

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS
IN *INVITATION* (*ZAPROSZENIE*, 1985), DIRECTED BY WANDA JAKUBOWSKA
AND *IT'S ME, NOW* (*TERAZ JA*, 2004), DIRECTED BY ANNA JADOWSKA

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Much has been written about the continuities in Polish cinema: the succession of movements, in which new schools opposed but also borrowed from the old ones, young stars replacing old ones, a different generation of directors appearing, which, nevertheless, shared many of the values and thematic concerns of the former. However, openly or tacitly this continuity refers to male cinema. For example, when talking about Polish stardom, Daniel Olbrychski immediately comes to mind as a successor to Zbigniew Cybulski, the missing actor in *Everything for Sale* (*Wszystko na sprzedaż*, 1968) by Andrzej Wajda. Similarly, the most potent symbol of permanence and the health of Polish cinema, Andrzej Wajda, is, of course, male. By contrast, cinema created by Polish female directors is hardly analysed in terms of continuity, succession and inheritance. There is no discussion about any “female movements” in Polish cinema, either as phenomena in their own right, or as significantly contributing to dominant paradigms within national cinema.¹

This article is a modest attempt to address this unbalanced approach by identifying connections between two films by female directors of different generations and made in different periods: *Invitation* (*Zaproszenie* 1985), directed by Wanda Jakubowska and *It's Me, Now* (*Teraz ja*, 2004), directed by Anna Jadowska. I am not implying that these films belong to a specific school of women's or feminist cinema, which was previously overlooked by film historians. Rather, following Michel Foucault's claim that science (and humanities in particular) does not consist of identifying any “organic” connections, but creating them (Foucault 1986: 284), I perceive my work as a contribution to creating

¹ On the lack of continuity in female cinema in Poland see Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006.

a discourse on women's cinema as a continuity, as a series of films consciously or unconsciously entering a dialogue with other films and offering new answers to the same questions. At the same time, there is a specific reason why I connected these two films: their belonging to the genre of travel cinema. It is worth mentioning that films made in Poland by women often use the motif of travel, for example by casting characters who would like to travel but cannot fulfil their dream. This theme frequently testifies to the female characters' restlessness or even unhappiness, especially in the films made in the last two decades, and can be regarded as a metaphor of women cinema's search for its own identity and home.

In this chapter I will focus on the main characters, comparing their values and generational experiences, which account for their different identities. I will also suggest that in each film there is a strong link between the film's author and its principal character. The autobiographical reading is encouraged by the similar age of the authors of the respective films and their protagonists, and the similarity of their experiences, as revealed in Jakubowska's interviews in the case of *Invitation*, and it is the provocative title of Jadowska's film that points to the author's desire to speak only on her behalf.

Invitation

Wanda Jakubowska (1907-1998), the director of first film I will discuss here, is the first female Polish director to gain national and international recognition. Her fame is due to films concerning concentration camps, to a large extent based on her own experience of incarceration as well as to some overtly political films, advocating Stalinism, among which the most important is *Soldier of Victory* (*Żołnierz zwycięstwa*, 1953) about the Polish Stalinist General, Karol Świerczewski. Until the 1980s, when such directors as Agnieszka Holland and Barbara Sass made their debut films, Jakubowska was also the most famous female filmmaker in Poland.

Can Jakubowska justifiably be regarded as a feminist filmmaker? Certainly she can be described as "communist feminist" or even "Stalinist feminist," although, as far as I am aware, she never used this term. She championed women's rights, but within the

framework of state socialism.² She was a Stalinist first, and a feminist second. The very term “Stalinist feminist,” in common with some others, constructed by juxtaposing “feminist” with an adjective referring to a specific ideology, such as “Muslim feminist,” will be regarded by some readers as an oxymoron. They would argue that “feminism” is incompatible with “state socialism,” because the latter was harmful to women. Consequently, one could not be honestly a “feminist” whilst accepting the policies introduced by the Polish authorities after 1945. However, I espouse an opinion that state socialism, at least in Poland, brought women both disadvantages and advantages, although the advantages, such as the right to abortion, could be fully appreciated only after the old system collapsed,³ when the new strict anti-abortion law was introduced. Moreover, even those who regard state socialism as anti-women, have to accept that within this paradigm there were attitudes revealing different degrees of misogyny. One task of my analysis of *Invitation* is to establish the hierarchy of values Jakubowska espouses in this film.

