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Phoenix Burning: The Collapse of the Fiction Film Studio and the Educational Film Studio in Łódź in the Early 90s

The year 1989 brought about political changes in all countries belonging to the former Soviet bloc. The collapse of the political system also triggered economic changes: the centrally governed economy, wherein most institutions and businesses in the country were subordinated to state authorities, was supposed to be replaced by a market economy based on multiple business entities and private ownership. The early 1990s were, on the one hand, a time when new private businesses started, and on the other hand, a time when many ineffective, deeply indebted state-owned institutions, unable to adapt to the new times, collapsed.

Such a situation was also characteristic of the film production industry in Poland. In the early 1990s, the system of financing film productions based on subsidies from the Ministry of Culture budget collapsed and cooperation with Polish Television basically ended as it now had its own dedicated units providing film services. Most of all, the crisis influenced those institutions whose existence depended on providing technical and production services. Huge financial problems were encountered by most film studios: WFF (Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych — Feature Film Studio) in Łódź, WFF-2 (Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych — Feature Film Studio) in Wrocław, and WFD (Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych — Documentary Film Studio) in Warsaw (however, since some feature films had also been shot at WFD after 1961, the studio changed its name to Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych — Documentary and Feature Film Studio — at the late date of 1989), as well as smaller state animation studios (Se-ma-for in Łódź, as well as studios in Bielsko-Biała, Krakow and Warsaw) and non-fiction film studios (WFO /Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych — Educational Film Studio/ in Łódź and the Czołówka Studio in Warsaw). Similar problems also confronted institutions offering post-production services such as film print development, e.g., ŁWZWKF (Łódzkie Zakłady Wytwórcze Kopii Filmowych — Film Copies Production Company) in Łódź and SOD (Studio Opracowań Dźwiękowych — Sound Post-Production and Dubbing Studio) in both Łódź and Warsaw. Therefore, the beginning of the 1990s was an arena of conflict for various, of-

ten contradictory ideas concerning how to manage the assets and heritage of film institutions situated in Łódź.

The transformation of the film industry in the beginning of the 1990s is a period scarcely researched by Polish film scholars. The only book dedicated specifically to this subject focuses on legal and fiscal regulations;¹⁾ while some information about the 'wild 90s' in Polish film culture can also be found in the last chapter of a seminal volume by Edward Zajiček.²⁾ Both authors are concerned primarily with institutional transformations on a national scale. In our opinion, this approach should be supplemented by a consideration of the 'local' aspect — since most of the institutions involved in film production were situated in Łódź. In order to pursue this local aspect, the research project 'Contemporary Hollyłódź' was developed, whose authors attempt, among other things, to re-construct the course of the film industry's decline in the city. The first phase of the project consisted of 'desk research': the professional and local press was examined and approximately two thousand pages of various documents were analysed, such as meeting protocols, correspondences, and transformation programs of experts referring to the whole city. Reading these documents was a quite depressing endeavour since it revealed a picture of the film industry as being extremely bureaucratic in nature, which resulted in a state of indecisiveness (one could get the impression that the more expert opinions and various 'strategies of development' were produced, the more difficult the situation became). This research was supplemented in the second phase by an 'oral history' procedure. Over 50 in-depth interviews were conducted with audio-visual sector employees, 15 of which were witnesses to or participants in the transformations that took place in the first half of the 1990s (each interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes; the Polish transcripts were deposited in the project archive file). The value of this undertaking was varied: some interviewees were either reluctant to share details of their former work or simply repeated formulations from Zajiček's book; by contrast, others offered significant insight, sometimes asking for discretion with respect to their current employer. Both the interviews and documents were analysed with the aim to not only reconstruct the path that transformation took, but also to bring to light all the alternative ideas and solutions that were not ultimately implemented.

In the present study, only two institutions — WFF and WFO — will be discussed. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, organizational transformations at that time were focused on these institutions. Secondly, both companies (or their legal successors) still exist, now owned by the local government. Thirdly, a paper about the history of another significant institution for Polish film culture based in Łódź, Se-ma-for, has already been published.³⁾ Fourthly, and finally, a detailed description of the history of all the remaining aforementioned institutions would require a separate study, for which this publication can only provide important background. However, before presenting the material of the study,

1) Ewa Gębicka, *Między państwowym mecenatem a rynkiem. Polska kinematografia po 1989 roku w kontekście transformacji ustrojowej* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), p. 55.

2) Edward Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Kinematografia polska 1896–2005* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Filmowców Polskich, 2009), pp. 304–327.

3) Ewa Ciszewska, 'The Se-Ma-For Film Studio from 1990 to 1999', *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication*, vol. 17, no. 26 (2015), pp. 276–282.

let us first introduce the 'cast and crew' of the drama itself in order to understand how significant the changes of the early 90s really were.

Glory Days

It was not by accident that Łódź became the place where the post-WWII film industry found its seat. As a result of WWII, most of Warsaw was razed to the ground and lay in ruins until the mid-50s. By contrast, Łódź had not suffered similar destruction and thus became the informal capital of the country for a few years after the war. Pre-war film-makers who had managed to survive the war also headed to Łódź, where the headquarters of the state-owned enterprise *Film Polski* were located. Among its first employees were members of the former Polish People's Army Film Crew, who had marched the entire military route to Berlin (the majority of the film equipment in the possession of Łódź film institutions, including the National Film School founded in 1948, had previously belonged to the German film studio UFA).

The history of WFF in Łódź began in December, 1945, when the first studio set was opened in Łąkowa Street, covering an area of 795 m². The first feature film to be produced there was *Forbidden Songs* (*Zakazane piosenki*, 1946). In 1948 a second studio set of 273 m² was opened, which later became a subsidiary area for the construction of set decorations for subsequent films. A third sound stage appeared in 1950 and occupied an area of 770 m². In the previous year (1949) two other state-owned film studios were established: WFO in Łódź and WFD in Warsaw (both originally dedicated to non-fiction productions). In 1954, WFF in Wrocław, which had hitherto been a branch of the Łódź Studio, gained its independence.

The period of 1956–1975 was a time when some of the best films in the history of Polish cinema were made in the WFF studios: Munk's *Bad Luck*, Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels*, Skolimowski's *Walkover* and Wajda's *The Promised Land* — to name just a few. Łąkowa Street was also the main production site for most of the historical 'giants' such as *Knights of the Teutonic Order* (1960) or *The Deluge* (1974), as well as some cult television series.

