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Ewa Mazierska and Elżbieta Ostrowska, *Women in Polish Cinema*, with a supplementary chapter by Joanna Sz wajcowska, Berghahn Books: New York and Oxford 2006, 244 pp.

Women in Polish Cinema marks the long-overdue first significant salvo in what may be called a face-off between feminism and Polish cinema. Of its two sections – ‘Women According to Men’ and ‘Women Behind the Camera’, the former is the more substantial, comprising about 100 pages concerning the representation of women in male-authored films from various stages in the evolution of Polish cinema since the 1930s. This evolution may be described in simple terms as moving from images of female conformity to the yardstick of the self-sacrificing ‘Polish Mother’ to a more recent Othering of ‘Witches and Bitches’ (Mazierska’s words) failing to match the stereotype. The director considered at greatest length is Wajda, a choice to be discussed below. The last four chapters comprise informative, auteurist overviews of the careers of Wanda Jakubowska, Barbara Sass, Agnieszka Holland and Dorota Kędzierzawska.

Given the book’s importance, it is regrettable that it appears only in English and is not more widely accessible to Polish readers. Whether or not this has occurred because (British) Research Assessment Exercises and the other forms of academic monitoring native to the Anglo-Saxon world (the authors’ current base) require a primary satisfaction of English-speaking audiences, or whether this reflects the degree to which they challenge the Polish critical establishment – including its *doyenne*, Alicja Helman (p. 3) – remains a matter of speculation. One can only speculate also whether a Polish cine-feminism will yield debates as rich and complex as those between Laura Mulvey and herself (‘Afterthoughts on *Duel in the Sun*’), and Mulvey and such figures as Carol Clover, Miriam Hansen and Gaylyn Studlar. Certainly, Mazierska and Ostrowska bid fair to occupy within Polish cine-feminism an agenda-setting position, though their own feminism takes its cue from cultural studies critiques of the psychoanalytic model employed by Mulvey and re-tooled by Clover, Hansen and Studlar (pp. 4-5) – a model that may have required correction, but whose fading has reduced the complexity of debate.

Women in Polish Cinema should indeed stimulate debate, for Mazierska and Ostrowska directly attack a Polish critical establishment they deem insufficiently politicized. Mazierska is particularly critical of Marek Haltof's contention that Polish cinema post-1989 'entertains, reflects life, and is free from political commitments' (p. 110), responding that 'this opinion is grossly simplified, if not overtly false; Polish cinema indeed changed, but did not lose its connections with politics and ideology.' (Ibid) In some respects, this quarrel is unnecessary, as Haltof's words gloss his earlier statement, quoted by Mazierska, that '[f]ilmmaking has ceased to be a national and social mission' (Ibid), which can hardly be denied. The problem seems to be that each writer uses 'political' in a different sense: Haltof, to designate overt, manifest political allegiance; Mazierska, to refer to the concealed workings of ideology - what might be called (c.f. Jameson) a 'political unconscious'. The two views are not necessarily contradictory, and can complement one another. Recognition of this possibility, however, requires a realization that 'politics' has the status of a Bakhtinian 'word in dispute'. Various language games can be played with it. The same applies to 'Romanticism', which the authors identify simply with politics and self-sacrifice (p. 206), overlooking the strong strain of individualism it nurtures, which includes the *gains* the self notches up through its sacrifice, both in terms of its relationship with the internal instances Freud would personify as ego and superego, and *vis-à-vis* other people and posterity (as in that key text of Polish Romanticism, *Konrad Wallenrod*). Moreover, Ostrowska's nuanced analysis of Daisy's silence regarding her love for Jacek in *Pokolenie* could be nuanced still further by viewing it as involving not just conformity to a syndrome of nurturing female self-sacrifice (p. 81) but also - perhaps even primarily - both fatalism and a pride some might call 'proto-feminist' (an unwillingness to betray the sort of weakness that - in a context that differs only slightly - causes the boys in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* to call its young female narrator 'a girl!').

