

THE INVERTED DRIVE IN ANDRZEJ ŻUŁAWSKI'S SZAMANKA: A LACANIAN READING OF THE POST FEMME-FATALE

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This is a difficult film. I first saw *Szamanka* in Paris in 1996, the year it was released. Attracted by the possibility to catch a glimpse of Polish cinema in the mid-90s, I was easily drawn in. The idea was to “translate” the film into English to my *partnerin* Brigitte whom I had persuaded to join me. The film began. I managed to translate the first ten minutes or so. I then quickly gave up. Not only was my Polish not good enough at the time, incomprehensible words passed me by, but also the filmic spectacle had me transfixed. The imagery was startling. We both emerged out of the theatre into the daylight not quite knowing what we had seen, but the film left a permanent impression on me.

Almost a decade later, I have returned to this film to uncover what might have disturbed me so profoundly.¹ Like Plato's pharmacon, this has become both a blessing and a curse. In preparation for what I have written, I watched the film too many times, each time trying to make out the Polish a little better and never quite knowing whether I have truly understood the words—an interesting question when it comes to translation. The title of this essay (and presentation) was written *before* I saw the film again. This may sound rather a brash thing to have done, but that was my best intuitive guess as to what had engrossed me a decade ago, which had left such a strong memory. Now, I write to live up to the title from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective.

THE NARRATIVE

After a Google search to find what little that has been written on *Szamanka* in English, I now know that it received very little distribution and that it was a hit only amongst young people of Warsaw. Andrzej Żuławski, a former assistant of Andrzej Wajda, has a bit of the “bad boy” of cinema reputation behind him. Some of his earlier films in the mid 70s were censored or rudely interrupted by authorities. He spent much of his life in France as an ex-pat, not unusual of a number of Polish directors who left when the climate was less favorable for making controversial and violent films.

Let me begin with a simple description of the narrative, which I hope will unfold as I proceed. The story is about a relationship between a young woman in her mid-20s (played by Iwona Petry²) who wants to be a university student. We know her only as “the Italian” (Włoszka), her proper name is not revealed.³ Her nickname indicates eroticism, but also objectification. Her lover is an assistant anthropologist in his mid-40s who works at the University of Warsaw. He is played by Bogusław Linda, who has some profile in Polish cinema, while Iwona Petry does not. Only once in the film is the anthropology professor properly named as Michael. As viewers, we learn his name only incidentally when he learns of the death of his brother—a priest—ironically during the frolic of a house party. All this suggests we are watching iconic figures who stand for recurring human themes. 317

Michael wants to complete his habilitation based on the discovery of a mummified body in the bog pits near a steel mill. This mummy is identified as a shaman, and its examination is performed like a modern operation, with the anthropologists dressed like surgeons about to perform a delicate ritualized operation in a church (reverential church music is heard in the background during the entire examination). The shaman’s brain has been exposed and magic mushrooms are discovered in his possession by one of the team members. However, in future scenes a Bahktinian-like carnival emerges as the team of grad students become intoxicated by the discovery and its existential implications, dancing around and walking like Egyptians, drinking and frolicking as if they were having a party.

The shaman becomes Michael’s uncanny object, his search to answer the riddle of immortality. It eventually becomes his Real Other. In Lacan’s lexicon, this is *das Ding* (*The Thing*), an object beyond the imaginary and language that can no longer be seen or heard. Invisible and inaudible it nevertheless gazes at Michael, speaks inside him from the outside, arousing anxiety. He is constantly obsessed by it. It is the archaic object, annihilating or enticing him from the outside of his being with the immanence of non-being, the promise of transcendental fulfillment and immortality. This is vividly illustrated much later in the narrative as Michael ponders the secret [*tajemnica*] of the Shaman and experiences a psychotic moment where the mummy comes alive—as animated living death—repeating Michael’s very words, words which show that the shaman and Michael’s *Szamanka* (Iwona Petry) have become one. Żuławski

uses a white screen to convey the notion of this transcendent psychotic state of immortal life, of total bliss.