The turning point in the history of WFF was 1970, when the Studio was enriched by the so-called 'Palace of Sound' — at the time, it was the most modern unit in Poland entirely devoted to work on film sound. The Palace of Sound was equipped with editing-rooms, sound-mixing studios, projection rooms, console rooms, and social rooms, which served as a meeting point for the Studio's employees. In the mid-70s, as many as ten films were being made simultaneously in the studios of WFF. In a 1978 report on WFF published in the magazine *Film*, a tone of admiration and respect for the Łódź complex prevails. The report contains the following description: 'Today, the Studio seen from the outside — it is modern architecture! At first glance, it resembles a scientific centre rather than a *dream factory*. A factory, because it could not be described differently with its staff of over a thousand employees representing 65 professions.'⁴⁾ In the early 80s, the first signs of

4) Andrzej Wojnach, 'Na Łąkowej', *Film*, no. 30 (1978), p. 8.

economic crisis were already showing. Nevertheless, quite a number of good films were made on the Łąkowa Street premises: Kieślowski's *Blind Chance* (1981), Machulski's *Va-bank* (1981) and Zanussi's *A Year of the Quiet Sun* (1984).

Several blocks south of WFF, in the WFO studios at Kilińskiego Street, short and medium-length documentary and educational films on almost every subject (e.g. about art, history, folklore, and nature) were made. The production volume was huge; in the period 1960–1979, WFO produced on average over a hundred titles per year⁵⁾ (from time to time some short fiction films were also shot on the WFO premises). The main difference between WFF and WFO was that the former was dependent on projects conceived and commissioned for production by Film Units (Zespoły Filmowe) in Warsaw, whereas the latter combined both functions: the creative 'core' and a production site. In other words: since WFO was the only studio in Poland dedicated to educational film, all screenplays — including those which had nothing to do with educational purposes — were discussed exclusively by the employees of the creative departments of WFO.

Despite the opportunity to gain new professional experience, Łódź Film School students did not typically aspire to work at WFO. 'The vast majority of Film School graduates were getting ready for feature films, the rest wanted to make documentaries. The least number of volunteers were for WFO⁶⁾ — recalled director, Sylwester Chęciński. Paradoxically, it may have been the film school graduates' lack of interest in working at WFO which contributed to the creation of a group of independent artists working there. Among them were long forgotten artists such as the outstanding nature film directors Puchalski and Marczak, as well as directors of so-called 'creative documentaries' (Wiszniewski, Królikiewicz, Szulkin). Jacek Bławut recalls: 'Feature Film Studio was the queen attracting fame, a place for celebrities. Whereas we, a group of documentary film-makers from WFO, considered ourselves the chosen ones, those who made authors' cinema, profound, real art.'⁷⁾

Indeed, there was hardly any cooperation between the WFF and WFO Studios, with one notable exception: because WFO produced nature films, it had a fantastic Trick Photography Department. Thus, when WFF made films requiring trick photography, it would approach WFO for cooperation (e.g., Stanisław Śliskowski, one of the main directors working for WFO, collaborated as co-cinematographer on one of the biggest hits of Polish cinema, *Academy of Mr. Kleks* /1984/, shot at WFF)⁸⁾. Nevertheless, each of the institutions would function autarkically — for example, there were three film labs in the city: at WFF, at WFO, and at the Łódź Film Copies' Production Company (this fact would soon turn out to be significant for the restructuring plans of the Łódź Studios).

The second half of the 1980s is unanimously described by film historians as a regressive period in the Polish film industry. The legal act about the film industry passed in 1987, which guaranteed, among other things, lower income tax on profits, was intended to sup-

5) Teresa Oziemska, Elżbieta Drecka-Wojtyczka (eds.), *Oświatówka. 55 lat przygód z filmem krótkim* (Łódź: Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych, 2000), pp. 13–22.

6) Interview with Sylwester Chęciński (26. 9. 2014). '46-Sylwester.Checinski-2014', audio file and transcription (in Polish) stored at: 'Contemporary HollyŁódź' Project Archive Files at University of Łódź (Archiwum Projektu 'Współczesna HollyŁódź' na Uniwersytecie Łódzkim — hereafter CLUL).

7) Stanisław Zawisliński, Tadeusz Wijata, *Fabryka snów* (Łódź: TOYA, 2013), p. 344.

8) Interview with Stanisław Śliskowski (11. 12. 2014), '47-Stanislaw.Sliskowski-2014', CLUL.

port Polish cinema. As it turned out, the new regulations did not go far enough to benefit film industry institutions in any meaningful way. Other changes in the field of film production were rather small and may be described as simple ‘rebranding’ operations. Until 1987, the ‘Film Units’ Production Company (Przedsiębiorstwo Realizatorów Filmowych ‘Zespoły Filmowe’) in Warsaw, an umbrella organization of individual film units, had a monopoly on feature film production contracting for the Studios in Łódź, Warsaw, and Wrocław. The new legal act simply replaced this company with the Board of Polish Film Producers (Zespół Polskich Producentów Filmowych). Likewise, the most superior institution (which supervised almost all the institutions of film culture, including the distribution circuit and cinemas, with the exception of film education), which had been called the Film Industry Executive Board (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii) prior to 1987, was simply renamed the Film Industry Committee (Komitet Kinematografii). Like its predecessor, this ‘new’ committee was also subordinate to the Ministry of Culture and Art, which supervised the Film Industry Fund (Fundusz Kinematografii).

The worsened condition of the Polish cinema had a negative impact on the functioning of the Studios in Łódź. Already by the mid-1980s, the number of films made in WFF had dropped, both those made for cinemas as well as those for television. Piotr Dziecioł, a former production manager of films and film series in Łąkowa Street, recalls: ‘I returned to Łódź from the USA in 1988. [...] it was apparent that there was simply no work here. If you wanted to work you had to move to Warsaw. If any offers turned up they would only be in Warsaw as so few films were being made that they would all be made in Warsaw and there was no need to move production to Łódź.’⁹⁾

The end of 1980s was not a promising time for WFO either, since the Studio faced several problems: an old and outmoded technological base, a lack of good film stock, and distribution difficulties in cinemas and television. At that time, thirty percent of annual WFO production constituted authors’ artistic films subsidized by the Film Industry Fund, whereas seventy percent were commissioned assignments for television, various ministries, and sporadically for other institutions, too. Despite all this, in 1988, the Studio employed 441 people, including 67 directors and cinematographers working as full-time employees (in WFF such professionals were not employed on a regular basis). In the same year, although the Studio provided services worth 836 million PLN, it only generated an income of 61 million. A camera bought in 1987 cost 72,5 million PLN, and the average wage in WFO was 36,5 thousand PLN (half of the average salary in the country), which is why many film-makers would get extra jobs making videos of weddings.¹⁰⁾ At the same time, Zbigniew Godlewski — the new head of WFO since October 1989 — pointed out in an interview that there was no single video camera in the Studio, and none of WFO’s movies has ever been available on VHS.¹¹⁾ The strategic goal of the new WFO seemed to be the shift toward video. ‘Educational films and documentaries recorded on video cassettes should be passed to on libraries. And it’s obvious, especially now when video players are

9) Interview with Piotr Dziecioł (18. 7. 2012), ‘1-Piotr.Dzieciol-2012’, CLUL.

