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ESSAY

Agnieszka Holland's Transnational Ties with the TV industry

Transitioning Between Televisions

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Agnieszka Holland has been Chair of the influential European Film Academy since 2013. The Polish filmmaker has also received award recognition as recently as 2011 with her oblique 'holocaust' film *W ciemności*. Her film career now spans five decades, with work being produced in at least as many different national film industries. A significant part of the 1990s, after the international success of another 'holocaust' film *Europa Europa* (1990), was spent operating upon the fringes of the Hollywood studio system, most notably on the two literary adaptations *The Secret Garden* (1993) and *Washington Square* (1997). Despite what would seem to be a long, nomadic and generally successful filmmaking career, Holland has increasingly turned her attention toward television directing, with a string of credits upon some of the most critically acclaimed US television dramas of recent times – *The Wire* (2002-2008), *Treme* (2010-2013), *House of Cards* (2013-present). What is more this isn't a new trend in Holland's career, as her initial critical breakthroughs came from television film productions within her native Poland – *Niedzielne dzieci* (1977), *Kobieta samotna* (1981). In fact it could be argued that it is precisely this early grounding within the two different motion picture mediums in Poland that makes Holland such an accomplished and valued television director within the shifting dynamics of the US television industry in the 21st century. State Socialist Poland was already blurring the boundaries between modes of film and television production and exhibition as early as the 1970s and similar patterns of convergence can be observed within other State Socialist nations of the period, as well as within West Germany and France. Experience of these production conditions undoubtedly assists Holland in her later transitions from one industry to another, as well as between the two mediums. Her extensive television work within the US during the last two decades has also helped to

position Holland as a key transitional figure in the export of US television production practices to European television productions.

Given Holland's extensive ties to the television industries within both Poland and the US it's hardly surprising that she should be one of the first film directors to have drawn attention to the increasing interdependence between film and television. In a recent interview with *ScreenDaily* she even suggests that European film needs to examine the manner in which the US television landscape is gradually influencing the way that films get made within Hollywood, so as to improve the perilous state of European cinema:

> Something which doesn't help is the weakness of European television in terms of the production of ambitious TV series. We don't have European stars, but nowadays they can be made by European television and that can be later reflected in the cinema.[1]

This frames the central concern of this article, namely how Holland's work within the US television marketplace transfers industry practices from this region back into European television industries. It will also simultaneously inquire as to what makes Holland such a sought after directorial presence within an increasingly narrow definition of what constitutes prestige television drama. Presently, despite an explosion in high quality television drama, the medium is still seen as a poorer, more parochial relation to film. Directors such as Holland not only force us to question the legitimacy of such qualitative distinctions, but through the promiscuous trajectory of their careers highlight how the two mediums have a much longer history of progressive convergence, as well as hinting at a wider transnational dynamic to television production that counters, or at least complicates, the clichéd notion of US hegemony within the medium.

Emerging Out of the Gloom: Kobieta samotna (1981)

Holland's feature-length film career begins within the rapidly transforming Polish State television landscape of the mid-to-late 1970s. Between 1977 and 1981 she directed three feature-length films for State television broadcast, prior to any theatrical release. The first of these was produced within Andrzej Wajda's Film X film unit and was entitled *Niedzielne dzieci*. Less than twelve months after the broadcast of that film in January 1977 Holland worked with the newly formed Centralna Wytwórnia Programów i Filmów Telewizyjnych (or PolTel for short) to direct *Coś za coś* (1977). Whereas *Niedzielne dzieci* had been made within the older structure of a Polish State film unit, *Coś za coś* is one of the first films to be commissioned directly for television broadcast. What

is more PolTel had the extended remit of commissioning and producing feature-length films for State television broadcast, whilst simultaneously enabling their promotion and distribution at International Film Festivals as theatrical releases.[2] By the early 1980s PolTel had been fully subsumed into the State broadcaster Telewizja Polska (or TVP for short). Thus, in 1981 Holland's bleak drama *Kobieta samotna* was produced under the aegis of TVP, in conjunction with Wajda's Film X.

