Introduction

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In the several books about Polish cinema that have been published in the last twenty or so years, both in Poland and abroad, women's contribution to cinema and women's issues as represented on screen are either omitted from the authors' discussion or have only a token presence. This treatment of women is by no means unique to scholars and critics dealing with Polish cinema. Many authors examining women in cinemas of other nations, such as Julia Knight in her book, *Women and the New German Cinema* (1992) and Susan Martin-Márquez in *Feminist Discourse and Spanish Cinema* (1999), draw attention to similar absences or inadequate treatment. While there are some common reasons why women are underrepresented or dismissed in the specific publications concerning national cinemas – the main one being the simple fact that female filmmakers represent a minority in the community of filmmakers – virtually in all countries in the world, there are also some reasons that are country specific. In Poland the main cause seems to be regarding women's issues, which, as Maria Janion, whose words we use as an epigraph to our book, puts it, are regarded as 'unserious', as opposed to issues concerning nation, state and religion, which were treated as 'serious'. The consequences of this approach are manifold. One of the most important is the unwillingness of Polish filmmakers of both sexes to give prominence to gender issues because of their fear of entering the domain of an unserious art. Another consequence found in the critical examinations is the repression or at least neglect of the gender dimension of those Polish films that foreground women and their concerns. It appears that this oversight and denigration of women in Polish films on both sides of the camera is unjustifiable, both as an artistic strategy and a critical approach. The aim of this book is to help to rectify it.

The collapse of communism brought hope that other discourses, including those concerned with gender and sexual differences, would replace what

Janion labelled as the domain of 'serious' discussion. So far this hope has been only partially realised. In particular, 'the struggle for independence' still occupies a central position in Polish culture, although it is typically understood in a new way: not as a fight against communism, but against a corrupting Western influence which threatens Polish identity (see Jackowski 1993), pushing to the margins other problems including the question of position of women in Poland, which is central to this book. Accordingly, it is as important now as it was before 1989, if not more so, to reveal and assess the ideologies which determine how women in Poland live, are perceived and represented.

In postcommunist Poland, feminism has been often perceived as one of the most serious threats to the traditional notion of Polish femininity, which was developed during the period of Romanticism and then 'saved' for the welfare of the whole country despite communist attempts to undermine it. In Polish academic circles this populist and nationalistic critique of feminism is avoided; there is, however, a conspicuous distrust of feminism, inasmuch as it is seen as a product of an 'aberrant Western mindset'. This is evident in an editorial of a special issue, devoted to film and feminism, of the journal *Film na świecie* (*Film in the World*) published in 1991:

> We bring this volume of *Film na świecie* to our female and male readers not without a certain anxiety. We devote it, almost wholly, to women's cinema, i.e. to films about Women, made by Women, watched by Women and analised by Women. Our scepticism over the subject of feminism in cinema does not stem from intellectual or cultural conservatism. We simply think that people cannot be divided into women and men, but, rather, into the wise and stupid, the poor and rich, the good and bad, etc. (*Film na świecie* 1991: 13)

This statement is symptomatic of the 'exorcisms' that are performed on feminism in Polish film studies. Authors writing about women in cinema demonstrate, more or less vehemently, their distance from feminist approaches to film. In an anthology, edited by Grażyna Stachówna, *Kobieta z kamerą* (*Woman with the Camera*, 1998a), which includes a number of essays devoted to female directors, this distance or even opposition to feminism emerges at many points. Although it is clear that the very concept of the volume stems from a supposed feminist approach, the editor does not even once use the word 'feminism' in her preface and some of the chapters' authors warn the reader not to locate their essays and the films they discuss in relation to feminism. Tadeusz Lubelski, for example, in his essay on Agnès Varda, claims that her films cannot be properly understood in relation to feminist film studies (Lubelski 1998: 21); Tadeusz Miczka informs us that Lina Wertmüller 'did not identify herself with the feminist movement' (Miczka 1998: 35); and Joanna Korska says, 'I do not want to prove that Barbara Sass is a feminist and I do not think this issue matters for an understanding of her films' (Korska 1998: 84). In order to support their scepticism towards feminism, almost all of these authors quote female

directors' interviews in which they oppose labelling their films as 'feminist' or 'women's cinema'.