Invitation is the third film Jakubowska devoted to life in the concentration camps, following *The Last Stage* (*Ostatni etap*, 1947) and *The End of Our World* (*Koniec naszego świata*, 1964). It is also her least known and critically acclaimed film tackling this subject, which partly reflects the growing boredom of Polish audiences with the topic of war, and partly the director's inability to change her style in step with the formal innovations introduced by her younger colleagues. However, the director did not want to stay aloof from her audiences by focusing solely on Poland's past. On the contrary, she wanted to engage with contemporary issues and to understand the incoming generations of Poles. *Invitation* points to this desire, for example by introducing a motif of sustainable development. In fact, as I will argue in due course, a

² There are different terms used to describe the period and political system in Poland after 1945 and none of them is ideologically neutral. However, to avoid, as much as possible, assessing this period and, at the same time, to differentiate it from socialism practised in some Western countries, I will opt for “state socialism” for the whole period 1945-1989 and “Stalinism”, for the period concurrent with Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union.

³ On the complexity of the position of women under socialism and the changes in their situation following the fall of communism see, for example, Kligman 1994; Plakwicz 1992; Watson 1997.

large part of the problem with the film results from the difficulty Jakubowska experienced trying to adjust her old-fashioned interests as well as her views and cinematic language to the new times.

As with *The Last Stage* (*Ostatni etap*, 1947), *Invitation* focuses on a woman's war history. Its main character, Anna, like the characters in *The Last Stage*, was imprisoned in Auschwitz, worked there as a doctor and engaged in anti-Nazi resistance, which included attempts to smuggle documents, and save the lives of fellow prisoners, including incarcerated children. Due to the fact that the role of Anna is played by Antonina Gordon-Górecka, an actress who was cast as one of the three main characters in *The Last Stage*, we can regard her as the same person, only forty or so years older. She is also the same in the sense that the experience of incarceration marked her for the rest of her life. After the war, Anna became a paediatrician, performing life-saving operations on children. She also remained an ardent anti-fascist, outraged by any attempts to undermine the importance of the war in Polish and world history, and for this reason a socialist, as it is tacitly suggested that only the countries belonging to the Soviet bloc preserve the memory of Auschwitz. In the West and, especially, in West Germany, the reality of the camps is denied, and neo-Nazism is flourishing, as we can gather from the television news Anna is watching.

Two events trigger Anna's memory of the war. The first is the anniversary of the outbreak of the war, celebrated on television; the second an unexpected visit by her first husband, Piotr. These episodes are connected, as Anna and Piotr's wedding was cut short by the tragedy brought about by the year 1939. The couple were separated not only for the duration of the war, but for the following years as well. Piotr fought in the army on many different fronts and was presumed killed in action. Anna married his brother, Janek and, together with Janek, ended up in a concentration camp. When after the war she learnt that her first husband had survived, despite her deep love for him, she decided to remain loyal to Janek, not least because he was the father of her only child, Natalia. Piotr, probably in order not to interfere with the couple's affairs, emigrated to the USA, where he made a career as an ecologist. Piotr visits Anna while attending a

conference in Kraków, devoted to ecological issues, as the guest of honour. He wants to discuss their private past and, even more to learn about Anna's war experiences (in line with the rule that in Jakubowska's films the history of a community takes precedence over the history of an individual). For this purpose, Anna and Piotr travel to Auschwitz, where Anna reminisces on her time there, as well as to Sachsenhausen, where Piotr and Janek's father, an eminent professor from the Jagiellonian University, was imprisoned and executed. Her memories are presented in the form of flashbacks, which fill most of the film's duration.

