Variations on Central European Theme: New Cinema of Central Europe as a Part of Our Common Cultural Heritage

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The idea to mount a one-day conference devoted to Polish cinema as a part of the Polish Week in Edmonton, usually organized by the Polish Culture Society in September, was abandoned because of a lack of support from other Polish organizations. Instead, the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies declared its interest in such a conference, pointing out its Central European character. Despite papers devoted to Polish cinema, the organizers included a presentation on Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke, a paper on Ukrainian cinema, as well as a keynote opening address devoted to the newest trends in cinema of Central Europe. First, we asked ourselves how to define Central Europe? There are many points of view in the academic discussion of this problem—some of them refer to political and historical events, while other only to cultural attributes.

The recent debate around the expansion of the European Union inevitably bears on the broader context of the refiguration of the political and cultural body of Europe within the last few decades. The evolving Central European identity exemplifies one of the contested cultural sites in today's Europe, continuously redefined in a geopolitically ambivalent, fluid space of shifting borders, real or constructed, particularly in the context of the post-totalitarian socio-cultural reality of the ex-Soviet bloc. The political power play behind the shifting demarcation line between "western," "central" and "eastern" is hard to ignore. The original concept of *Mitteleuropa* was a creation of the eighteenth century and was associated with the rise of German economic and political power in its opposition to France and later—in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century—with Austrian/German interests in Europe. The designation of Central Europe started to undergo a major shift in the post-Cold War period. The formation of the Soviet bloc solidified the concept of

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Eastern Europe as embracing more than the purely geographical criterion, adding to it both political and ideological dimensions as well as the implications of economic lag. With the warming of the political atmosphere, and later with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the countries of the (ex)-Soviet bloc turned to the West in a continuous attempt to re-align themselves in the context of Western culture and civilization, with the nostalgic mythologizing of the Austrian-centered Central Europe. Thus, while the early designation of *Mitteleuropa* up to the First World War was clearly associated with German and Austrian interests in Europe, the more recent concept of Central Europe (as differentiated from Eastern Europe) became a mediating designation implicated in the context of the post-WW II Russian hegemonic influences.. This designation of Central Europe can be conceptualized as a political tool for the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc to demarcate themselves from the eastern other (also see Leonard Neuger's recent overview of the historical evolution of the concept of Central Europe).

Central European presence is continuously marked by the shadow of the Other, whether in the broader context of European space, which uncovers new tensions in the historical European discourse of belonging and exclusion, or in the context of the more recent geopolitical refigurations following the collapse of the Russian empire. An exploration of the Central European geopolitical space and cultural identity and an impetus toward a creation of a coherent discourse and community are strongly present in the contemporary culture of the countries of the Central Europe. Central Europe remains both a contradictory geophysical reality and an object of mythological longing: "naming it tempts us to a closure, a completeness of presence, thus stifling desire" (Neuger 30). In this context of both impossibility and undesirability of a closure, György Konrád's sentiment seems to be relevant: "Being a Central European is an attitude, and outlook on the world, an aesthetic sensitivity for the complicated, a polyglot conglomeration of viewpoints. ... Being a Central European means believing diversity to be a valuable quality. ... Central Europe is where Central Europeans are to be found" (19-21). Contemporary Central European cinema reflects many aspects of this world outlook along with the awareness of the challenges of the socio-political reality: the aesthetic and philosophical sensitivity to everyday life presented in art, the new political and cultural vision of the post-communist era in some Central European countries, and problems associated with the membership in the European Union and challenges related to the difficult economic situation of ordinary people in free market economy.

In Polish cinema some of the representative movies are *Cześć Tereska* (*Hi, Tereska*) by Robert Gliński (2001) or *Edi* by Piotr Trzaskalski (2002), which picture problems of everyday life in post-communist Poland. For example, Cześć Tereska portraits a young girl who is robbed of her dreams to be a fashion designer. The physical violence and emotional destruction present in her working class neighbourhood emphasizes the grimy day-to-day existence that confronts the young protagonist with reality. The narrative of *Edi* takes place in contemporary capitalist Poland. Edi and his friend

