



Mediální obraz leseb a gayů

Media image of lesbians and gays

Středoevropská konference při festivalu Mezipatra 2006
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MEDIA IMAGE OF LESBIANS AND GAYS

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Representation of Gays and Lesbians in the Mainstream Visual Media

Věra Sokolová (CZ)

It is absolutely beyond doubt that representation of gays and lesbians has changed significantly in the Czech visual media in the past few years. The main points of this transformation can be summarized in rather simple terms: firstly, though still too little, gays and lesbians are more visible in the Czech cinema and TV screens. Secondly, contexts in which they appear have not been connected - for quite a long time - only with medical surgeries and personal confessions; they have shifted into the levels of complex relationships and stories. Furthermore, thirdly, presentation of gays and lesbians in the visual media is gradually becoming positive on one hand; on the other hand, complicated, thus preventing formation of either negative or glorifying, simplified and flat pictures of their lives and identities. These trends in the visibility were not born at random or spontaneously, but go hand in hand with gradual change of the general public's awareness of homosexuality and homophobia, with successful long-term campaign for the codification of registered partnership, with permanent work and promotion of gay and lesbian associations and web pages and, finally, with growing commonplace and openness with which many gays and lesbians live their lives.

Four basic TV channels and approximately twenty cable TV channels, today common and for many people available from financial point of view, can be considered as the mainstream visual media in the Czech Republic. Moreover, we can mention film industry, which - in spite of being swallowed-up by Hollywood production

- still brings both mainstream and independent European and world production to our country. Among visual media, though not necessarily mainstream ones, belong also photography and the world of new media, comics, computer games and web pages, moving advertising, clips, designs and many other forms of visual culture. In other words, we are surrounded by the visual media literally at every step; their gigantic, although often also hidden, power within the formation of the all-society consciousness and values as well as our own world-view and sub-consciousness can not be underestimated. Visual presentation of gays and lesbians, produced by these contexts, is then utterly crucial for the equal status of gays and lesbian women in the society also for the possibilities how openly and naturally to live the lives. Furthermore, it also represents certain barometer of diversity and respect in the society.

The following text outlines production and presentation of gay and lesbian themes in the most important mainstream visual contexts in our country. At the end the main aspects of the visual transformation, sometimes more and sometimes less visible and concrete, through which the presentation of gays and lesbians has gone through in our society from the November revolution till today are then discussed.

Presentation of Gays and Lesbians in the Television

Up until the year 1989, gays and lesbian women were invisible in the mainstream media, leaving aside negative presentation in various

movies, serving only as the motivation triggers of pathological acting or problematical character delimitation of movie heroes and heroines. Foreign movies, depicting homosexuality and gays and lesbians as normal and integral part of the society, which - of course - existed at those times, did not find their way into the Czech cinemas based on understandable ideological reasons. After the fall of communist regime it was above all Česká televize (Czech Television- ČT), which gradually started to insert into its program films with gay and lesbian subject-themes and gay and lesbian characters. Nevertheless, independently on genre or plot of the movie, in the beginning it was exclusively the broadcasting on the 2nd channel of ČT very late at night. Moreover, TV program did not always specify that the story was related to homosexuality or the life of gays or lesbian women, i.e. the viewers very depended on lucky chance or the word of friends, who already knew the movie. However, in the past ten years Czech Television - as the only one from the three main television channels in the Czech Republic - quite regularly includes into its program full-length gay and lesbian films, mostly of foreign prov-

(1993), *And The Band Played On* (1993), *Philadelphia* (1993), *Antonia* (1993), *They Are From Us* (1994), *Chasing Amy* (1996), *The Birdcage* (1996), *Ma vie en rose (My Life in Pink)* (1997), *In & Out* (1997), *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000), *The Closet* (2000) or *Le Fate Ignoranti* (2001). Mainstream Czech visual culture was penetrated with movies, which usually represent homosexuality and gays and lesbians normally, positively, in various historical and social contexts.

Besides these occasional foreign feature films ČT focuses in the context of gay and lesbian theme mainly on journalistic and documentary programs related both to the position and life of gays and lesbian women in the Czech society and to homophobia and respect to homosexuality in the Czech Republic. Of course, partially it results from the principle of ČT as the only one television on public service in the Czech Republic, the obligation of which is to present comprehensive and objective picture of the Czech society. On the contrary, it is true that ČT itself initiated certain projects resulting in the visualization of homosexual minority and the improvement of visual image of gays and lesbians. Presentation of gays and lesbians in such programs went through significant and qualitative positive change since 1990's till today. At the very beginning, there was a documentary program *Tabu*, "three-piece essay on the problems of homosexuality" (1990), which prevalingly took place in the sexology surgery. The title itself prompts that the main objective of the program was to point out to "the problems which homosexuality carries" and to explain to heterosexual people that homosexuals are really not responsible for their sexual orientation. Presentation of gays, lesbians and homosexuality in this program unwound within the framework of medical discourse, which presented homosexuality as inborn (thus positively defining it against then still valid classification as medical diagnosis),



Making of the TV programme LeGaTo. Photo: Martin Strachovní.

ence. Approximately from the mid-1990's we could see in ČT known mainstream as well as independent films such as *The Crying Game*

nevertheless installing it as a problem brining to suffering the lives of gays and lesbians; therefore, the other (heterosexual) society should understand them and tolerate them.

Probably the most outstanding illustration of the change of this image and the top of the effort of ČT for objective social journalism is the three-year broadcasting of independent, openly gay, lesbian and transgender cultural-journalistic “regular” (originally periodical) program *LeGaTo*, which ČT enforced in the year 2003 within the framework of its declared project of the support of social minorities. Since its very beginning this project was drawn as the program “about us with us” and on its preparation- besides professional authors from ČT - always significantly participated addressed gays, lesbian women and transgender people, which is of course reflected in informed and positive representation and presentation of gay and lesbian lives. Responses to *LeGaTo* from the inside of the gay and lesbian community itself are large-scaled for the whole period of its duration, from excited and encouraging to disapproving and negative, which is certainly a positive phenomenon as it documents the variety of taste and priorities of Czech gays and lesbians. In spite of its current irregularity and opinion variety of its viewers, the most important aspect of *LeGaTo* and the most positive information on Czech TV scene is quite undoubtedly the fact that the presence of such program in the mainstream television so far does not have any analogy in all over the world. The fact also is that according to the statistic survey of ČT *LeGaTo* is regularly one of the most followed programs in its broadcasting slot.

Original Czech Film and Television Production with Gay and Lesbian Subjects

In terms of the Czech production itself, it is arranged nearly solely by documentary jour-



TV film *Pedofil's death*. Photo of production: Barbara Holomková.

nalist production, not taking into account the controversial works of the film director Wiktor Grodecký on boyish homosexual prostitution in Prague from the mid-1990's - documentaries *Not Angels But Angels* (1994), *Body Without Soul* (1996) and the drama *Mandragora* (1997) - or recently shot *Smrt pedofila* (*Death of Pedophile*) (2002). The author of the majority of Czech documents with gay, lesbian and transgender subject matter is the director Andrea Majstorovičová (responsible for *LeGaTo* from script-editor point of view). Famous works were born in her studio, such as *Zpovědi- Confessions* of Ota Tasinat, poet Jiří Kuběna and photographer Robert Vano, or transgender portraits of Tereza Spencerová, Miluška Šubrtová or doctor Otto Kott. Ms. Majstorovičová shoots her portrait stories with persuasive self-evidence, not being afraid of intimate or unpleasant themes and presenting “her” gays, lesbians and transgenders in the whole complexity of their lives.

In the year 1996 another interesting film was made, *Takové normální manželství* (*Such a Normal Marriage*), about long-lasting relationship of two gays living in the city of Opava. In the year 2003 director Helena Třeštíková filmed the documentary *Jsem žena orientovaná na ženy* (*I am a Woman Oriented to Women*), which - however - was very criticized by lesbian

community based on its cautious and in some places even suffering-seeking approach, so significantly missing in the works of Ms. Majstorovičová. Remarkable work from the inside of lesbian community was certainly the black-and-white documentary *Moje tělo je ONA (SHE is My Body)*, on the relationship of eight lesbian women to their own bodies, shot by Iveta Kratochvílová and Tereza Kodičková in the same year. The author conception as well as the acceptance of this particular shot by lesbian community contrasted absolutely clearly with the work of Ms. Třeštková and markedly demonstrated the advantages of own, though



Making of the TV documentary *I am a woman oriented on women*. Photo: archive of Czech Television.

non-professional - visual self-presentation over - though professional, but sometimes too much pushing - views from the outside. Unfortunately, *Moje tělo je ONA* also revealed the limits of lesbian visibility in the Czech environment - some protagonists insist that just thanks to their visualization as explicitly lesbian women the document must not be screened in public; consequently, the film is practically unavailable since its shooting. The shift in the television presentation of gays can be demonstrated by this year's portrait of Pavel Vítek in the cycle *13. komnata (13th chamber)*, presenting his personal story without any exoticism and necessity of justification.

Festival Scene

Annual film festivals represent very important part of Czech visual culture by frequent presentation of films which are not available in the mainstream selection of Czech cinemas. Nevertheless, the majority of presented movies are available at least in the festival archives. Since 1999 the international human rights documentary film festival *Jeden svět (One World)* is held in the Czech Republic. Since 2003 the festival features a section which frequently includes films with the subject of gay, lesbian and transgender identity. In the year 2003 it was the section *Quest for Identity*, in which the British film *Closer* and the amazing Norwegian documentary *All About My Father* appeared or, on importance of family love as well as own personal self-fulfillment irrespective to social conventions and standards. In the year 2004 in the category *Accepting Otherness* three documentaries appeared interested in the questions of homophobia: Swedish picture on coming-out of three adolescent girls *Don't You Worry, It Will Probably Pass*, Serbian documentary on homophobia in Serbia *Intolerance*, and the Norwegian film *7th Heaven*, on abstract artist fighting in the small village in a very personal way against conservative thinking of his neighborhood. In the year 2005 the section *About Love* focused on the presentation of "love in all its diverse forms". In the year 2006 one of the thematic workshops "Gender Montage" showed seven films from the post-Soviet countries, mapping the hard position of women on one hand and limits of dual understanding of gender identity on the other. With respect to the characteristics of the festival the presentation of gays and lesbians in this particular workshop is always held in the context of the fight for human rights and fight against homophobia. One of the main quality of *One World* is the fact that this festival offers in the mainstream environment documentary films from abroad,

presenting real stories with profound narrative value, thus forcing us to a comparative reflection of similar questions in our society.

Indeed, the *Katlovy Vary* and *Febiofest* film festivals touring do not offer gay and lesbian thematic sections; nevertheless, movies with homosexual theme and gay and lesbian characters are not lost there. For example, the main competition of the 32nd edition of the Karlovy Vary festival in the year 1997 was won by the French film of the director Alain Berliner *Ma vie en rose (My Life in Pink)* and the 38th edition in the year 2003 by the film of Ferzan Özpetek *La Finestra di fronte (Facing Window)*, both brilliantly and impressively narrating the stories on complicity of gender identity and tragically cut homosexual love.