Invitation thus takes the form of travel cinema, in which travelling in space is the means of moving in time. As I argued elsewhere, such cinema is a specifically European phenomenon (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006), but in the vast majority of films conforming to this type it is the man who serves as a medium connecting the nation's past with its present. In Jakubowska's film, by contrast, only Anna's war history matters. Piotr's past, although heroic, is reduced to a couple of somewhat obscure sentences ("We were running after Rommel and then ran away from him") and is not enriched by any visual content, which would add validity to his words.⁴ Moreover, as he himself admits, fighting in the army was nothing in comparison with enduring the camp conditions. Equally, Janek's war past is rendered insignificant and we get no information about what happened to him when the war was over. The question thus arises as to how Anna uses her privilege to tell her history to Piotr and to us, the viewers. As Jolanta Lenard observes, Anna's attitude in this respect is somewhat inconsistent as, on the one hand, she insists on the need, even necessity to remember the times of the crematoria and passing it on to the following generations, but on the other, she claims that the experience of living in the concentration camp cannot be effectively conveyed—it has to remain private (Lenard 1986: 14). In particular, anticipating Claude Lanzmann's disgust of any attempt to identify psychological explanations for the camp

⁴ One possible reason why Jakubowska ignores Piotr's war past is that he fought in the West, in a "wrong army." Jakubowska's portrayals of characters in her films were always influenced by the realities of the Cold War.

atrocities, she dismisses Piotr's interest in the psychology of the Nazi officer, who first saves the life of a Gypsy child, only to later throw the boy into a fire. In my opinion, this paradoxical attitude, rather than diminishing Anna's authority by questioning her rationality, affords her an immense power in her social environment. She comes across as almost a goddess who keeps a key to the gate of ultimate truth. Antonina Gordon-Górecka's restrained acting and her natural, regal dignity, adds to the impression that she knows and understands history like nobody else.

The impression of Anna's power and dignity is augmented by Jakubowska's portrayal of her heroine as devoid of any personal needs. She only wants what is best for the children she treats, her country and humanity at large; she does not care about her appearance or any material possessions. Metaphorically speaking, her subjectivity is her objectivity. For her even love is a matter of choosing a man with whom she could best serve others. This attitude, which bears resemblance to that of the archetypal Polish Mother,⁵ awakens among people who surround her both admiration and envy. On the one hand, we see some older colleagues who try to get rid of her, because they perceive her as an obstacle to their shadowy activities; on the other hand, younger (male) doctors treat her as their mentor, even metaphorical mother. A sign of their admiration is offering Anna a lift in their cars. Hence, although she does not have a car, she comes across as very mobile and her journeys appear to be effortless. It is not difficult to guess that Anna stands for Jakubowska herself—her life's trajectory parallels that of the director, who always remained an ardent communist and anti-fascist, and Anna's values are similar to the director's values, as conveyed on and off screen⁶.

Yet *Invitation* concerns not only Anna, but also her family, and especially her daughter Natalia, a married woman in her thirties with two children. Brought up in Poland free from wars and relatively prosperous, Natalia does not know much and does

⁵ On the theme of Polish Mother see Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006.

⁶ Jakubowska claimed that the experience of concentration camps marked her for life and became an important reason why she remained an ardent communist and anti-fascist (Madej, Alina 1991). "Ja po prostu swojej partii ufałam: Rozmowa z Wandą Jakubowską." *Kino*, 8: 28-31; Hollender, Barbara. 1997. "Nie można nikogo nauczyć żyć." *Rzeczpospolita*, 10-11/11, 25.

not care about the wartime past. Moreover, in contrast to her mother, Natalia is governed by her personal passions, not her sense of duty. She is curious about life outside Poland, likes adventure and shows little concern for others, including her own family. Her profession as a photographer epitomizes her desire to travel and learn about foreign lands. We meet Natalia shortly after her return from Budapest. Excited, she tells her mother about her trip, boasting that there she took excellent photographs and earned a lot of money. The ultimate sign of the precedence of Natalia's private desires over any social concerns is the fact that she decides to take advantage of Piotr's visit, asking him to send her an invitation to America. In communist Poland such an invitation was a prerequisite to receive a passport and visa. Often those who wanted to emigrate strove for an invitation. Probably, this is also Natalia's case, who, as we learn in the course of the narrative, does not hurry to return home, despite leaving in Poland her two children and husband, desperate to see her back.