IWONA'S WARSAW

The opening scene gives the audience some hints of what is to come and some sense of the setting. Warsaw is presented as very *noir*. The graffiti wall in the opening credits is frequently revisited right until the end of the narrative; the camera dolly along-side Iwona—the Italian—in the beginning and in the end of the narrative shows the physical transformation that has taken place in her body. Żuławski shoots Warsaw's underground bunker-like passageways, its grimy apartment blocks, sterile psychiatric hospital wards, its aging trams and trains, and the heavily industrialized setting of a steel mill where the mummified body is found. There are many night shots as well.

318 Viewers see nothing of its historical buildings, nor the beauty of its *stare miasto*.

In the opening scene we already have three glimpses of Iwona's behavior that will later begin to stand out. First is her eating habits and her penchant to eat raw meat. The second is her red lips, which will become a site of her oral drive (*Trieb*), and the third is her hysterical behavior—not only is she always twitching and running, but often she gestures wildly like she is out of control, animal like. It is left to the viewer to speculate if her uncontrollable behavior may be a result of eating raw meat—*Tartar*, considered by some a delicacy—or if this is a hysterical symptom, a reaction to not having a place in the patriarchal symbolic order of Poland. I shall come to answering that.

THE SEX SCENES

The other aspect to be noticed is, of course, the sex scenes. How could one not. Michael almost rapes her during their first encounter in an apartment he is offering her to rent. The industrial music of his sex drive is heard throughout all the sex scenes. It only stops very briefly during a moment of hesitancy when they meet eye to eye, a moment of acceptance as they stare at each other. There is a general development in the progression of sex scenes throughout the narrative. In the beginning, Iwona is passive in the opening sex-scene. In the next sex scene she has an orgasm, which she was unable to have with her first lover. When she comes, she doesn't quite know what to do about it. Eventually both are equally enjoying the sexual bliss of their bodies, but Michael insists on dominating her, unable to quite let go. The sex scenes become more violent and brutal, ending with Michael sadistically penetrating her body anally after she shaves her genitals to give him more viewing pleasure. The transference from one, "permissible" hole to another, "non-permissible" one plunges him into total self-gratification; again a white screen of transcendence appears. Eventually, he tries to

play her slave by tying himself up, but then he easily breaks the belt that is meant to constrain him. He is unable to subordinate himself in this relationship.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

It would seem almost impossible not to have the discourse of the Catholic Church intervene in a narrative where mysticism surrounding the shaman plays such a central theme. The priest whose face Michael strokes in the opening scenes turns out to be his brother, a very significant aspect of the narrative, which is exploited anamorphically—that is, obliquely, from angles invisible to the viewer. It turns out that Michael is renting out his brother’s apartment to the student, Iwona, which is where most of the sex scenes take place. Not only is this an allusion to Sade’s (1965/1795) *Philosophy of the Bedroom*, but also to the repressed discourse of the Catholic Church symbolized by the drop sheets that cover most, if not all, of the furniture. These drops sheets begin to be slowly lifted away as Michael struggles with his own fall into perversion. **319**

The core of the action then is really composed of a relationship between three people: the Italian (generic for an insatiable woman), the anthropologist Michael (generic for “man” searching for the secret of life), and the preserved mummified shaman (generic for the mystery of immortality itself—more properly of the “flesh,” having been perfectly preserved). Michael becomes obsessed with the shaman, trying to discover its “secret” (*tajemnica*), and this obsession is then transferred onto “Woman”; she eventually becomes his Szamanka—as death itself—the evil woman as femme fatale whom he must ultimately abandon.

PERIPHERAL CHARACTERS

Surrounding this core of three, a trinity being significant when it comes to theorizing transferences, are other peripheral relationships. We get a glimpse of Iwona’s mother, who was sexually abused and beaten by her father. Michael has a girlfriend, Anna, whose father is a psychiatrist. Anna has decided to leave him for a while by traveling out of the country, but returns later looking for him when she hears of his affair. Surrounding Michael are four male graduate students whom he pals around with. They assist him with the examination of the mummified shaman. One of them gets into serious money trouble with a gang and is badly beaten and killed. We are also introduced to two of Włoszka’s lovers. The first is a doctor who looks after mentally ill children; the second is a steel mill co-worker. Neither one can satisfy her sexual needs and both feel like they are failures as men. The sex scenes with them all end in disappointment. As the relationship between Michael and Iwona develops, both Michael’s girlfriend Anna and her second lover commit suicide. Unable to fulfill the desire of

the Other, both reach a point where they feel empty themselves. Death becomes a welcome alternative to living without their lovers.