Mezipatra, as the only gay and lesbian film festival in the Czech Republic, has gained a real name over the seven years of its existence. Statistical data from the festival prove that not only the offer of the movies increases each year, but also the interest of viewers. From careful inspection of internet references of various pages, ranging from news to special-interest pages, clearly results that also the general public's awareness of *Mezipatra* and its indisputable quality grows every year.

Offer of Gay and Lesbian Films in Cinemas and Video Libraries

Czech cinemas blindly copy all Hollywood production, not excluding from this offer also mainstream movies with the theme of homosexuality and same-sex relationships. Presentation of gays and lesbians in this context then depends on the quality of the treatment in the individual movies, and it is necessary to stress that recently the quality is rather high (at random, we can mention for example the movies *Far From Heaven*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Hours*, or *Brokeback Mountain*). Offer in the Czech video libraries is then surprisingly rich and



Film festival *Mezipatra* has been attracting visitors regardless of their sexual orientation. Photo: Jan Bartoš.

variable, far exceeding the offer in the cinemas. However, a major problem still is that mainstream video libraries do not classify films with gay and lesbian themes. On one hand we can say that it is a positive aspect that gay and lesbian movies are not "sorted" according to some questionable key; nevertheless, those interested must then rely on themselves and must know exactly what they search for, or they must rely on luck. Identically, for example Czech - Slovak Film Database (ČSFD) so far does not have at disposal (as common all over the world) genre identification of gay and lesbian movies. Majority of films falling into this classification is then found in the categories erotic, drama or psychological and the interested person must rely on exact title of the movie or at least on the name of the director.

Conclusion: Shifts in Image Creating and Representation of Gays and Lesbians in Visual Media

Generally, we can say that the shift, which is running in the visual representation of gays and lesbians in the Czech Republic, proceeds in a good way, in spite of the fact that we might certainly comment its slowness. Nevertheless - *Mezipatra* is shifting towards mainstream awareness of film festivals in our country, there



are more and more films with gay and lesbian subject-themes in all contexts, gay and lesbian characters are not anymore only idealised heroes of traumatic stories and homosexuality long-since stopped to be shocking and the most important component of their film identities. Presentation of gays and lesbians and their existence in the screens, TV screens, web pages, advertising billboards and video clips is becoming to be - as such - the mainstream part of the visual culture. And this is how it should be. What we should be aware of with this positive transformation and propagation is the mainstream aesthetics of gay and lesbian presentation that orders that identically to heterosexual characters also the homosexual

characters are prevailingly attractive, young, successful, longing for orderly couple life in their own apartment with mortgage and going to the seaside for holidays. There might be too much of the mainstream.

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Queer theory, Sexual difference and Gender in Polish Cinema

Analysis of *A Conversation with the Man from the Closet* by Mariusz Grzegorzek

Małgorzata Radkiewicz (PL)

Queer theory assumes a skeptical attitude towards an unambiguous definition of sexual identity. It implies a departure from categories such as biological necessity, normative family structures, and objectified sexuality. Such departure from a conventional, schematic perception of gender and sex enables one to construe sexual identity as a process that is both individual and unique. It depends on a constant tension between normative, socio-cultural pressures and an individual striving towards liberation from all such pressures. An individual subject assumes its form in the process of a self-reflexive auto-creation. This auto-creation in turn may be characterized by the interdependence of identity and transgression, i.e., the crossing of dominant gender norms and a distancing from these norms. A subjective attitude towards sexual roles (in queer theory among others) boils down to an attempt to answer the following question: what is the essence of otherness? According to theorists, a transgression that is devoid of this type of a clear, underlying notion ends up being a charade. The understanding of difference in connection with marginalization and with a departure from the generally accepted standards is crucial for queer theory and for the interpretation of gender that it puts forth.

In *A Conversation with the Man from the Closet* (*Rozmowa z człowiekiem z szafy*, 1990) Mariusz Grzegorzek shows an unconventional attitude of an outsider who instead of maintaining a relationship with the outside world descends deeper and deeper into a world of his own.

Gender constructions in the film authored by Grzegorzek evokes the traditions of Polish art cinema, where “human lives did not develop in ways of which the protagonists were worthy, and both everyday and historical circumstances did not function the way one would have expected.” Grzegorzek’s consistent striving towards a clear and unsettling presentation of emotions and of a subjective worldview, instead of just telling the story, contributes to his protagonists’ originality.

A Painful Difference – A Conversation with the Man from the Closet

Grzegorzek’s first feature film gives expression to a conscious creation, both in the realm of his own attitude as an artist, and in the poetic film style. Maria Kornatowska considers Grzegorzek’s work to be a phenomenon unlike any other in Polish cinema, free from fashionable trends and market mechanisms. She looks at Grzegorzek as an uncompromising film director who remains faithful to himself and who consistently strives to attain a higher degree of artistic self-consciousness. The plot of *A Conversation with a Man from the Closet* and the constructions of its protagonists, Anna- the mother (Bożena Adamek) and of Karol, the son (Rafał Olbrychski), were, according to the director’s design, sufficiently clear and precise to have the viewers accept his individual way of working. Grzegorzek states in an interview that he is most interested in the type of film that presents a kind of a fairy tale, even if it is rather dark. This form



allows the film director to simplify conflicts, as well as the protagonists and their emotions, in order to present an unequivocal vision of the world that sways between good and evil. The metaphorical story of the mother whose child has been taken away by death underscores the fairy-tale-like character of Grzegorzek's film debut. The mother follows in her footsteps. She sacrifices her beautiful hair and her eyes along the way in order to get back the one she loves. Dream fantasies are interwoven with the narration of the protagonist who hides himself in the secure hiding place provided by the closet. The film opens with the male narrator's words: "I am fine. I do not want any changes. I do not need any changes. I do not need anything. I prefer to stay here, in my closet. It's been three months since I left here for the last time. This is fine." Karol's subsequent reminiscences provide a commentary to the episodes evoked in the retrospectives. They emerge gradually to form a chronological whole. The film's fabula tells the story of a child who lost his father, and who is raised by his mother, in complete isolation. The son describes her in the following words: "Strange, really strange, somehow all tangled inside. This is what I inherited from her. After my father's death, she never mentioned him. All she had was me. (...) I was happy. I did not know another life. She was really good for me."

The end of the boy's isolation comes when the mother takes note of his sexual maturity. Anna finds it to be disgusting and terrifying. At the same time, it awakens her interest in men again. After she finds herself a boyfriend, she pushes the son away and she sends him to a boarding school. The seventeen-year-old gets his first opportunity to meet other people and to establish contact with the outside world. As he remembers: "It was not bad, being in the institution. I did not care where I was." His encounter with a sympathetic teacher, Kowalski (Marek Walczewski) helps Karol shape his

male identity. Kowalski's advice gave him faith in his own abilities and convinced him that one should not always be afraid, and that it is necessary to fight for one's own position in life. After the young man leaves his school it turns out that it is a lot more difficult to deal with one's own strangeness in reality. Outside of the boarding school the young man is no longer accepted. He encounters a humiliating persecution from the side of his superior (Adam Ferency) in his new work place. The abused dishwasher suffers a nervous breakdown and he takes revenge on his boss. He is able to find respite only after he hides away in the interior of a wooden wardrobe in a rented apartment. He returns to the previous state of consciousness by saying: "I am not an adult. I do not want to be an adult. I hate being an adult." Among piles of scattered clothing, he dreams, vainly, about a return to his childhood. The way in which the protagonist's sexual identity is presented offers an embodiment of Grzegorzek's artistic ideas, which depend on the presentation of phenomena that do not fit within the frame of accepted norms. Karol's personality goes against the rules: the protagonist attains the state of inner peace only after he immerses himself in solitude. The wardrobe plays the role of his hide out. Here is what he says about it: "Sometimes I wish the wardrobe disappeared. I spend my entire days and nights inside it. I do not feel like leaving in the morning. I hate it when I am leaving. I need a mask. I want to get into a stroller. I want to be one year old again. Is this going to come about? I know that it will not."

In queer theory the closet appears as a metaphor for the opposition between everything on the outside, on the one hand, and the world inside on the other; it stands for the opposition between everything that is ordered and that which is unsystematic, other, abnormal. An "inner exclusion" forms one of the key issues within this pattern. It transforms the process of sexual



identity formation into a “vicious circle of exclusions.” This problem arises when an individual does not find – among the images and sexual roles that are offered to him/her - a satisfying model of sexual identity that would correspond to his/her personality, sexual preferences, behavior, attitudes, values. Otherness means exclusion and marginalization, although it is also decisive when it comes to the individual’s uniqueness. Otherness emerges as an inseparable element of a complex and multifarious structure of individual identity. Queer theorists have applied the notion of an identity “across” to describe it.

A voluntary seclusion in a closet becomes a symbol of a protest against patriarchy and its heterosexual discourse. It represents an attempt at finding an alternative solution. The networks of normative definitions that regulate sexual identity within a given culture provide the necessary context for the understanding of such deconstructive actions. Social organization is based on the repetition and the reproduction of accepted patterns that take into consideration to some degree also individual likenesses and differences. The situation in which Grzegorzek places his protagonist mirrors the subordination of an individual to a dominant order. Karol’s “different” behavior points at the same time to the “possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of humanity’s social landscape.” The notion of a “man from the closet” that appears in the film’s title pertains to individual attitudes as well as to a certain psychic condition. It expresses an opposition to the dominant system, its ideas, and sexual identity patterns. Karol graduates from school and he starts a job, beginning an independent life. The abuse he suffers from the cafeteria manager makes the sensitive young man opt for a solitary, isolated existence. The same type of existence had been imposed on him during his childhood by his mother. One can consider the way he behaves to be a con-

scious violation of existing norms. According to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, such attitudes appear in every, even the most restrictive system, and they come as reactions to the arbitrary, established patterns. Kosofsky-Sedgwick claims that, if one should give serious consideration to such categories that differentiate people as gender, race, nationality class, and sexual orientation, then each of them contains a potential for undermining existing stereotypes and traditional ways of thinking about sexuality and gender as constructions of sexual identity.

The space of voluntary as well as involuntary isolation serves as an antidote to the outside world and its hostility towards any type of difference in Grzegorzek’s film. The protagonist obsessively returns to the home enclosure, and he finds shelter in the secure interior of the wooden wardrobe. Psychologists consider this type of escapism to be symptomatic of an individual’s lack of adjustment to “normal” life. This condition manifests itself among others in the individual’s search for objects that help him/her to overcome pain and to minimize fear inspired by everything that comes from the outside world. The objects’ symbolism becomes more important than the objects themselves in *A Conversation with a Man from the Closet*. The cavernous piece of furniture represents for Karol a place where he can immerse himself in a world of his own. The director uses the motif of the closet as a pretext to show a person’s inner life as “it appears and is understood with all of its complexity, ambiguity, darkness, and mystery.” In his film debut Grzegorzek presented a portrait of various stages of the protagonist’s life, while consistently maintaining the perspective of “pain, and not harmony, balance or strength that comes from comprehending and being familiar with the world.”