The relationship between Anna and Natalia is pushed into the background of *Invitation*, but from the brief episodes showing mother and daughter together, we gather that they live in different worlds and their contacts are superficial. For example, Anna shows little interest in her daughter's trip to Budapest, preoccupied with her own work and her wartime memories. More importantly, she shows polite disapproval of Natalia's desire to travel, especially to the West. Natalia, conversely, comes across as bored with her ascetic mother and finds Piotr more interesting, largely on account of his belonging to the Western world. Thus quietly, but perceptibly, Natalia contests Anna's values and the whole patriotic discourse her mother epitomizes.

The motif of Natalia's emigration can be regarded as an oblique reference to martial law in Poland, because this period, practically concurrent with Jakubowska's shooting of *Invitation*, caused a mass migration of Poles, reaching over one million people. Choosing emigration at this time was an obvious sign of utter disappointment with the Polish government and Polish reality at large. From Natalia's desire to live in the USA we can infer that Anna and Natalia not only differ in their lifestyles but also in their political views.

By showing Anna in an utterly sympathetic light, and portraying Natalia as selfish and reckless, Jakubowska not only reveals her solidarity with the war generation, but tacitly endorses the communist regime and criticizes those who opposed it. However, unlike in Jakubowska's socialist realistic films (those made in the 1950s), where the enemies of socialism were treated very harshly by the director, Natalia is granted some sympathy by the filmmaker. It feels like Natalia's world is not Jakubowska's world, but she condones her or at least does not condemn her for what her regards as her mistakes. Anna's blindness to her daughter's plight might be regarded as metaphorical for the communist authorities' disregard of the values and ideas of the younger generation.⁷

Interestingly, while among people of her own age, Anna is particularly close to Antonina, a nurse who works with her and fellow ex-prisoner of Auschwitz, amongst the younger generation she finds rapport only with men. She is more attached to a man whose birth she assisted in Auschwitz and who now works as a sheep farmer, than to her own daughter. Similarly, she appears to be close to her son-in-law and a young doctor, who seeks her advice in medical and everyday matters and gives her a lift in his small Fiat. Unlike Natalia, who loves but does not want to follow her mother, these men worship the ageing doctor and try to emulate her. At the same time, all of them come across as weak, ineffectual, provincial and completely devoid of sex appeal. Especially de-sexed is Natalia's husband. In one episode Anna even mentions that Natalia's behaviour humiliates her husband.

The representation of men in *Invitation* which, I assume, was regarded by Jakubowska as ideologically neutral, is for this very reason interesting from the perspective of ideology. Firstly, it testifies, in my opinion, to the metaphorical castration of Polish men, which happened in the 1980s, largely due to the introduction of martial law and its aftermath, and was registered in the number of films about the concurrent

⁷ During the 1980s those who participated in anti-communist demonstrations were labelled "wprostki," which is a contemptuous term for young people. Hence, political dissent was equated with youth, and youth with immaturity, even childishness.

period, such as *Inner Life* (*Życie wewnętrzne*, 1986) by Marek Koterski and *I Want to Scream* (*Chce mi się wyć*, 1990) by Jacek Skalski. Secondly, in her representation of strong women surrounded by weak men, Anna unwittingly repeats the stereotype about the gender dynamic in postwar Poland, and frequently presented on screen, examples are such comedies as *Women's Republic* (*Rzeczpospolita babska*, 1969), directed by Hieronim Przybył and *The Sex Mission* (*Seksmisja*, 1983), directed by Juliusz Machulski (see Chałupnik 2008). In particular, Jakubowska's portrayal perpetuates the misogynistic view that an ambitious, financially independent and emotionally strong woman cannot live under the same roof with an equally strong man; women's emancipation equals men's emasculation or even, in an exaggerated version, proposed in Polish comedies, their physical annihilation. It is worth mentioning here that Anna herself "exchanges" the dashing Piotr for his weak, ineffectual brother, who in due course literally disappears from the picture. Although, as I previously mentioned, the official reason for her decision not to return to her first husband is her and Janek's shared experience of the camp and her loyalty to her second husband, the deeper motif may be her anxiety that there would be a personality clash between her and Piotr and one of them would lose his or her independence. In the same vein, Natalia's trip to the USA might be interpreted as her escape from the place where women's emancipation is incompatible with having an attractive man at one's side.

