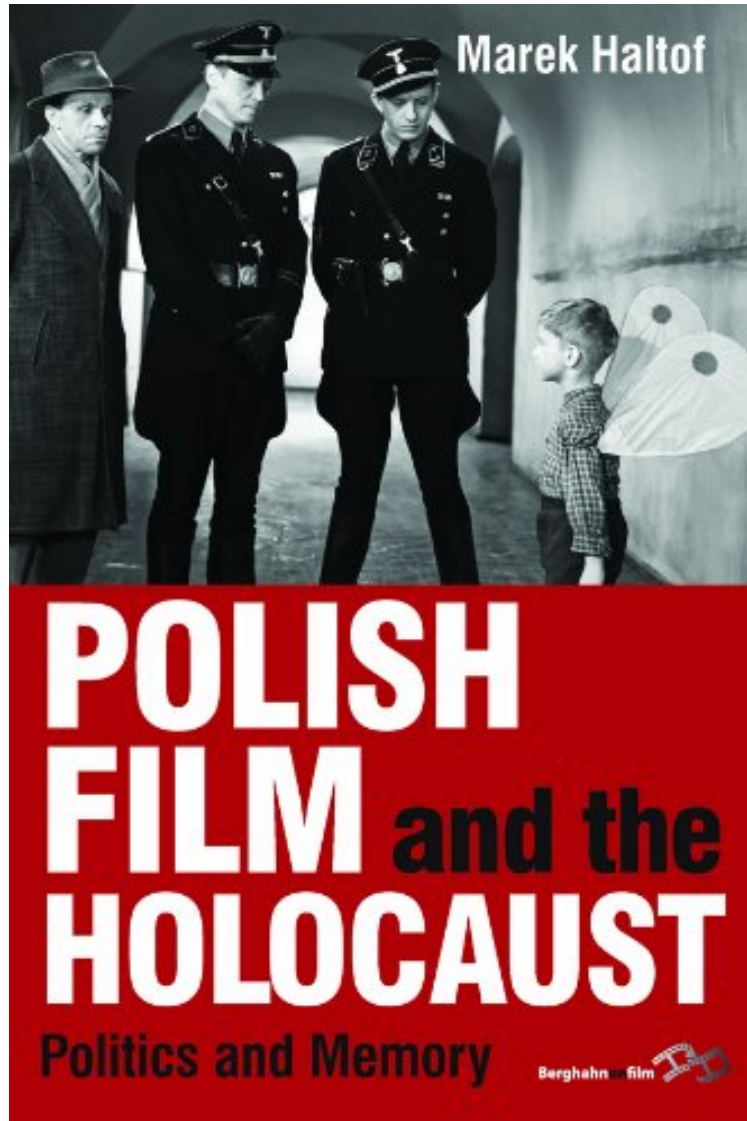


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## Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory

*Marek Haltof*

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#2713828 in Books Haltof Marek 2014-03-30 2014-03-30Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.02 x .61 x 5.981, .86 #File Name: 1782384960288 pagesPolish Film and the Holocaust Politics and Memory | File size: 28.Mb

**Marek Haltof : Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "Rememberance" reflects of a love affair inside AuschwitzBy ZenheadThis book is revelatory. I'd suggest a reading list that includes: "Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans ..." by Daniel Goldhagen; Christopher Browning's: "Ordinary Germans: Reserve Police Battalion 101;"