These shifting production arrangements are reflective of the turbulent politics of the period, with General Jaruzelski's declaration of Martial Law coming in December of 1981 – after a period of prolonged political unrest and workers' strikes. Holland's *Kobieta samotna* would fall victim to the State crackdown upon the increasingly radicalized politics within society, failing to actually be broadcast in 1981 and instead receiving a belated theatrical release within Poland as late as 1987, after an extensive run of screenings on the International Film Festival circuit. By that stage Holland had relocated to France and was gradually insinuating herself into the French film and television industries. However, the different organizational structures for each of Holland's productions thus far mentioned are also illustrative of the groundbreaking developments within television production in Poland during the 1970s. As Ostrowska and Radkiewicz explain:

> This was also the time [the mid-1970s] when thanks to the longstanding film-makers' contribution to television production the medium of television began to demonstrate an increasing degree of formal evolution as well. With the political support of the Party and ambitious plans for future development, TV managed to work out an agreement, which coordinated the workings of TV and cinema by virtually subordinating cinema to television […] The distinction between television and cinema was constantly blurred as popular episodes of TV series were given theatrical releases.[3]

Polish cinema and television, despite being technically two different moving image mediums, were seen as mutually interlinked. Yet this relationship was not one of equals, but was rather weighted in favor of the newer technology. By the end of the 1970s Polish television was already strongly established as a major producer of Polish film and Polish State cinemas frequently broadcast television product. This situation only intensifies after the collapse of State Socialism, as TVP and other emerging television broadcasters such as Canal+, TVN and HBO become the major production partners for a large number of Polish theatrical releases. Thus, the situation that has gradually emerged over the last two decades in the US film and television industries – a steady convergence of the two moving image mediums – had already occurred

decades earlier in the Polish industries that the young Agnieszka Holland had come to prominence within.

Kobieta samotna also showcased formal and aesthetic concerns that have remained consistently present throughout the bulk of both Holland's cinematic and televisual ventures. Among these are tropes that may be perceived as belonging to the 'social realist' backdrop of State film production in both the Czech and Polish State Socialist systems.[4] A focus upon 'representative' individuals, the foregrounding of industry and work and a preference for 'realistic' location shooting, are some of the elements that feature within early works like *Kobieta samotna*, as well as much later productions such as *Hořící keř* (2013) – a striking predominately Czech television production, commissioned, financed and promoted by HBO Europe. Holland also has more individual 'auteurist' flourishes that reveal themselves in the way that she approaches character and her formal concerns for the microcosmic subversions within seemingly all-encompassing systems. Lugo de Fabritz relates these elements to what she calls the art of 'speaking indirectly', which she argues is borne out of implicit State diktats as to what could and couldn't be shown on screen.[5] Within *Kobieta samotna* these take the shape of a subtly subjective narrative, underpinned by the central character Irena's painful everyday struggles with life, as well as an intensive focus upon the close-up and extreme close-up framing of bodies and the objects they interact with. Frequently, this technique of cutting in to the close-up draws attention to an element of mise-en-scène and how it is incorporated into Irena's world of pain and discomfort, as well as explicitly foregrounding the oppressive and restrictive conditions of her existence. Holland also complicates medium or wide shots through a concentration on physical details that the central character strongly identifies with – her increasingly worn mailbag, for example – and which serve to convey a particular attitude that runs against the 'officially approved' party line. Work is not something that gives value and meaning to life in *Kobieta samotna*, but rather something that fixes the individual and holds them in place, as it gradually wears them down or wears them out.

This early film in Holland's career serves to establish the beginnings of a particular cinematic aesthetic that will be refined and returned to frequently throughout her work over the next three decades. Arguably this aesthetic can also be read within her work on major US television drama series, where it would be commonly assumed that a television director is very much adhering to a prearranged series aesthetic and style, usually crafted by a showrunner or creator. What is more it also demonstrates the increasing importance of television within the production of films, highlighting the convergence of film production units and State television companies in the State Socialist Poland of the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Kobieta samotna* would be Holland's last film within Poland until after the transition to a democratic state in the early 1990s. For most of the 1980s the director worked within the film and television industries of France and the US. It is America that, ultimately, provides her with

the bulk of her television opportunities from the mid-1990s onwards.

Fake Noir and True Crime: Fallen Angels (1993-1995) and HBO

After the international success of her Oscar-nominated 'holocaust' film *Europa Europa* and the tough studio-funded production of *The Secret Garden*, Holland was given an opportunity to direct a segment of the television show *Fallen Angels*. This long-forgotten, high-gloss, mid-nineties crime anthology series for Showtime, one of the key premium cable television networks in the US, brought together a number of major new Hollywood figures, including Tom Cruise, Steve Soderbergh, Tom Hanks and Alfonso Cuarón.[6] Holland worked on an adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *Red Wind* which was the last instalment of the show's second and final season. The executive producer was Sydney Pollack, who Agnieszka Holland, in an interview[7] for the Director's Guild of America (DGA), eventually remembered was the person who had nominated her to the DGA so she might be able to helm *The Secret Garden*. In the same lengthy and wide-ranging interview Holland talks about how working on 'quality' television series offers an independent director opportunities they may otherwise struggle to get.[8] Holland also discusses her intention to learn about the craft of television directing and series production so that she can create something of quality within the Polish system. This is an explicit reference to her work on the Polish series *Ekipa* (2007) that ran in tandem with her occasional work upon the critically-acclaimed HBO series *The Wire*. (Both of which will be discussed within the next section.)