Invitation, despite having at play two planes of action, wartime past and the present day in late socialist Poland, comes across as a traditional, even old-fashioned film. This is because of the classical style of acting employed by the actors, especially Gordon-Górecka in the role of Anna, which harks back to her role in *The Last Stage*; the rather static camera; the dominance of the dialogue over the visuals, even in the part set in the camps; the heavy-handed handling of the ideological messages of the film. At the same time, it appears that the film was heavily edited and as a result of the cuts some vital information is missing, the sense of time is confusing, and the narrative is not always clear. This refers especially to Natalia's discourse; her trip to America, for which we see

no preparation, comes across as extremely hasty and psychologically unconvincing. But again, psychologically implausible situations were the specialty of socialist realism.

By and large, *Invitation* demonstrates that Jakubowska not only failed to assimilate the various stylistic innovations that occurred in Polish cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, for example introduced by Krzysztof Kiesłowski (who was her student), but that near the end of her career she regressed. Thus, stylistically, *Invitation* cannot be regarded as a piece of “feminist art”. At best, we can classify it as women’s cinema as minor cinema: cinema that articulates women’s concerns, but places them at the margins of the main discourse, and using “major language,” in this case the male language of mainstream film.⁸ And even if we agree that that it is a form of “women’s cinema,” we must be aware that it is not free from misogynistic undertones. Nevertheless, I will not neglect *Invitation*’s significance, because by “looking awry”⁹ at it, to use Slavoj Žižek’s phrase (Žižek 1991), particularly at Natalia’s discourse, we can learn something of importance about women’s frustrations and dreams in the period depicted by the director.

It’s Me, Now

Unlike *Invitation*, *It’s Me, Now*, was made by a young director. Jadowska had previously finished only one full-length feature film, *Touch Me (Dotknij mnie, 2003)*, co-directed with Ewa Stankiewicz, and awarded at the main Polish festival of independent cinema in Gdynia. In Jadowska’s own words, the main inspiration for *It’s Me, Now* was an article in a women’s magazine, which encouraged female readers, frustrated by their lack of time and space to take care of their own well-being, to pencil a date in a calendar, writing there, “It’s me, now” (Jadowska 2008). However, unlike the magazines which address mostly female readers thwarted by their double burden of job and domestic duties, Jadowska chooses as her main character a woman who despite

⁸ Elżbieta Ostrowska and myself elaborated the concept of Polish women’s cinema as minor cinema in our book *Women in Polish Cinema* (Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006).

⁹ “Looking awry” is an important strategy of the feminist researcher, trying to detect female discourse in mainstream film. A good example of this strategy is *Women in Film Noir* (Kaplan 1998).

being thirty years old, has neither a job nor children and appears to run away from home not because of a shortage of duties, but rather because of their lack, and the boredom and emptiness related to it. Another reason for her escape, hinted at both by Hanka and her boyfriend Paweł, is Hanka's disappointment with their relationship, which, again, might result from boredom. The precise reasons for her departure are not spelled out, either by Jadowska's heroine or anybody else: she leaves home without explaining to anybody the motives of her decision.

Jadowska's choice of heroine brings both narrative and ideological advantages and disadvantages. The main disadvantage is the viewers' sense that Hanka is a spoilt individual, with whom it is difficult to sympathize. Conversely, it could be suggested that choosing as the main character a woman who has no obvious commitments and material worries, poses a challenge to the feminist or women-friendly audience, especially in Poland, which expects women to prove themselves and show their usefulness in many different fields (see Plakwicz 1992). Hanka can thus act as a litmus test of how much autonomy we allow Polish women.