His first film gave Grzegorzek a chance to try to answer the following question: “What is it that is inside of us, who are we?” The film



presents a study of a young man's psyche, his sexual identity, formed through the complicated relationship with his mother and the surrounding world that rejects his difference. Critics pointed to the film's metaphysical dimension present in the protagonists' behavior, their susceptibility to the influence of mysterious and irrational impulses. Human relationships are in the state of crisis that results from the inability of establishing authentic contact, even with someone close. Maria Kornatowska concentrates on an examination of the relationship of the son and the mother. She points out that the "gene of evil" appears to be present in their relationship, and it hurts them both. The way Karol acts results from and comes as a continuation of his mother's neurotic personality. Some psychologists would consider the way the mother acts towards him typical of women frustrated in their emotional life who raise children by themselves, and whose fathers have either abandoned them early on or orphaned them. Such mothers may display an emotional hunger. Since it cannot be satisfied by adult male partners, the mothers find a vent for their emotions and a partial satisfaction of their feelings in the love they feel for their sons. Specialists emphasize that the mother's egocentric love provides a form of a cover-up for her reluctance to accept the child's growing up and his imminent maturity. The mother wants to keep the child for as long as possible. She tries to attain her goal by systematically undermining the child's individuality, and by demanding his constant attention and presence.

The film's main protagonist, the "man from the closet," personifies a "misunderstanding between body and soul," which is typical of neurotics who use all sorts of means to defend themselves from the world. The protagonist's personality and his existence have been determined by the problems he faces when trying to define his ego. Karol is not able to think about himself by using categories of an independent

subject. It is difficult for him to free himself from the inhibitions and burdens that result from his attachment to his mother and from the memories of his childhood experiences.

As Adrienne Rich notes, every culture accepts a version of a relationship between the mother and the child - whose birth and upbringing justifies female existence - that it deems most suitable. At the same time, a patriarchal society perceives the mother as a being who controls, who is filled with guilt. The mother transfers the guilt onto others. The mother-son relationship is also connected with death. The male person remembers that his own existence "is a mere speckle, a weak and blind piece of flesh" which grows inside the woman's body. He fears a re-absorption into this body. In Grzegorzek's film this condition is represented by dream sequences, in which the specter of death appears next to the figure of the mother, who serves as an intermediary between life and the forces that destroy it. The behavior of Karol's employer, the cafeteria manager, is just as domineering as that of the mother. The manager continuously demonstrates his superiority over the boy by ordering him to carry out humiliating tasks, such as the washing of the huge, grease-covered ovens.

Grzegorzek attempted to "construct something that would attack people from the gut, from the back of the head, something that would really work." This is why he treats both femininity and masculinity in a controversial fashion, and rejects traditional definitions and stereotypical convictions about their "natural," obvious and unambiguous character. The axis of action in this film revolves around the problem of identity and gender construction. The structure of the film presents a multilayered story that allows to show "something fresh, unsettling, neurotic, something that would express the times we live in." The director did not see anything like this in Polish cinema of the time. The naivete of the director's declaration testifies that, as a first-film



director he tried both to explain and to provide reasoning for his attitude. His first film was sufficiently convincing artistically that he did not need to provide similar arguments on the occasion of his subsequent artistic ventures.

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Construction of male homosexuality in Polish cinema

Ewa Mazierska (PL)

For the whole of the communist period male homosexuality on screen, along with other types of sexual otherness, remained practically silent in critical discourse in Poland, despite the production of a large number of movies with this motif. One critic mentions as many as thirty-five gay men present in Polish postwar films (Jagielski 2004: 68). When this issue was considered in Poland, it was usually tackled in relation to Western European and American cinema. This attitude prevailed well into the postcommunist period. For example, in an issue of the alternative film periodical *Easy Rider*, entitled 'Gay cinema' published in 1996, there was not a single word on homosexuality in Poland or in relation to Polish cinema except for some observations written by Derek Jarman in his diary, when he visited Poland in 1990. Moreover, when critics tackled the Polish film with strong homosexual themes, they either overlooked them, or considered them as a sign of something else (see Ostrowska and Stevenson 2000). However, eventually the programme of 'opening the closet' began to be realised in Polish cinema, as in other areas of cultural production. In this short essay I am attempting to summarise the trajectory of a Polish male homosexual on screen, from communist to postcommunist period.

Uranians and ordinary men in the films of the communist period

Probably the first Polish film to include a homosexual character was the comedy *Ojciec (Father, 1967)* by Jerzy Hoffman. Here the role of the

homosexual is episodic; he is only a friend of the main character. However, from my perspective this film is important as it provided a matrix for the way homosexual characters were cast in the Polish films of the next two decades. They appeared either in comedies or were meant to add a comical dimension to the narrative, and they were reduced to episodic or at best secondary characters. This was the case, amongst others, in *Motylem jestem (I'm a Butterfly, 1976)* directed by Jerzy Gruza and *Zakłete rewiry (Hotel Pacific, 1975)* by Janusz Majewski (which was a Polish-Czechoslovak coproduction). In the first film the homosexual is a ballet dancer; in the second an older effeminate man who is falling for a young, straight man. In Polish jargon this type is called *ciotka (auntie)*. At least half of the remaining homosexual characters in the films of the 1970s and 1980s were either ballet dancers (or representatives of similar professions, such as circus performers) or older aristocrats. By themselves such stereotypes are not homophobic; after all, theatres and operas were frequent sites of homosexual subcultures. Yet, in the context of postwar Polish culture they were because aristocrats and artists represented the sections of Polish society that communist authorities barely tolerated. Aristocracy was a remnant of the old, overthrown class system; artists were the parasites taking advantage of the working classes, and both were associated with decadence and self-indulgence. Moreover, in the films featuring them a style of acting was employed to distance the viewer from the

homosexual character. For example, the gestures of the ballet dancer in *I'm a Butterfly* are extremely mannered and his voice, as Maciej Maniewski puts it, is the 'voice of an eunuch' (Maniewski 1994: 88).

Camerawork and the *mise-en-scène* are another means to create distance between the homosexual and heterosexual characters in the film, and by extension, between the homosexual on screen and the heterosexual audience in the cinema. *Kontrakt* (Contract, 1980) by Krzysztof Zanussi provides a seminal example of such a strategy. Here we find an effeminate ballet dancer, who takes part in a conversation with a famous French ex-ballerina, who pays a visit to the Polish opera. This man, played by Eugeniusz Priwieziencew, who specialises in the roles of eccentric and emotionally unbalanced men, is extremely objectified by the camera. We look at him from a distance, and do not hear what he says, as his voice disappears amongst the many voices uttered by the dancers and other opera sounds. He is the only man in a company of female dancers, which underscores his position as a 'queen'. Moreover, he is looked at by a young woman who does not know much about ballet conventions, therefore is embarrassed by his demeanour, and her embarrassment adds to the impression of his strangeness created by his costume and mannerisms. He, on the other hand, is unable to return her gaze and to force her to question her appearance and behaviour and feel strange in her heterosexuality. The otherness of the dancer is strengthened by his proximity to the French ex-ballerina, who is portrayed by Zanussi as an utterly snobbish and decadent person, complete with a miniature dog, smuggled in her handbag from Paris. It is she who initiates the excursion to the opera and who eventually invites the dancer to the wedding of her brother-in-law's grandson, in this way changing the noble event into a decadent farce.

In the 1970s and 1980s Polish filmmakers even succeeded in laughing at homosexuals without showing them, as in *Dzięcioł* (*The Woodpecker*, 1970) by Jerzy Gruza. Here a middle-aged man, whose wife, a famous sports-woman, left him for three days to take part in a sports championship, embarks on an affair with another woman. In order to have an empty



From *Zygfryd*. Photo: author's archive.

house to win her heart, he takes his ten-year-old son to the theatre, where he leaves him on his own. When he returns, saying 'I came to collect my boy', he is informed by the porter, 'The entrance to the ballet is from the other side'. It is worth noting that this apparently innocent joke plays on a couple of not-so-innocent associations, including the link between homosexuality and power (the boy is to be collected by an older man, as a slave or servant by his master) and homosexuality and paedophilia (the object of affection is a child). I find such jokes particularly dangerous because, unlike blatant homophobia that can easily be recognised and challenged, they appealed to the audience's subconscious.

In the bulk of Polish films of the 1970s and 1980s, including those previously mentioned, the homosexual category is defined less by the direction of the sexual preferences of its members and more by their gender identities. Here

the homosexual is the 'invert' - the feminine man, the owner of a feminine soul enclosed in a male body. As John Marshall maintains, such a concept prevailed in Western discourses on homosexuality in the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, to be gradually replaced by the conception of a homosexual as being attracted to the same sex (see Marshall 1981). Hence, we can deduce that the way Polish cinema in the 1970s and 1980s constructed homosexuals testifies to Polish tardiness towards the West in this matter, of something like twenty to thirty years. The proliferation of 'pansies' or home-grown *ciotki* used for comic effect in the 1970s can also be explained by the rise of popular or populist cinema in this period – the final period of socialism in Poland. As comedies constituted a large part of the diet offered to viewers at the time, there was a need to find new objects to make viewers laugh. Homosexuals were well suited to such a purpose because, unlike politicians or policemen, they did not constitute any powerful group, therefore laughing at them proved cheap and the filmmakers could take for granted that the laughter would be shared by the vast majority of the audience.

In *Ziemia obiecana* (*The Promised Land*, 1975), directed by Andrzej Wajda, the discourse on sexuality is intertwined with a discourse on ethnicity. Based on the novel of the same title by Władysław Reymont, about the growth of capitalism in Łódź during the nineteenth century, Wajda's film focuses on three male characters, an impoverished Polish noble Karol Borowiecki, a Jew Moryc Welt, and a German Maks Baum who cooperate to build a factory that is supposed to make them a fortune. Through the narrative, casting (Karol is played by Daniel Olbrychski who was the sex symbol of the 1970s) and the use of the *mise-en-scène* Wajda constructs a sexual hierarchy of his male characters and by extension, of nations to which they belong. Thus, Karol is at the top

of the hierarchy, having a Polish fiancée who is utterly devoted to him, a Jewish lover and eventually a rich German wife. Below him is Maks who lusts after Karol's Polish fiancée, but fails to seduce her. At the very bottom is Jewish Moryc who is unhappily in love with Karol, as demonstrated by the photo of Karol that he carries with him (and once loses to the embarrassment of his friends) and his exaggerated gestures and mannerisms. Thus, Wajda uses sexual stereotypes to elevate Poles over other nationalities and ethnicities. I regard such representation as compensatory; it betrays Wajda's willingness



From *Egoiści*. Photo: author's archive.

to flatter his male compatriots who might feel inferior towards nations more successful than Poles in the sphere of the economy or politics, or even his own complex of being a powerless and emasculated Pole.

In Reymont's novel Moryc is a heterosexual man, unhappily in love with a young woman.