Browning's "The Origins of the Final Solution;" "There Once was a Village:A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok" (Poland);"The Golden Age of the Shtetl:"and "Neighbors:The Destruction of the Jewish Community of Jedwabne, Poland," among many, many others about the Holocaust.I did not know Poland had made so many films about the Holocaust. The Poles began making films about the Holocaust almost before the guns were silent. Of course, the entire post war period up until the fall of the Soviet Empire was the environment in which many of these films were made. Two, more modern, post Soviet influence films, are "Edges of the Lord" and "Rememberance" which reflect of the relationship between Poles and Jews during the war. "Rememberance" reflects of a love affair inside Auschwitz, with the two key figures going separate ways ... to reunite thirty years later. Both the man and woman have had families and life for those thirty years, but the power of their love has to be sought for some "closure." Or, continuance. I'm not sure which. Many of the films cited in this book involve relationships with Polish men or women who are Jews. Some involve love affairs between Jews of other nations and Poles. The role of the Polish Resistance Movement is portrayed as generally lethal. The book demonstrates that while there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of Poles who helped Jews, the greater majority were either "neutral" or "complicit" in turning the Jews in to the Germans. And, of course, no real understanding of the special dilemma of Jews and Poles can avoid watching Claude Lanzmann's massive 9-hour "Shoah." One certifiably correct observation is that many who were cooperative with the Germans, the Nazis, the SS, SD, Gestapo, were Dutch or French or any number of other nationalities. A spectrum existed with degrees of complicity to eliminate the Jews from all countries in Europe. France certainly had a serious complicity; so did the Dutch; Hungarians, Rumanians, Ukrainians, White Russians. Denmark may have set the high tone ... getting their 5-10,000 Jews to safety in Sweden before the SS could swoop them up. Poland had and in several more modern documentaries, still has a shame to deal with. Most of the extermination camps, death factories, concentration camps, work to death camps, starve to death camps, ghettos, were located in Poland. The Germans understood the tension that had existed for many years between the Poles, the Jews, and the Russians. In several of these books, photographs of even what might be termed ... agricultural or rural shtetl, show prosperous Jewish citizens. And, it is clear, that many Jewish merchants and wealthier citizens, did have enough cash, disposable items, to trade, bury, distribute to their Polish neighbors who hid them from rapacious Nazi hunters. The level of savagery that the Nazis perpetrated on the Jews who invariably wound up in Poland was beyond description. They also killed many Poles who were found to be connected to Jews in hiding. There were many Poles who had known Jews personally, who evidently watched for many years their Jewish neighbor's prosper ... often times, in their minds ... at their expense. The Jews of the shtetl often sided with the Czarist Russians who absorbed parts of Poland and of course, created "The Pale of Settlement" which incorporated Ukraine, Belarusse, parts of Poland, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and German Empires. Always "outsides" by their religion and culture, the Jews of Poland were often seen as antagonists to the Poles, regardless of class. The Jews, as outsiders, always tried to survive.They did, but the animosities by WW II were seething. I'd guess that the Polish film industry has tried to grapple more than any other nation what the Holocaust meant to them. And it is impossible to understand how Poles acted, regardless of helpful or damning, without this hundreds of year history we in America simply do not have. The underpinnings of our republic, and democracy, haven't seen such a tense relationship as that of the Poles and Jews of Poland. The closest would be our history with the Native Americans. Even that, however, is distant. I would say that overall, the Holocaust as a subject of key interest, has been one the Polish film industry has tried to address. A PBS documentary: "Shtetl" @ 3 hours, is perhaps even more revealing. A young Pole in a village has on his own, with some retribution by other Poles, tried to document the demise of the Jewish population in his own place. At first, survivors who return to that place, are laudatory in general of his activities. But once the young man goes to America, and then Israel, he gets a mixed review. Some survivors are bitter at him for not doing enough. Israeli teens pretty well toast him as he sits in a classroom. Later, the film maker returns to the village. The Village is having a 500 year anniversary. The filmmaker, a Pole who left before the fall of communism, even exhorts the man to make more of the Jewish history of the village. Modern pressures by other poles have by then taken their toll. I'd guess his fellow villagers villified him upon his return from America for bringing or enticing other Jews to return. The temperature is: we don't want those Jews to return: they may make claims on property; they may have their own hatred; sadness; painful memories. Some who helped Jews are found. Some who seem to forget what they did to Jews, are encountered. Answers are dodged. Eyes fail to meet. Shame based laughter (see "Shoah"). The SS was evil. As an evil instrument, it was able to manipulate the racial, ethnic, and religious tensions between Polish Jews and Poles. A scene in "Shoah" is remarkable. Lanzmann interviews a man and a woman in the sixties, about their house. It was, it seems, taken from the Jews when they were expelled. Shot, perhaps, by Einsatzgruppen. Certainly, removed from their house. The man's eyes suddenly glimmer with an evil brightness: "They had money. They had gold." He says. And several Poles describe, and then nervously laugh, how they made a "slashing" movement across their throats, as trains loaded with Jews ran by. Their laughs are shame based. They know what they did. Anyone who turned in anti-war demonstrators in this country, during Vietnam; who villified Quakers, Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists, who refused to fight in WW I or WW II; who turned in men or women who were suspected of being Communists during the McCarthy era: those folks know what they did, and why. I'd guess they're as close to the Poles who cooperated with the Germans. The numbers were, of