WHAT'S UP? WARRING BODIES

So what is Żuławski up to through this narrative? Despite the core relationship between Michael and the so-called student, there is nothing in it about love; rather it is about the intimate relationships between the body instincts, its drives, sexuality, and death itself. Desire, which is on the side of the signifier, has been completely voided. There is no imaginary body; as lovers they do not meet in some fantasmatic space of the imagination to be one; rather, their intercourse takes place in sterile spaces—in the sterile apartment where there is no romantic atmosphere, on trains, on sidewalks where the public can gawk at them. Nowhere is love to be found throughout the film.

320 There is no passionate kissing, only the exploration of the mouth as a sensual cavity—for fellatio, for sharing the mutual taste of chocolate, for spitting.

The destruction or death of the signifier is clearly identifiable in a scene where Michael, after doing drugs, opens up his valise (he has now moved into the apartment with Iwona), takes his field notes, slurring his words and unable to read them, soaks them in water and pours the ink over Iwona's sleeping body, situating the book between the crack of her ass. He then takes photographs, pornographic ones, one after another like shooting a gun, a death drive that replicate his style of photographing the shaman's body. Without the signifier of language to anchor him, the shaman has merged with Iwona—she has become his Szamanka, its feminized form. Once an object of desire and fascination, she, like the Shaman, now has become an object of loathing and fear. Drained of desire, she has now been transformed into his *femme fatale* whom Michael must abject, otherwise he will continue to be caught by her "flesh" and the magic of her beauty.

In this context I would name films like Peder Almadovar's *Matador* (1986), Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1976), Nagisa Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), Marco Bellocchio's *The Devil in the Flesh* (1986), and, finally, Louis Malle's *Damage* (1992) as similar films which probe this most difficult question of the body of *jouissance*. In his exposé of Polish cinema, Marek Haltof (1997) quips that Szamanka would be more appropriately named "Last Tango in Warszawa"; however, I dare say, Żuławski goes further than these films by addressing two themes that lay at the very heart of the postmodern dilemma. The first theme that I shall develop is the never-ending battle between two conceptualizations of the body that define the postmodern condition, which are explored and questioned via the intermediary dead and preserved but immortal body of the shaman. Stated somewhat differently, *Szamanka's* narrative juxtaposes the body of desire (*Begeren*), presented to us obliquely as I will show, with the body of the drives (*Triebe*), while the biological body of instincts (*Instinkts*) is given its fair recognition. Michael, more than Iwona,

struggles with this contradiction within himself. The second theme is the question of the *jouissance* of woman, a theme which feminists like Irigaray (1985) have attempted to theorize. Can “The Italian” (Woman) find a place in Polish patriarchal society with its oppressive institutions like the Catholic Church and the University? In a sense, Iwona’s struggle, her hysteria against the symbolic order, is the obverse side to Michael’s own questioning of masculinity. In this relationship, love finds no imaginary fantasy to cling to.

Let me begin by developing the first theme. On the one hand there is the body of enjoyment—where enjoyment is the experimentation of death in life; that is, more properly speaking, the body of *jouissance* where the experimentation for the search for the body’s limits takes place *beyond* the pleasure principle in Freud’s terms; it is a Sadean body where the subject is identified with the body as such and where the claim is to reach a form of transcendental bliss through the body as subject: the subject is the body since only the body can enjoy itself (*se jouit*) or can be enjoyed (*cela se jouit*). In contradiction to this body of limits is the body of sacrifice. Rather than the monist and material subject who searches for *death in life*, the idealistic, theological and metaphysical philosophy of the body separates the subject from the body. Its assumption is that of a subjective life achieved by the meaning of death itself, the experience of *life in death* that is opposed to *death in life*. The experience of sacrifice as life in death is a transcendental plane that is lived in another world—it is not the one here and now. Of course, it is the Catholic Church that represents this body best, the crucified Christ, who died on the cross to save Christians for an afterlife. Both Iwona and Michael have abandoned the body of sacrifice. In this regard, a very important scene takes place on a train where Michael indiscriminately tries to fondle Iwona in public and then has sex with her in the train’s corridor, all along speaking of the sacrifice his brother, the priest, had made—but to what end? He committed suicide.