He also proves treacherous in his business dealings with Karol and his disloyalty is one of the reasons for Karol's bankruptcy and subsequent moral fall, whereas in the film this disaster is presented as a result of Karol's love affair with a married Jewish woman. Ostrowska and Stevenson argue that Wajda removed any taint of treachery from Moryc's character to avoid the accusation of anti-Semitism (see Ostrowska and Stevenson 2000). In my opinion, by moving the blame for Karol's downfall from a Jewish man to a Jewish woman (who is, besides, portrayed by Wajda as a dangerously sensual creature, not unlike in Jewish women in Nazi propaganda) Wajda's film did not become less anti-Semitic. On the other hand, through linking Jewishness with homosexuality (both validated negatively by the majority of Poles), Wajda played into the hands of those who regard homosexuality as an 'imported illness', foreign to the Polish national character. It could be argued that by rejecting the stereotype of the 'ballet boy' and instead, showing him as a man engaged in the 'serious' activities of setting up his own business Wajda offers us a more progressive vision of a homosexual man than in the Polish films previously discussed. However, at the same time he suggests that in Poland a homosexual can only be treated seriously if his interests, habits and values are in accordance with those of the straight men; he cannot enter 'polite society' on his own terms.

The first Polish film that attempts to 'make a modern homosexual' (to use Kenneth Plummer's phrase) on the Polish screen is *Zygfyrd* (1987) by Andrzej Domalik. This is also the first Polish film that puts a homosexual character at the centre of the narrative. Based on a short story of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who was himself bisexual, and set in 1934 in a sleepy village in the south of Poland, it depicts the fascination of Stefan Drawicz, an older art connoisseur and philosopher, for a young acrobat from an itiner-

ant circus, the eponymous Zygfryd. After seeing the young man's performance, Drawicz invites Zygfryd to his home and gradually draws him into his world of art, literature and philosophy that he presents to him as full of spiritual beauty and harmony. Moreover, he pampers the teenager, offering him fine alcohol and buying him expensive clothes. As a result of this exposure to art and luxury, Zygfryd begins to feel out of place in the circus and shows contempt for his colleagues who now appear to him crude and barbaric. His distance from the old company is increased by a rivalry between himself and a number of other men, including the circus manager Waldo, for the sexual favours of the most attractive woman in the circus, Maria who is also Waldo's wife. Having to choose between Stefan who appears always to be accessible, and Maria whose interest in him is flimsy, Zygfryd gravitates towards Drawicz. Yet, he becomes repelled by the old man, while posing naked for his portrait as a beautiful Greek male, Drawicz touches him on the arm (that may be a prelude to more intimate caresses). Zygfryd abruptly rejects this intimate gesture, hits Stefan and runs off, convinced that he killed his patron. When the same evening, during his trapeze performance, he sees Drawicz in his usual place in the audience, looking at him as before, he is convinced that he sees a ghost. He loses his balance, falls from the ladder and is paralysed. As a cripple, he has no value for the circus, which leaves him behind and travels on. He moves into the house of Drawicz, but by this stage the old aesthete has no interest in him and avoids any contact with him.

Although the relationship between the older, rich aristocrat and the young artist conforms to the (homophobic) stereotype of the same sex liaison, familiar to Polish and foreign viewers, Domalik breaks with the usual way the men in such a relationship are represented. His Zygfryd reminds us less of an 'invert', more of a



'new man' who rejects macho masculinity not because he feels too weak or feminine to be macho, but because he regards such a model, encapsulated in the film by Waldo, as outdated, even ridiculous. His dismissive attitude towards Waldo is perfectly revealed in a scene when Zygfryd refuses to be the target in Waldo's knife throwing act, showing his boss that he is above his 'masculine' games. Similarly, Domalik leaves no doubt that although Drawicz's sexual behaviour is homosexual, his gender identity is male and his gender role is masculine. Everyone around him treats him as a 'proper' male whilst being aware of his sexual preferences. The casting and acting confirm the 'manliness' of both Stefan and Zygfryd. Drawicz is played by Gustaw Holoubek, a well known (heterosexual) actor who himself specialises in the roles of mature intellectuals, bringing to his character the seriousness and dignity of his earlier roles. Zygfryd, played by Tomasz Hudziec, who was earlier cast as a child actor in a number of films, accentuates the adolescence of his character, his openness to new experiences.

Ostrowska and Stevenson note that in the Polish press *Zygfryd* was considered to be a film in which homosexual attraction epitomises something else, typically a 'purely intellectual yearning for perfect beauty' (see Ostrowska and Stevenson 2000). In my opinion, however, the opposite is true; following Iwaszkiewicz, Domalik unmasks such an 'intellectual yearning' as hiding a purely physical passion for a perfect, adolescent male body. Drawicz is quite frank with Zygfryd that his collection of pictures (dominated by portraits of naked young men), pales into insignificance in comparison with the beauty of young flesh. Accordingly, his passion for collecting art and his own attempts at sketching portraits of young men and his own self-portraits as an attractive youth are poor substitutes for physical contact with another man, and the way to come to terms with his own

ageing and loneliness. Consequently, Drawicz's later rejection of Zygfryd is a logical development of his mindset. Once the young body is broken, the attractiveness to an older man also evaporates and the boy is discarded like an old toy. It could be argued that the fate of Zygfryd epitomises the predicament of young men who sell their bodies to older men. Although at one point they might appear to be in a position of power over those who pay them, this position is only temporary, if not illusory.

For me *Zygfryd* produces an autobiographical effect – I cannot help but see in the figure of the ageing *culturati* lusting after the young boy Iwaszkiewicz himself. If this effect was intended by the writer, he offered us a sombre, if not masochistic diagnosis of homosexual relations, as based on inequalities and destined to fail. Or, perhaps such a construction of homosexual love is the price writers and filmmakers have to pay to be able to represent it at all, because happy homosexual love would be unpalatable to Polish audiences (see Maniewski 1994; Kot 2006).

In the same year as *Zygfryd*, *Magnat* (*The Magnate*, 1987) by Filip Bajon was also released. *The Magnate* invites comparison with Wajda's *The Promised Land* because here homosexuality is also inscribed in the discourse on Polishness. Bajon depicts the history of the fictitious aristocratic Silesian von Teuss family (modelled on the real von Plesses of Pszczyna) during the first half of the twentieth century. The patriarch of the family, Hans Heinrich von Teuss, is a virile man who was married twice and fathered four children, including three sons with his first wife Daisy. Moreover, for most of his life he successfully inhabited the geographical and cultural boundaries spanning Poland and Germany. Nationality was never a problem for him; he happily served the German Kaiser, but also employed a Polish engineer to manage his coalmines. By comparison, his sons prove

unable either to emulate their father's potency or balance their multicultural heritage. Franzel, the eldest son, who comes across as cold, asexual and domineering, becomes a Nazi collaborator, and is involved in the abduction of his youngest brother Bolko by the Nazis. Bolko, on the other hand, is a compulsive gambler and womaniser who spends most of his life in the casinos of Nice and Monte Carlo and eventually marries his stepmother when his father is still alive, causing a major scandal in the whole region. Finally, the middle son Conrad, is a homosexual. His homosexuality is construed by Bajon as one of the flaws suffered by von Teuss younger generation, which together mark the family's decadence and decline, not unlike Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (*La Caduta degli Dei*, 1969). However, against the backdrop of his brothers' extreme behaviour, Conrad comes across as the most moderate and balanced. He neither squanders the family fortune, nor become possessed by a dangerous ideology. In his pragmatism and 'ideological sobriety' he proves closest to his father who eventually chooses him as his successor. Conrad is also the only one of the brothers to embrace his Polishness, as signified by his conversion to Catholicism, having a Polish lover (who is the son of the manager of his father's coalmining business) and relocating to Warsaw. Furthermore, Conrad is the only one of the sons and indeed, the only member of von Teuss clan, who survives the political storms of the 1930s and 1940s and after the Second World War returns to the family's palace, albeit only as a tourist. The style of acting of Jan Englert, playing Conrad, contrasting with the histrionic performance of Bogusław Linda as Bolko, underscores his character's moderation and normality. On the whole, whilst Bajon succumbs to the homophobic view that homosexuality is a deviation from the norm, he also stresses that it is a minor aberration that might save a person from more

dangerous pathologies such as political fanaticism. The construction of Conrad suggests that in contrast to Wajda, for Bajon homosexuality is compatible with Polishness, although not with the type of Polishness exalted by Polish romantics. The difference in this respect between these two directors reflects the wider variations in the way they construct Polishness. Wajda



From *Kochankowie z Marony*. Photo: author's archive.

focuses on the dominant discourses of Polishness; the Polishness of his central characters is beyond any doubt. I will argue that this is the reason that Wajda is the ultimate Polish national director. Bajon, on the other hand, searches for liminal identities, often suggesting that for people who lived on the margins of Poland, national identity was a question of pragmatic choice, not patriotism.

Although films such as *Zygfryd* offered new homosexual characters, they did not inscribe them into a new type of film that foregrounds gay sensitivity. To put it differently, there were films about homosexuals in Polish cinema, but there was no Polish queer cinema worthy its name.

Images of homosexuality in postcommunist cinema

Films about homosexuality and other alternative sexualities erupted after 1989 in Poland. More homosexuals were seen on Polish screen



after 1989 than in the entire communist period. Moreover, members of sexual minorities represent a wider social spectrum than before and they receive more prominent parts than they did in the films made under socialism. In this respect postcommunist Polish cinema can be compared to Spanish cinema after Franco when the affirmation of the new national identity manifested itself through an upsurge in images of homosexual, transvestite and transsexual men and women. However, we must be careful not to push this analogy too far as whilst in post-Franco Spain representatives of non-straight sexualities were brought to the screen chiefly by Pedro Almodóvar who shared his homosexual characters attitudes and styles, and was not shy to show himself amongst them, in Polish and Czechoslovak cinema a large gulf has remained between the author and subject of the film. After 1989, as before, the films about homosexual characters are made by straight directors or at least by those who do not admit to being homosexual. Moreover, the old homophobic stereotypes that began to be challenged in the Polish cinema of the 1980s, did not die after 1989, but even erupted with a vengeance, although they are now accompanied by representations of new types.

In the majority of Polish postcommunist films homosexual men are still seen through the hostile or contemptuous eyes of heterosexual characters and directors. Moreover, homosexuality, even more than during the communist period, is linked to inequality and oppression, and serves as an indicator of other types of negatively valued otherness, such as decadent aristocracy. *Zakład* (*The Reformatory*, 1990) by Teresa Kotlarczyk and *Urok wszeteczny* (*Devilish Charm*, 1996) by Krzysztof Zanussi (both directors renowned for their solemn films, devoted to Catholic figures), perfectly illustrate this trend. Kotlarczyk's film depicts a reformatory for young men from a young woman's

perspective that can be equated with the point of view of the director herself. She is making a documentary about 'the human being in extreme circumstances' and its extremity can be equated with totalitarianism. The hierarchy of the totalitarian system is maintained through sexuality. As Ostrowska and Stevenson argue, 'Homosexuality is presented here as both a result of a totalitarian system and the very support of it. Homosexuality itself is seen as a relationship of power: one forces somebody into "it" or is forced into "it" oneself' (Ostrowska and Stevenson 2000).