"Parasitic women," who neither work nor have children, but live off their hard-working husbands and boyfriends, often changing their lives into living hell, are a constant feature of Polish cinema of the last five years or so. We find them both in the films directed by men, examples being *1-0-1* (2008), directed by Piotr Łazarkiewicz and by women, as in *Sleepiness* (*Senność*, 2008) by Magdalena Piekorz, who in this film, in my opinion, created the most neurotic and selfish female characters of the last decade. Their presence confirms the view that, to paraphrase Lucy Fischer, who once wrote that "women have no monopoly on feminist art" (Fischer 1989, 18), male directors do not have a monopoly on misogynist cinema. No doubt Hanka comes across as a much more intelligent and less self-centred individual than women in the films by Łazarkiewicz and Piekorz, but she is, metaphorically speaking, their "cousin."

Jadowska conjures up Hanka as an empty vessel, waiting to be filled by what she finds "on the road". Hanka shows an appetite for adventure and a need to find out what she wants. Subsequently, she wanders from one small town or village to another,

meeting various people: women, men, couples, each with their own modes of living and baggage of problems. At the same time, her boyfriend attempts to find her, approaching the police and contacting Hanka's best female friend. In the end, he visits a mortuary to find out whether the corpse of a young woman whose description matches Hanka, fits that of his girlfriend.

The question arises as to what the journey gives to the female traveller? The bulk of reviewers claim "next to nothing." They depict Hanka's travel as lacking in purpose, direction and meaning. "What does she want?", they asked with exasperation (see Malatyńska 2006; Maciejewski 2006; Szczerba 2006). Her purposeless wandering is typically regarded by them as a sign of her immaturity; she is labelled a "little girl," lost on the tangled postcommunist roads (Szczerba 2006). The obvious conclusion of such an approach is that Hanka should grow up and return home. Reading these opinions I wondered if they would be the same if Jadowska's protagonist was male. I presume not: male wandering in cinema is typically regarded as a dignified and adult activity. No critic asks the characters in *Easy Rider* (1969) or even its male-centred Eastern European equivalents, such as the Student in Roman Polański's *Knife in the Water* (*Nóż w wodzie*, 1962) or males in Jan Svěrák's *The Ride* (*Jízda*, 1994), to grow up and return home.

In contrast to these opinions I argue that travelling gives Hanka a lot. First, it offers her adventures, including some dangerous ones and makes her aware of her attractiveness. On several occasions Hanka finds herself with men who show an immense appetite for sex with her. She also learns to appreciate female company. It is women who help her on the way, providing shelter and direction: her old girlfriend, a girl much younger than her, possibly a lesbian, who allows her into the empty house of her relatives, and a much older woman who gives her a lift and shares her experiences with her. Meaningfully, whilst male company puts Hanka (as well as female viewers of this film) off men, the women she meets make her consider returning home.

Moreover, travelling allows Hanka the position of an observer which, as one might guess, she could not afford in her previous life, locked in a claustrophobic apartment

block and which, as feminist authors argue, is typically denied women in mainstream film. This position also allows Jadowska's heroine to situate herself, metaphorically speaking, in changing *mise en scène*. This is because each person whom she meets not only tells her a different story but, by doing so, offers her a new scenario of her own life. For example, an older woman warns her that when she takes time off from her boyfriend, he might seek consolation first in conversation with and then in the arms of her best girlfriend. A couple who split up on their way on holiday suggest that if Hanka was not leaving her partner, hatred might develop between them, which would, sooner or later, erupt and destroy their relationship. Another couple make her realize how difficult is the position of a not so young woman who is both materially and emotionally dependant on her partner. Most importantly, she learns about various compromises, even lies and humiliations people are prepared to put up with, in order to be with somebody. It could be argued that because she acts as an observer and collector of other people's stories, as well as because of her relative youth and lack of experience, Hanka functions as the director's alter ego.