10) Ryszard Nakonieczny, ‘Cwaniacy i maniacy’, *Odgłosy*, no. 12 (1988), p. 7.

11) Małgorzata Karbowski, ‘Stan firmy jest krytyczny. Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Godlewskim’, *Głos Robotniczy*, no. 250 (1989), p. 5.

so common.’ — he would remark.¹²⁾ Godlewski ran negotiations with Sony to provide VHS technology to schools. However, at that time, schools had financial problems in providing just basic supplies such as chalk — buying video players was out of the question for a few good years.

This Boat is Sinking

The first attempt to specify the basic parameters of how WFF will function in the free market were undertaken at the end of November 1989. It was then that Piotr Holwek, administrative manager of the Studio, presented his ideas on the matter to the chairman of the Film Industry Committee.¹³⁾ Most of all, he emphasized the need to determine the rules of cooperation between film producers (in Warsaw) and film studios. Both parties, according to Holwek, should sign long-term agreements specifying the number of films to be produced per year. Such a demand was utter nonsense given the realities of 1989 — the year of rapid political changes, incredible inflation, and mass protests on the streets. Other ideas proposed by Holwek related to organizational changes at WFF. Some departments were to become more independent, others would be terminated, and a marketing department would be created. However, Holwek’s proposal was questioned by the Solidarity Trade Union, which was in favour of combining the Studio’s production units rather than granting them independence, and suggested introducing an ‘employees-shared ownership’ policy in the future.¹⁴⁾

1990 brought further ideas about how WFF should function in new economic climate. Its management commissioned an expert report entitled ‘Economic Aspects of Ownership Changes in WFF’.¹⁵⁾ These experts agreed that the best option would be to lease the Studio’s property, or a part of it — by creating a new entity that would function in a fully competitive environment (without state subsidies, but also free of debts of the state institution) which would be able to use the studios, equipment, and know-how of the state Studio.

At the same time, the WFO director, in a manner typical for the socialist economy, boasted about his achievements in reorganizing WFO in a letter to the Film Industry Committee in June 1990: ‘the number of organizational units was diminished by 4, and the number of posts of managers by 10’.¹⁶⁾ Soon afterwards, the Textile Industry Economics Institute (sic!) of Łódź University prepared a thorough report called ‘The Directions of Ownership Transformations in WFO’,¹⁷⁾ in which it was recommended, similarly to the case of WFF, to create a separate company which would lease from the state the assets of the ‘state’ WFO.

12) Renata Sas, ‘Jak się kręci. Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Godlewskim’, *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 296 (1989), p. 3.

13) ‘Piotr Holwek’s letter to Juliusz Burski’, 28. 11. 1989, Film Industry Committee Files (*Zespół Komitet Kinematografii*) in New Acts Archive in Warsaw (*Archiwum Akt Nowych*) — hereafter ZKK-AAN.

14) ‘Andrzej Pabianek’s letter to Juliusz Burski’, 10. 1. 1990, ZKK-AAN.

15) ‘Ekonomiczne aspekty przekształceń własnościowych w Wytwórni Filmów Fabularnych’, November 1990, ZKK-AAN, pp. 18–19.

16) ‘Zbigniew Godlewski’s letter to Film Industry Committee’, 22. 6. 1990, ZKK-AAN.

17) ‘Kierunki przekształceń własnościowych w WFO’, November 1990, ZKK-AAN.

Thus, an identical solution — in fact, one typical for early ‘privatization’ in Poland in 1990s — was suggested for both companies. Numerous ventures would rapidly spring up alongside the many institutions remaining under state supervision and ‘suck out’ from these institutions the best of what they had to offer. The mechanism was the same in almost every industry: employees of a state institution (often its management) would start a private business, often based and functioning in the same building as the state institution, and would then take over the assignments which would have previously been passed to the state institution. What’s more, those assignments were often carried out by using the equipment and staff of the state institution.

Quite often, the local Łódź press would inform readers about the difficult situation of the local Film Studios — typically with a wordplay that alluded to the meaning of the word ‘Łódź’ (pol. *boat*). Almost as a rule, readers could come across phrases like ‘Film Łódź is drowning’ (alternately: ‘is drifting’) and there was the prevailing opinion that Warsaw lacked interest in Łódź affairs. In the middle of 1990, a passionate article appeared in the newspaper *Dziennik Łódzki*, which read: ‘Łódź, which has been the centre of the Polish film industry for the past 45 years, has now a duty and a moral right, or maybe even the privilege to reanimate it. [...] It is Łódź’s historical mission. A mission which also gives the city a chance to return to Europe.’¹⁸⁾ These words directed at city authorities were written by Jacek Cybusz, an employee of the Łódź Film Museum (at the time a young institution, founded in the mid-1980s, which turned out to be one of the few film institutions that have survived until the present). This initiative did not reach beyond press declarations and was not transformed into any real action — possibly because Łódź film circles were concentrated on production issues and were reluctant to develop closer cooperation with a museum oriented towards historical work, or maybe because of actions undertaken in the following months by the authorities in Warsaw, which reorganized all film studios in the country.

Warsaw Does Not Believe in Tears

Whereas at that time WFF and WFO management analysed the situation exclusively from the point of view of the institutions they represented, members of the Film Industry Committee recognized the necessity for complex and systematic solutions. It is worth mentioning that the majority of the 30 members of the Film Industry Committee were fairly young directors and ambitious producers who, one might get the impression, were yearning for the arrival of capitalism; there was not a single representative of Łódź film circles in this group.

Generally speaking, the Film Industry Committee did not consider the problems encountered by the Film Studios as crucial ones. Transcripts of Committee meetings from 1990 show clearly that the Committee was mostly occupied with the issues of constructing a new subsidy system and new film institutions: the Film Production Agency (Agenc-

18) Jacek Cybusz, ‘W sprawie Łodzi filmowej’, *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 200 (1990), p. 4.

ja Produkcji Filmowej) and the Screenwriting Agency (Agencja Scenariuszowa), both founded in June 1991. This change considerably modified the way the film industry functioned in Poland. From that moment on, film institutions would no longer receive production funds as part of their current operating costs (from the previously existing Film Industry Fund); in order to get funding for a particular film they were required to present a so called 'producer's package' (screenplay and production plan). Then, the committee would evaluate the project, recommending it to the Film Industry Committee's chairman or denying the funding.¹⁹⁾ With regard to Łódź, the change mostly affected WFO, in fact, in a double way. Firstly, the Film Production Agency was not interested in supporting educational and nature films. Secondly, until that time it had been the Studio itself that would assign funds received from the Film Fund between production and administration, but from this point on, it had to apply for production funds separately.