Interestingly enough, though, Mazierska and Ostrowska do not simply distance themselves from critics who may be accused to doing the usual critical job in patriarchy - that of distorting the female object of their consideration. They also, and more controversially, disagree with some of the female directors as whose advocates they appear, such as Agnieszka Holland and Dorota Kędzierzawska. The issue of just why these Polish female directors should decline the label of 'feminist' is a complex one, and certainly cannot be attributed to anything like conformism, as both are very independent-minded. (Indeed, Holland, who has worked outside Poland since the imposition of martial law, is probably under considerable pressure to conform to Western intellectual discourse, to which feminism is far more central than it is in Poland). As my last parenthesis indicates, the issue also concerns the degree of applicability of paradigms forged in Western countries, which have enjoyed democratic rule for the last two centuries, to a country whose traditional self-alignment with Western values was skewed by almost unremitting occupation during the same period, first by authoritarian and then by totalitarian

regimes. Changed historical circumstances mean that the persistence in post-war Polish women of the traditional Polish unwillingness to speak of feminism cannot reasonably be attributed solely to the 'Polish Mother' syndrome whose influence is the lead theme of this book, expounded in both its opening chapters. Other factors have to be considered also. These would include a reluctance to divide a nation already suffering an oppression beside which the everyday female one could be seen to pale, rendering it almost indecent to speak of it. Another might be the degree of overlap between the discourse of the Women's Movement and that of a Soviet import and imposition, the Marxist-Leninism that did indeed accord women many privileges not granted them elsewhere (even though saying this runs the risk of bad form). The fact that the new opportunities for women's professional work were simply grafted on to their traditional duties by a society resistant to any imperatives issuing from the new invaders – yielding the notorious 'double female shift' – should not prevent recognition that some of the intentions were idealistic, as the case of Jakubowska indicates. (Her comparison to Riefenstahl is intriguing but also possibly libelous, and never gets off the ground: whatever Riefenstahl did, she privileged not motherhood (p. 162) but herself as the intrepid lone female in *The Blue Light* and *Tiefland*.) If Holland and Kędzierzawska, meanwhile, refuse the label of 'feminist', this may reflect their strong commitment to the rights of children, which might traditionally be categorized as a 'woman's issue', but whose oppressed status they adjudge more in need of a voice than their own. (The importance of children for Jakubowska, Kędzierzawska and Holland is a sub-theme the volume could well have highlighted.) The crucial factor in the refusal of the label, however, may be the artist's dialogic imagination, which resists the binarisms on which politics feeds, and view (almost?) any practitioner of the critical job as liable for classification as the translator who is also a traitor. Ostrowska approaches an explanation of this kind when she rightly stresses the role of irony and skepticism in Holland's work (pp. 203-204). Despite Kędzierzawska's blunt 'I have nothing in common with feminism' (pp. 205-206), Mazierska – perhaps wishing to smooth over potential disagreements between sisters – bravely terms her one, though she also hedges her bets by deeming her 'ambivalent' (p. 205). It is unfortunate that she feels that praise of Kędzierzawska requires a disparagement of those who deem Wajda and Kieślowski 'humanistic' or 'compassionate'. (p. 220). Since the inverted commas are hers, the tone – intended or not – is one of sarcasm.

As far as the question of binarism is concerned, one may wonder whether the strict dualism of Mulveyesque feminism, reproduced in this book's division between a section entitled 'Women According to Men' and a much shorter one headed 'Women behind the Camera', is sustainable, particularly in a theoretical climate whose emphasis on performativity renders it increasingly hostile to all binarisms. After all, an examination of the role of Polish actresses would have complicated the bi-partite distinction. Confronted with Winnicka in the films of Kawalerowicz, with Komorowska in Zanussi's, or Szapołowska

in Kieślowski's, should one speak of 'Women According to Men', or of a more complex interchange, even collaboration (Szapołowska's suggestion causing Kieślowski to change the end of *A Short Film About Love*, for instance)? In the case of Mulvey, of course, the 'active male/passive female' opposition gains credibility (some of it rhetorical) from its focus on a classical Hollywood cinema for which star-manipulation and spectacle are primary factors, and which lacked female directors of real significance. The theatrical backgrounds and experience of most Polish actresses within the highly professionalized socialist culture industry – something that rendered them well-accustomed to speaking, to evading the net of silence traditionally cast over women – complicates matters too. After all, obvious glamour is rarely a priority in the casting of stage actresses, who are professionals, and seldom starlets. If the patchiness of the evidence this book adduces to support some of its generalizations is somewhat problematic (particularly with regard to 'the Polish School' – see below), the lack of a section profiling some of the key Polish actresses is even more so. Only Janda gets a look in – and even here she does so arguably on Wajda's coattails, as 'Agnieszka' (*Przestuchanie* gets only a brief mention).