Zanussi casts as the main character an old and rich aristocrat who uses his position to sexually exploit and humiliate younger men. The narrative focuses on his attempt to corrupt a young married academic Karol, who due to financial problems begins to work as his assistant. However, the older homosexual fails to pervert the young man and ends up disgracing himself. It is worth mentioning that the homosexual is played by Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, who played sexually ambiguous characters in Zanussi's earlier films such as *Za ścianą* (*Behind the Wall*, 1971) and *Barwy ochronne* (*Camouflage*, 1976). The fact that in this film his character comes out, encourages us to treat the earlier incarnations of Zapasiewicz as homosexuals also. Zapasiewicz's roles in Zanussi's films can even be treated as the trajectory of a Polish homosexual: from total sexual abstinence in *Behind the Wall*, through timid attempts to enter into a relationship with other men of similar tendencies in *Camouflage*, to openly homosexual behaviour in *Devilish Charm*. Unfortunately, by the time 'Zanussi/Zapasiewicz's homosexual' is able to declare his sexual preferences and act upon them, he is too old and bitter to build a lasting partnership with another man. Thus, paradoxically, despite the open homophobia, conveyed by Zanussi in his last film on this subject, the film points to the damage the atmosphere of sexual intolerance

causes to the wellbeing of individuals who do not fit into mainstream society.

Ogniem i mieczem (*With Fire and Sword*, 1999), one of the principal examples of Polish heritage cinema, in a way reminiscent of Wajda's *The Promised Land*, uses homosexuality as a means to mark the difference between Poles and other nations. The film depicts Polish-Ukrainian conflict in the seventeenth century and represents the leader of the non-Christian Tatars who help the Ukrainians to fight the Poles, as having an effeminate male lover, whom he feeds with sweetmeats. Such an image poignantly contrasts with the portrayal of the 'spartan' Poles who do not have time for any frivolities and whose sole affection is directed either to their fiancées waiting for them in re-



From Kornblumenblau. Photo: author's archive.

mote villages, or to the Holy Mary. Hence, not unlike Wajda's film, homosexuality here equals foreignness and weakness.

Whilst the aforementioned films, and the bulk of remaining ones, are made from a dis-

tinctively homophobic perspective and depict a homosexual as a social outsider, *Egoiści* (*The Egoists*, 2000) by Mariusz Trelński treats him with some sympathy and situates at the centre of society. Despite that, I would describe it as a 'middle of the road film' that consciously or unconsciously slips into the familiar stereotypes. The main character, homosexual Filip, is a famous architect in his forties who lives in a tasteful house and socialises with Warsaw (heterosexual) *culturati* and yuppies. He does not look any different from his heterosexual male friends, even appears more 'cool' and macho than they, as testified by a female prostitute who takes him for a potential client. However, as time passes, the marks of his success, macho masculinity and belonging to the mainstream society drop and Filip reveals the familiar face (and body) of a Polish *ciotka*. His literal and metaphorical striptease takes place in his own house where we find him first pleading with his young soldier lover to stay with him, and when he refuses, dancing with a doll and crying. The doll is a sign of his effeminacy and, in his own words, plays the role of his adopted 'child' and therefore, a symbol of his aborted effort to create a family with his lover. Needless to say, such an image perfectly fits the opinion, typical of the Polish Church, but also famously expressed by Margaret Thatcher, that homosexuals only pretend to have families. The final stage of Filip's demise is his committing suicide by setting fire to himself in his own house. In this scene Filip takes off his clothes, including a tight, female corset that he wears under his masculine clothes - the symbol of his 'uranian' personality and his closet.

The Egoists is set in 2000 – the last year of the century and the millennium, regarded as the peak of decadence and the expected end of the world. Trelński plays on these associations, presenting Warsaw in 2000 as a contemporary inferno where people are desecrating religious



and national symbols and nothing is sacred any more. In this world a homosexual is not an exception to the rule, not an outsider, but a leader and a role model. The gap between the homosexuals and straight people is closing because heterosexual society adopted what was previously identified as homosexual lifestyles, becoming hedonistic, decadent, self-centred, sick and sterile. Treliński does not accuse Filip and others of his kind for depraving the 'healthy' youth; they engage in all possible illicit pleasures on their own initiative. However, for the homophobic critic the very proximity between the homosexual and the hedonistic, immoral youth might be enough to attribute the former full responsibility for corrupting the latter.

Parę osób, mały czas (*Few People, Small Time*, 2005) by Andrzej Barański can be regarded as another step towards making homosexuals more important in the narrative, as well as more complex and sympathetic, although again, not free from stereotypes. The main character is the previously mentioned poet and novelist, Miron Białoszewski (1922-1983). Barański's film acknowledges Białoszewski's homosexual identity, but focuses on the period of his life when he 'did not practice' homosexuality, following his separation from his long-term lover. During this time Białoszewski met a blind woman with artistic interests, Jadwiga Stańczakowa who was married and still lived with her philandering husband, but emotionally was separated from him. Despite her disability, she took the role of Białoszewski's secretary and personal assistant, trying (and succeeding) to organise the practical side of his life. He, on the other hand, helped her to battle with her depression and encouraged her to follow her artistic ambitions. During the time of their friendship, Stańczakowa wrote a diary, documenting their lives that provided the source of the film. As a result of choosing the period of Białoszewski's life dominated by the female presence, homo-

sexuality in *Few People, Small Time* sublimates into a certain sensibility conducive to artistic creativity – as was also the case of homosexuals depicted in Polish postwar literature (see Warkocki 2005). It is linked to the poet's famous sociality (his flat used to be an important literary salon in the 1960s and 1970s), his disdain for material possessions, his insistence on *carpe diem*, rather than making long-term plans, as well as his experience of being an outsider in socialist Poland. I will argue that this sublimation and consequently, avoiding the question of homosexual desire as sexual desire, is the chief reason that Barański's film was so well received by the Polish critics - it allows viewers who regard themselves as liberal and who are often 'closeted' to enjoy the feeling that they are sympathetic to the plight of Polish homosexuals without really challenging their values and tastes. Whilst in this respect I regard Barański's film as conservative or at least timid, in another I see it as courageous and pioneering in Polish cinema, thanks to representing relationships that do not adhere to the conservative, Catholic definitions of the 'family' but function well, giving love and support to its members and even providing a good environment for bringing up children (see Sobolewski 2005). Hence, *Few People, Small Time* has the potential to open a debate about the meaning of 'family' in the new postcommunist Poland. Finally, Barański's film deserves special attention and praise for documenting the cultural history of Polish homosexuals, which as Błażej Warkocki observes, is largely unwritten (see Warkocki 2005).

The last Polish film I want to discuss here is *Kochankowie z Marony* (*Lovers from Marona*, 2005) by Izabella Cywińska. Cywińska's movie is a remake of the film made almost forty years earlier by Andrzej Zarzycki, both being based on Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's novella of the same title. Comparison of these two films can thus serve as a litmus test of the change in the

attitudes to homosexuality that occurred in Poland over the period. Both films depict love between Ola, a young unmarried village teacher and Janek, a married patient from a sanatorium who is dying of consumption. However, Zarzycki makes their affair the kernel of the story. The tragedy in the film results from society's intolerance towards heterosexual promiscuity. Ola is spurned by the village community and despite Janek's affection, has to give way to his wife. In Cywińska's version, on the other hand, the situation is more complex, as Janek is also erotically involved with another man named Arek. Janek is bisexual or, to use more contemporary terminology, queer. What is equally remarkable is the director's lack of inhibition in presenting the physical side of the homosexual relationship and her sympathy towards all characters, irrespective of their gender and sexual orientation. The reason for her sympathy appears to be Cywińska's respect for love as the strongest and purest of human emotions, able to overcome death, and her conviction that love (or desire) is essentially the same in heterosexuals and homosexuals (see Pawłowski 2006). The addition of a homosexual liaison and the way it is represented obviously testifies to the openness with which homosexuality can be treated in Poland a decade and half after the fall of communism. It is worth adding that this openness was unattainable for Iwaszkiewicz himself. Although *Lovers from Marona* alludes to the greatest love of his life, for a man called Jurek Bleszyński, Iwaszkiewicz who co-wrote the script of Zarzycki's film, ensured that the narrative of cinematic *Lovers from Marona* is free of any traces of homosexual behaviour (ibid.: 13).

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What Image Are Gays and Lesbians Creating About Themselves in Various Media Campaigns?

Noemi Szabo (HU)

Seven years have passed since the 1999 Amsterdam Contract, which in its 13th paragraph prohibited discrimination based on sexuality. In 2002 the annual report of the Human Rights Watch stated that Hungary is still a place where homophobia exists. Since then the situation has improved a little, but in general it hasn't changed much. Homosexuality is still an issue in Hungary. A topic that still stirs most people's minds, and generates great arguments even among the most intelligent individuals. Gay media campaigns are very effective means of changing this, as the power of the media is almost almighty. The subsequent paragraphs aim at presenting the Hungarian situation, first discussing the recent past and the importance of the media as such and then focusing on some aspects of the gay media campaigns.

The love of the same-sex citizens was considered a crime to be punished until 1961 in Hungary. The changes in the law, however, did not help much to moderate discrimination. The next important date in Hungarian homosexual history is the year of 1967, when the age of consent of 20 years was reduced to 18. 35 years passed without any change. The age of consent changed again in 2002 to the age of 14, which is the same as the age of consent of heterosexuals.

The alteration of the age of consent was partly due to Hungary's aim to be a member of the European Union. In 1998 the European Parliament declared that the countries that hurt the

human rights of the homosexuals in their laws or regulations will not be accepted as members. Gays are recognized as common law spouses since 1995 – without the rights that straight people have. Hungary's EU membership might help activists to optimize this, as well. The goal and desire of most gays now in Hungary is to be able to marry each other officially - and child adoption, of course. The conception of the new Civil Code does include the widening of the gay life companion rights. The Hungarian Parliament plans to discuss this in 2007. The gay right activists are optimistic. The following lines are already a slogan: "We're going to walk hand in hand in five years. In ten years' time we're gonna marry. Give us fifteen years and we adopt children."

According to investigations conducted abroad at the end of the 20th century, the rate of the homosexuals was between 5 and 15 percent in European societies. Hungarian researches proved the same. This 5-15 percent in Hungary means that there are about half million grown-up citizens who can be called gay. With such a number they are the third biggest minority of the country after women and gypsies.

The means of mass media are those which have the most power in influencing the judgment of any minority groups, since their messages reach almost everybody. Because of its controlling and systematizing properties, the media suggests priorities: it pushes some things into the spotlight, while it hides others.



Thus, we can admit that it does determine reality as we perceive it. Since it is not only the common man who gets his information from the mass media, but also political leaders and celebrities, the messages of the mass media highly determine the public opinion, and they operate as a link between the interaction of the political and the social sphere. Consequently, the media is essential and necessary for the survival and acceptance of the gay society, since it is the thing that transmits messages, which then determine the opinions of the people. For the homosexual individual the reflexions of the mass media operate as a mirror and have a great role in their identity-searching and self-determining process. According to a study conducted by Marc E. Vargo, 15 percent of men realized that they were gay based upon their reading material. This is rather problematic, since it can be claimed to this day, that most of the information resources are homophobic and paint an inconvenient image about the love of same-sex people. We very rarely find articles or studies that provide us with balanced information, throwing light upon both the positive and negative aspects of this lifestyle. This is quite dangerous, because it makes harder for those searching for their real self to find the significant answers. The tendency is that the so called heterosexual media pushes the gay issues into a negative direction, while the gay media does the opposite.