In January 1990, the chairman of the Film Industry Committee created a special sub-commission to be in charge of formulating policies regarding the reorganization of film production companies and specifying the conditions of their division, mergers or possible liquidations. The team consisted of 20 people, 5 of whom were from the Warsaw studio WFDiF, 4 from WFF-Łódź, and nobody from other Łódź Studios (interestingly, the body included several representatives of Worker Councils or trade unions). The final 'report' consisted of as few as 6 pages.²⁰⁾ Only one paragraph was devoted to WFF, in which it was suggested that particular units should be extracted from the Studio in the form of independent ventures with separate bank accounts which would be able to voluntarily join a holding company named 'Holly-Łódź Film Society'(!). The proposal was supposed to undergo further consultations, but no sign of them can be found in the files or in oral accounts.

Another project, dated January 1990, was prepared by Zygmunt Król (a long-term production manager and head production manager of the 'Studio' and 'Kadr' Film Units) together with Wiesław Stempel (head of WFF from 1959 to 1962). They had the idea to use state subsidies to create and sustain two 'bases of film equipment and sound stages': one was intended to be founded in Warsaw, supported by the assets of WFDiF and Czołówka, the other one in Łódź, as a merger of Łódź and Wrocław Studios.²¹⁾ On top of that, the authors of the study pointed out the necessity of combining the three Łódź film print development labs into one institution.

The reports were presented (without conclusions) during a meeting between Juliusz Burski, the head of the Film Industry Committee, and film industry representatives in May 1990. In the course of the discussion, yet another idea was presented by Mariusz Walter (at the time one of the managers of state-controlled television TVP — Telewizja Polska — and later the chief of the private television station TVN), who suggested combining the technical base of the film industry with that of television (the seat of the new studio

19) Gębicka, *Między państwowym mecenatem...*, p. 93.

20) 'Zespół przygotowawczy dla wypracowania stanowiska w przedmiocie celowości reorganizacji wytwórni filmowych oraz sprecyzowania warunków podziału, połączenia czy ewentualnej likwidacji', 28. 3. 1990, ZKK-AAN.

21) Zygmunt Król, Wiesław Stempel, *Uwagi i propozycje dotyczące kierunków zmian strukturalnych i organizacyjnych w sferze produkcji filmowej*, 9. 1. 1990, ZKK-AAN.

was supposed to be Warsaw or Łódź, with a branch in Wrocław).²²⁾ This idea was also not acted upon, but it is worth mentioning for at least one reason: prior to this, the television business was never taken into consideration when discussing the restructuring of the film studios. (The reason for this may be simple: in 1990 TVP enjoyed a monopoly on broadcasting and it was not until December 1992, that the first private television station started broadcasting nationwide.)

The issues of the Studios were discussed by the Film Industry Committee once again in June 1990. Among other things, the information prepared for the meeting stated: 'The current year is the last one in which it will be possible to have purchases subsidized by the Film Fund, because it will be liquidated. The Studios are aware that from the next year onwards they will be subjected to strict free market rules. The last lists of equipment needs made by the Studios should be aimed at contributing to the purchase of current sound equipment, cameras, and dollies.'²³⁾

Take the Money and Run

The aforementioned 'last minute purchases' from the Film Industry Fund turned out to be extremely unlucky for the Łódź Studios. Director Godlewski rejected the idea of buying an Arriflex BL-III camera, to which WFO was entitled, in favour of purchasing equipment for the sound studio. As a matter of fact, WFO was approached by representatives of the Swiss firm Sondor with an interesting offer. According to Godlewski:

I was told, that Sondor makes use of the Hermes fund. The Swiss government established a guarantee fund, which covered losses if Sondor made transactions and the contracting party did not pay. The Foreign-Currency Department director in the Ministry of Finances, a friend of mine, advised us: 'You'll pay the first instalment, and then say you have no money and have them take it back'. Sondor equipment was supposed to be some kind of present. Knowing this, I wanted to take advantage of the situation. I assumed that if we had such a well-equipped sound studio, it would have no competition in that part of Europe and the resulting income could support the whole Film Studio.²⁴⁾

Unfortunately, the directors of WFF and Se-ma-for had exactly the same idea having been visited by cunning sales representatives from Switzerland. Ultimately, equipment worth over a million dollars ended up in Łódź — an amount of money, which, according to some past and present opinions, could have been used to provide sound services for all the films made across whole Europe at the time. It is not known whether, beyond the 'the friend's advice', any sensible analysis accompanied the purchase decisions at either of the

22) 'Spotkanie Juliusza Burskiego, szefa Komitetu Kinematografii, z przedstawicielami branży filmowej' 9. 5. 1990, ZKK-AAN, pp. 17–21.

23) 'Informacja na posiedzenie Komitetu Kinematografii w przedmiocie reorganizacji wytwórni filmowych', 21. 6. 1990, ZKK-AAN.

24) Interview with Zbigniew Godlewski (17. 4. 2015), '51-Zbigniew.Godlewski-2015', CLUL.

studios. Nevertheless, the Swiss firm did not fail to notice that the contracting parties were in fact state institutions and did not intend to retrieve the due payment from the Hermes Fund but from the Polish state. The state, however, was not eager to help any of the careless Studios; in the yearly balance-sheets prepared by WFF and WFO for the years 1991, 1992 and 1993, next to the figures indicating a small income or a small loss it was noted: 'The balance does not cover liabilities owed to the Sondor firm.'

It is no secret that the beginning of the political transformation in Poland provided opportunity for many unclear deals often initiated by cynical frauds with foreign passports — however, there is no proof to claims that the incredible success of the businessmen from Switzerland was rooted in anything more than the gullibility of the Studio directors. The 'foreign investor' was the buzzword of the decade — a state institution could feel special if it had this cherished protagonist of newspaper and television reports knocking on the door. There were several other attempts at Łódź film studios to create some form of joint venture with foreign investors. In 1990, the WFF director reported to Warsaw his intention to enter into a joint venture with the British company Euro-Rank (allegedly a subordinate to the Rank consortium), and in 1991 WFO's director announced his intention to gain funding from an American company called Cartoon Communication. Not much is known about either firm, apart from the fact, that CC started some sort of cooperation with Cartoon Studio in Krakow and most probably contributed to its closure.

