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Summary

Another world? The cinema of Dorota Kędzierzawska

The theme of childhood has been present in the film since the beginning of the cinema, which we owe to the Lumière brothers. Today, however, it is often simplified, trivialized or shown in passing. There are not many filmmakers in Poland whose specialty is film with children characters. The figure of Polish cinematography, to which I would like to pay special attention, is director and screenwriter Dorota Kędzierzawska.

The main aim of my dissertation is to identify, analyse and define the cinema of Dorota Kędzierzawska. She is regarded as one of the most original post-communist Polish filmmakers. All of Kędzierzawska's films: "Devils, Devils" (1991), "The Crows" (1994), "Nothing" (1998), "I am" (2005), "Time to Die" (2007), "Tomorrow it will be better" (2011), "Another world" (2012) are discussed in the dissertation in chronological order. The following dissertation consists of 7 chapters: Author of a separate cinema. Apart from the alternative; Women's cinema or auteur cinema; Initiation among strangers – "Devils, Devils"; Child in the liminal phase – "Crows" and "I am"; The moral dilemma of the mother-folk – "Nothing"; (No) "Time to die"; Initiation on the way - "Tomorrow will be better". Kędzierzawska concentrates in her films on the experiences of disadvantaged children who contend with a difficult situation, rejection by adults, or both. Her characters are usually children and women, hopelessly fighting for the love of their men.

The dissertation asks why her films occupy the margins of Polish national cinema. I also analyse Kędzierzawska's choice of characters (ethnic minorities, children and single

mothers) and the postmodern style of her work, which is marked by fragmented narratives and visual stylization. Kędzierzawska's attitude toward feminism and women's cinema is also examined.

Dorota Kędzierzawska is the daughter of Jadwiga Kędzierzawska, a filmmaker who specialised in children's films. Kędzierzawska often accompanied her mother on film sets and became accustomed to them at an early age. "When my mother was shooting a film and took me with her, all she wanted of me was that I keep quiet. I did so and watched what was going around me for hours: it was a magic world for me" - says the director. Kędzierzawska graduated from the National Film School in Łódź in 1981 and before that she had completed a course in cultural studies at the University of Łódź and studied film directing in Moscow for two years. In the 1980s she got her first directing experience as a part-time assistant and second director working alongside Jadwiga. Kędzierzawska's first big success was the nomination of her student film "Egg" for a Student Oscar in Los Angeles in 1983. A consistent style in Dorota Kędzierzawska's films has been clearly visible since her university works, which were influenced by cinematic Polish tendencies from the 1970s and 1980s. The director was interested in making deep insights into the child's world and taking the perspective of her main characters. The spirit of the visual element does not minimize the realism of the filmed world. What is more, the limited role of speaking allows cinematic techniques of expression to develop. Kędzierzawska has always been fascinated by young people and their problems as well as their life experiences.

Dorota Kędzierzawska has made relatively few films up to this point, all of them representative of independent cinema. Non-commercial by definition, they grapple with difficult and painful issues. Her characters are people who have been pushed to the margins of society, who are poor, lonely, weak and helpless. They are awaiting love, help and human understanding, no matter how hopeless it may be. Kędzierzawska takes on topics that reflect her social sensitivity and are characteristic of so called cinema engagé. What makes her films highly original is the poetry of their language, which is made of a

different material. A concrete description of the main character of Kędzierzawska's "Nothing" wouldn't get you anywhere near the film itself. The main characters in her films are mainly children and the elderly. "I have a soft spot for people who are fragile, and this explains my choices in my films so far. But making films with children does not mean they are meant only for children, I get through to adults as well. Usually, the idea for a film comes from something I have seen or heard and the image it conferred appealed to me. I am interested in people who live other situations to the 'normal' ones, and the way in which they struggle to conquer these situations. In daily struggles, feelings of love and friendship give us courage and make us feel more optimistic" - she said. Each shot is carefully constructed, with careful attention paid to the details of set design, light and colour, as well as to the subtle gestures and looks that make up the art of acting. She creates a special atmosphere with each film and through each character portrait. To her, the visual is the most important and basic medium of communication, and she is remarkably frugal with her language.

Although Kędzierzawska is indifferent to box office success, her films, often regarded as esoteric, have a devoted audience that she is unlikely to disappoint. She admits that she doesn't see herself as a commercial film director. It seemed inevitable that the film director being a woman, and at that one of Poland's most prominent filmmakers who, according to many people, brings out films that are essentially feminine, she would be asked what her position was regarding feminism. "It is obvious that my view of life has been defined by the fact that I was born a girl, the influence my parents had on me, the city where I was born; now, if this is a particular feminine view, I don't know. And I certainly never felt any gender discrimination in my field of work".

I argue that specific stylistic feature is related to Kędzierzawska cinema of visual issues and rejection of dialogue. She insists on maturation limits, which are underpinned by nonlinear perspective and reinforced by nonconventional use of cinema. In my opinion, the films of Kędzierzawska exemplify a distinct cinematic trend and label as a female or films for children cinema for two reasons: first, to avoid overgeneralization and

homogenization of the commonly used term “poetic” cinema; second, to emphasize the different quality in Polish cinema and put my analysis into a broader tradition of visual arts. In doing so, this project challenges a critical heritage in film studies, Polish women’s history, and art history that has long dismissed female accomplishment. By investigating the style of the Kędzierzawska cinema, this dissertation contributes to the largely understudied field of the Polish cinema and makes a theoretical contribution to rethinking the period of post-communist cinema in Poland.