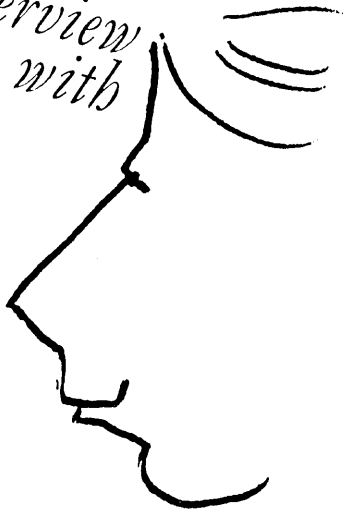


*interview
with*



ROMAN POLANSKI

by GRETCHEN WEINBERG

Roman Polanski, the young director of *Knife in the Water* and *Two Men and a Wardrobe*, has been working recently in Paris, where he directed one of the episodes in the international short-story film *Les Plus Belles Escroqueries du Monde*. The following interview, taped during Mr. Polanski's recent visit to New York for the festival screening of *Knife in the Water*, was carried on almost simultaneously in Polish, English and French. Translation from the Polish is by Mr. Richard Horowitz, who acted as interpreter.

GRETCHEN WEINBERG: *Mr. Polanski, would you tell me how you got started in the film world?*

ROMAN POLANSKI: I began as an actor in the theatre, then I had small parts in several films, among them Wajda's *A Generation*. I enrolled for five years in the National Film Academy at Lodz, and while there I started making short subjects as part of my curriculum. Students were assigned to various directors; those who showed promise were remembered. I was assigned to Andrzej Munk. I made six shorts before directing my first feature.

Many people have called your films experimental. What do you think of that term?

I feel that any film in which a director wants to express something new and interesting is experimental. But I don't always think of myself as that kind of film-maker—only occasionally. In any case, I think the term has been misused to cover many different types of films. My opinion is not important, whether I think of myself as an experimental director or not . . .

Is there a new kind of film-making in Poland today?

It is difficult to describe any school or direction in Polish cinema, because it is still developing. After a while, when you can judge it from a distance and a certain perspective, you can talk in terms of directions and schools. With one exception: when a couple of 'independents' get together and say: "We're going to do this or that." But that doesn't happen very often. It's impossible to see a clearly defined direction for film making in Poland, because production is based on economics. When the New Wave occurred in France, that too was

founded on economics: the directors had to form groups in order to be able to afford to make films. They had to create a new movement which could be publicised, and so could help them. Within this movement there are a lot of good film-makers, but there are also many with no talent who simply hang around. Fortunately, these people are dropping out; and when you talk about this New Wave in years to come, you will talk about the best people only.

Who do you think they will be?

Truffaut . . . Godard . . . Truffaut . . . (laughter)

It's impossible to have such a movement in Poland, because there creative groups are built up and put together by the government: we have eight such production groups created by the Ministry of Culture, but you are free to join any of them. They are already created, and you cannot start *another* group yourself.

There is complete freedom to work within these groups, but if your idea is not accepted you won't get financial support. In France, a group of people gets together and says "We're going to create a new movement," and they are very conscious of what they are doing. In Poland, things like this *may* occur, but they are subconscious when they do happen. When viewing the films later, you may see that they have certain things in common. *Knife in the Water* was made in one of these groups; there is no production outside them.

Would you like to make a film in the United States?

Of course! I have very vague plans for doing so, however. I don't prefer making films in Poland or France: it would depend on the kind of film. I don't feel that I would like to make another film like *Knife in the Water* anywhere, for instance.

You once said that you make films because you don't speak very well. Do you feel that you really express yourself better that way?

I like to talk, but I don't know how. I have no problems when I talk to my friends, but I feel that for me language is difficult as a means of expression. I had a lot of problems with the writing of my films, although I managed to get over these difficulties through practice. For my first shorts, there were no words, just drawings. When I wrote the script for *Knife in the Water*, there were no drawings, only words. Usually, though, I like to draw scenes and camera set-ups. People have said the shots in *Knife in the Water* were well composed—that's

because I don't like to talk, I like to show. The picture is the most important part of a film. If it shows nothing, the film makes no sense; if it consists of talking only, there is no need for the picture. On the other hand, there are films which are very talkative but which would be meaningless without the visuals. If you want to show a man, you have to show him in his natural environment, and language is part of what he is surrounded with; but I don't like talkative people or situations. You can find certain situations in which people talk a lot but you cannot understand them: it's not important what they are saying, but it is important what kind of mood they are creating.