In Hungary, just like everywhere in the world, at the beginning of representing the gay society, bizarre and humorous images were shown. Describing homosexuality as a lifestyle was missing altogether. For the Hungarians talking about gays was a taboo in the seventies. The topic was only referred to in case of scandals or crimes. Around 1980 homosexuality was considered to be the eccentric lifestyle of artists and politicians, so the topic was an

informational ‘treat’ that emphasized extremity. The question of gays emerged as an issue of human rights at the end of the 80s – beginning of 90s. Since then we bump into it frequently, what is more, it is considered a fashionable subject, however we can still experience the reluctance, even disdain of the society.

The first gay magazine called *Mások* (Others) started in 1989, but its official debut was in 1991. It still exists today, going strong among the younger ones. The first Hungarian internet site was called www.gay.hu and it was started in 1990. At the beginning it was basically only good for chatting, not for spreading information. As far as the timing is concerned, the second gay newspaper, *NaVégre!* (AtLast!) debuted together with the second gay internet site www.pride.hu in 2001. The radio career of the Hungarian homosexuals started in 1993 with the show of Zsazsa Tax, a woman imitator. The show was broadcast by Tilos Radio (Prohibited Radio), which had quite a reputation at that time. It was the most liberal radio, always surrounded by some scandal or at least an air of really progressive and underground vibration. The great breakthrough however, was the show called *Őnazonos* (~Same as me, SiMElar) of Balázs Pálfi. It was broadcast by the state radio Radio Petőfi, and this is one of the reasons why the people had accepted it more easily. The show is on to this day. The first absolutely gay radio was started in 2005. It’s called Radio G and it is an internet radio from gays for gays. Lately, the number of the internet sites has also increased and is increasing day by day. Next to some gay characters in the TV-serials, the Hungarian reality shows did let gays and lesbians in, but except Balázs Pálfi’s monthly radio show (and Radio G broadcasting basically only music) there is still no constant live gay program in the country. Thus, gay issues are hosted by straight media or by the gay press.



In order to conduct a campaign one just needs a good reason. People who are oppressed by any kind of power feel an even greater need to stand up for themselves. Usually, campaigns last for a while, then they end, and there is not much left to do, but to wait for the outcome. Naturally, gays have campaigns as well. However, until the day society fully accepts their way of life, we will bump into gay campaigns. If we look at homosexual life from an activist point of view, we can even say that the life of gays is a never-ending, constant campaign. If you are gay, and your environment knows it, you always have to watch out what you do and say, how you do and say it – in order to earn the tolerance of those around you and to paint a good picture of the gay society. If you succeed in doing so, the personal campaign was a good one, and you might be able to state that you altered one or two person’s opinion about same-sex love. If you are a celebrity or a well-known person, the task is easier – and harder at the same time. Since the media deals with you all the time, you reach a lot more people. But because of the same reason your responsibility is bigger, as well. A good example for this is Klára Ungár, the first politician in Hungary who came out (March, 2005). With her act of accepting a TV-show’s invitation and declaring that she is a lesbian, she stirred up the public opinion. The media and the people began to talk about it, and this way the question of homosexuals got into focus. The pictures the TV, the radio and the newspapers presented about the politician were that of a human being. Those interested in the case had to realize that Klára Ungár was just like them: a human being, with the same joys, problems and personal traits like everybody else. We can say that this was a successful campaign. Naturally, we could go on listing the persons who did, or do the same, but there is no space for this now. Nevertheless, it is compulsory to name the new Mr. Gay Europe,

because he is Hungarian. The name is Nándi Gyöngyösi. This one-person campaign is a lot more organized and complicated than a coming out. The winner (“the most beautiful and clever boy of Europe”) has great tasks coming up. He still has to prove he is worth talking about not only in Europe, but elsewhere, too. At the moment he is among the few who can do a great deal against the discrimination of homosexuals in Hungary – and in the world. So far it seems that his campaign was a great success even among the heterosexual majority. Nándi is talked about in the media only positively. An instance: “we are talking about a modest, but not poor-spirited, jabbering boy, who is desperately in love with his boyfriend.” /www.velevet.hu/

Naturally, campaigns including many people are a lot easier to attend, since the presence of others walking in the same shoes gives one strength and faith in the good cause. The biggest homosexual campaign of the kind is the annual LGBT festival. This is the event that gets the most media coverage, as well. Fortunately, we can state that Hungary is tolerant enough and thus the mass media is not full of scandals at the time of the marches and demonstrations. Of course, there is a small group of people every year that tries to bother them, but this can be called a minor problem comparing to the surrounding countries. In the past years the news (both gay and straight) about the festivals painted quite a balanced picture about the community.

As far as anti-discrimination campaigns are concerned, it has to be stated that there are very few – if any – homosexual campaigns that were invented for the mass media in Hungary. The above mentioned radio shows and festivals might be squeezed into this category (together with the open letters to the government in the case of smaller scandals), however, the everyday heterosexual person, who is not



especially interested in the life of the gay community, does not bump into gay media campaigns very often. Hungarian gays are a bit absorbed in their own world. Maybe this is because of the average minority-feeling, or because they do not have spaces/resources for that, or both. Whatever the reasons, one can notice that there are several media campaigns inside the gay community, while almost none in the 'outside world.' In the gay magazines and on the web pages same-sex people keep expressing their opinions, they organize events, have discussions about finding their real self, handling the heterosexuals' assaults, gay rights (nowadays especially the issue of marriage), etc. There is a lot said about HIV/AIDS, too, and safe sex. Naturally, since these media campaigns were invented by gays and are aimed at gays, their tone, wording and atmosphere is a bit different than it would be in the case of campaigns aimed at heterosexuals. Nonetheless, in many of them heterosexuals are mentioned in a very nice and friendly way. Every poster, ad, etc. mentions that tolerant heterosexuals are welcome. Sometimes they call out to even the homophobic ones, trying to get to know them and talk to them.

It is interesting how gay and lesbian campaigns differ from each other. Since there is no printed lesbian magazine in Hungary, we can only compare the internet sites of the kind. Gay media images emphasize the 'coolness' of the guys by promoting parties, places to go to, posting galleries full of handsome guys and lots of partner-searching ads. Sex is a lot more central topic than in the case of girl sites. Lesbian pages and campaigns focus rather on the intellectual side of homosexuality. If there is an issue to deal with, they are there to write letters, talk and think about it. They organize more events concentrating on the spiritual aspect of homo-

sexuality. Based on the images projected about themselves and their lives, their side of the story seems to be a lot more balanced and peaceful – not aggressive in the way the men side is. This is of course obvious if we consider that gay and lesbian love is fundamentally different and the tolerance of the society differs respectively. Considering females as a secondary gender, and the fact that people usually view feminists and lesbians as the same group, takes a lot of weight off lesbians, not to mention that female homosexuality is less visible.

Summing the case up it can be stated, that as far as gay media campaigns are concerned Hungary is a quite moderate country with a gay community focusing mainly on itself. Activists and journalists turn to the mass media only when it is absolutely inevitable and necessary. So far it seems that personal campaigns have had a bigger success than mass ones, however, we should not underestimate them, since they can be extremely effective, as well. Let us hope that in some time gay groups will have the resources and the power to make themselves more visible in the media, as this is one of their biggest chances of winning the people and obtaining their deserved rights.

Noemi Szabo

I was born in Transylvania (Romania) and my family moved to Hungary after the revolution in 1989. Trying to fit in in my new country I experienced discrimination myself. This might be one of the reasons why I feel so strongly about injustice. Why do I stand up especially for gays? I can't put it into words. During my university years I noticed that I kept writing papers on the topic - and finally my MA thesis. I hope that this spirit will lead me on and that I can be of use.

Activities and campaigns of the LGBT organizations in Slovakia

Paula Jójárt (SK)

LGBT activities in Slovakia started almost immediately after the fall of communism. In 1990 Ganymedes was established – movement of homosexual people, and in 1993 the first lesbian association MUSEION was formed. Since then several new organizations were established, such as for instance HaBio for homosexually and bisexually oriented people (1997), Altera – association of lesbian and bisexual women (1998), Centre of communication, cooperation and integration of sexual minorities (1999), Hab Východ, Prometheus and others. In the first half of the 90's the LGBT (or better to say LGB) associations focused primarily on activities focused inward – community building: parties, meetings, helplines, discussion meetings, libraries and archives, film screenings with follow-up discussions etc.

At the end of the 90's and on the break of a new millennium the organizations start to direct their attention towards public and political sphere. The first sign is the shift of the Gay Film Festival from the closed event into the public event taking place in the capital city in public film clubs. Following, LGB organization opened the issue of registered partnership and civil rights of sexual minorities. In 2000 the Initiative Inakosť (the Initiative Difference) was established that represents an informal platform of the existing LGBT organizations striving for positive visualization of the concept of Difference, adoption of antidiscrimination legislative and Act on registered partnership.

The Inakosť initiative realizes its first systematic campaign activity focused on wider public. The representatives of the Inakosť initiative comprised of several female and male speakers at the same time. Thus they represent a multi-voice platform emphasizing the respect to differences on the route leading towards the same goal. The goal of their intensive media campaign was to enter the media and publicly express their opinion on any issues linked to the lives and rights of the LGBT minority. The aim was both to make the minority visible and to represent their multi-voice. As well due to negative responses, e.g. from the national party (SNS) and Christian conservative circles (KDH) the issue remained in the media for several years. The positive shift can be found mainly in the fact that the journalist themselves have become the bearers of the issue as they actively addressed the representatives of the LGBT organizations asking their opinions regarding politician's statements. The issue was discussed openly and was well-balanced. The most extreme statements of the nationalists and conservatives (healing homosexuality, nancy/poofter, restriction of homosexuals to enter schools etc.) were presented by the media as non-adequate and prejudiced statements. In this perspective we can say that the media campaign was successful.

In 2001 the Inakosť entered another level. In summer the organizations associated within IN IN organized several public events. In Bratislava, Banská Bystrica and in Košice there



were the Inakosť marches that, however, were not so extensive. The most participants (about 100 people) participated in the march in Bratislava, which began with a symbolic wedding of two lesbian activists, the faces of whom were covered with veils. The symbol of a veil tried to point out the fact that even at this time many LGBT people cannot reveal their faces publicly or among closest people due to prejudices or risks of being attacked by extremists or due to the fear of being rejected by the closest people or being expelled from home or job. At the same time, Altera has organized exhibition held in Banská Bystrica called Black and white statements about pink world. The goal was to point out the homophobic statements of politicians.