Jureczek are junk metal collectors. Edi also is a fan of literature and treasures his library, stored in an old refrigerator. His troubles start when he is hired to tutor a teenage girl for her high school examinations. "The Princess," unfortunately, is connected to the members of a gang group. "When the girl becomes pregnant, she blames Edi in order to avoid throwing suspicion on another man, Gypsy, who is the real object of her affections. In a paroxysm of violence the gangsters brutally beat up and castrate Edi as the supposed rapist of their sister. Nine months later they also deposit her child in his lap, and he and Jureczek move out of town to the country to Edi's ex-girlfriend, who has married Edi's brother and lives on Edi's family land. But when the gangsters finally discover who the true father of the child is, they are so moved by Edi's silent sacrifice that they allow Princess and Gypsy to be together and the child is returned to its rightful parents" (Caes). Warm and touchy, *Edi* paints a portrait of post-Communist Poland, while detailing a genuine human drama.

Similar themes are explored by Magdalena Piekorz, a young talented female director. Her *Pręgi* (*The Welts,* 2004) opens with a monologue by the main character Wojciech, who talks about his childhood and his living with his father, who physically and psychologically abused him. Wojciech runs away from home and continues to run away from his father, only to realise that the escape is impossible because his father lives within him. Even when love appears, he tries to fight it because in each mirror he can see his father. Social problems of the *nouveau riche* class are represented by Wojciech Smarzewski's social commentary *Wesele* (*The Wedding,* 2004). It serves as an allegory of the moral corruption brought on by the ethos of financial success at all cost, which is a theme which has been present in Polish cinema since the late 1990s. *Komornik* (*The Debt Collector*) by Feliks Falk (2005) is about an ambitious debt collector who is heartless and arrogant in his work. One day, because of dramatic events in his life, he changes his attitude to people and resigns from his job.

Some Polish movies of the beginning of the 21st century have philosophical and poetic character, e.g. *Zmruż oczy* (*Squint Your Eyes*) by Andrzej Jakimowski (2003) or *Mój Nikifor* (*My Nikifor*) directed by Krzysztof Krauze in 2004—a movie about a very well-known Polish "primitive" painter Epifan Drowniak (known as Nikifor Krynicki). Both movies refer to art and philosophy as a way of discovering and seeing the world. The same point of view takes Małgorzata Szumowska—another gifted Polish female film director. In her *Ono* (*Strangers*, 2004), she discusses poetically what the main character, 22-year-old pregnant Ewa, refers to in the following words: "It takes courage to love life." Ewa is alone—her boyfriend left her and her parents did not accept Ewa's pregnancy, but she, with words, music and sounds describes the world to her baby, shyly at first, then more and more confidently. Her spirits rise even more when she meets and falls in love with the sensitive Michał, who acts like her guardian angel.

Andrzej Barański's poetic movie *Parę osób, mały czas* (*Several People, Little Time*, 2006) is about self-centered Warsaw poet Miron Białoszewski, and his blind assistant Jadwiga Stańczakowa (an amazing performance by Krystyna Janda), who has literary

aspirations of her own. Her friendship with Miron Białoszewski, eccentric poet and prose writer, completely changes her life. Miron's helplessness with everyday chores encourages Jadwiga to be more active and self-reliant. She becomes Miron's secretary: records his dictations and later types them. The artist pays back giving Jadwiga advice on the diary she writes. Their relation, however, exists not only for practical reasons. It is a deeper need which roots from the complications of their lives. The friendship with Jadwiga significantly influences Miron's writing (*New Polish Films*).

In their *Plac Zbawiciela* (*Saviour Square,* 2006) Krzysztof Krauze and Joanna Kos-Krauze tell the story of a modern family in crisis. It was inspired by true events of everyday struggle with reality, experienced by their friends, a struggle which could lead to the disintegration and break-up of the family. Another example of female philosophical cinema of Poland is the newest Dorota Kędzierzawska's movie *Pora umierać* (*Time to Die,* 2007). It is a beautiful philosophical filmic conversation about life and death, based on impressionistic picture of a daily life of an old woman, full of joyous memories that speak to her past which is never to be recovered. It is also worth mentioning here an earlier Kędzierzawska's movie, *Jestem* (*I am,* 2005), where she discusses similar existential problem of loneliness in this world. It is a story of an eleven-year-old boy trying to find his way in life. Together with his female friend they discover that one could find people who think alike and perceive the world the same way. To the same category of cinema belongs Andrzej Jakimowski's, recent film *Sztuczki* (*The Tricks,* 2007), which belongs to the subgenre of philosophical film of everyday life. The movie tells the story of the young Stefek, who believes that a chain of events he happens to be part of will help him to develop a relationship with his father. His sister tries to teach him how to control fate with small tricks. With the power of his childhood imagination, Stefek tries to make his dreams come true.