When you begin a film, do you start with a basic idea or just a mood?

With a mood. I build up around that and the idea comes later. It's easy to manage, since I write both dialogue and script myself. In America they have different departments for making films: there's even a corrector of scripts. But there are no union problems in Poland.

Are there any Polish directors you admire?

Yes! Wajda—very much. And Jan Lenica.

Knife in the Water dealt with the relationship between three people: do you prefer to make films dealing with such relationships rather than with broader subjects?

My ideal would be to make a film with just one person. I'm very much interested in a man and in what he thinks. I'd also like to make a film with only two characters. But it's very difficult to make such a film; very difficult to find someone to back me up . . . Have you read Rilke?

. . . What I have created up to now is very bad because I was dealing with three people, not two. In literature, in a marriage, you can always find the third person . . . Rilke said that if he had the courage to write another treatise he would write about two people only, because the actual conflict occurs between two people: the third person is completely unnecessary. The third person is just an excuse, not only for the writer but for the couple in the marriage. In *Knife in the Water*, the young boy is just an excuse; the conflict is between the couple.

Many people say that Knife in the Water is a comedy. Do you see it that way?

I don't think about it. I leave that to the public. When I make a film I want people to like it, and I'm pleased when they do. I'm aiming at two types of audience: the most intelligent and at the same time the general public. It's not very hard to be understood by intelligent people, and the public is gaining a lot because it is learning.

What do you think of the many war films made today: of Godard's Les Carabiniers, for instance?

Ah, *Les Carabiniers*! *Formidable!* But the basis of art has always been love and war. It is understood that there are war films: everyone says there are too many, but it's not very significant what action is taking place within these films. The environment of war is not really as important as the conflicts between people. War creates very specific conflicts, it makes them more drastic, and this makes things easier for the director. It's enough to show two fighting men during a war who find themselves in a shell-hole—a director can find fantastic things here to work with. You would have to break your head thinking up a similar situation to deal with.

Do you like Hollywood films?

Yes, very much. Not all of them, but some. There is a great deal of snobbery in decrying Hollywood films and praising European, but there's a lot of truth, too. There are no young people in Hollywood.

There are any number of theories about film-making. Do you believe in theory, or just simply in making films?

I don't believe in them. I believe in theories as far as they deal with elevators and skyscrapers—and even elevators sometimes break down.

There was a large film society in New York called Cinema 16 which used to show experimental films. Do you think an

organisation like that is useful to educate the public?

Yes, it's a good idea; everything that educates is good, and the only way to raise the general level is by exposing the public to more and more difficult films. In France, for the anniversary of Gérard Philipe's death, they revived his old film *Le Diable au Corps*, and they found that nobody now wanted to see this picture, which had a great success in its day. Public taste has changed tremendously during the last few years, and films now have to have something extra about them to attract audiences. I feel that's very good.

Could a young person in Poland make a film with just his own money?

No. The way of going about it is so slow and difficult that there is no sense in trying. I know that in the U.S. young people work and make films with the money they earn. As long as they have money to make films, that's fine. You have the right to waste your own money, but not somebody else's. No young person in Poland has enough money to make a feature film, so if you are given a sum of money by the government you have to use it the right way, not to be called a social disaster.

Is there more freedom for film-makers in France than in Poland?

There are different criteria. In France, for instance, you are not allowed to criticise the police. Right now, the situation in France is such that you cannot criticise anything you want to—you have to make nice films. In Poland, nobody would give you money to criticise the regime, because the government is the producer of the film and no producer will give you money to make a film against himself.

Do you know the subject of your next film?

I know what I would like to do. It's a story of a married couple, he is approximately 46 or 48, and she is 22 or 23. They live in a seaside house which is falling apart. He is very rich but she is ruining him slowly by her extravagance; she is crazy, but he's in love with her. A wounded gangster falls into the house where he finds shelter . . .

In Knife in the Water, Two Men and a Wardrobe, and again in this projected film, the sea plays a prominent part. Do you have any special feeling about the sea?

Yes, I like water. I like the smell of water . . .

(Mr. Polanski puffed out his lips and made the putt-putt sound of a motor boat.)