The issue of antidiscrimination resonated in the media and politics also in 2003, when the governing party KDH initiated the protest against the government office body's intention to include a term "sexual orientation" in the article of the bill elaborated by the government, where discrimination on the basis of the

The winning motifs in the competition for the antidiscrimination poster of 2004. Photo: author's archive.

LEKÁRSKA SPRÁVA - NÁLEZ			
Meno pacienta:	MARGITA TEPLÁ		
Rodné č.:	775220/6564		
Kód poisťovne:	01-31		
Bydlisko:	ŠPITAĽSKÁ 20, BA		
Zamestnávateľ:			
Subj.obtiažie:	výhrážky kontrola správnosti, záležitosti, fyzické napadanie		
Objekt.nález:			
Dg.:	Homosexualita		
Doterajšia liečba:	Discriminácia		
Požadované:	Tolerancia		
Dátum	30. 7. 2004		
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Národné zdravotné ústredie Patislav Štefánik BRATISLAVA</td> <td>01-87-8236-00142 MUDr. Milena Skarňáková oftalmológ</td> </tr> </table>		Národné zdravotné ústredie Patislav Štefánik BRATISLAVA	01-87-8236-00142 MUDr. Milena Skarňáková oftalmológ
Národné zdravotné ústredie Patislav Štefánik BRATISLAVA	01-87-8236-00142 MUDr. Milena Skarňáková oftalmológ		
Podpis a číselný kôd odbojnosti lekára, pečiatka			



individual stipulated characteristics was restricted. Full wording of the act (without excluding the individual characteristics) was defended by a wide spectrum of human right organizations focusing at, for instance, fight against racism, rights and position of women in the society, feminist organizations, organization of foreign students, organizations of handicapped people, Romany organizations etc. For the first time the LGBT organizations could play second fiddle in this fight and enjoy solidarity and support of other human right organizations. The joined demonstration in front of the Parliament, which due to the effort of KDH rejected governmental bill on equal treatment, included people from different organizations who stood there one next to the other and waved the slogan boards calling for adoption of the bill. A figurine wearing man's suit formulated a joint idea of coalition policy: a figurine had a sentence written on his breast: "I am a heterosexual, white, healthy man, who is more?" The slogan boards in the crowd visualised also the LGBT minority, however not only this one. In the end, and following long debates, several more proposals and next several months, one complex act including homosexuality as well was adopted instead of a series of small amendments of other acts. Even though the contemporary legislation is not ideal, in the view of the entire perspective we can consider it a success.

In connection with the adopted antidiscrimination Act in 2004 Altera prepared a public competition to design an antidiscrimination poster that would help to support this idea in connection with the LGBT community. Within a two-week promoting campaign the winning posters, *The same people have the same lives* and *If love is an illness, is the whole mankind ill?*, were presented in the public transportation system, and a winning postcard was distributed during various events and at festival of the les-

bian culture el be fest. The above mentioned posters have been used during other promotion events afterwards.

Along with the competition Altera prepared the brochure *How to face discrimination*, which is intended for the LGBT people who would potentially need to use this Act in specific cases of discrimination that they have encountered. The brochure was well received also by other organizations representing other minorities – e.g. Romany communities, women etc. apart from a print version it can be found at website <http://diskriminacia.altera.sk>.

One of the competition proposals, which did not fully cover the idea of antidiscrimination, however it was found interesting by Altera women, was used to promote the association and the websites of ALTERA. The postcard "We are not dealing with this" was primarily intended to be used in the LGBT clubs to attract the visitors to view Altera website, nevertheless occasionally these postcards are distributed also in mainstream coffee bars and pubs in Bratislava.

In 2006 MUSEION started a new petition campaign to support adoption of registered (life) partnership. Again, this campaign was held as media presentations (press releases) and signature collection happenings, for instance at festivals or other cultural events (e.g. concert against racism).

For spring 2006 an independent activist Andrea Svákova prepared an exchange with Spanish students from university LGBT organization Sin Verguenza within the project Come out Slovakia, who along with Slovak young people carried out a local campaign in Bratislava. Jointly they collected petition signatures to adopt registered partnership and placed posters of Altera and COS project posters with such mottos as HELLO GAY, HELLO LESBIAN, and HELLO BISEXUAL. In clubs and pubs they handed over condoms with the COS logos.

So far the campaigns in the LGBT organizations did not have any nation-wide extent. Their impact was more or less local – in the towns where the campaign was held. A greater impact can be expected in case of media presentations that accompanied those events. However their impact is also time-bound to the period during which the media news is update.

In terms of organization, these activities are matter of authors' inputs of leaders of the individual organizations. So far there were no financial funds to prepare and implement the campaigns professionally through PR or advertising agencies. The only hope to organize a bigger campaign was a governmental campaign prepared in connection with the antidiscrimination issue through billboards and TV spots in 2003. All minorities were included, including homosexual pair of two men. However this part of the campaign spot was the reason why KDH through its representatives in public TV and in the government stopped this campaign. Thus the prepared billboards and finished spots have never been shown to the public.

Within the years the multi-voice diminished from In In, and number of speakers reduced to one couple. In In has slowly finished its activities. Currently it does not exist any more in its original form. Along with this organization also many independent organizations, established in the 90's, face burn out of activists and absence of new successors. Due to this reason there is for instance no Gay Film Festival organized any more, as well as no continuation of other smaller community activities. Moreover it seems the organizations have lost, somewhere on the road, the ability to respond flexibly to the interests of people from the bottom – people from the LGBT community that they should represent. Thus they face the lack of interest concerning activities that the women and men leaders from the LGBT organizations are offering to the community. The question is, if they are still the



The poster of the Come Out Slovakia campaign of Spring 2006. Photo: author's archive.

real representatives of the community that they should represent as its leaders. Nevertheless it was not the case even in the past, as around the association there were only few people – those who are active and willing to do something. For a certain period, however, they were at least somehow attractive for the community to be able to identify with them. Today there is an absence of this kind of identification.

On the other hand there is an ongoing and considerable lack of interest of most people from the community concerning any form of activity. People care mostly only about their own lives, their own existence, and to live in a hetero-normative world as an invisible minority is convenient for many of them.

A new millennium will probably confront us with new challenges which we cannot exactly define at the moment. A group of mostly new (and young) and probably future activists has established a new initiative Inakosť recently, however this time not as an informal platform, but as a civic association based on a membership principle. It prepared a project concerning the International Year of Equal Opportunities 2007, which is still in process of approval. In the end of 2006 Andrea Sváková from the green Party in collaboration with Altera and new Inakosť prepares Slovak continuation of

photographic exhibition concerning the LGBT families called FAMILY REUNION. Museion and Inakosť plan future collaboration concerning petition campaign with the aim to adopt registered partnership.

Mgr. Paula Jójárt, MA. (1977) Slovakia. She graduated from psychology and gender studies. She published articles in feminist journal Aspekt, and appears on domestic as well as foreign forums devoted to issues of the LGBT community. She is a co-author of the book Neviditeľná menšina. Čo (ne)vieme o sexuálnej orientácii (Invisible minority. What we [do not] know about sexual orientation) and Správa o diskriminácii lesbických žien, gejev, bisexuálov a bisexuálok na Slovensku (Report on discrimination of lesbian women, gays and bisexuals in Slovakia) (2002). In the past she worked in the non-profit sector. In the area of Queer studies she is involved mainly in the issues concerning the history of the LGBT community, LGBT families and bisexuality. She is also interested in various feminist issues such as gender stereotypes in the education, violated women and media representations.



The poster „We don't deal with this“ promoting the Altera association. Photo: author's archive.

What Image Do Lesbians and Gays Create about Themselves in the Czech Republic

Kateřina Beňová (CZ)

Above all, this text focuses on the information campaign of Gay a lesbická liga (Gay and Lesbian League), running in the autumn of the year 2005 in the period of the ratification of the registered partnership law (RP). I shall try to evaluate the impacts of the campaign, reaction of media and co-operation with them. Furthermore, I shall slightly touch the campaign of G-Liga (Gay League) dated to the year 2002. Unfortunately, I can not monitor medial activity before the year 2002. All information is taken from the web partnerstvi.cz, gll.cz and my personal experience from the work in GLL.

Firstly, I would like to explain why in Czech, I use the word “lesba“ instead of more common “lesbička“ (diminutive form of the noun). I am aware of the fact that the word “lesba“ sounds like an invective – it was used for such a purpose for many decades - and the diminutive “lesbička“ came into existence as the demonstration of the good will as “positive“ addressing - nevertheless, at the same time this diminutive unintentionally made from lesbian women little girls, submissive, subsiding, unimportant, weak...as well as the word “wifie“ – you would hardly describe for example queen Victoria as wifie, would you? Identically, if the word “feminist“ is perceived hard and negatively, it seems to me to be out-of-the-way to call oneself a feminist in diminutive only because of the fact that it sounds softer (it is meant, of course, with exaggeration).

In the beginning it would be helpful to outline how lesbians and gays were depicted in the media, and what they faced in the effort for their own representation.

Lesbians were classified into two types:

- “masculinists“- bad, hard and ugly, in men clothing, seducing innocent heterosexual women, threatening little girls (too bad if they work as teachers) devoid of any maternal feeling.
- attractive “seduced“ lesbians, who need to get to know a “proper“ guy – then they will be normal again, not thinking about lesbian love at all

With progressing porno entertainment another type of lesbians has come into existence – or rather (non)lesbian couple, toying together only for the purpose of stimulating a man who could join them later.

Identically, gays are perceived in two positions

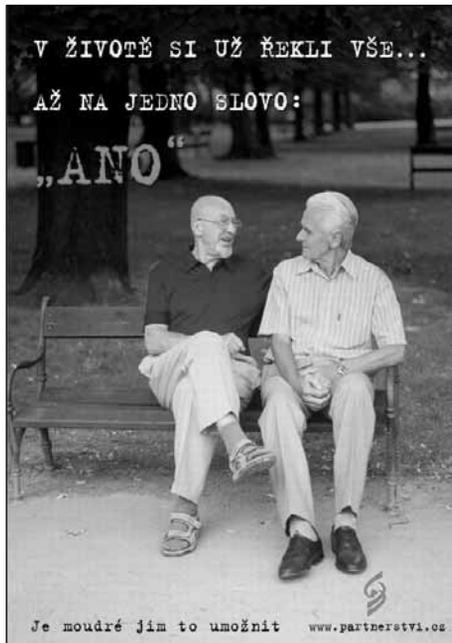
- Feminine, comical, narcissistic, faint no-men, dressing themselves as women, harassing every single man around
- Aggressive, sado-masochistic, raping heterosexual men

Both types are obsessed by sex, they are dangerous to little boys and - what a paradox - also to little girls– they can not control their sexual instincts.

Of course, it is a non-sense to argue that no lesbian or gay has anything in common with above mentioned list - there are masculine (butch) lesbians and feminine gays, there exists pederasty, violence etc. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that this relates to a minority of gays and lesbians and that similar deviations from majority behavior occur also in heterosexual population.

Unfortunately, just from these peaks of the glacier, penetrating into the public awareness, stereotypes are formed, by which we make our life easier, but which contravene the principles of equality and presumption of (social) innocence. While forming their own media image, gays and lesbians had to destroy such stereotypes.