course, much larger for the Poles, than such Americans. I've watched "The Last Stage" and several other of the films mentioned. In my opinion, if you want to get into this, watch "Shoah" and "Kitty Returns to Auschwitz" (not a Polish film); and several documentaries about Polish women who sheltered Jews during the War. In "Shoah," one goes back without a single frame of the Holocaust. "Remembrance" and "Edges of the Lord" and "The Last Stage" (filmed in Auschwitz very nearly directly after the war); and "Shtetl" (PBS) are enough to give you an idea if you want to know more. Every Polish film that might have been conceptualized to show more reality of the dynamic between Poles Jews between 1944 and the end of the Soviet Union were coopted by the Soviet political authorities. But ... here's the deal: Polish film makers TRIED. Given the number of Jews killed in Poland, and the number of Poles killed because they were among the Jews there ... the Poles have tried to grasp what they did or didn't do. As majority Catholics, they may carry an extra burden for "sins" of commission or omission that hardly any Americans can get. I know that I hope we never return to an era where someone turns you in for being in the military and speaking out against Vietnam ... as I did, in 1967. For that, I WAS turned in by someone in my home town. Who? I'll never know unless I search for certain files. I've let it go. Do you see? Do you get what it can be about? Read many books before you automatically damn the Poles. And yes, the extermination of Eastern European Jews was vicious and "thorough." I, for one, believe that in Buddhist terms, "What was as it was ..." means: no other nation in the world, in the period 1933-1945 was so fanatical and single minded and efficient and thorough about exterminating the Jews of Europe as were the GERMAN Nazis. Anti-semitism was rampant all over the world then. Only the GERMANS were able (capable) of wiping out one group of people with such determination. The GERMANS must live with that. They've made reparations. I don't think the Poles have. It's a gordion knot that should be approached with this question: what would I do or have done? Those Poles who helped Jews in that maelstrom were heroes. Without a doubt. Focus on them. Get this book. Learn more. Put your own head and heart in a tailspin. I was called a "f..king traitor" and "communist piece of sh.t" when I stood up against the War In Iraq. That was just six years ago. Easy to criticize; harder to stand against a juggernaut which says: "You're either with us or against us." That's George Bush Dick Cheney, don't forget. Enhanced Interrogation Techniques. "A Most Wanted Man." Watch and think about our very recent past. A very, very good book. Commendable. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Debunks the Oft-Repeated Holocaust Myth That, Until Recently, Poles Had Disregarded Jewish Deaths By Jan Peczkis In this review, I focus not on the Holocaust filmography in this book, but on the historical trends identified therein. I also highlight the way that this book helps dispel misconceptions about how Poles handled the Nazi German-caused disappearance of Poland's Jews. But first I briefly tell the reader some atypical features of this work. A REFRESHINGLY-RARE BALANCED PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION This work features a variety of scholars, and not just the familiar small circle of Judeocentric ones. For instance, Haltof features some of the works of historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz. This includes (p. 110) his Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR: Dokumenty (Polish Edition) [See my review], his (p. 251) Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939-1947, and (p. 10, 25) his After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II (East European Monograph) [See my review]. VENTURING INTO FORBIDDEN TOPICS Unlike most Holocaust-related works, which exclusively promote the view that Jews were victims and nothing else, this one does not. It presents both sides of many issues. For instance, this work is candid on the fact, and magnitude, of Jewish-Soviet collaboration in 1939 and again in 1944-on. (e. g, pp. 17-20). Author Marek Haltof provides details on how many of Poland's pre-WWII Jewish filmmakers, after the defeat of Poland in 1939, turned against Poland, and began to openly collaborate with the Communists, (quote) It has to be stated that [Aleksander] Ford was not the only Polish filmmaker of Jewish origin who had worked for the Soviets. Stanislaw Wohl, Adolf Forbert and his brother Wladyslaw, Leon Jeannot (Lejbele Katz), and Ludwik Perski gathered toward the end of 1939 in Lvov (Lwow) and later in Kiev, where they found work in Soviet cinema. They contributed to several Soviet films that were clearly of anti-Polish nature. (unquote). (pp. 54-55). These notable individuals, and other named filmmakers who were Polish Jews, continued their pro-Soviet activities in Poland on the heels of the Red Army's entrance into Poland in 1944. (p. 13). THE "JEWS WERE IGNORED" MYTH: AN INTRODUCTION In order to highlight the significance of this book, I first introduce the reader to the myth which this book implicitly demolishes. It is unclear why this myth was promoted. Perhaps it was a fake mirror-image of the very-real Jewish disregard and minimization of the sufferings of Poles under the Nazis. According to extreme forms of the Jews-were-avoided myth, Poles had long forgotten about the prewar Jews and their destruction during the Shoah. Better yet, according to the imagination of the likes of neo-Stalinist Jan T. Gross, this forgetting was deliberate. It was caused by Poles repressing their guilt for not having helped the Jews enough, and, better yet, out of Polish guilt for having acquired Jewish property. According to milder forms of this myth, Poles did remember their exterminated Jews--but only in indirect ways. Thus, Jewish and Polish victims of the Nazis were merely conflated as "Polish citizens", "victims of fascism", etc. Even this was only PARTLY true, and, even then, was generally limited to the first ten years after WWII, as elaborated next. However, this was hardly something specifically Polish. In fact, Haltof points out that it was common, all over the world, at the time, for Jews not to be singled out as victims of the Nazis. (p. 44). [Furthermore, the "Holocaust was special" thinking did not become widespread until the 1970s.] The lack of deference to the presumed specialness of Jewish suffering does not mean that Jews were held in low esteem far from it.