This contradiction between the physical and mental existence is quite admirably stated by Michael in a lecture to his students concerning the Shaman when he compares a cosmonaut who is protected by his space suit to physically sustain existence and the shaman who psychically sustains himself through magic mushrooms, searching for kundalini as the life force that is discovered in Kama Sutra, and so on. Iwona, who enters his lecture hall, all of a sudden becomes ill and faints, as if his words had penetrated her own unconscious struggles. Transcendental immortality through the body in the here and now through sexual and drug-induced experimentation, or transcendence of the body in the next life that is not of the world—this is the paradox of the Shaman’s secret.⁴ This discourse of sacrifice, however, is presented to us obliquely, as said earlier, anamorphically throughout the narrative. Three scenes illustrate this anamorphic view of the sacrificial body.

In the first scene Iwona has just destroyed her own family home, abandoning her mother and sister; having stolen money, she leaves with a packed suitcase. As she walks away, she is caught by a weeping statue of the Virgin Mother that looms at her,⁵ an allusion to the suffering her own mother has had in an abusive relationship with a

man. Iwona touches her red lips, as if she recognizes the aporia pulling at her between the body of desire and the body of her drives.

In a sex scene in their apartment, Michael and Iwona are presented as crucified figures. The music begins to change to the sounds of long and continuous painful suffering. No more industrial punk music. In the background, a cross has been established using the photo images of the shaman's brain, an indicator that Michael is turning away from the Sadean position. Only Iwona is wanting more and more bodily *jouissance*, her hands covered with semen, while Michael remains still and disinterested.

When a steel worker is badly injured on the job, Iwona's suitor, Martin, immediately kneels and prays to the icon of the Black Madonna at Jasna Góra (Bright Hill), Our Lady of Częstochowa, a symbolic protector of the steel and coal workers due to the influence of Lech Wałęsa wearing the Black Madonna lapel pin on his jacket. Iwona, on the other hand, stares into the promethean fire—into the face of death itself, transfixed. This is a startling juxtaposition of the folk superstition of heaven and hell. Iwona as a woman simply lives in this hell already. She has no choice: death is simply to be embraced when it comes.

What is common to both positions (*jouissance* and sacrifice) is death; death mediates both sides, as Heidegger wrote—*dasein* is a “being towards death.” And this “death” is materialized as a “living death” in the form of the shaman, the perfectly preserved body of the bog. I now turn to Lacan for some theoretical conceptualization of this mediation of the mummy as it relates to the “warring” factions of both sides, the way the body is constantly pulled in both directions at once, balance and harmony difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

KANT AVEC SADE

Żuławski, or rather Manuela Gretkowska, who wrote the screenplay, presents the case that neither of these two subject paradigms are a creative solution to the contemporary existential paradoxes of (Polish) life. Michael's brother, a priest, commits suicide; Anna, Michael's girlfriend, commits suicide, as does Iwona's second suitor, Marin, the steel worker who knelt in front of the Black Virgin. Lacan (1989) pretty well said the same in his notorious and difficult essay, “Kant avec Sade,” where he argued that the universal categorical Imperative, as presented by the morally pious protestant Kant, led to an impossible position—the experience of a transcendental *jouissance* of mind free of guilt. One suspects this is the position reached by Michael's priestly brother. While Sade presented the obverse of this enlightenment universal—the impossible *jouissance* of the body that eventually seems leads to the false position of the Sadean pornographic woman, who believes that equality can be achieved strictly at the level of sex. Prostitution, as is well known, is rampant in every

cosmopolitan city, Warsaw being no exception. Indeed, this is the stalemate that is presented at the end of the narrative.