Briefly returning to *Fallen Angels*, not only does the show demonstrate a degree of professional networking between Holland's Hollywood studio debut *The Secret Garden* and her transition into 'quality' US television drama, but it also exhibits some of the tropes that have been discussed in relation to Holland's narrative and visual aesthetics. One of the most striking aspects of this episode is the decision to cast Danny Glover as Chandler's private detective Phillip Marlowe, the first time that the character had been cast as an African-American. Glover would receive an Outstanding Guest Actor nomination for his performance at the 1996 Emmys. Holland apparently held out for the inclusion of an African-American actor in the Marlowe role, believing that it would help to take the story away from the comfortable complacencies of white American life, as well as drawing attention to troubling areas of racial tension.[9]

Holland's use of tight framing also plays a major role in the general aesthetics of this episode. There are many deliberately patterned cuts from medium to close-up, and vice-versa, that help to define a relationship through the associations of the object focused upon. The most extravagant example of this is the mother of pearl necklace scene towards the end of the episode, in which Marlowe reveals to Lola (Kelly Lynch) that the necklace she believes to be a fake is actually genuine. This item is foregrounded as Lola tests the pearl

between her teeth – in medium shot Holland presents its purity and genuine nature, alongside the tentatively etched interracial relationship between Marlowe and Lola. She then complicates this medium shot by placing Marlowe outside of the frame, whilst still being visible within it. This effect is performed by capturing Marlowe's reflection in the mirror, the same mirror in which Lola appraises the pearls as fakes. Marlowe then steps in to the shot, close to Lola, to tell her that the pearls are real. This whole sequence toys with the purity of the pearl and the racial purity of Lola's relationship with Frank (Ron Rifkin) – a false relationship compared with the true love that Lola and Marlowe appear to share. It is this complex and subtle framing of select details of mise-en-scène that is Holland's hallmark throughout her television work, as will be demonstrated further in the next section.

A crucial turning point in Holland's US television career comes with her helming of the critically acclaimed television movie *Shot in the Heart* (2001). This was an HBO production from the makers of *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999) and *Oz* (1997-2003), the latter of which was the first of HBO's award-winning, hard-hitting and sprawlingly unconventional TV drama series – a full two years before *The Sopranos* (1999-2007). The production team consisted of producers Irene Burns and Nina Kostroff-Noble (both of whom worked on *Homicide: Life on the Street*), and a trio of executive producers, Jim Finnerty, Tom Fontana and film director Barry Levinson (all of whom worked upon *Homicide: Life on the Streets* and *Oz*, the latter of which Fontana actually created).

Levinson's involvement once again points toward the increasing overlap between film and television industries in the US as the 1990s progressed, particularly amongst those filmmakers operating outside of the cavalcade of studio blockbusters and family festive releases. Levinson was one of the first directors within the US system to move into television production as a means of finding production possibilities for projects that would have been impossible to realize as film ventures. *Homicide: Life on the Street* was a Baltimore-set police procedural that brought David Simon, a journalist and crime writer, into the medium of television. Simon is one of the most influential figures in the US television landscape of the 21st century. After *Homicide: Life on the Street* he would work on an adaptation of another one of his crime books *The Corner* (2000), which became a mini-series for HBO, produced by Nina Kostroff-Noble (this partnership between Simon and Kostroff-Noble was at the creative hub of a work that will be discussed in the next section – The Wire). Levinson's cinematic sensibilities brought a greater scope and ambition to the police procedural in his production work with *Homicide: Life on the Street*. Complex narrative arcs, a hand-held camera style and a gritty 'realism' were just some of the elements that made the show unlike anything hitherto seen on the small screen. Levinson's creative fostering of David Simon brought a densely politicized voice into US television production at an opportune time for just such a writer to flourish. Pairing Simon with Kostroff-Noble inadvertently

established one of the most important producer-creator relationships in HBO's history, which is still producing content in the form of the recently commissioned new HBO series *Show Me A Hero* (2015). Holland was a figure who fit seamlessly into this creative group's requirements of a show director, and it was on *Shot in the Heart* that she was first assimilated into this group.