Distrust of feminism has been openly expressed by Alicja Helman in her introduction to a collection of essays devoted to the representation of women in cinema, *I film stworzył kobietę…* (*And Film Created Woman…*, Stachówna 1999). In her general characterisation of the essays in the volume she concludes: 'These essays reveal problems specific to women with a greater complexity and subtlety than when they are approached in a way typical to feminism' (Helman 1999: 15). Given the diversity of approaches within feminist analysis, it is not clear which of its strands Helman regards as unsatisfactory. But this can probably be discerned through considering two main ways in which feminism has been employed in Polish film studies. The first attempted to familiarise the Polish reader with translations of seminal feminist texts on film, such as Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (Mulvey 1992), as well as with more general surveys of its basic notions or assumptions. The second way consisted of applying feminism to specific films. In general, the feminist approach in Polish film studies emerged through its poststructuralist variant founded on psychoanalysis and semiotics.

Surprisingly, those who have employed a feminist approach in Polish film studies have rarely, until very recently, undertaken analyses of Polish cinema. A pioneering attempt to look at indigenous films from a feminist perspective has been made by Wiesław Godzic in his book *Film i psychoanaliza* (*Film and Psychoanalysis*, 1991). He applied the methods of feminist-oriented psychoanalysis to *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* (*An Adventure at Marienstadt*, Leonard Buczkowski, 1954). Undoubtedly, his interpretation shed a new light on this canonical example of socialist realism in Polish cinema. However, Polish film scholars have commonly regarded his discussion, divorced from a historical and ideological context, as a significant drawback. After Godzic Polish film scholars have applied a feminist approach almost exclusively to Western cinema, as if convinced that it can only be useful in relation to texts that originate from the same cultural tradition as the method used. Hence, the majority of their potential readers diagnosed a feminist approach towards Polish cinema as inappropriate. Simultaneously, the modifications and changes in feminist discourse itself have not been generally acknowledged. Polish film scholars only familiarised themselves with and tried to use feminist concepts and ideas that were developed up to the first half of the 1980s. Later stages in the development of feminist film theory, beginning in the second half of the 1980s, have been overlooked in film studies in Poland. This is particularly unfortunate in light of the fact that the second half of the 1980s brought a significant change in feminist film theory. As Susan Hayward observes,

> By then feminists felt that the focus on the textual operations of films was too narrow and that a film needed to be examined within its various contexts –

> that is, the historical and social contexts of its production and reception …There was a need to move on from questions of gender and broaden the debate to include questions of class and power relations between women, of differences among the spectating female subjects, of the film industry as more than just an ideological institution or apparatus of patriarchy that renders women invisible and constructs Woman – and also to see these questions in relations to history. Only after this broadening of the debate could gender be reintroduced. (Hayward 2000: 120–23)

This criticism led to three new strands in feminist film theory. The first was developed in the United Kingdom, inspired by British cultural studies and its historical-materialist approach. The new analysis of popular culture linked the issues of gender with those of class and race in their relation to power.

The problem of power and possible resistance to it was also a merit of analyses undertaken by American feminists who, in turn, based their theories on Michel Foucault's work. They offered a new understanding of film spectatorship that replaced the earlier binary opposition of the masculine/feminine spectator, arguing that an individual can be positioned within a cultural discourse in many different ways. In this new approach to the problem of spectatorship the factors of age, gender, race, class and sexual orientation were regarded as significant modifiers of the process of reading and interpreting texts.

