FEMINISTS UNDER COMMUNISM?

Everyday Experiences of Polish Women as Filmed by Female Documentarians

Anna Misiak, Falmouth University, UK
THE PROJECT

• The Leverhulme Trust Fellowship 2015
• The National Film Archive in Warsaw Poland
• The Documentary Film Studio (Documentary Films vs. Newsreels)
Krystyna Gryczełowska (1931-2009)

Danuta Halladin (1930-1987)

Irena Kamińska (1928-2016)

Maria Kwiatkowska (1926-1999)

Helena Amiradžibi (1932-2017)

Maria Kwiatkowska (1926-1999)

Krystyna Gryczełowska (1931-2009)

Irena Kamińska (1928-2016)
WOMEN’S DOCUMENTARY FILMS IN POLAND
An Overview

- Female contribution to the Polish School of Documentary (1950s-1970s)
- Domestic and international festival trophies
- Non-political authorial visions
- Variety of documentary styles: Diverse experiences of men & women
- Films focused on women from the late 1950s
- Limited visibility in film history at home & abroad
- Resisting the official version of gender equality
Men Don’t Know About It (1957) dir. Jerzy Kaden
THE DIFFERENT HISTORY OF WOMEN UNDER COMMUNISM
The Female Perspective

- Women on tractors (The laughing stock)
- Communism in the Catholic patriarchal society
- Legal equality (official)
- Gender identity fixed on biology (traditional femininity)
- Domestic matriarchy/Self-sacrificing women
- Job market (equal work, not career progression, up to 40% pay gap)

- Double burden of work
- Feminism dubbed ‘unnecessary’
- Female complaints as ‘not serious’
- Women’s heterotopia (Foucault)
- Women’s survival strategies in the documentary films (and their views on that)
DIGGING OUT: THE COMMUNIST PIONEERS OF TODAY’S FEMINISM

- Female documentary filmmakers as ‘unintentional’ pioneers of contemporary feminist activists
- Legal guarantees and access to the job market don’t translate into gender equality in everyday life
- Women’s resilience under patriarchal discrimination
- Distinct & differing definitions of womanhood empowerment and resistance (from girl power to female sisterhood)
- Recognition of privilege (city vs countryside, workers vs educated women)
- Varied articulations of resistance from heroism through celebration of femininity to a rare open statement of resistance
- Diverse versions of feminism as an emergency exit from women’s heterotopia
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Coping with the Double Burden of Work

The 24 Hours of Jadwiga L. (1967)
dir. Krystyna Gryczełowska

Our Friends from Łódź (1971)
dir. Krystyna Gryczełowska

Guarded Grade Crossing (1976)
dir. Maria Kwiatkowska
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Coping with the Double Burden of Work

Our Friends from Łódź (1971) dir. Krystyna Gyrcełowska
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Celebrating the Self-Sacrificing Mother/Caretaker

Good Morning, Children (1966)
dir. Irena Kamińska

The Family (1971)
dir. Danuta Halladin

Nurses (1974)
dir. Krystyna Gryczetowska
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Coping with Social Suppression (Female Migrant Workers)

*Zambrów*  
(1962)  
dir. Helena Amiradžibi

*The Women’s Island*  
(1968)  
dir. Irena Kamieńska

*They Were There*  
(1985)  
dir. Danuta Halladin

*Where From Where To*  
(1987)  
dir. Danuta Halladin
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Coping with Social Suppression (Resilient Heroines)

Fathers of A Town
(1972)
dir. Danuta Halladin

Workwomen
(1980)
dir. Irena Kamieńska

Day After Day
(1988)
dir. Irena Kamieńska
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
Empowerment through Fashion, Leisure & Entertainment

Who Wants a Dress?
(1963)
dir. Helena Amiradžibi

Career
(1964)
dir. Helena Amiradžibi

Not Just on Fashion
(1965)
dir. Maria Kwiatkowska
FILMED EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
The Independent Career Woman

The Girls from Nawojka
(1963)
dir. Maria Kwiatkowska

Scenes with the Captain
(1971)
dir. Maria Kwiatkowska

Ms Zofia
(1978)
dir. Maria Kwiatkowska
DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S HETEROTOPIA
An Open Statement of Female Resistance to Patriarchy

The Weak Woman (1967) dir. Helena Amiradžibi
THE WEBSITE

WOMEN & FILM UNDER COMMUNISM
A REPORT FROM THE ARCHIVE

This site provides an intro to the history of women in Polish documentary cinema. It presents some of the most prolific female filmmakers who, under Communism, managed to develop directing careers at the Documentary Film Studio in Warsaw.

http://womenundercommunism.com/