Another obstacle for establishing actual cooperation with foreign contractors was the attitude of the film studios themselves. Sołtysik, a highly-experienced production manager at WFF-Łódź, recalls:

At the beginning of the 1990s, TOR Film Production, which I cooperated with, was supposed to provide production services to the Spanish. They were considering Poland mostly because Zanussi — a renowned film director, recognized all over Europe — was the studio head at that time. We managed to convince the Spaniards to build two sets in the film studio in Łąkowa Street. We added the studio's lighting equipment and other service to this order as we managed to convince our foreign contractors that it wouldn't make sense to transport such equipment from Spain. The studio calculated the costs of such services for me and they came up with an amount which was the equivalent of the cost of a full-length feature film production, i.e. 7 billion Polish zlotys. They included everything they could into this calculation plus additional surcharges and margins. Everything was set, the Spanish studio somehow accepted the inflated cost, so we were waiting for the arrival of the Spanish: the director, the producer and the production designer. A few days before their arrival a representative of the Polish studio came to me and told me that they had miscalculated the costs and that the services provided would be even more expensive, by 3 billion zlotys. [...] It was easy to predict the effect of such an attitude; the Spanish made that film in Munich [...]. I described only one incident, which I know first-hand, but there were others. Why was *Schindler's List* produced in Warsaw and not in Łódź? ²⁵⁾

25) Zawisliński and Wijata, *Fabryka snów...*, pp. 319–320.

The Film Industry Committee was well aware that the Łódź film studios were far from being competitive on the international market. In 1991 Tadeusz Ścibor-Rylski made the following observation: 'Let's remember that foreign producers may now use Babelsberg Film Studio in Potsdam and Barrandov Studios in Prague and that the conditions that these facilities offer are much better than we have. Our film studios are not highly esteemed in Europe and they do not attract film producers.'²⁶⁾

Hear Me Cry

During the proceedings of the Film Industry Committee, several speakers urgently called for a complete inventory of WFF property. As Waldemar Dziki commented: 'It needs to be clearly said that the studio's property is now being stolen. I am afraid that soon it will be impossible to make a property inventory as there will be no property left.'²⁷⁾ Recollections of property 'being stolen' recur in many accounts, though only as a general reflection; we have not found any documentation confirming such dealings (no inventory of missing equipment or props, police reports, or court files, etc.) nor have we come across a single specific account (of who illegally took what from which studio). It may be assumed that the idea of 'stealing' refers to the already described peculiar relationship which prevailed in the 1990s between the declining state companies and private enterprises running similar business activities.

An example of these obscure connections — not necessarily evidence of criminal behaviour, but rather an illustration of the conflict between the Film Studios and the newly-established entities — is the most famous film produced at WFO at the beginning of the 1990s — *Hear Me Cry* by Maciej Drygas, a documentary about Ryszard Siwiec, who, in 1968, committed suicide by self-immolation in protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In the opening credits of *Hear Me Cry* there is no WFO logo. Instead, there is the following information: 'Logos Film Unit at the Educational Film Studio and Zodiak Film Production'. Why is Drygas's film then mentioned as one of the flagship works of WFO?

Logos Film Unit was founded in June 1990. As stated earlier, until that time Film Units resided mostly in Warsaw and there was no special Film Unit responsible for educational matters. Logos — located on the premises of WFO in Kilińskiego Street — was thus perceived as an experiment: it was neither an independent company, nor was it subordinate to WFO management (such a 'legal vacuum' was typical of early 90s in Poland). Władysław Wasilewski (a long-time director employed by WFO) became head of the unit and Konstanty Lewkowicz (a highly-experienced production manager at WFF) was responsible for the financial matters. *Hear Me Cry* was the first production by Logos — apparently, WFO did not want to make it and Drygas was treated as an 'outsider'.²⁸⁾ The studio's approach, however, changed considerably when *Hear Me Cry* started to win awards, including a prestigious Felix. Then, the executives of WFO decided that it has the rights to 'all the achieve-

26) 'Posiedzenia Komitetu Kinematografii. Protokoły 1991', pp. 112–113, ZKK-AAN.

27) Ibid., p. 23.

28) Bogdan Sobieszek, 'Szanse dla mocnych filmów', *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 188 (1992), p. 3.

ments of the Studio employees²⁹⁾ and, hence, the name Logos Film Unit should not appear in the opening credits.

Animosity between WFO and Logos was fuelled particularly by financial matters. Until May 1991, the WFO film studio received funding without any guidelines as to which productions should receive what amount. Therefore, the Studio used the grant to cover any existing arrears and, as a result, no money was transferred to the awaiting filmmakers. The Studio did not make proper financial settlements regarding either planned films or generated debts. When WFO's bank account was blocked, the Studio 'borrowed' money from Logos' subsidiary bank account. Moreover, in order to avoid losses, cash was withdrawn from the account and kept in a safe. 'Even if the bank did not raid the subsidiary bank account of Logos Film Unit, the Educational Film Studio did it continuously in order to take any funds deposited thereon.³⁰⁾ — Wasilewski explained.

The conflict between WFO and Logos concluded with the privatization of the latter and its separation from WFO. In 1992, the newly established institution, under the new business name Logos Film Studio, moved its seat to Łąkowa Street, where WFF was located (and until 1998 Logos made nearly 20 more documentaries). Several smaller companies also started to operate at the same address, i.e. in Łąkowa Street, and they would participate in the coproduction of projects developed by WFF.

At the same time, the financial situation of WFF itself was deteriorating; in 1992 its liabilities amounted to seven billion one hundred and twelve million zlotys whereas calls for payment value was estimated at nine billion eight hundred and five million zlotys. Towards the end of 1993, approximately 350 people were employed at the film studio, however, only a certain percentage of them received full pay while other members of the crew were on so-called 'duty', which means that each month they received approximately one-fifth of their regular salary, while the full salary was supposed to be paid when orders appeared. A report published by local daily *Dziennik Łódzki* reveals a lot about the condition of the film studio at that time:

from among 100 people working in the set building unit, 44 workers are employed full time. The remaining workers are on so-called duty and remain idle. They receive 500–600 thousand zlotys per month but earn more if there is some concrete work in film production. The situation is the same in the Cinematographic Technique Unit; from among 46 workers, only 14 are employed full time and receive permanent pay amounting to 2–3 million zlotys per month. The workers who are 'on duty', work on average 3 months per year [...] There was a time when the dressmaking workshops of the film studio employed fifteen workers. Now there is only one tailor, who, when necessary, makes some minor alterations [...]. Between December and March, the costumes storage room is quite busy, as it is the carnival and prom season. Having such demand in mind, the studio ordered the making of fifteen Santa Claus cos-

29) Krzysztof Kąkolewski, 'Pierwsze samospalenie', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 1 (1993), p. 64.