Like the character of Kevin Spacey, Lester Burnham in Sam Mendes *American Beauty* (1999), Michael thinks he can escape the *jouissance* of the body by plunging himself into doing menial physical tasks as a worker, to find new meaning in life by becoming a laborer who washes trains, cleans toilets, handles shit, scrubs windows, and so on. Embracing the body of sacrifice, transformation complete, he comes back to the apartment wearing his brother's collar, impersonating a priest. Iwona is outraged. No longer the man who gives her sexual pleasure, like her pimp,⁶ he has become a piece of shit. She kills him by smashing his skull with a can of raw meat. Michael's brains are exposed just like that of the Shaman they found in the bog. Iwona then proceeds to eat his brain with a spoon while he is still somewhat "fresh" (alive.) She then experiences a transcendental moment, indicating her complete turn towards the Sadean position. She has become a Szamanka, enraptured in a psychotic state who loves the taste of brains and blood. Through such an "act" Iwona steals back her own *jouissance*. 323

Reality, in Lacan's terms, is structured around the rejected *objet a*, the something—a piece of our own being—that must be relegated to non-being. It is a loss of part of our *jouissance*, our immortality making us mortal creatures fated to death. In this case, however, Iwona has literally eaten her materialized *object a* (Michael). This is her radical feminine Act given her position in the patriarchal order (see Žižek, 1999, 2000, 8-12). There is no compromise here. She takes his life. The exemplary figure for such an Act, is of course Medea, who kills her two children when learning that her husband Jason plans to abandon her for a younger woman. Michael did not respond to her ethical demand—to have a place in the Symbolic order of Polish society. As a student she was rejected and ignored. She became his *femme fatale*. In the end we see her walking along the same graffiti wall as in the opening scenes, no longer as an eager student searching for an apartment, but more as a prostitute who now knows only one way she can survive instinctively with the raw meat that surrounds her, and that is to "play" with it—sometimes swallowing it, sometimes spitting it out. A siren call is heard, a warning that such women are roaming the streets—loose.

FEMININE JOUISSANCE

I now turn to the second theme of *Szamanka*: the *jouissance* of Woman, and argue as to why "The Italian" is an example of the inverted drive of the *post-femme-fatale* position. If we take the body of *jouissance*, that is the body on the side of the drives as distinguished from the imaginary body, and the body of desire, of language, Lacan (1992) makes a further distinction between the body of instincts and the body of the drives. The body of instincts is the invisible and complex life of the flesh, which Merleau-Ponty (1968) (Lacan's friend) called "brute flesh" or "wild logos." For Lacan,

this “wild being” of flesh, because it was wordless, had an unalterable life and death logic of its own. The body of instincts is a body of needs (*Not*), while the body of the drives is a body of want, lack, or requirement (*Bedürfnis*). Need as *Not* has to do with self-preservation, while *Bedürfnis* has to do with want. In the film’s narrative, as I claim, desire has been suspended. The body of need and the body of want have their source (*Quelle*) in the body itself. However, the instinctual body refers to the body’s inside (to its depth, the stomach, intestines, heart and other vital organs). Michael slightly cuts himself on Iwona’s jacket as he stripped her in their first sexual encounter, a sign of the impending exposure to the Real of her body. He sucked the blood on his finger, which is symbolic of this inner instinctual body—and can become vampiric as it thirsts for blood. The raw meat presented throughout the narrative serves a similar symbolic function. The body of the drives, on the other hand, is the surface body, the body of erogenous holes. The eye, as part of the scopic drive, sits paradoxically half inside and half outside the body. The two bodies, of course, interface each other, having a paradoxical relationship as to what is inside and outside. Hence, their transgression is possible as the *anti-anthropologist* George Bataille (1962) wrote about concerning the excesses of the body. The study of what is inhuman (Lyotard, 1991) as opposed to what is human, restages the complexity of all three bodies—of *Instinkt, Trieb, Begehren*.

While the body of instinct is regulated, homeostatic, providing shock-pleasure in the sense that excess pressure recedes or is suddenly eliminated through satisfaction, the drive, on the other hand, is a thrust, a constant force that never sleeps. Drives, unlike instincts, do not follow the laws of pressure; they continually transgress it—they pulse like the industrial music that is heard throughout the sex scenes. The body of the instincts is a desexualized zone. It also belongs to the Real in Lacan’s lexicon, beyond the imaginary and language—of the signifier. The pleasure of instincts are homeostatic and not erotic like that of the drives.