Some contemporary Polish movies refer to the ontological and epistemological aspects of the condition of the human being in contemporary world from a historical perspective. The theme of Holocaust is still present and the most representative movie devoted to it is Roman Polański's epic *Pianista* (*The Pianist,* 2002). This is a true story of Władysław Szpilman, a Polish-Jewish piano virtuoso, who in 1940 ended up in the Jewish Ghetto of Warsaw. In the climax of the story, in the weeks leading up to the end of the war, Szpilman is found in an abandoned building by a German captain who questions him, hears him play the piano, and helps him to survive. A laureate of three Academy Awards, the movie is often compared to *The Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg. Another film with a Holocaust motif is *Daleko od okna* (*Keep Away from the Window,* 2000) by Jan Jakub Kolski. It is about a young Jewish woman, Regina, hidden by a Polish couple. One day she becomes pregnant with Jan, Basia's husband. The daughter, Helusia, is raised as Jan and Basia's daughter, even after the war. The movie shows Kolski's fascination with how ordinary people learn to deal with extraordinary circumstances.

In 2005 Robert Gliński takes another look at a difficult historical question–the problem of Polish-German relations. Based on the novel by Günter Grass, his *Wróżby*

Kumaka (*The Call of the Toad*) presents a story of Alexander, a German born in Gdańsk, and Alexandra, a Polish woman, born in Vilnius, who lives in Gdańsk. He left Gdańsk in 1945; she left Vilnius also in 1945. The theme of exile is featured prominently in the film. Between a mix of flirting and arguing Alexander and Alexandra fall in love with each other. Both of them would like to contribute to the reconciliation of the two nations, Polish and German. They start the Polish-German Cemetery Society in order to give the dead the right to symbolically come back to their homelands (*New Polish Films*). Another film that should be mentioned is Andrzej Wajda's *Katyń* (2007), which also deals with a painful and tragic page in the history of the WWII, namely when Soviet troops carried away thousands of Polish officers and intellectuals, imprisoned them in camps, and then systematically executed them in 1940 in the Katyń forest, near the western Russian city of Smolensk.

Another important genre is Polish "popular cinema," or "B-movies"—a genre film with minimal artistic ambitions but very popular among the viewers. The most acclaimed movie which belongs to this category is *Testosterone* (2007) by Tomasz Konecki and Andrzej Saramonowicz. This film was a massive hit in Poland in early 2007. Adapted from a successful stage play *Testosterone* is a story about a wedding party happening after a marriage ceremony that does not take place because the bride runs away from the altar. The abandoned groom is supported by a group of six equally disoriented men. Their meeting turns into a crazy series of fights, discussions, toasts, surprising new turns of action and shocking discoveries in the area of male-female relationships. Another great movie of the "B-category" is *Nigdy w życiu* (*Not in this Lifetime*, 2004) by Ryszard Zatorski. This is a film adaptation of the book by Katarzyna Grochola under the same title, which has a lot in common with the soap opera conventions, including love and betrayal as the main theme. Judyta is 37, angry at her husband who has left her, and dreaming about great love while raising her teenage daughter Tosia and building a country house. She also works for a weekly magazine and is a successful journalist. Notwithstanding all the challenges presented by her busy professional life, she falls in love and her life makes sense again.

The so-called "Post-Velvet Cinema" of the Czech Republic and Slovakia continues the aesthetics of the Czech New Wave. It investigates political and social issues of the two new republics, as well as concentrates on emotional life of ordinary people. The poetics of the absurd, which is also derived from the Czech New Wave era, has been transformed into a new form of ironical tool for presenting historical topics. The best example of this type of a "Second New Wave era" is Oscar-nominated *Musíme si pomáhat* (*Divided We Fall,* 2000), by Jan Hřebejk, a movie which explores Czech Holocaust history. We should mention documentaries that also explore history, e.g. *Český sen* (*Czech Dream*), a project of two film students Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda (2004), and *Ženy pro měny* (*The Beauty Exchange,* 2004) by screenwriter and director Erika Hníková.

