of the Kielce cinemas. Presenting an ambitious, open to discussion film, *The Adventure*⁵², by Antonioni, showed in the *Robotnik Cinema*⁵³ visited mainly by young people, that is, the audience still without adequate intellectual preparation, causes some dissonance and a lack of understanding of the film. As the reviewer [SHM] notes – a similar mistake has been made in Kielce not for the first time⁵⁴.

She opposed “schematists” to thoughtful, intelligent, sensitive viewers, that is the people [schematists] that are deterred by any novelty in showing the phenomena of life. However, they eagerly watch what is easily received, because it is prepared according to the recipe tested many times, and even if it does not taste excellent, then you might believe that it is beneficial to your health, of course – moral health⁵⁵.

Interestingly, this diagnosis made for the audience of mid-50s, experienced by a period of socialist realism, which – as it is known – raised schematism to the rank of dogma, also works today and applies not only to the film *Mr. Hulot’s Holiday* in the context of which the sentence above was formulated by the reviewer. Heymanowa-Majewska poses the question which actually may be qualified as a rhetorical one (substituting the title mentioned any other film giving a certain difficulty in reception because forcing to think, rejecting schemes):

⁴⁹ Generally, the audience had some trouble with the understanding and adoption of perverse and ironic Munk „Why do the Poles laugh at themselves? Is Poland really like this? I saw *Zezowate szczęście* [*Bad Luck*] and I do not know what to think about it” – says a 41-year-old worker from Gliwice, by K. Żygulski, *Film in the working class environment*, Warsaw 1962, p. 167.

⁵⁰ *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag*), dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark 1943. SHM, On our screens. *Day of Wrath*, „Word of the Peoples” 1958, no. 118, p. 4.

⁵¹ SHM, From our screens. *The Game Is Up*, „Word of the Peoples” 1959, no. 187, p. 4.

⁵² *The Adventure* (*L'avventura*), dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, France, Italy 1960.

⁵³ The *Robotnik Cinema*, which was located in Wojewódzki Dom Kultury [The Provincial Centre of Culture] in Kielce, was opened probably in the 2nd half of the 50s.

⁵⁴ SHM, From our screens *The Adventure*, „Word of the Peoples”, 1963, no. 121, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Stefania Majewska, *On film themes. The enemies of Mr. Hulot move to attack*, „Word of the Peoples” 1955, no. 31 – “Word of the Week”. Socio-Literary Supplement 1955, no. 8, pp. 2, 5.

Did *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, by chance, provoke so much opposition and suspicious longing for “realism”, “deeper thought,” etc. that the film is so distinct, both in its form and content, that it also requires from the viewer to go beyond the known to him/her formulas, that disturbs his/her peace, not to be labelled according to the accepted rules?⁵⁶.

Reviewer's understanding for the choices of Kielce audience thus had its limits, the audience underestimated major titles which aroused anxiety in the journalist and provoked to strict assessment of the “level of film culture in Kielce”.

So what image of Kielce audience emerges from the film-oriented texts by Stefania Heymanowa-Majewska published in “Word of the Peoples”? As it might be expected, this is a rather conservative audience, which finds it difficult to face more demanding film proposals, in large part “supporting incredible gig and avoiding valuable films”, sometimes longing for the good Polish cinema genre (comedy or thriller).

But the fact that in Kielce, in the mid-50s, the second DKF [Discussion Film Club] in Poland was founded (following the model of the Warsaw club *Po Prostu* [Simply], later *Zygzak* [Zigzag]), proved the recipients' demand for such an organisation. As the co-initiator of the project, Wiesław Barański, mentioned: “the projection room at the *Warsaw* Cinema barely housed about 300 people, meanwhile, there were thousands of fans.” However, a snobbery turned out to be a significant feature of Kielce audience, perhaps resulting from the complex of the province, “where people like to undergo collective admiration or condemnations”, which became – according to the assessment of the journalist – one of the causes of problems concerning the attendance at DKF meetings only a few years after its creating.

So how did Heymanowa-Majewska, being aware of the shortcomings and limitations of the Kielce audience, perceive her role as a film critic in the mid-size (though provincial) city in the province? The belief that “film culture can develop truly only where the viewer is not suggested a priori undisputed judgments (positive or negative ones), based on non-artistic premises” accompanied her throughout the whole period of her journalistic activity. A sensitivity to the viewer was very important in her journalism. On the one hand, the respect for his/her tastes, and on the other hand – awareness that provincial audience does not have so many opportunities for active participation in the film life, sometimes it has no awareness or need to reach for more ambitious titles or film industry magazines. Thus the journalist wanted a suburban viewer-reader of daily newspapers to have at least a sample of a solid film analysis with a focus primarily on artistic grounds.

⁵⁶ Ibid.