My claim is that Iwona (an English pun is possible here: “I wana”), the Italian, is not entirely driven; she only comes to be driven through her relationship with Michael. She is searching for a signifier—after all she wants to study, to anchor herself. Michael is a professor. He has knowledge, *la sujet suppose savoir*, the subject-who-is-supposed-to-know, in Lacan’s terms. On the whole, her hysteria, her “wild being” should be read as her body of instincts. She becomes hysterical (animal-like, instinctual) when there is no place in the patriarchal order. This is illustrated in spaces where she is unwelcome: she faints when entering Michael’s lecture hall; she becomes hysterical when attempting to drink like his graduate students in a cafeteria. She learns quickly that she cannot “drink” with the boys, Michael’s *Stammtisch* of male pals. Her only place in the narrative is when she dresses and does the same job as a man in a steel mill, or when she dresses for Michael as a prostitute. Those are the only two positions available to her in Polish society, having rejected the role of motherhood, which only leads to a life of masochistic suffering.

Rather than being offered the signifier of knowledge, Michael as the Sadean pervert offers her the body of the drives—orgasmic pleasure—which eventually turns her into the Sadean woman. Eventually she is walking around Warsaw after having mastered high heels that she stole. In one scene she walks around with a short dress but no panties, and flashes her vulva to an invalid who leers at her, completely disarming him as he lays on the ground unable to get up. She has found her chthonic powers.

She, “The Italian,” must then *invert* these drives into the body of instinct—illustrated by her cannibalism—in order to escape him. Michael was never a loving Father/boyfriend, only a pervert who knew the *jouissance* of the Other—what would “turn her on.” The fantasy scenario of desire, illustrated by Lacan’s matheme $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ (where $\$$ refers to the split subject that lacks and a is the object cause of desire) has been reversed into the perverted position. Lacan’s matheme for perversion is $a \leftrightarrow \$$. The pervert (Michael) acts as her *objet a*, satisfying her bodily drives, but not her desires. Her other suitors, on the other hand, were unable to fulfill her desire given her hysterical position. She did not want to be “had” by them, to be incorporated back into the social order—and be like her mother. Her “escape” from Michael comes at a high price. Killing him makes her even more abjected by the symbolic order; she will become a fugitive, an out-Law. There really is no escape. 325

MEAT

Meat is then her inverted drive object. Eating raw meat eventually turns out to be the *inverted drive of cannibalism* as she spoons Michael’s brain to reach transcendent bliss of the Real. Raw meat, in Iwona’s case, plays an ambivalent relationship between the instinctual body and her driven body. Meat, in all its possible significations, the most obvious being a slang term for penis/phallus, is both an erotic object as well as an abjected object. As an erotic object she either sucks it in (with her spoon, which she licks, relishes its taste) or spits it out, and faints around it when, for example, she is forced to work at the meat factory where her father works to pay off the money she stole from her mother (she faints at the site of ground meat as she touches it). This is when raw meat becomes an instinctual abjected object that is then spat out. It becomes shit. She is caught in-between her oral (exemplified by her always red lips, like the red of raw meat) and anal drives (the meat that needs to be shit out). The choices of masculinity that this “meat” unconsciously and erotically calls her to, given The Italian’s social position, is a choice *without a choice*: it calls her either to her Father, an abusive figure, brutal to the flesh who must be spat out, or Michael, a pervert who satisfies her erotic drives. Michael’s transformation as (possibly) a celibate priest at the end of the narrative offers no choice at all.

Meat is Iwona’s *objet a*. It is her uncanny object, which is at once familiar (*Heimlich*) as it is unfamiliar (*unheimlich*), like Kryptonite was for Superman, a piece of his

home planet that can take away all his super powers. So it is for Iwona. Meat, when it is treated by her instinctual body, as the desexualized Real, has only to do with pure self-preservation that neither knows nor recognizes any Otherness. In the end, instinctual self-preservation takes place in her *Act* as a *post-femme-fatale*. She kills Michael so that he can be consumed. There is no relationship in this consumption. To have a relationship something has to be left over, something must *not* be consumed. Here, it is the *objet a* that has been materialized and consumed. The Sadean woman, rather than accepting the fundamental objectlessness of the drive, seeks to fill in the lack with a “real” material object, to satisfy her erogenous zones—like her mouth as well as her vagina; in one scene she places raw meat inside her vagina while Michael feels her up.