The rather grim image of Polish family and erotic life helps Hanka to reflect on her life with Paweł, making her realize that against the background of freaky, violent, promiscuous or simply pathetic males, her partner stands out as a loyal and mentally healthy, albeit weak man, and on her own position as one who has led a rather comfortable, if empty, life. The testimony of her realization is her attempt to contact him. On the other hand, the stories people tell her and the situations which she observes act as a warning against what she might encounter in future. The encounters reveal Hanka's attraction to playing different roles, engaging in identity games: an affinity, in which she could not engage in her previous static life. In each new encounter Hanka is less shy to lie about herself. Travelling transforms this opaque and amorphous young woman into a self-conscious, even cunning actress, who uses her lack of distinct identity to her advantage, as a means to appropriate numerous false identities. Finally, her journey turns out to be an excellent way to exercise control over her apparently

controlling boyfriend, because by embarking on her journey Hanka also forces him to travel, both literally and metaphorically, by reconsidering their relationship.

All the stories which Hanka tells about herself concern her as a private person. Likewise, the questions which other people ask her, refer to her only as a private individual. This partly reflects the fleeting nature of her encounters; the fact that there is never enough time to enter into deeper discussions, but also mirrors the wider reality in which she operates, where people live solely as private individuals, not concerned about culture, politics or history, and interested in others only as potential partners for sex or, at best, as friends. Equally, among the people whom Jadowska's heroine meets we find nobody who reveals any sense of history, who wants to compare the present day with the past or possible future. All the characters appear to live in the present, focused on immediate gratification. Many of them, like Hanka, also like to tell stories about themselves, inventing new personas for the purpose of their meeting. However, as Jadowska shows, these identities do not last; typically even before Hanka leaves, their true identities are revealed, leading to the embarrassment of the story-tellers. The disparity between the real and invented identity testifies to people's disappointment with themselves and, in a wider sense, with the opportunities existing in Poland.

Among the people Hanka meets on her way we do not find anybody like Jakubowska's Anna and her friends, namely somebody who feels acutely the burden of history and who lives for others. The idealists who were prepared not only to live, but also to die for other people, have disappeared completely from the landscape. Interestingly, their absence is not discernible in the film. Only when watching *It's Me, Now* in the context of Polish films made before 1989, such as *Invitation*, are we able to register it.

However, we find in *It's Me, Now* a character whom we can regard as a metaphorical link between Jadowska's film and *Invitation* (as well as Jadowska's previous film, *Touch Me*): a woman in her fifties who offers a lift to hitchhiking Hanka. She is played by Ewa Szykulska who was cast as Natalia in Jakubowska's film. It is not difficult to imagine that this female driver is in fact Natalia, only twenty or so years older. She

comments on her life and offers Hanka a handful of lessons, encouraging her to strive for her happiness and pleasure, and be independent. She also demonstrates that having one's own car is a better way to travel than to rely on the politeness of strangers. Superficially cynical and full of herself, but in reality well-disposed and helpful, this woman comes across as the wisest and happiest person Hanka meets on her journey. If we treat the female driver as an older version of Natalia, then we should conclude that the decisions which she made in the 1980s and her whole approach to life were in due course validated. Not only did she achieve the material success and mobility which she strove for, but proved to be able to communicate with the younger generation more effectively than her aloof mother was able to communicate with her.

It's Me, Now also reminds me of *Invitation* because of its inclusion of a large gallery of unattractive men: weak, emasculated or dangerous and aggressive, which can also be read as a sign of their weakness.¹⁰ Thus in both films the unspoken reason for the exodus of the young Polish women is their disappointment with Polish men.