30) 'Pismo Władysława Wasilewskiego do Rady Pracowniczej Wytwórni Filmów Oświatowych w Łodzi', 16. 3. 1992, ZKK-AAN.

tumes — red cloaks and beards made of genuine hair. In the Christmas season, these are very popular.³¹⁾

The situation was not much different at WFO. In 1992, it employed 243 employees (71 administrative workers, 71 technical workers, 27 directors, 18 production managers, 14 cinematographers and 4 sound mixers).³²⁾ Andrzej Czulda, a long-time employee of the company, remembers: 'There was a time when we would come to work, sit in a colleague's room and actually do nothing. We only drank coffee and complained. We did not know what to do with ourselves. We were waiting for better times to come.'³³⁾ Television and the Ministry of National Education eventually withdrew from cooperation with WFO due to high cooperation costs. At this point, revenues came from postproduction work ordered by outside companies and from selling the company's property. 'The library was liquidated, with books being sold for just 1 PLN each. We decided that we had a lot of redundant equipment. We sold off cameras, editing tables and reflectors for next to nothing. One of the cinematographers bought the camera which he had always used at work and an editing table. He encouraged me to follow his example but I didn't' — recalls Czulda.³⁴⁾

Another idea to improve the financial condition of the company was something which appalled and shocked a lot of people connected with the studio, both professionally and emotionally, namely renting out the premises to companies operating outside the cinematographic business: 'Every month, it was getting more and more crowded at WFO; it was necessary to vacate certain rooms for other companies to move in there (the most ironic example was a signboard placed between other signboards on the film studio's gateway — egg wholesaler).'³⁵⁾ In Łąkowa Street, on the other hand, the WFF car depot became a Fiat repair shop, Agrobank's offices moved into one of the sound stages, and stage 2 was hired out as a cosmetics wholesale warehouse.

In contrast to the ineffective, huge film studio, smaller private companies did much better on the production market. Dzieciół remembers:

When I returned from the US, I started to work at WFO. I was making a major film in collaboration with Grzegorz Królikiewicz about Lech Wałęsa. Thanks to my working there, I met Sławek Wójcik, who was a vice-director. At this time, a group of young Americans was looking for a company to help them make a feature film in Łódź. They came to WFO and Sławek and I made a deal with them and so we founded a company, Opus Film, which was supposed to provide them with production services. I had my office in Łąkowa Street as all the shooting was done there. [...] Beautiful sets were built. We constructed, for example, the inside of a large tenement house. Production went well, the contractors were very happy and we are still in

31) Bogdan Sobieszek, 'Ciężkie czasy fabryki snów', *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 124 (1993).

32) 'Raport o sytuacji Wytwórni Filmów Oświatowych', 24. 2. 1992, Zbigniew Godlewski's Archive (*Archiwum Zbigniewa Godlewskiego* — hereafter AZG).

33) Interview with Andrzej Czulda (19. 12. 2014), '49-Andrzej.Czulda-2014', CLUL.

34) Ibid.

35) Leszek Skrzydło, *Z tamtej strony kamery* (Łódź: Muzeum Kinematografii, 2008), p. 131.

touch. It was a black-and-white, sort of arthouse film, it was never shown at cinemas either in Poland or in the US.³⁶⁾

This account shows the mechanisms typical of early Polish capitalism: an American contractor approaches a state-owned company, but its vice-director transfers the order to a private company which he co-owns. There was nothing unusual about such actions in the harsh realities of Poland in the early 90s — at that time, hardly anyone would have any legal doubts regarding similar undertakings or judge them as ‘unethical’.

Let's Stick Together

In the middle of 1992, the head of the Film Industry Committee appointed a restructuring sub-commission for the Łódź film industry. In an appendix to the review, the authors list examples of rare, positive changes from the point of view of the restructuring which occurred in Łódź film studios between 1990 and 1992. Apart from the rental of space, the separation of particular units, the exchange of equipment and ‘significant limitation of social activities’, they also mention ‘undertaking coproduction and subcontracting of particular film services for television (e.g. in the field of commercials) and other private companies or foreign film producers.’³⁷⁾ The listed activities were seen as opportunities and guidelines for the future. It is worth mentioning that this recommended strategy was followed by, among others, the previously-mentioned Opus-Film, which (as one of the first such companies in Poland) started to produce TV commercials and later feature-length films.

The expert advice prepared by the sub-commission argued that it was necessary to unify all the cinematographic film processing studios into one central film lab and to somehow combine the sound studios (two options were considered: WFF plus WFO, or WFF plus WFO and Se-ma-for). All these ideas were analysed and presented in relevant reports (70 pages each) by a team from the Łódź Personnel Consulting Centre.³⁸⁾ The authors of the analysis agreed with the concept of establishing one film processing unit (located in Łąkowa Street). They concluded that having parallel but separate units would not make sense in the case of WFO and ŁWZWKE. Although the authors of the reports saw many arguments in favour of establishing one sound mixing studio (that would put highly-qualified professionals and cutting-edge equipment in one place and develop a unified marketing system), one factor led to this proposal not being adopted. It was, of course, an economic factor, mostly to do with obligations to the Sondor company.

The next meeting of the Film Industry Committee, during which the matter of the Łódź film studios and other film institutions was discussed, was held in September 1992.

36) Zawiśliński, Wijata, p. 357. See also: Marcin Adamczak, *Strategie i przypadki. Działalność firmy Opus Film w latach 1991–2012*, in Ewa Ciszewska, Konrad Klejsa (eds.), *Kultura filmowa współczesnej Łodzi* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo PWSFTviT, 2015).

37) ‘Program restrukturyzacji jednostek organizacyjnych kinematografii w Łodzi’, 16. 10. 1992, ZKK-AAN, p. 6.

38) ‘Analiza celowości utworzenia i funkcjonowania połączonego studia dźwięku’, April 1992 and ‘Analiza funkcjonowania zakładów obróbki taśmy’, April 1992, ZKK-AAN.