It has been argued, especially with reference to the Jedwabne trial of 1949, that the Soviet-imposed Communist puppet government was indifferent to what had happened to the Jews, and was lenient on the defendants because it was eager to get over Jewish-related matters. This was far from the truth. The Communists built a monument to honor the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1946, while one to the Polish Warsaw Uprising was not built until the fall of Communism in 1989. (p. 56). Communist propaganda, beginning in 1944 Poland, consistently connected anti-Semitism not only with fascism, but also with pre-WWII Poland. (p. 16).

**REMEMBERING POLAND'S JEWS: THE FOUR MAIN HISTORICAL STAGES** Author Marek Haltof divides the post-WWII period into four main stages: Postwar Beginnings (1944-1955); the Polish School Period (1955-1965); the Years of Organized Forgetting (1965-1980); and what, for want of a more specific term, may be called the modern period (1980-Present). Now let us consider the changes that followed the death of Stalin. Haltof comments, (quote) During the Polish School period in the late 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, several young filmmakers, including Stanislaw Rozewicz, Andrzej Wajda, and Andrzej Munk, significantly contributed to the representation of the Holocaust. Their films were followed by the state-imposed stage of organized forgetting. The struggles with censorship, and the banning of several projects in the late 1960s and in the 1970s, finally gave way to a renewed interest in the subject in the 1980s. (unquote). (p. 227). As for how Jews were portrayed, Haltof suggests that, during the Postwar Beginnings (1944-1955), Communist ideology reigned supreme in films [After all, it was the first decade of Soviet-imposed Communist rule, so how could it be otherwise?], and the plight of Polish Jews was [unsurprisingly] not specifically addressed. (p. 214). However, the Holocaust itself was an explicit theme during the Polish School Period (1955-1965), and Haltof gives several examples of this. (pp. 214-216). Even during the years of Organized Forgetting (1965-1980), Jews were not literally forgotten (p. 119). Instead, the emphasis was shifted to Polish aid to fugitive Jews. (pp. 216-217). After about 1980, large-scale interest, specifically in the Jews, increasingly became prominent. (pp. 217-on).

**SHOAH, LANZMANN, AND THE ATTACK ON ANDRZEJ WAJDA** When prominent Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda completed his classic film, *KORCZAK*, Claude Lanzmann leveled the bizarre accusation that Wajda was an anti-Semite. In response, Haltof states the following, (quote) According to several Polish sources, the French accusations of anti-Semitism directed against Wajda and his film served to cover up French wartime past and their present anti-Semitic excesses, like the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras, which happened during the release of *KORCZAK*. (unquote). (p. 198). Wajda himself expressed the opinion that the French preferred to lecture Poles on anti-Semitism instead of dealing with such matters as the French-German collaboration that had included the Vichy government and the French police dispatching French Jews to their deaths at Auschwitz. (p. 198).

<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. Searing Film By Claire Datnow This is not a review of the book, but a review of a film discussed in the book. As I viewed the film, *The Passenger*, I felt outrage, horror, and deep sadness that our human species could be capable of such evil. *The Passenger* is an unfinished 1963 Polish film directed by Andrzej Munk, who died in a car accident while the film was in production. The completed scenes were combined from parts of original footage and screenplay. It is the story of a German woman who served as a guard at Auschwitz. After the war, while on a luxurious ocean voyage with her new husband, she spots a passenger she thinks she recognizes. The passenger had been an inmate at Auschwitz where the German woman had been her guard. In a moment of shock, the guard confesses to her husband that she was a guard in the death camps not an inmate. She makes a bizarre attempt to explain her behavior in the best light but she shows no remorse for willingly participating in the killing of thousands of prisoners. In the end, what message does the movie convey? For me the film focuses on one German of many thousands, who committed mass murder but have escaped prosecution, going on to lead lives as respectable citizens. The good news: Just recently it has become possible to convict these criminals in Germany without evidence being presented to the court of a specific crime with a specific victim. The 2011 conviction in Munich of Sobibor death camp guard Ivan Demjanjuk, has set this legal precedent. Demjanjuk case now provides a legal basis for the prosecution of many Holocaust perpetrators who spent lengthy periods in carrying out mass murder, but have escaped prosecution. May justice be done.

During World War II Poland lost more than six million people, including about three million Polish Jews who perished in the ghettos and extermination camps built by Nazi Germany in occupied Polish territories. This book is the first to address the representation of the Holocaust in Polish film and does so through a detailed treatment of several films, which the author frames in relation to the political, ideological, and cultural contexts of the times in which they were created. Following the chronological development of Polish Holocaust films, the book begins with two early classics: Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* (1948) and Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* (1949), and next explores the Polish School period, represented by Andrzej Wajda's *A Generation* (1955) and Andrzej Munk's *The Passenger* (1963). Between 1965 and 1980 there was an "organized silence" regarding sensitive Polish-Jewish relations resulting in only a few relevant films until the return of democracy in 1989 when an increasing number were made, among them Krzysztof Kielowski's *Decalogue 8* (1988), Andrzej Wajda's *Korczak* (1990), Jan Jakub Kolski's *Keep Away from the Window* (2000), and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002). An important contribution to film studies, this book has wider relevance in addressing the issue of Poland's national memory.

Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2012 "In this excellently researched, highly informative survey of Polish films about the Holocaust, Haltof... expands on a chapter in his valuable Polish National Cinema... His measured assessments, conveyed in clear, accessible prose, are rooted in an enviable command of both the relevant production documents and important secondary literature. The select list of relevant films and television programs is very useful. The ample notes and fine bibliography incorporate many Polish sources as well as all the available literature in English." Choice "Marek Haltof's monograph is the most comprehensive, scholarly contribution to have emerged in a long neglected field of study: the Holocaust in Polish film. His 'survey' is insightful and substantial, and sheds new light on films little known even to a connoisseur... [He] has intertwined the difficult theme of the complex and varying Communist policy (and politics) with the development of postwar cinema, while the linear narrative constitutes a sophisticated meditation on the difficulties faced by Polish and Polish-Jewish filmmakers in the decades since 1945. This is a significant study that will prove indispensable to historians of post-war Polish film and the Holocaust, separately and together, along with all those concerned with Polish-Jewish relations after 1945." Patterns of Prejudice "By discussing many works that have fallen below Western critical radar, Haltof's analyses offer a very useful mapping of the filmmakers and films that address these topics. He does not shy away from the sometimes difficult historical controversies the films elicit or from offering sensible criticisms of the artistic failings of certain works he discusses. With this volume, our understanding of Poland's cinematic engagement with the Holocaust has been elevated to a new, higher level, even as certain omissions and blind spots in Haltof's study shows how much more essential work still needs to be done." Cineaste Magazine "Marek Haltof's study is impressive in its breadth and depth. Polish Film and the Holocaust encompasses a variety of motion pictures - many of which were never released outside Poland - while illuminating individual titles with an informed, nuanced perspective... In the continually charged context of Polish-Jewish relations, Haltof's book provides an elegant bridge between what he terms competing versions of victimization by history." Slavic "...displays the same virtues as Marek Haltof's Polish National Cinema, from the same publisher, to which the new book forms in a sense a companion piece. Here too one has a judicious and well-organized chronological survey... the result of a good deal of compilation, research and effective synthesis. The work is highly economical, packing discussion of a large number of films... into 229 pages of discursive text... Haltof's book not only informs non-Poles about Poles' attempts adequately to conceptualize events often considered beyond representation; his practice offers an examples and encouragement to further archival work." Studies in Eastern European Cinema "Representations of the Holocaust are among the most well researched topics in contemporary film studies, but Polish cinema still remains of marginal interest to the international academic world... Therefore, Marek Haltof's achievement is especially appreciated as he highlights different motives of the Holocaust in the works of Polish filmmakers in his complex and important study." Pol.Int.Org "Marek Haltof's monograph is the most comprehensive scholarly contribution to have emerged with respect to a long neglected field of study: the Holocaust in Polish film. Haltof's 'survey' is insightful, substantial, and sheds new light on films little known even to a connoisseur. Most importantly his evocation of films made during the years of 'official silence'... demands a re-evaluation from all scholars of post-war Jewish life in Poland... This is a significant study that will prove indispensable to historians of post-war Polish film, and the Holocaust, separately and together, along with all those concerned with Polish-Jewish relations after 1945." Polin "...the author has identified a significant and little examined subject for study, and displays a deep knowledge of it... Where previously the issue of Polish film and the Holocaust had been addressed in single articles or chapters on the depiction of the Holocaust in particular films, here, for the first time we have a history." Jeremy Hicks, University of London About the Author Marek Haltof is Professor at Northern Michigan University in Marquette. His recent books include the Historical Dictionary of Polish Cinema (2007), Australian Cinema: The Screen Construction of Australia (in Polish, 2005), The Cinema of Krzysztof Kielowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance (2004), and Polish National Cinema (2002).