The effort for the emancipation of lesbians and gays started immediately after the revolution in the year 1989 (not taking into account sexologist education since 1960's and "underground" during the communist regime). I shall start with the year 2002 and independent platform called G-Liga (Gay League): "G-Liga is free opinion, communica-



The male version of the campaign run by Gay and lesbian league in 2005 says: "They told each other everything... but a single phrase: I DO. It is wise to allowe them do it." Photo: www.partnerstvi.cz.

tion and information group of individual subjects, groups and organizations, united by the effort for the legalization of the partner common life of the

persons of the same sex in the Czech Republic..." (http://www.partnerstvi.cz/rp-kampan_2002/)

Někomu pomůže, nikomu neublíží (2002) - It Can Help Somebody, It Shall Not Hurt Anybody

Campaign supporting registered partnership law was in the form of web banners, advertising in newspapers and billboards, and got the space also in the radio and TV broadcasting. With the motto "Někomu pomůže, nikomu neublíží" (It Can Help Somebody, It Shall Not Hurt Anybody) and photograph (in my view rather innocently) kissing gay couple around 150 billboards all over the Czech Republic were posted. Public reaction was prevalingly positive (or, not significantly negative). The objective was to point out to the discrimination of LG minority and to open the discussion on homosexuality and registered partnership. Due to the dramatic floods in the summer 2002 the campaign moved to the "side tract"; however, in spite of this fact it attracted the attention of some daily papers and TV Prima, thus satisfying its goal— to draw attention to registered partnership law and to open the discussion.

Another (we could say continuing) group of activists (both women and men) was Gay a lesbická liga (GLL - Gay and Lesbian League). This body was officially established on 4.4.2004; however, the group already existed since the year 2003 as informal independent communication and information platform, by means of which individual organizations, groups, teams of internet projects as well as individuals, united by the effort for the equalization of lesbians and gays in the Czech Republic co-operated, mutually informed and coordinated their activities - identically to previously mentioned G-liga. After the agreement of participating individuals and groups, transformation to civic association was made.

Besides activities focusing on the support of the registered partnership law in the government

and parliament, GLL also aimed at the informing of majority population through media. Representatives of GLL - since the very beginning- featured in radio and TV discussion programs (ČRo, BBC radio, Česká televize, TV Prima and others) and gave speeches and materials to printed media.

At the same time, they started (2003) to prepare medial campaign for tolerance and against homophobia, which should have appealed to democratic values of equality and human rights. Because of financial reasons, there remained only drafts and visions; nevertheless, gained experience was fully used in the year 2005, when decision - this time very important - on registered partnership law was to be made.

Information Campaign on Support of Registered Partnership Law 2005

With the support of the JWT Prague team (creative ideas) GLL decided not to appeal to democratic values, but conservative ones – this campaign was to address just conservative part of the population. Consequently, GLL - instead of appeal to tolerance and acceptance of difference - tried to accentuate the values of monogamous and lifelong relationships – by the motif of two older couples (internally: grandmothers and grandfathers) referred to the fact that many lesbian and gay couples live together for many decades, being a mutual help to one another, interested in common life, not only in “sexual experiments“, as the homosexuality was regarded by many opponents of registered partnership.

GLL “divided“ the society into three groups for its work:

- 1) supporters – GLL provided them with expert materials and data, on the basis of which the supporters could better prepare themselves



Motif of the campaign run by Gay iniciativa and Stud Brno for registered partnership bill in 2002. The follow-up campaign by G-LIGA used the same slogan “helps some, hurts no one” with a similar photograph. Photo: archive of Stud.

- for the discussion on the registered partnership
- 2) mild opponents (people not having objective information about homosexuality, thus influenced by prejudices and stereotypes) – GLL tried to present them true information about the life of lesbians and gays
- 3) stubborn opponents (fanatic homophobes) – GLL tried to discuss with them in public and to disprove their arguments against registered partnership.

Campaign in the form of web banners, shots screened in the busiest stations of Prague subway (Rencar - Metrovision) and advertisements in newspapers and journals addressed broad public. Furthermore, mentioned campaign also addressed members of parliament - both women and men - to whom GLL handed-over the package of materials to registered partnership law, in the cover with the motive of the campaign. Company Xland.CZ - Tojsemja.cz supported the campaign financially. Comics about registered partnership was also distributed in the Parliament – in brief form and with exaggeration it depicted seven basic points of registered partnership and their influence over the life of gay and lesbian couples (GLL - to its surprise - found out that large part of members of parliament was against the law without even reading it, having frequently reservations against subjects not included in the law). By intensive lobbying and the work in the Parliament the contents of the



registered partnership penetrated into the awareness of members of the Czech parliament.

Various materials and information were also offered to the media. Part of them focused on technical points – sexuality, human rights, political discussions, and part of the media was interested in so-called “deep human stories” of gay and lesbian couples. Medical facts were stressed in expert texts (homosexuality was erased from the world list of illnesses, it is neither dangerous nor infectious, it can not be healed etc.), human-legal (constitutional laws on equality, right for self-determination, love, individual freedom, non-discrimination), political (the effort to find the support to registered partnership across the political spectrum – i.e. also from right-wing parties and de facto “de-politization” of the whole subject) and ethical (it is neither perversity nor depravity, gays and lesbians are not “bored” by heterosexual relations, it is not a fashionable trend or experimenting ...). In so-called entertainment media GLL - with the help of couples willing to stand out publicly - tried to show the life of lesbian women and gay men and to refer to the problems, which homophobic society cause them (for example the program of TV Prima “Trní” - “Thorn”). Through “deep human stories” the picture of GL people longing for the same things as most “normal” people was formed - for love, touch, good relations with parents as well as surroundings, feeling of safety, financial security etc. In spite of the fact that GLL had little troubles with too much dramatized individual stories, GLL gave a free hand in this respect as this method of addressing of the public is usually more effective than expert debates. Thanks to such approach, the media as well as majority of journalistic public were positive; i.e., in the period of autumn passing of registered partnership in the Parliament of the Czech Republic the articles supporting registered partnership exceeded both in quality and quantity the articles with opposite message.

Inseparable part of medial picture of gays and lesbians in the Czech Republic formed by gays and

lesbians themselves is TV magazine Legato (broadcasted till the year 2005, allegedly a completely new program is being prepared at the moment) and radio program Bona Dea – both programs, especially TV magazine, presented lesbians and gays to the broadest public and had principal share upon the change of the perception of LGBT.

By means of these methods, the public opinion was shifted in favour of registered partnership law. In the period of final voting on this particular law in the Parliament, the public support equaled approximately 70%. Gradually homophobes have become “unwelcome”, not gays and lesbians. The picture which lesbians and gays formed about themselves, is not about sex (therefore, GLL avoids the term “homosexual”, evoking sexual undertone), but about normal people who want the same what the others have – by the constitution guaranteed human rights for the equality and non-discrimination. Although there still persists “paranoia” regarding the bringing-up and adoption of children, we can see a significant change as well. Lesbian women are not seen any more as “no-mothers” and the public usually does not have any problem with lesbian couple bringing-up biological offspring of the one of them (which is also treated in registered partnership law). Unfortunately, artificial insemination still remains accessible only to women married to men. With respect to gay couples the situation is far worse, especially thanks to patriarchal model, according to which only women are predestinated for the care for children, while men are to secure the family only from material point of view (and not emotional). In spite of the fact that it was partially explained that a child brought up by gay couple would not be sexually abused, still the prejudices about the incapability of men to bring-up a child are deeply rooted and it shall be very difficult to persuade majority society about the opposite.

In several years, media image of lesbians and gays turned for their benefit; however, still we have to avoid the presentation of negative sides of gays

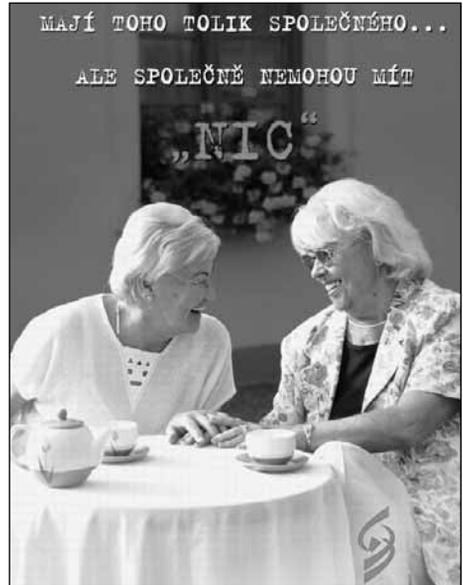
and lesbians, as any imperfection of the individual can call homophobic reaction and strengthening of stereotypes. Though majority society is able to tolerate human minuses in case of heterosexual people and their false steps and not apply them to the whole group as such, in case of minorities the situation is completely opposite – flat dispraise of Gypsies, refugees, homeless people as well as gays and lesbians is usually the first reaction to the offence of the minority representative. The most effective means of the fight against homophobia still remains personal courage to be one's own person, not to hide oneself and to “come out“, so as the people around could see that they do not have to be afraid of lesbians and gays .

Final comments:

Media representation of bisexual and transgender people is more complicated, and shall demand a lot of work. Within transgender people the society expects that they would fully accept the role of the opposite sex and shall integrate with the majority society (and the system helps them to achieve this), but neither wants to perceive “inter-sexuality“ attending the process of the change of the sex nor the involvement in un-hiding of transgender people. Very frequently, in the interest of their protection, transgender people are recommended to completely change both environment and identity, and to conceal their past. Nevertheless, by the suppression of information there is given a stimulus to disinformation and the fear of difference.

Bisexuality is for the majority related to sex only. The idea that all bisexual people must have parallel relationship (sexual relationship) with both sexes is so wide spread that most bisexual people prefer to declare themselves only to lesbian or gay community, keeping silence about their bisexuality there as well. Standpoints of some of our specialists (by the way, completely baseless) about the fact that bisexuality as such does not exist and in fact represents only the stage before the

acknowledgement of homosexuality makes the situation of bisexual people - unfortunately - far more complicated.



The female version of the campaign run by Gay and lesbian league in 2005 says: “They have so much in common... but together they can own nothing. It's time to change it.” Photo: www.partnerstvi.cz.

For more detail information, visual pictures of campaigns of GLL and G-Liga and their acceptance in media see www.partnerstvi.cz

Kateřina Beňová, one of the speakers of Gay a lesbická liga, founder and editor-in-chief of information web page for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women www.bengales.cz. In the years 2000 and 2001 she was active in Scottish Edinburgh in Gay Women Social Club, after her return back home she joined the project *Rozdílné Rytmy* (meeting of L/Bi girls and women in Prague), which she presided over in the years 2003-2005. At present, she works in non-profit organization Fórum 50%, endeavoring in the parity of women and men in management and decision-making positions.

Mediální obraz leseb a gayů

Media Image of Lesbians and Gays

Sborník příspěvků k tématu středoevropské konference 7.-8. 11. 2006.

Collection of entries to the subject of Central European conference 7- 8 November 2006.

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