A visionary surrealist, Jan Švankmajer, who directed *Otesánek* (*Greedy Guts*, 2000) and *Šilení* (*Lunacy*, 2005), uses animation, live action and elements of theater in order

to create movies based on black humor, bizarre obsessions, and deep psychological picture of the human mind. Lesser known internationally, the films of Petr Zelenka, Bohdan Slama and Tomáš Vořel are among the most acclaimed in the Czech Republic and in Central Europe.

After the Velvet Revolution, the Slovak cinema has been in crisis due to political and economic changes in Slovakia. The only Slovak film studio "Koliba" was closed and the state was no longer interested in financing Slovak film projects. Therefore Slovak cinema, having no base for film production in Bratislava, uses the Barrandov Studio in Prague, or cooperates with foreign producers. This was the case of a movie by Dušan Hanák—*Papierové hlavy* (*Paper Heads*, 1995) or *Čert ví proč* (*The Devil Knows Why,* 2003) by Roman Vavra. The very well known older generation of Slovak filmmakers, like Juraj Jakubisko, who currently works on his project *Bathory*, Štefan Uher, the author of *Pásla kone na betóne* (*She Kept Crying for the Moon,* 1982), or Martin Hollý (*Nocní jazdci/Night Riders,* 1981) moved to Prague. The young generation, however, uses the European Union's grants to produce innovative documentaries and animations. From the middle-aged generation of Slovak film directors the most productive is Martin Šulík, born in 1962, whose films *Neha* (*Tenderness*, 1991), *Všetko čo mám rád* (*Everything I Like,* 1992) and *Záhrada* (*The Garden,* 1995—nominated for an Oscar and awarded prizes in Cannes and Berlin) were internationally acclaimed. His colleague Vladimír Adásek, the director of *Hana a jej bratia* (*Hana and Her Brothers,* 2000), explored the theme of homosexuality and the film was a great success in Europe and beyond.

In order to exemplify the difficult political and cultural context of Slovak cinema even in the past, it should suffice to recall the Oscar-winning movie *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on the Main Street,* 1965) directed by two artists: Ján Kadár (Hungarian-Slovak) and Elmar Klos (Moravian-Czech). The movie was produced in Prague, shot on location in Slovakia, in the Slovak language, with Slovak actors, but many critics considered it as Czech, since both film directors used to live in Prague and the movie was financed by the government of at that time Czechoslovakia.

The contemporary Austrian cinema is praised for its themes of realistic social dramas, as well as for the top artistic quality of production. The so-called New Austrian Film has become internationally recognized since the end of the 1990s, when Barbara Albert's *Nordrand* (*City Skirts,* 1999) became the first Austrian production which competed at the Venice Film Festival. Nordrand focuses on five young people of various ethnic backgrounds, who met in Vienna and share their lives, dreams and wishes in order to find their happiness in their own way. They live in a housing project in Vienna and "flounder between memories of war in Yugoslavia, temporary jobs, and unwanted pregnancies until they finally drift apart" (www.greencine.com/central/guide/newaustrian). Her latest movie, *Fallen* (*Falling*, 2006) focuses on female characters struggling to find a sense of life, and perhaps even salvation, in an alienating and hostile world of chaos and destruction. It is a beautiful poetic story about women in their early thirties who meet after many years at the funeral of their

teacher. The reunion continues until the following day, bringing a long discussion about how youthful idealism turns into adult pragmatism, and how to cope with past, present, and future in our life (timessquare.com/movies/film-festivals/setting-the-standards).

Another film preoccupied with social problems of the Austrian society is Ulrich Seidl's *Hundstage* (*Dog Days*, 2001), which explores darker aspects of the middle-class suburban life. Seidl's last film *Import/Export* (2006) is about Olga, a professional from Ukraine, who moved to Vienna with her dreams to start a better life, which never materialize, and Paul, an Austrian, who decides to explore life in the East and goes to live in Ukraine. Using non-professional actors and crossing the line between documentary and fiction, Seidl often gives us scenes from everyday lives full of compassion and tenderness (bermuda.bside.com/2008). Stefan Ruzowitzky became famous because of his contribution to the provincial melodrama known as the "Heimatfilm," when he made in 1998 *Die Siebtelbauern* (*The Inheritors*). He has recently won the Oscar for *Die Fälscher* (*The Counterfeiters,* 2007), which is based on the true story of the largest counterfeiting operation during the WWII, set up by the Nazis in the concentration camp with the best specialists in falsifying money, passports, and other documents from all over Europe.