Kostroff-Noble had been impressed with Holland's execution of challenging material in her *Fallen Angels* episode 'Red Wind'. As well as having been sponsored and supported by Sydney Pollack in her transition from European filmmaker to US filmmaker, Holland had also been given the opportunity to helm *The Secret Garden* by Francis Ford Coppola. It was Coppola's involvement that secured production funding for *The Third Miracle* (1999) and it was also his influence that alerted Levinson to Holland's qualities as a filmmaker. Up until *Shot in the Heart* it could be argued that Holland's US film and television work had lacked any clear identity, ranging over a number of different genres and dealing with literary adaptation and original screenwriting. However, what becomes apparent after *Shot in the Heart* – and for realizing this Kostroff-Noble has to take a significant degree of the credit – is that Holland's early State Socialist training within Polish television makes her ideally suited for explorations of corruption, criminality and duplicity. Holland's capacity to create deceptively complex framing that 'speaks indirectly' finds its perfect home within the kinds of police procedural and societal studies that Simon and Kostroff-Noble excel at into the 2000s. *Shot in the Heart* is where Kostroff-Noble and Holland first work together, the success of which swiftly leads to Holland's work with Simon and Kostroff-Noble on *The Wire*.

Shot in the Heart was a true crime account of Gary Gilmore (Elias Koteas), the first prisoner to be executed in the US after the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. It is told from the point of view of Gilmore's brother Mikal (Giovanni Ribisi). As with Glover's performance in 'Red Wind', Ribisi was singled out for high praise and received award nominations for his role. There are quite striking parallels between Holland's work on this television movie and her work on *Kobieta samotna*, some two decades earlier. Just as in *Kobieta samotna* Holland frequently resorts to extremely tight framing of the female protagonist to establish her inwardness and inscrutability, Mikal Gilmore is likewise the subject of numerous close-ups or extreme close-ups as he struggles with comprehending his brother's relentless desire to die. Once again Holland's medium shots are complicated by the manner in which relationships are established within them. The central exchanges between the Gilmore brothers at prison meetings whilst Gary is on Death Row, frequently obscure both faces in over-the-shoulder shots where the back of one character's head is a barrier to the face of the other. The number of locations utilized in the film are minimal, repeatedly operating between Mikal's claustrophobic and lonely motel room and the intensely oppressive holding cells that Mikal and Gary's meetings take place in. Objects in close-up are again associated with character relations. In an early childhood scene, for example, the mother (Amy Madigan) of the

Gilmore boys is carving a turkey at the dinner table, when she flies into a rage and throws the turkey before attacking the boy's abusive father with the knife. Holland first of all focuses upon the knife as an object of domesticity, in close-up, carving the turkey. Then pulls out to the medium shot as the mother throws that turkey and picks up the knife to now use it as a weapon against the father. Frequent double-takes in which objects are destabilized from their seemingly original context return throughout the film. It is striking how similar *Kobieta samotna* and *Shot in the Heart* are, even if they are about very different characters. Holland's use of close-ups and cluttered medium shots conveys a deep sense of character alienation and dislocation, present in both films, and which contributes to the suffocating sense of doom and entropy that is their prevailing atmosphere.

Crime and Punishment: Taking From The Wire (2002-2008) and Giving to Ekipa (2007)

If *Shot in the Heart* was Holland's first significant breakthrough in the US television landscape, then HBO's *The Wire* saw confirmation of just how valuable her particular skills set was to the crime/police procedural genre. Having established a good working relationship with Nina Kostroff-Noble on *Shot in the Heart*, Kostroff-Noble raised Holland's name as a possible series director on *The Wire*. David Simon was intrigued by the idea of working with a non-US director who could bring an outsider's eye to bear on his 'forgotten Baltimore'.[10] While Holland awaited confirmation of being brought on to Simon's highly political deconstruction of the various layers of corruption within Baltimore society she decided to demonstrate how comfortably she could handle police procedural material by signing up to two episodes for the first season of CBS's crime serial *Cold Case* (2003-2010). These episodes ('Hubris' and 'The Plan') were worked upon in late 2003 and early 2004, airing in January and May of 2004. 'The Plan' was the penultimate episode of the first season and received some of the most positive reviews of the entire series. It also saw Holland collaborate with show writer Veena Sud who would go on to become a key producer on the show. Sud would also later hire Holland for her 2011 AMC adaptation of the Danish crime series *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*, 2007-2012). Having noted that Holland had begun to establish some clear credentials within the genre, Simon put her at the helm for a key episode in season 3 of *The Wire*.