The third new strand in feminist film theory can be seen as the most radical polemic with the earlier feminism. It was initiated by black feminists, who argued that so far feminism had been developed as a discourse of white, middle-class woman which did not contain the experience of women of colour. As bell hooks claims:

> Feminist analyses of woman's lot tend to focus exclusively on gender and do not provide a solid foundation on which to construct feminist theory. They reflect the dominant tendency in Western patriarchal minds to mystify women's reality by insisting that gender is the sole determinant of woman's fate. (hooks 1984: 12)

It ought to be emphasised here that psychoanalytically oriented feminist theory offered an essentialist notion of female identity characteristic of modernism. Contrary to modernist psychology and philosophy, 'recent approaches to the problem of identity', as Craig Calhoun claims, 'have stressed the incompleteness, fragmentation and contradictions of both collective and personal existence' (Calhoun 1994: 14). Consequently, the notion of singular female identity defined through sexual difference has been gradually replaced by feminism with the category of gender discourse, which develops within a particular culture and under specific historical, political and social conditions. This transition that has occurred within feminism has barely been recognised in Polish film studies. As a consequence, the pragmatic trend that emerged in feminist film criticism in the

last twenty or so years has not been applied as an analytical strategy to examine Polish cinema.

Our book is an attempt to fill this gap. We argue that to examine women's issues in Polish cinema in a comprehensive way it is necessary to go beyond the level of textual analysis and situate the films within a broader system of representation in Polish culture. The latter has been influenced to a significant extent by the national discourse and as such we will pay special attention to it.

Women in Polish Cinema has two principal objectives. Firstly, to examine the main types of female characters in Polish feature cinema, from its beginnings after the First World War to contemporary times. Secondly, to analyse the work of the most prominent Polish women film directors against the background of the roles played by women in Polish history, and their positions within society. For this reason, we begin by considering the most important and enduring female figure in Polish culture: the Polish Mother. We look at the historical origin of this paradigm of femininity and various factors that shaped it, albeit in different ways, such as the Catholic Church, the socialist state and the anti-totalitarian opposition.

The second part of the book, 'Women According to Men' examines the main types of women represented in Polish films. Chapter 2 considers the presence of the myth of the Polish Mother in Polish cinema from its beginning until recent years. In order to demonstrate the stability of this myth we concentrate on two films with distinctive images of the Polish Mother. The first, *Huragan* (*Hurricane*, 1928), directed by Józef Lejtes, is a model of the cinematic representations of the myth in pre-Second World War cinema. The second, *Skarga* (*The Complaint*, 1991), directed by Jerzy Wójcik, is examined as a testimony to the persistence of the myth in postwar culture, including the period after the collapse of communism in 1989.

Chapter 3 analyses a number of Polish cinematic heroines of the early 1950s in order to deconstruct the propagandistic message they were meant to convey. The main issue addressed in this part is whether the idea of a 'New Woman' as presented in such films as, for example, Jan Zelnik's documentary, *Kobiety naszych dni* (*Women of Our Days*, 1951), Maria Kaniewska's *Niedaleko Warszawy* (*Not Far from Warsaw*, 1954), Jan Rybkowski's *Autobus odjeżdża 6.20* (*The Bus Leaves at 6.20*, 1954), and Leonard Buczkowski's *An Adventure at Marienstadt*, successfully challenged the feminine roles prescribed by a supposedly defunct patriarchal hegemony. The chapter concludes with an examination of the figure of the 'Superwoman', which recurred in films made during the 1980s, offering a revisionist perspective on the Stalinist period in both Polish history and cinema.

Chapter 4 focuses on the representations of women in films belonging to the Polish School of the late 1950s, when the rigorous schemata of socialist realism were replaced by films of directors such as Andrzej Wajda,

Andrzej Munk and Kazimierz Kutz, who offered more individualised vision of reality. All of their films dealt with the same theme: a certain type of experience of the Second World War that had been either suppressed or distorted in socialist realist work. This chapter reassesses the portrayals of women in these films, like, for example, Andrzej Wajda's *Pokolenie* (*A Generation*, 1955) and *Lotna* (1959), Andrzej Munk's *Eroica* (1957) and *Pasażerka* (*The Passenger*, 1962), and Wojciech Jerzy Has's *Jak być kochaną?* (*How to be Loved?*, 1963) in order to see whether they reflect with some equality the war experience of both genders.