Perhaps the most internationally recognized name of all New Austrian Film *auteurs*, Michael Haneke, has become known for his almost clinical approach to images evoking the collapse of modernist aesthetic order and meaning. He has cinematically addressed issues of racism in *Code Inconnu* (*Code Unknown,* 2000); created a "psychosexual allegory of Austria" in *Die Klavierspielerin* (*The Piano Teacher,* 2001) and showed an apocalyptic social disintegration in *Wolfzeit* (*Time of the Wolf,* 2003). His most recent feature was *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005, www.greencine.com/central/node).

The new Hungarian cinema refers to the past glory of the Hungarian New Wave in the sixties. For example, the veteran of the New Wave Miklósz Jancsó made a very significant, innovative film titled *Nekem lámpást adott kezembe az Úr, Pesten* (*The Lord's Lantern in Budapest,* 1998), where he emphasized black humor and irony. Produced in 2001/2002, István Szabó's film *Taking Sides*, based on a screenplay by Ronald Harwood, who adapted his theatre play for that purpose, tells the life of the famous conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler of the Berlin Philharmonic who worked during the Nazi rule. The movie was very often compared to *Mephisto* (1981) made by the same director and was critically acclaimed all over the world. Another film director, Márta Mészáros, a famous Hungarian female artist, directed *A Temetetlen halott* (*The Unburied Dead*, 2004), a movie devoted to life of Imre Nagy, the prime minister of Hungary of the 1956 Revolution, who was executed after the Soviet invasion of his country. The movie, based on Nagy's own diary, presents the events of the uprising from his personal point of view.

Ibolya Fekete's film *Chico* (2001) caused mixed reactions and heated debates, mainly for its depiction of the recent history of Central Europe and especially the

war in former Yugoslavia. Several other Hungarian movies of the beginning of the twenty-first century represent the return to psychological and artistic cinema with a strong New Wave influence. These include Tamás Sas, who became successful thanks to his film *Presszó* (*Espresso*, 1998), which was shot with a camera hidden in a small café, capturing stories happening there. His comedy *9 és 1/2 randi,* (*9 and a Half Dates,* 2008) about a sexually obsessed man who must date ten girls in ten days in order to meet the rules of the game, is one of the most popular films in Europe. Another significant film, György Pálfi's *Hukkle* (*Hiccup*, 2002), tells the story of everyday life in small Hungarian village. The movie has strong poetic power and is often compared with the cinema of his Polish friend Jan Jakub Kolski.

Slovenian Film Fund was established in 1993 to promote independent filmmaking in Slovenia and immediately the film industry produced debuts of more than 25 filmmakers in its fifteen years of operation. One of the first films made by a new generation of Slovene artists, *V Leru* (*Idle Running,* 1999) is a hilarious comedy about Dizzi, a cynical mature university student who takes life easy and contests the norms of the new capitalist society. The film, black and white, directed by 35-year-old Janez Burger, won awards at several international film festivals, also due to Jan Cvitković, a leading actor who co-wrote the script with Burger. Cvitković's directorial debut with *Kruh in mleko* (*Bread and Milk,* 2001), premiered at the Venice International Film Festival 2001, was awarded "Lion of the Future—Best First Feature Film Award". It is a painful drama about the main character's problem with alcoholism and his adaptation to the new life. Another successful debut was made by Janez Lapajne. His movie *Selestenje* (*Rustling Landscapes,* 2002) is a story of a young couple pictured as a dysfunctional family. The movie is deeply psychological and is entirely improvised in its searching of examination of how relationship of two people could fail. A similar topic is the basis for Igor Šterk's drama *Uglaševanje* (*Tunning*, 2005).