This episode, entitled 'Moral Midgetry', establishes the definitive breakdown in Stringer Bell and Avon Barksdale's relationship as the brains and brawn of a Baltimore project's drug empire, whilst further exploring Major Colvin's laissez-faire approach to policing in his 'Hamsterdam' experiment and the self-interest of the political figures higher up the municipal food chain.[11] It is material that seems ideally suited to Holland's modus operandi to 'speak indirectly', which in a US television context involves deliberately crafting sequences that force the

viewer to recontextualize narrative information frequently. An example that McNeilly deals with in his essay is highly illustrative of this approach. As has been demonstrated in previous television work by Holland, she has an eye for telling small details and how they might be suffused with complex and multi-layered meaning. MacNeilly describes this process as a "way of seeing that is primarily micrological, focused on small, momentary details that unfold into her larger project, to alter how we watch each other".[12] In *The Wire* Holland would appear to have found the perfect material for her ongoing concern with how a character is observed by others, this is a show after all that is predicated around the idea of monitoring and surveillance – a very totalitarian paranoia. MacNeilly draws attention to the opening section of 'Moral Midgetry' as a textbook example of Holland's direction. The episode opens in the legalized drug zone of 'Hamsterdam', where two police officers are framed in a wide shot sitting on the hood of their car, minding their own business and ignoring a local girl who is talking away to them. As the two officers allow their focus to wander, the camera pulls its own focus in toward a detail occurring in the foreground, that the audience is now aware the police officers do not care about. This detail is a drug transaction. The curiosity of the detail is the way it occurs out in the open, right in front of the cops. The camera is drawing the viewer's line of sight bluntly, directly, forcefully toward this transaction, in a manner the very antithesis of the surreptitious and sly way such illegal transactions are normally revealed. Why are these officers not making an arrest? Why are they instead reading the newspaper, or staring off into space? The fluid and mobile camerawork that follows reveals the permissive and promiscuous reality of the 'Hamsterdam' experiment, where policing of drug-related business no longer occurs. Yet before this flamboyant tracking shot through 'Hamsterdam' Holland has already alerted the viewer to a change in the expected societal norms with that brief opening shot and focus pull. The same techniques of concentrated and multi-layered meaning that Holland brought to her Polish television works to enable her to 'speak indirectly' and therefore prove subversive whilst remaining generally acceptable to the State Socialist machine, have since been co-opted to disorient the US television viewer. Such techniques present a reality and then subtly invert its co-ordinates, forcing the viewer to question what it is they are bearing witness to, and, as a result, potentially promoting a greater engagement with the issues and politics of the piece.

The Wire has successfully enshrined Holland as a shrewd and highly economical television director. Her preference for telling minor details and the ambiguous potential of the close-up have found their ideal medium within US television's serial drama formats[13], particularly in the crime genre. Since working with Simon and Kostroff-Noble on the series she has worked with them again on *Treme*. She has also worked once more with Veena Sud on *The Killing* (2011-2014) and with David Fincher – whose Propaganda Films was behind Holland's first work for US TV 'Red Wind' from *Fallen Angels* – on the US remake of *House of Cards*. In each of these shows she has directed crucial

episodes, almost always close to the dramatic finales of a season. In the case of the wonderful picaresque human drama *Treme*, Simon and Kostroff-Noble entrusted Holland with the season finale of three of the four seasons.

A large part of Holland's success in US television has almost certainly been down to her ability to import techniques perfected during her time working within the cinematically inclined Polish Socialist State television of the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, how has working upon increasingly ambitious and challenging US television drama formats, for the likes of HBO and Netflix, enabled Holland to have an impact upon the European television industries she appeared to have left behind in the 1990s? A focus solely upon Holland's considerable US television output over the last two decades might lead one to conclude that Holland is yet another journeyman European director who has found their metier within the largest and most influential television industry in the world. It has, hopefully, already been established that Holland brings crucial elements of her experiences and training within the State Socialist television industry of Poland to her work upon US television production. Likewise, her continuing experiences and training within the US have been transferred back to European television production in interesting ways that complicate the clichéd notion of US hegemony within television production. These transfers between different national television industries are also filtered through Holland's continued engagement with film, resulting in some interesting ideas about the contemporary relationship between the two mediums.