Chapter 5, devoted to Solidarity heroines, focuses on Agnieszka, the main female character in Andrzej Wajda's *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1976) and *Człowiek z żelaza* (*Man of Iron*, 1981), as a paradigm of Polish woman fighting against communist oppression. Special attention is given to the political background of Agnieszka's 'birth' and her transformation from an independent and strong-headed woman in *Man of Marble* to the thwarted and submissive Polish Mother in *Man of Iron*. This chapter also examines later portrayals of a Solidarity heroine, comparing them to Agnieszka, and reflects on the phenomenon of the actress who played her part, Krystyna Janda, the greatest star of Polish postwar cinema.

In Chapter 6 we discuss the representation of women in Polish postcommunist cinema, arguing that in the 1990s and in the first decade of the new century they are as marginalised in Polish cinema as ever before. More importantly, patriarchal and sexist attitudes, which in earlier periods of Polish cinema were typically masked as the consequence of appropriating a nationalistic and patriotic stance, have been expressed openly since 1989. Moreover, the conflict between the two sexes, which before was hardly articulated in Polish films, now erupted with a vengeance. This led to the proliferation of some female stereotypes such as the witch and the bitch to which the audiences of Polish films had rarely been exposed before. We suggest that this portrayal of women is particularly influenced by the rise of masculinism and the crisis of masculinity which affected Polish society after the collapse of communism.

The last chapter in the second part of the book is devoted to the portrayal of Jewish women, who serve as an archetypal figure of 'the Other woman' in Polish culture, in order to analyse the intersection of the issue of gender and nationality. As analysis of Andrzej Wajda's films *Ziemia obiecana* (*The Promised Land*, 1974) and *Wielki Tydzień* (*Holy Week*, 1995) demonstrates, Jewish women are often constructed in film as an opposition to the femininity created and developed in the Polish national discourse that has its perfect embodiment in the myth of the Polish Mother. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Jan Jakub Kolski's film, *Daleko od okna* (*Far From the Window*, 2000), which offers a revisionist reading of the relationship between Polish and Jewish femininity dominant in Polish cinema.

To sum up, in the second part of the book we examine how films belonging to the main schools and paradigms of Polish cinema reflected the situation of women in Poland, to what extent their portrayals were stereotyped, how they deviated from other cultural representations of Polish women and what ideological purposes women in Polish films served. Our principal argument, based on the assumption that cinematic representations (as with all other cultural representations) are not neutral but fulfil various ideological functions, is that the main types of female heroines were introduced and developed to support the dominant ideology of the day. These ideologies changed in step with the political and social changes in Poland and abroad, but they also contained some constant elements. In our opinion, Polish women were defined in relation to the state or nation, and to their families, and morally judged according to their success or failure as citizens, fighters for their homeland's independence and welfare, as well as wives and mothers. The burden of responsibility placed on the shoulders of the average Polish woman was very heavy. She was expected to make sacrifices which in many other societies were attributed only to men, including fighting against the nation's enemies, contributing to material production by working in the factories and on the land, as well as fulfilling the traditional female obligations, such as childbearing and homemaking. This position of Polish women had both advantages and drawbacks. The main advantage was the relatively high status of (at least some) women in Poland. They were figures of authority, widely admired – even revered – in art and literature, as well as respected in the domestic setting. The crucial disadvantage of this specific situation was their constrained subjectivity, combined with widespread disregard by state institutions of their individual, private needs. On the whole, patriarchy to a large extent shaped and policed the lives of Polish women. Similarly, representations of women in the majority of Polish films were firmly rooted in patriarchal discourse. It is worth emphasising that the collapse of communism in 1989 did not fundamentally change either the position of women in society or the way they are depicted in films. Paradoxically, the introduction of democracy not only failed to set women free, but undermined the special position Polish women had enjoyed in sociocultural life for several centuries.