326 When drive transgresses in the direction of the instinct—*inverts* itself, it enters this excluded desexualized zone, which is on the side of the psychic Real. The sexualized subject-cum-object can become a parcel of meat to be consumed. The sexual partner is reduced to the function of the Real, and the reaction may be one of disgust, hysterical vomiting, or cannibalistic desire. Iwona exhibits all of these. Whenever she is thrust back inside her “organism” (as both body and ejaculation), she encounters the Real and exhibits the shock of throwing up with no erotic reactions. So when the drive object is approached in an instinctual way—as Michael is at the end—something that was merely psychic and absent is “eaten” as if present and full. In perversion, an uneatable, instinctual object (namely Michael’s brains) is consumed with erotic pleasure as if these were the materialized *objet a* of the drives, giving her full satisfaction—as symbolized by the white screen of transcendentalism.

BACK TO HER LIPS

One last development to expand upon is the oral instinct/drive around the mouth. Iwona’s striking red lips that she checks in the mirror as a would-be student, bring her steadfastly into the eroticism of lipstick as the ornament of feminine desire, a sign for the supplementary excess of desirable pleasure. But this lipstick functions for herself; it has very little to do with Michael as a male partner. The kissing scenes are quite explicit in this case. These are not lips of desire, but red lips of the drive. In one scene she spits at him, and it is this thin line of spittle between them that holds their curiosity as to what function their mouths should take. But there are two further ways this oral drive becomes inwardly perverted. The first is when she eats raw meat instinctively and catches herself—as in a scene where she tries desperately to get rid of the traces of raw meat by rubbing her lips with ice cubes. She wears no lipstick here. The second relates to the drive and desire to become flesh, like Courtney Love of *Hole*, smearing the lipstick around the lips, which is a sign of abuse and loss of control. Iwona comes across a scene of abuse as a prostitute is trying desperately to apply her lipstick as a man is about to grab her from behind. This incident is just too close

for her, and she quickly turns and walks away. The loss of the lipstick's containment and lure represents the grotesque monstrosity of her father who beat up her mother or prostitutes who have let themselves be used as mere holes.

To conclude, the *jouissance* of woman has been denied throughout the entire narrative—until its end where it is “found.” Not only is the signifier denied to her, the only signifier she is allowed to bare is one where she is like a man—a steel worker—or perhaps a member of the sex trade, a prostitute. Iwona in effect has no place except to be the Sadean woman, to act as a *post femme fatale*, as a destroyer of men. Why post? She is willing to commit a feminine act to steal back her *jouissance*. *She survives through her instinctual body* rather than being destroyed as in classic *femme fatale* narratives. She inverts her drives so that she can destroy/sacrifice her fantasmatic support—her perverted lover, Michael. But at what price? Having experienced the perversion of *jouissance*, all “ordinary” men seem to be a joke to her, unable to satisfy her drives. She knows nothing of desire, having been denied it, while Michael has no escape either, neither as a pervert nor priest, or at least this has been my reading.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This essay was originally a conference presentation to *The Cinema of Central Europe*, sponsored by the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies on April 21, 2005 at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Its personal style reflects an address where a number of clips from the film were shown to support my reading.
- 2 A rumor was circulated shortly after the film's release that Żuławski pushed the young actress during the sex scenes causing her psychological damage. Boguslaw Linda was said to have been incensed. However, thus far I have not been able to substantiate whether all this was part of the hype to sensationalize the movie or not. Accounts vary.
- 328 3 This provides an obvious problem since using "The Italian" throughout this essay would further reify, objectify and distance the reader as to her character, which is the intention of the film: a beautiful young woman is degraded to the status of a prostitute. Despite this, I will often use Iwona, the actress's proper name, to induce her humanity.
- 4 I might risk a speculation here and say that the dividing line in contemporary philosophy today rests on a similar aporia. Philosophers of immanence, especially Gilles Deleuze, argued for the *force* of matter, a *transcendent* empiricism where agencies immanent to matter are given their due as a body of instincts, whereas *transcendental* philosophies remain engaged in teleological possibilities.
- 5 A crane shot over the shoulder of the statue is used to establish this relationship, making it appear that the Virgin Mother is gazing at her.
- 6 There is one scene where Michael literally tells one of his graduate students to fuck her, as if he were her pimp. He could do what he liked with her body, even "give" it away to another man.