Other Slovenian filmmakers discuss the new socio-political situation in Slovenia more directly, like Damjan Kozole, whose *Delo osvobaja* (*Labour Equals Freedom,* 2005) criticizes the consequences of Slovenia's recent ascension into membership in the European Union. Some of contemporary Slovenia filmmakers take into consideration the question of ethnicity. Vinko Möderndorfer, for example, is a strong critique of nationalism, ethnocentrism and homophobia. His *Predmestje* (*Suburbs*, 2004) might be called the Cinema of Endurance as it portraits, in a Haneke style, a life of four middle-aged suburban men who live scandalous and obscene life. Devoted to similar themes of ethnic difference and economic marginality is *Kajmak in marmelada* (*Cheese and Jam,* 2004) by Branko Đjurić—a love story and a social drama involving a Slovenian woman and Bosnian man. Miha Hoèevar's *Na planicah* (*On the Sunny Side,* 2003) discusses the events and the aftermath of the Balkan War, and another war movie, *Varuh Meje* (*Guardian Of The Frontier,* 2002) by Maja Weiss, examines the porblem of political extremism before the beginning of the Balcan war and genocide.

The new cinema of Croatia is closely connected to the political changes of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. This has been a fruitful time which gave birth to a series of movies called "the third golden era" movies (after the first one in the 1950s and the second in the 1960s). One of them is *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the War on my Island started,* 1997), by Vinko Brešan. Although being one of the first movies to take a humorous approach towards violent break-up of Yugoslavia, this motion picture is partly based on real events that took place in September of 1991. Brešan's next film, *Svjedoci* (*Witnesses*, 2003), was a winner at the Berlin International Film Festival. Another Croatian young film director, Zrinko Ogresta, won several awards for his *Tu* (*Here*, 2003), including the Special Prize of the Jury at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. One of the more active figures on the Croatian cinematic scene is Ognjen Sviličić. His films *Oprosti za kung Fu* (*Sorry for Kung Fu,* 2004) and the father-son story *Armin* (2007), premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and won awards at several international film festivals.

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The following articles presented during the conference reflect some important issues related to the visual culture of Central Europe. The opening address, updated and modified, serves as an introduction to the volume. It contains a concise overview of the main artistic and thematic trends in Central European cinema after the year 2000.

The paper titled "The First Five Years with no Plan: Building National Cinema in Ukraine, 1992-1997," by Bohdan Nebesio, outlines the transformation of the Ukrainian film industry after the break-up of the Soviet Union. It considers the aspects of production, distribution and consumption of films in Ukraine geared towards the formation of a national cinema. The first part of the paper describes the state of the film industry Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union and the second explores the efforts—artistic, economic, political and organizational—undertaken by the filmmakers and the government to rebuild a national film industry. The author argues that both the idealistic nationalists and the corrupt Soviet-style bureaucrats failed to recognize its potential and to act in the best interest of the national project. Nevertheless, the years 1992 to 1997 can be also seen as a period of exploration when three generations of filmmakers not only set foundations for the new Ukrainian cinema but also challenge the notion of a national cinema through their thematic, generic, and formal concerns.

Marek Haltof's essay "Modern Film Adaptations of the Polish National Literary Canon" looks at the recent Polish adaptations of the national literary canon, such as Jerzy Hoffman's *With Fire and Sword* (*Ogniem i mieczem,* 1999) and Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), and their successful competition with Hollywood cinema. Adaptations are the most prominent part of the Polish film industry in terms of their popularity and prestige; on the list of nine Polish films which had more than one million viewers since 1989, there are seven adaptations, including six adaptations of canonical literary works. Polish adaptations are discussed as the local version of

"heritage cinema." They offer romantic-nostalgic images of the past, rely on the popularity of their literary sources for success, and perform an important nation-building task. The paper stresses that Polish heritage films are specifically Polish products. They fare poorly among those who lack familiarity with their literary sources and the elaborate knowledge that surrounds their literary and political contexts.