Although the representation of women is the focus of our discussion in this part, we also tackle the way men are portrayed in Polish films. Men cannot be ignored in this context because gender operates dialectically: the position of women must be measured in relation to the situation of men. It must be added that the second part of the book focuses on films directed by men. 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 cinema, advocating patriarchy or misogyny. However, it must equally be stressed that male directors played a dominant role in promoting and elaborating numerous stereotypes of both women and men that

conveyed patriarchal ideology. For example, they created various types of noble, patriotic Polish men: sons, husbands and fiancés, for whom Polish Mothers wanted to sacrifice their personal happiness and even life. Similarly, in the period of socialist realism they 'gave birth' to high-minded and generous male Party secretaries who helped young women to reach higher positions on the professional ladder (but never as high as that which they occupied themselves). Furthermore, after the collapse of communism male cinema made the audience believe that Polish males suffered multiple crises because of women's selfishness and greed. Hence, cinema (more than any other area of national art) expects women to pay for the various disappointments which the political, social and economic transformation brought to Polish men. The structure of the second part of *Women in Polish Cinema* reflects how in different periods of Polish cinema male directors used and transformed ideas and images of both sexes in a way that was beneficial to male causes.

In the third part of the book, 'Women behind the Camera', we examine whether patriarchy was also conveyed in the films directed by female filmmakers, as well as discuss other topics and motives of their films relevant to the problem of representing women. This part is devoted to the work of four female directors: Wanda Jakubowska, Barbara Sass, Agnieszka Holland and Dorota Kędzierzawska. They were chosen primarily because of their important place in Polish cinema. Jakubowska and Holland also gained some recognition abroad, the former mainly thanks to the topical subjects of her films, made soon after the Second World War, the latter as a result of making some of her best films abroad.

Chapter 8, devoted to Wanda Jakubowska, explores two main topics of her films: life in the concentration camps during the Second World War and changes in Polish society and culture after the introduction of communism. It pays particular attention to Jakubowska's advocacy of the communist cause, reflecting her personal beliefs and her professional standing as one of the highest-profile filmmakers to join the Polish Communist Party after the Second World War. We also attempt to establish whether and how her films reflected problems specific to women, such as motherhood.

Discussion of films directed by Barbara Sass in Chapter 9 considers her as an author of women's films, namely films about and for women – the only Polish director who was ever regarded this way. We discern in Sass's work two distinctive strands. In one, which coincides with the early part of her career, she is concerned with the position of women in contemporary Polish society. In the second strand she chooses women from earlier epochs as the main characters, and represents them as melodrama heroines. By looking at the various aspects of Sass's films belonging to these strands, such as the construction of the heroines, *mise-en-scène*, and the mode of addressing the spectator, we attempt to establish whether and to what extent the label 'an author of women's films' is justified in regard to this director.

Chapter 10 examines the Polish films by Agnieszka Holland, who is undoubtedly the most renowned Polish female director. Although she does not perceive herself as a representative of 'women's cinema', thanks to the diversity of themes, styles and ideological positions she achieves an effect of remarkable heterogeneity which may well be considered symptomatic of cinema made by women. Moreover, the chapter shows that in her Polish films Holland deals with the subject matter and motives that pertain to the dilemmas experienced by contemporary women. The persistence of these themes allows her to be located in the context of 'women's cinema' understood in the broadest way.