Such omissions may, of course, simply reflect the current commodified norms for academic publication, which prize a brevity useful both to publishers (more products on shelves) and academics now required to publish with a monitored frequency that renders the notion of a life-work an increasingly distant memory. However, they can also be seen as a downside of the otherwise admirable all-round productivity of the two authors. This volume would surely have been more substantial and wider-ranging had they not been engaged with other worthwhile book projects simultaneously, and one can only hope that this book's pioneering presence in the field will not preclude the emergence of the far more substantial volume (something on the scale of the *Historia filmu polskiego*, whose stalling is a lamentable sign of the times) the subject both merits and deserves. For, as noted above, this volume omits vast swathes of Polish cinema. Its choice of Wajda as its primary source of material may not simply be politically canny, though since his primary focus has always been upon male combat, with the landscape after a battle in *Polowanie na muchy* being that of a skirmish of the sexes, his *oeuvre* provides some rich pickings for seekers of evidence of misogyny. The omission of *Samson* from a consideration of his Polish School war films may be significant, as its themes of male feminization and female strength reflect the effects of the persecution of the Jews, not any sexual battle. The question of the extent of Wajda's representativeness – along with that of the criteria for work-selection in the first section in general – is begged, however, perhaps because the privilege accorded him renders the volume more accessible to non-Polish speakers for whom he and Kieślowski remain the best-known Polish directors. However, the absence of any serious consideration of Kieślowski himself (the index that makes him seem genuinely present hides the fact that he figures only in lists of representative of trends) could be questioned, to say nothing of those of Konwicki, Skolimowski

and Zanussi. Similarly, the coverage of the history of Polish cinema is heavily weighted towards the last three decades, though there is some useful work also on its first one (particularly on the 'Polish Superwoman' and on Wanda Jakubowska). If the 'sixties are the big losers, disappearing almost completely, even the Polish School is treated very selectively: 'Women in the Polish School' features films by Wajda, two by Munk, (*Eroica* and *Pasażerka*), one by Has (*Jak być kochaną*), part of one by Kutz (the third section of *Krzyż Walecznych*), and a brief paragraph on Różewicz. No Konwicki, no Kawalerowicz, and only token coverage of Has, Kutz and Różewicz. *Women in Polish Cinema* is brave, lively, informative, penetrating – but also partial and deliberately polemical. It should be a good starting point for debate.

Ewa Mazierska

Pęknięty monolit i pęknięty monolit

Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Pęknięty monolit. Konteksty polskiego kina socrealistycznego*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego: Bydgoszcz 2005, ss. 272.

W ciągu mniej niż dziesięciu lat Piotr Zwierzchowski stał się w polskim filmoznawstwie głównym badaczem kina realizmu socjalistycznego. Czyni to jako autor prac monograficznych, redaktor zbiorów esejów oraz pomysłodawca i redaktor naczelny „Bloku”. Fundamentem wszystkich tych przedsięwzięć wydaje się przekonanie, że realizm socrealistyczny jest różnorodny i żywy. To pierwsze oznacza, między innymi, że choć jego wytwory mają z sobą w warstwie tematycznej, estetycznej i ideowej wiele wspólnego, to wiele też je dzieli. W szczególności, między słabymi filmami odnaleźć można perły, pośród filmów, niewolniczo podążających za formułą przywiezioną ze Wschodu, znaleźć można i takie, które urzekają polskością czy czerpią z wielu różnych źródeł. Witalność realizmu socjalistycznego zaś przejawia się w tym, że nie umarł on wraz ze śmiercią Stalina czy Bieruta, lecz odradzał się w każdej kolejnej dekadzie, i to często w filmach, które od socrealizmu uciec pragnęły jak najdalej. Do tego zjawiska należy więc stale powracać, zarówno ze względu na dzieła minione, które wymagają spojrzenia przez nowy pryzmat, jak i nowe, które przy dokładniejszym badaniu potrafią ujawnić socrealistyczne oblicze.

Pęknięty monolit wyrasta z powyższych założeń, o czym autor informuje we wstępie, pisząc: „Trzeba [...], przełamując stereotypy uformowane jeszcze w latach 50., dostrzec w polskim kinie socrealistycznym jednocześnie jego monolityczność i różnorodność”. Rodzi się pytanie, jak autor z tą różnorodnością i monolitycznością sobie radzi? Odpowiedzi na to pytanie w znacznym stopniu udziela struktura książki. Pierwsza część,