The most important action taken at this meeting was the adoption of 'The Privatization Programme in Cinematography', conceived by Aleksander Walczak, head of the Department of Economics in the Ministry of Culture. The programme assumed, among other things, that WFF, WFO, Se-ma-for, and ŁZWKF shall be treated as one complex 'which should be restructured, so that an effectively-operating film production company appears in Łódź.'³⁹⁾ The programme also included the suggestion that the complex was expected to be self-supporting and should not be financed from the Film Industry Committee budget. The institution's activities were supposed to focus on providing services for American and European producers to offer an attractive substitute for Yugoslavia, which due to the political situation in the Balkans was no longer a place where Americans could make their films. The major obstacle which could hinder the entire project was the lack of hotels with standards that would satisfy the expectations of American contractors. One of the committee members complained:

I brought twenty contractors to Łódź, mostly American, and they were all disappointed [...] Perhaps we would have been able to attract Spielberg or Warner Bros., but again the main obstacle was the fact that there are no appropriate hotels in Łódź. I had a meeting with Spielberg's representative, but it finished quickly, most probably because we had it in the obscure lobby of Hotel Centrum.⁴⁰⁾

Waldemar Dąbrowski, then head of the Film Industry Committee, confirmed that foreign investors were disappointed with the conditions in Łódź, both when it came to hotels and to the technical standards of the WFF itself:

The equipment is worn-out and we are talking about 90%. I was told that the reflectors were good for nothing. We must remember that in the last few years filmmaking techniques have developed immensely [...]. When I went to visit a filmmaking technique exhibition in Munich I understood how backward we are.⁴¹⁾

The cost of restructuring the Łódź film institutions was estimated at 10 billion zlotys. Dziki objected to such estimates, and made the following comment on the situation: 'We may not allow a situation where there is no money for film production; and I am not sure if there will be money both for the restructuring project and for film production.'⁴²⁾ It was precisely this unknown that was perceived as the main threat connected with the restructuring of film institutions in Łódź. If restructuring funds came exclusively from the resources of the Film Industry Committee, this could pose a threat to film production. Film-makers were afraid that the government would not be willing to earmark any additional funds for the execution of the restructuring project in such a form.

Members of the Film Industry Committee discussed the issue of the film studios again in October 1993. This time, the meeting was devoted to a document entitled 'Restructur-

39) 'Program przekształceń własnościowych w kinematografii', September 1993, ZKK-AAN.

40) 'Posiedzenia Komitetu Kinematografii. Protokoły 1993', ZKK-AAN, p. 163.

41) Ibid., p. 175.

42) Ibid., p. 167.

ing Activities Schedule and Draft of Property Division of Film Industry Organizational Units in Łódź⁴³⁾. A solution recommended by Dąbrowski was the establishment of a complex called Łódź Film Centre (Łódzkie Centrum Filmowe — ŁCF), which would be a services institution, taking over the entire property of WFF and of the SOD, as well as part of WFO's property. Holwek, the head of WFF, was enthusiastic about this proposal. He insisted that the objections of workers' councils and the concerns that Łódź film institutions would become subordinate to the film studio in Łąkowa Street were groundless.⁴⁴⁾ The protracted debates prolonged the state of stagnation. This was most harmful to WFO, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. The studio was in serious trouble, which is reflected in the way the number of produced films plummeted: in 1990 WFO produced ninety films, whereas in 1993 — only seventeen.⁴⁵⁾

Some members of the Film Industry Committee raised other doubts. Most of all, film directors were wondering if adopting the draft would not be equivalent to liquidating the film studios in Łódź. Krupska-Wysocka presented the following opinion on the restructuring programme: 'It is obvious that we are coping with reduced production and that, actually, production on the current level could be done by the film studio in Warsaw. [...] Why are we talking about liquidating certain institutions in Łódź, but we do not mention the fact that these functions are taken over by Warsaw?'⁴⁶⁾

In spite of the doubts mentioned above, the committee adopted the Łódź Film Institutions Restructuring Programme. The Antimonopoly Office was consulted in order to verify whether the institution which was being developed would not be a monopolist on the film services market (which might sound hilarious from today's perspective). With its decision in November 1993, the Antimonopoly Office did not raise any objections to the project.

The New Hope

The new institution — ŁCF — was a combination of WFF, SOD and a part of WFO. By the end of 1993, more than a month later, an agreement was signed between the Mayor of Łódź and the head of the Film Industry Committee, whereby the municipality committed to making a contribution to the company in the form of the municipality's receivables (7 billion zlotys), to apply tax credit to ŁCF and to cooperate on the development of films made in Łódź. The committee promised to contribute funds for the restructuring of the company.

Łódź Film Centre was established on January 1st, 1994 with Holwek as director. ŁCF took over most of WFO's property as well as real estate with an area of 23,847 square meters. (The newly-established Educational Films and TV Programmes Studio retained

43) 'Restrukturyzacja oraz podział majątku jednostek organizacyjnych kinematografii w Łodzi', 27. 10. 1993, ZKK-AAN.

44) Bogdan Sobieszek, 'Jak to się robi po polsku', *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 100 (1992), p. 3.

45) Oziemska and Drecka-Wojtyczka, pp. 22–23.

46) 'Posiedzenia Komitetu Kinematografii. Protokoły 1993', ZKK-AAN, pp. 149–150.

space with an area of 12,000 m²).⁴⁷⁾ The building of the sound studio was located in the area taken over from 'the former' WFO; some of the equipment was supposed to go to the film school and some to ŁCF in Łąkowa Street. Thus, the earlier project of one common sound studio came into being. The 'new' WFO consisted of: an office building, a sound stage, a natural history films division, and archives. In 1994, the restructured Educational Film Studio had twenty-nine employees (seventy-five fewer than at its former stage of operations).⁴⁸⁾

A few days after ŁCF had been established, a certain Bert de Neve from Belgium sent a fax to the Łódź City Hall. It is worthwhile to quote a fragment here:

Łódź may be a world leader in the area of film production. It only requires preparation, development, financing and construction. A hotel base, airport, film projects — it must all be seen together as an all-inclusive package. There must be mutual benefits for the city and for the country and a EUROPEAN HOLLYWOOD may be established in Łódź.⁴⁹⁾

The mysterious Belgian assured the city hall that thanks to his contacts he could make American and European film producers interested in Łódź and bring them to the city. In return, he demanded the position of consultant with a monthly salary of \$7500, a furnished apartment for himself and his family where he would live while working on the project, and a translator/interpreter at his disposal. The offer was treated quite seriously, since the city authorities forwarded it to the Film Industry Committee in Warsaw. The newly-appointed head of the committee, Tadeusz Ścibor-Rylski, was sceptical and wrote: 'I believe that the attitude of the proposer is overly optimistic and, somehow, unrealistic. This includes the requested remuneration as well', however, he later stated, 'In my opinion it would make sense to continue talks, with the participation of ŁCF representatives.'⁵⁰⁾ There are no further records regarding Mr. De Neve dealings with the Łódź film industry. (He did turn up once more, though, in 2000, as the Director for East Europe working for a Belgian developer who was supposed to build an aquapark in Silesia — an undertaking that concluded with a criminal investigation). The correspondence perfectly reflects the quite desperate situation of decision-makers, who could not afford to reject any idea to support the collapsing film industry in Łódź, however bizarre it may have sounded. At the same time, it also somehow proves the good orientation of the potential crook, who was aware of the fact that the phrase 'European Hollywood' may be understood as sweet-talk by the city hall representatives (hence the previously mentioned 'Holly-Łódź Film Society' concept).