The final chapter is devoted to the cinema of Dorota Kędzierzawska. Due to her interest in those who live at the margins of society – ethnic minorities, children and single mothers – and her use of formal rupture and visual stylisation, we regard her work as closest to a paradigm of feminist cinema, identified with the critical work of Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston, often described as 'feminist counter-cinema'. The second main frame of reference applied in this chapter is a radical version of postmodernism, associated with the work of Jean-Luc Godard. We suggest that these two approaches are in an important sense similar, as both encourage deconstruction and decentring as a means to interrogate reality and cinema. Our list of female directors is short, reflecting our decision to concentrate only on the most distinctive examples of Polish women's cinema, but also the fact that only a handful of women succeeded in making films in Poland and even fewer achieved national recognition. It must also be added that female directors in Poland were often confined – by informal means or simply by tradition – to making low-budget films, addressed to an audience of children, or dealing with problems affecting children. Three of the directors discussed in this book, Wanda Jakubowska, Agnieszka Holland and Dorota Kędzierzawska, also made films for or about children. We mention this fact not to undermine their overall achievements or to suggest that children's films deserve less attention than adult films, but to emphasise a specific ghettoisation that Polish women risked when embarking on a career in filmmaking. This was the fate of, amongst others, Maria Kaniewska and Anna Sokołowska, two accomplished female directors, who barely entered the 'male' territory of making films about adults and continued to be treated as second-class citizens in the community of Polish filmmakers. Similarly, if it was not for her third film, *Nic* (*Nothing*, 1998), which was the first in Kędzierzawska's career to depict mainly adult characters, this highly original director would probably have remained regarded simply as a director of 'small, obscure films' which do not deserve wider distribution, let alone publicity. The fear of being marginalised in the Polish cinematic world was a crucial factor in why Polish women filmmakers rarely produced films directed specifically at women, such as films about adolescence, childbearing or avant-garde films addressing women's sensibilities, and instead con-

centrated on general social issues. The desire to be part of a wider artistic or political movement within Polish cinema and to be treated as a serious filmmaker also explains to a large extent why female directors avoided certain genres such as criminal film and comedy. Until the collapse of communism generic cinema in general, and these genres in particular, were treated with contempt by film critics – as pure entertainment. Hence, if women embarked on making comedies and thrillers, they would risk double marginalisation: as female filmmakers and as producers of low art.

The directors whose work we choose to analyse represent different generations. The first to be discussed, Wanda Jakubowska, was born in 1907 and started her cinematic career in the 1930s; the last one, Dorota Kędzierzawska, was born in 1957 and made her début in the 1990s. On the one hand, this suggests that female directors, however rare, were somehow present in all periods of the cinematic history of Poland; on the other, that there was never a 'women's movement' in Polish cinema. Polish female filmmakers, not unlike women playing prominent roles in other spheres of culture, played down gender divisions. This view also applies to post-communist times, when there are more female directors in Poland, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of all directors (which is, however, still low in comparison with other European countries, such as Germany). At the same time, the chosen directors played a significant role in Polish cinema. Jakubowska, Holland and Sass participated in the important movements in Polish national cinema: Jakubowska in START and socialist realism, Sass and Holland in the Cinema of Moral Concern. The youngest director discussed here, Dorota Kędzierzawska, who began her career after the collapse of communism, is also, in many senses, the most marginal. One of our objectives in the third part of the book is to analyse what subjects interested these four directors and how they tackled them. Consequently, we would like to explore their attitude to national and international history, politics and culture, including the previously mentioned myth of the Polish Mother. By doing this we also wish to establish whether belonging to some particular movement in Polish cinema, or, conversely, placing oneself in opposition to them, and favouring certain genres and styles, was compatible with, or perhaps even conducive to advancing the female cause and using specifically feminist aesthetics. In other words, we wish to examine whether Jakubowska, Holland, Sass and Kędzierzawska can be regarded as creators of 'women's cinema'. Yet, this is not a straightforward task, as the concept of women's cinema is notoriously difficult to define. It suggests, as Alison Butler observes in her study of this phenomenon, films made by, addressed to, or concerned with women, or all three. Moreover, various authors emphasise different and sometimes even contradictory features as essential qualities of women's films. However, for the purpose of our research into the work of Polish directors, we will refer to Butler's definition of women's cinema as minor cinema: cinema that uses the same lan-

guage as mainstream cinema, but with different concerns. Butler argues for considering women's cinema as minor cinema, as opposed to 'counter-cinema' (which was favoured by earlier authors, especially Laura Mulvey), because 'the plurality of forms, concerns and constituencies in contemporary women's cinema now exceeds even the most flexible definition of "counter-cinema"' (Butler 2002: 19).