It's Me, Now does not have a traditional narrative. It opens in the middle of events, in which Hanka first appears to be only a peripheral character: an accidental passenger on a bus, taking a group of school children on an excursion. Only gradually is Hanka's narrative significance revealed, as if she herself needed time and space to come out of the shadow and be able to assert her importance. The ending of the film is open: we learn that the corpse that Paweł came to identify does not belong to Hanka, but neither do we know whether the couple would be reconciled, although certainly Jadowska hints at this possibility. The events, represented by Jadowska, appear to be connected only by chronology, not causality. At the same time, as I argued, there is a certain logic to Hanka's encounters, as each one sheds a new light on her relationship with Paweł and opens up a new possibility for her. Another striking stylistic feature of Jadowska's film is its garish colours and the extensive use of close-ups. Such a technique evokes

¹⁰ The abundance of emasculated men in Polish women's cinema and, to a large extent, male cinema, from the 1980s to contemporary times, deserves separate treatment. Some insights are offered in my earlier work (see Mazierska 2003).

associations with the style practised on Polish television, especially the popular soap operas. Its use adds to the sense of the openness of the narrative. The loose, one could say, postmodern structure of the film, was noticed and extensively commented upon by the reviewers. Some critics regarded it as a sign of Jadowska's unwillingness to conform to the dominant way of making films in Poland, and thus of her independence and progressiveness (see Maniewski 2006). Others regarded it as a testimony to her lack of professionalism and the shortage of important things to say, as suggested by such an opinion: "We wait for when the film truly starts, but when it happens, the film is already finished" (Szczerba 2006: 14).

I would repudiate these criticisms by saying that if *It's Me, Now* appears to be open and unfinished, it is because, as I previously argued, Hanka is "unfinished." The difficulty of deciphering her and the film does not result from Jadowska's hiding something of importance about her from the viewer, any particular wound or mystery, but that Hanka lacks anything worth concealing. She is postmodern in the sense of being only a surface, an empty shell waiting for its content. She does not know what she wants; it is easier for her to leave any given situation and move on, than to make any positive choice and stick to it. Yet this seemingly purposeless wandering seems to be necessary for the character who previously lived a rather dull and sheltered life, to experience freedom, learn about the world and gain a sense of identity. As we learn more and more about Hanka on each new stage of her journey, so she learns more about herself and the reality which surrounds her, as numerous protagonists of road cinema did before her.

Conclusion

To summarize, I will suggest that *Invitation* and *It's Me, Now* mark an important development in Polish female cinema and female travel cinema especially. This transformation pertains, first of all, to the characters in the respective films. In *Invitation* we encounter a heroine who is selfless, experienced and "finished" and, consequently, does not change during her trip, and who overshadows her immature daughter. *It's Me, Now*, on the other hand, proposes a female character who is self-centred, young and

opaque and significantly changes on the road. The trip itself also undergoes a profound change. In the first film it is a journey which has a distinct, well defined itinerary and leads to the character and the country's past; in the second the road is chosen at random and leads to the future.

This transformation can easily be mapped into the postwar history of Poland. It could even be suggested that in the respective films the female protagonists epitomize Poland itself at specific historical junctures: Poland which has lived for long, perhaps too long, in its past and Poland which forgot about its past and thinks only about its present and future. However, as far as I know, such a reading of the heroines was never proposed in the discourses on Polish cinema and most likely, would be contested by the bulk of critics and historians, all too willing, if not to throw these films into the bin, at best to place them in a footnote to the history of Polish cinema.

One can guess that the risk of disappearing from history by making films that are female-centred, challenging narrative expectations and ideologically ambiguous was recognized by Jadowska herself. A sign of this recognition is her currently working on a television series, *General (General)* about General Władysław Sikorski, who during the Second World War was Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile. Although it would be risky, if not preposterous to suggest that Jadowska wanted to follow in Jakubowska's footsteps, it is not difficult to note that these female directors are similar in choosing to make films about well-known historical figures. Also, most likely, her *General* would attract more interest from the critics and ordinary viewers than *It's Me, Now*, which at best would enjoy an after-life at feminist conferences and feminist websites like this one.

Invitation and *It's Me, Now* also point to the hidden or not-so-hidden anti-women sentiment permeating films made by female directors in Poland. Assessing all the main reasons of its existence and persistence would exceed the parameters of this discussion, so I will limit myself to only one: the misogyny of Polish culture at large, which even countercultural works, to some extent, reflect.

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