"The Polish Femme Fatale—Ideological Demand or Visual Pleasure?" by Elżbieta Ostrowska takes into consideration the iconic American film noir figure of the femme fatale, which is, at first glance, the very opposite of the dominant figure of Polish femininity, the Polish Mother. If the former is selfishly interested only in her well-being and is in full control of her sexuality that she uses to achieve her goals, the latter is a selfless and flawless Virgin Mary. In the dominant representations of women in Polish cinema before 1989, there is an abundance of female characters based on variants of this national icon of the feminine constantly deprived of any sexuality. Cultural and ideological strategies used both by the communist regime and a defensive nationalist discourse, were sufficient to deny female sexuality and to erase it from cinematic representation. However, a closer scrutiny of Polish films made before 1989 shows that female sexuality in fact was not and could not be fully repressed, but was rather relocated into marginal areas of femininity. Significantly, these representations of female sexuality were most often articulated through figures that may be regarded as vernacular variants of the femme fatale type.

"The Inverted Drive in Andrzej Żuławski's *Szamanka*: a Lacanian Reading of the Post-*Femme-Fatale*", a paper presented by jan jagodziński, corresponds with the previous text on Polish *femme fatale*. The author concludes, that the *jouissance* of the main character has been denied throughout the entire narrative—until its end where it is "found." Iwona in effect has no place except to be the Sadean woman, to act as a *post-femme-fatale*, a destroyer of men. Having experienced the perversion of *jouissance*, all "ordinary" men seem to be immaterial to her, unable to satisfy her drives. She knows nothing of desire, having been denied it. Today, as cultural studies and film theory share Lacanian concepts as one of the common intellectual frameworks for film analysis, the relevance of using Lacanian ideas is unquestionable.

Janina Falkowska's discussion of "Exasperating Miscommunications in the Cold Europe in Michael Haneke's Films from Austria" discusses films made by the renowned Austrian filmmaker in the context of speech acts theory. Haneke portrays the European middle class in a cold and disheartening way mainly by denying them the privilege and the pleasure of interpersonal communication. The author of the article interprets this disturbing portrayal of contemporary Europe in Haneke's films with the help of the concepts of locutionary and perlocutionary acts of speech theory. In her article Falkowska aims to prove that the miscommunications in Haneke's films define Europe as a place that not only guards itself against "the other" (the immigrant) but also closes itself to communication and dialogue in a Kafkaesque manner and remains in its own interiority carefully guarded against the unknown dangers lurking in the outside world. In her analysis of the most famous films made

by Haneke, *Funny Games* (1997), *Code Inconnu* (2000) and *The Piano Teacher* (2001), the author refers to the works of Franz Kafka, who was similarly preoccupied with the state of mind of the European society.

Alexandra Miękus in "What Borders Images and Sounds in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours*?" discusses the poetic aspect of Kieślowski's cinema. According to her own summary of the article, "[…] in *Blue, White and Red* Krzysztof Kieslowski labours to unveil and render with familiarity and commonness the very personal ways in which everyone experiences the world. As a result he represents it filled with frailty, prudence and watchfulness, one concerned with the intimate, with all that could the hidden away and which stands obscured by constant possibility, by movement, by silence. Based on a personal encounter with the *Three Colours*, the author of the article asserts that in Kieslowski's world intuition is an important source of insight, while sensations and emotions present themselves as the true fundamentals in the films' quest for meaning and knowledge."

Wacław M. Osadnik continues the debate on Kieślowski's cinema concentrating on the *Decalogue*. He uses the possible world semantics as a methodological tool in order to describe a unique construction of possible worlds from the artist's point of view. Kieślowski, for example, constructs the picture of a family in such a way that the family is profoundly dysfunctional, and clones it into ten different possible worlds of the *Decalogue*. He also uses a number of objects, such as windows, mirrors, telephones, among others, to play a significant role as vehicles of symbolization in the series. In conclusion the author states that Kieślowski uses possible worlds as a way of framing the philosophical speculation "what if…" This is why the *Decalogue* could also be treated as a series of metaphysical films.

Andrzej Gwóźdź in his "Teutonic Knights, Hakatists, Fascists: The Picture of the German in the Polish Post-War Cinema" discusses the stereotype of Germans in Polish movies after 1945. The negative picture is closely connected with the war movies, as well as adaptations of Polish literature, like *The Teutonic Knights* by Sienkiewicz. The positive representation of Germans did not exist until the appearance of *Odjazd* (*The Departure*, 1991) by Magdalena and Piotr Łazarkiewicz. During the communist era there was a clear-cut division between the "good German" from the East Germany and the "bad German" from the West. Several Polish movies from that period observed this political stereotype and promoted the ideological power of the filmic medium.

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