Time has shown that the liquidation of the sound studio did not contribute to an improvement in the condition of the institution. Ten months after ŁCF was founded, the au-

47) 'Zarządzenie nr 4 przewodniczącego Komitetu Kinematografii w sprawie podziału i łączenia niektórych instytucji filmowych w Łodzi', 13. 12. 1993, ZKK-AAN.

48) Oziemska and Drecka-Wojtyczka, p. 23.

49) 'Restrukturyzacja oraz podział majątku jednostek organizacyjnych kinematografii w Łodzi. Harmonogram, opinie, uwagi, korespondencja. 1993–1994', ZKK-AAN.

50) Ibid.

dit of the Supreme Chamber of Control showed a one-hundred-billion-zloty debt. In December 1994, the Film Industry Committee withdrew subsidies for ŁCF and, in February 1995, the subsidy for restructuring the film institutions in Łódź was suspended.⁵¹⁾

This happened at roughly the same time as the academics from Łódź (the Film School and the Department of Film Studies at the University of Łódź) became more active in lobbying for a satisfying solution for sustaining the traditions of 'Holly-Łódź'. Earlier, they had shown little interest in the matter: the most famous directors who worked at the Film School lived in Warsaw and came to Łódź only once a month or so. For those who lived in Łódź, on the other hand, it was the Film School — not WFF or WFO — that paid them small but regular salaries. As for the film scholars from the University of Łódź, today they admit that at that time they had a lot of catching up to do ('we could at last watch all these films, which we had previously only written about' — joked one of the academics, who wishes to remain anonymous). In 1993 they established the Cinematic Łódź Rescue Committee (Komitet dla Ratowania Łodzi Filmowej) first headed by Professor Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska (formerly connected to WFO) from the University of Łódź, and later by Professor Edward Zajiček from the Film School. The effects of their work were rather disappointing, as they later admitted in a self-critical manner.⁵²⁾ In fact, the 'rescue committee' limited its efforts to the organization of celebrations connected with the one-hundredth anniversary of cinema.

The Story is Not Over

All the discussions regarding the plans for restructuring state film companies demonstrate that both the members of the Film Industry Committee and the directors of film studios had a hard time finding their place in the 'deregulated' reality of the early 1990s.

In the face of so many problems — the debts of the studios, the lack of commissions, conflicts between executives and trade unions — it was difficult to submit a restructuring plan which would satisfy all the parties. It is significant that there were no representatives from the Łódź film sphere on the Film Industry Committee, which was the body responsible for either compiling or ordering the elaboration of subsequent proposals for the Łódź centre. Such a situation inflamed mistrust from the people connected to the film business in Łódź towards institutions in Warsaw. Unfortunately, the Łódź film sphere did not have a strong leader (Holwek, the head of WFF, made attempts to be such a leader, but smaller institutions were afraid that they would be dominated by the studio in Łąkowa Street). Simultaneously, different companies were feuding and conflicts within organizational units did not contribute to improving the general image of the city. The opportunities for international cooperation were completely neglected. Resentment towards Warsaw predominated. It was expected that debts would be written off and certain commissions transferred to Łódź. The lack of such actions was perceived as a willingness to destroy Łódź Film Centre.

51) Bogdan Sobieszek, 'Posłowie o łódzkiej kinematografii. Ale kino!', *Dziennik Łódzki*, no. 71 (1995), p. 15.

52) Zajiček, p. 341.

At the same time, the film studios in Łódź were a sort of 'test site' for Polish cinema. The other two film studios (in Warsaw and in Wrocław) are still state companies, just like the smaller studios which operate mostly in Warsaw and each year receive subsidies from the budget of the Ministry of Culture. The film studio in Wrocław (WFF-2) has been transformed into the Audiovisual Technology Center (Centrum Technologii Audiowizualnych), now rendering postproduction and educational services. The film studio in Warsaw (WFDiF), on the other hand, is now unquestionably the centre of Polish film production.

The later life of Łódź film institutions in the years 1995–2015 may be the subject of separate studies. Currently, both companies — ŁCF and WFO — still operate. They are local government companies and one hundred percent of their shares is held by the city of Łódź and by Łódź Voivodeship, respectively. Both companies are only weak shadows of their ancestors, since they have no more than 10 employees each.

WFO is, apart from the Film School, the only Łódź film institution which has operated continuously since the 1940s. Production is limited to, on average, one film a year — and these are mostly films commissioned by the local Fund for Environmental Protection. Beyond this, WFO co-organizes the biannual Włodzimierz Puchalski International Nature Documentary Film Festival and is also endeavouring to digitalize their huge collection of approximately five thousand films, collected in the archive on Kilińskiego Street.

ŁCF, in contrast to WFO, does not possess rights to any movies made in the time of the People's Republic of Poland. The activities of the company, which in 2016 moved from Łąkowa Street and today operates under a different address, consist of renting out film costumes and props that used to be the property of WFF. 29 Łąkowa Street, where the former film studio once was, hosts several institutions, such as: Opus Film (established by aforementioned Piotr Dziegiel, now one of the leading film production companies in Poland), a branch of the National Film Archive in Warsaw (film negatives are stored in the building of the former film processing unit of WFF), local TV broadcaster TOYA, as well as TOYA Sound Studios (the former Pałac Dźwięku, where most Polish feature films currently produced are post-scored). In addition, on the premises of the former WFF complex there is a music club, Wytwórnia, and a Double Tree Hilton Hotel, both owned by TOYA holding (and it was TOYA, the private entrepreneur, and not ŁCF, the institution owned by the city, that tried to sustain the memory of the WFF by publishing an album about the history of Łąkowa 21).⁵³⁾ The front windows of the Hilton Hotel are installed in such a way that when seen from a distance, they compose a frame from the film *Forbidden Songs*, the first movie shot on the premises of that unique film site in 1946.

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53) Zawisliński, Wijata.

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SUMMARY

Phoenix Burning: The Collapse of the Fiction Film Studio and the Educational Film Studio in Łódź in the Early 90s**Konrad Klejsa, Michał Dondzik, Jarosław Grzechowiak**

In the early 1990s, the system of financing Polish film productions based on subsidies from the Ministry of Culture budget collapsed. This resulted in huge financial problems for the film studios located in Łódź: WFF (Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych — Feature Film Studio) and WFO (Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych — Educational Film Studio). This paper analyses multiple layers of that crisis, including its origins as well as various contradictory ideas from the period as to how the assets and heritage of film institutions situated in the city once called the ‘Polish Hollywood’ should be managed. These attempts — undertaken simultaneously by the Film Industry Committee in Warsaw and on the local level by the management at both studios — were often contradictory and included efforts to merge both entities into one state-funded institution as well as striving toward their full privatisation. The findings are based on examinations of the local press, archival research, as well as in-depth interviews with employees in the audio-visual sector.