While we accept Butler's arguments for using this term, we will also point to another reason, which is specific to the situation of Polish female directors (with the possible exception of Dorota Kędzierzawska) – namely, their previously mentioned desire to play a pivotal role in the main paradigms and debates in the national cinema, while simultaneously creating films conveying interests rarely expressed in male films. Consequently, this book will concentrate not on a comparison of the work of Jakubowska, Holland, Sass and Kędzierzawska with some abstract 'women's cinema', but rather will attempt to establish whether and in what sense their work can be treated as an alternative discourse to the male one. As a result, the reader of our book can treat the second and third parts as complementary.

Our book utilises a variety of approaches and methods. It looks both at text and context, at the director's work and her biography, at the film itself and its importance for different generations of viewers. There were several reasons for producing such a heterogeneous work rather than using a uniform method of research. Firstly, we felt that each phenomenon, be it a type of representation or a body of work of a particular director, deserves a specific approach because of its particularities in terms of subject, style and ideology, as well as the unique set of circumstances in which it was born. We share Bakhtin's belief that 'just as lava differs from the rock it will become, so the two states of lived experience, on the one hand, and systems of registering such experience on the other, are fundamentally different from each other' (Holquist 1999: x). In other words, disunity and heterogeneity is built into the nature of things and any form of depiction should account for what is particular and situational in the world, the 'once occurent event of Being' (Bakhtin, quoted in Farmer 1999: 381). In our analyses we try to employ Bakhtin's notion of 'architectonics' which is 'a way to generalise the particular without compromising its very particularity, its concretness' (Farmer 1999: 381).

Secondly, research on women's issues in general and women's cinema in particular is in a state of flux, and as we have already suggested, few assumptions and theses go uncontested. Moreover, a substantial number of feminist film critics suggest that rather than employ a rigid theory or methodology, those interested in feminist art should embrace a multitude of approaches and perspectives or even reject theory (see Wallace 1994: 5). Nevertheless, we feel that we owe the reader an explanation of how we use the biographies of female filmmakers – especially which aspects and moments of the women filmmakers' lives we regard as constitutive to their

development as filmmakers. Our conviction, which arises from the contemporary concept of identity as fluid and shaped by a multitude of factors, is that for each director these aspects and moments were different, as each biography was a result of different set of circumstances. For example, in the case of Wanda Jakubowska's becoming a film director, a particular role was played by her involvement in the communist movement and incarceration in a concentration camp; for Holland it was having a Jewish father who opposed the communist regime. In addition, we refer to the directors' biographies to emphasise the obstacles Polish women (not unlike their Western 'sisters') have to overcome to enter the mainly masculine world of filmmaking. On the whole, by considering biography we embrace the feminist conviction that every piece of knowledge and every opinion is a 'located knowledge' and a 'located opinion', formed and developed in a particular set of historical circumstances.

Theoretical debate concerning 'women's cinema' is usually conducive to creating such a cinema as a distinctive phenomenon. In countries in which such a debate has been widespread, particularly Britain in the 1970s, the ideas discussed were put into practice by a stream of female directors, including Sally Potter and Laura Mulvey. In contrast, until recently Poland has had no significant feminist theory or critique – not one that would inspire female directors to make films deliberately different from their male colleagues. We hope that our discussion, albeit in a minor way, will play a positive role in encouraging other Polish scholars and perhaps female filmmakers to take part in a debate concerning the existence, character and status of women's cinema in Poland.