Around the same time that Holland was working upon shows such as *Cold Case* and *The Wire*, she became interested in how the structures of cable drama production within the US television marketplace were beginning to shape and affect film production. The longer form dramas of HBO, Showtime and AMC, were creating immersive dramatic worlds that relied upon powerful performances rather than star appeal and drew their stories out over multiple seasons and many hours in comparison with the pragmatic limitations of cinematic running times. For a director interested in multiple perspectives, subversion and ways of seeing, this provided, for the first time, a set of conditions for elaborating upon an aesthetic that may have been lost within the limiting framework of the feature film.

A curious contradiction in Holland's aesthetic is her tendency toward very economical use of framing and mise-en-scène – in effect saying as much as possible with very little – and how this economy is most effectively captured within the lengthier and less 'auteurist-friendly' structures of the serial drama format. One explanation for this seeming contradiction is that Holland, within television, has tended to work on only a handful of episodes within any one series.[14] Also Holland's microcosmic focus on detail appears to be motivated by a strong interest in presenting complex characters. She isn't a director who extracts showy performances from actors, but rather a director who forces

actors to withhold, and by so doing gives their performances a far greater degree of organic development. The rise of US television dramas like *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* have made mainstream film presences of actors who wouldn't normally have strayed beyond character roles, people like James Gandolfini, Damian Lewis and Idris Elba. There has also been a pronounced tendency toward Hollywood stars more often working on meaty roles in television series, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey and Anna Paquin being some examples. What is more the capacity for immersive universe creation that the best US TV dramas now possess is finding a mirror within the growth of overlapping comic-book, action and fantasy franchises. Holland was aware of these changes as early as 2006 when she became involved in the creation of *Ekipa*, a Polish television drama that was very clearly predicated upon the model of the complex political and social drama that had brought her to prominence in the US television industry.

Ekipa was a political drama series made for PolSat by Agnieszka Holland, her sister Magdalena Łazarkiewicz, and her daughter Katarzyna Adamik[15]. The television production company behind the series was the ATM Group, one of the most important and dominant television production companies within the country, and the only television company, at that time, that negotiated foreign rights deals for Polish television product. The presence of Holland and Łazarkiewicz, as well as the backing of the ATM Group immediately established *Ekipa* as a high profile domestic drama production, that ATM were clearly hoping might have export potential. The presence of Janusz Gajos in one of the central roles further enhanced this idea of the series being a prestige production. Gajos, thanks to his work on Kieślowski's *Trzy kolory: biały* (1994) has some international presence within film circles. Domestically he is a respected stage actor with a string of noteworthy performances in popular films such as *Psy* (1992).

The series dealt with the political upheavals within Polish society during the early 21st century, with the country still coming to terms with the legacy of State Socialism, and dealing with the growth of right-wing patriotic populist politics. Although not using corresponding party names, the drama clearly illustrated the divide between centrist political parties, like the current ruling party Platforma Obywatelska, and right-wing populist parties, like the major opposition party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS for short. The political intrigues and attempts to develop the drama beyond just the idea of corruption at the highest levels of government move the work into the realm of *The Wire* than the more obviously identifiable template of *The West Wing* (1999-2006).

What is certain is the degree to which Holland's US TV experience fed into her work on the show. This was the first drama about the Polish political class in over twenty years.[16] There was simply no tradition of this kind of television drama within a Polish television context. The length of the series run (14 episodes) was also more broadly in line with the number of episodes featured

in cable TV drama serials for the likes of HBO and Showtime, rather than domestic producers, such as TVP and PolSat. Also, the individual episodes were between 55 minutes and 58 minutes in length, which was much longer than most other shows featured on PolSat, and resulted in fewer commercial breaks during the program. This kind of formatting is more comparable to HBO product, where, since the success of *The Sopranos*, drama series have frequently pursued varying episode lengths, based around the requirements of the drama, rather than the requirements of advertising (this is achievable on HBO as it is a pay-television service, whereas PolSat is one of the Polish commercial terrestrial broadcasters).

Aside from being one of the show's creators Holland directed the first two episodes, before handing over the remainder of the series to her daughter and sister. What is immediately striking about these opening two episodes, which delineate the transfer of power from the besieged Prime Minister Henryk Nowasz (Janusz Gajos) to his less controversial right-hand man Konstanty Turski (Marcin Perchuć), is the chamber-like nature of the dramatic action. The backroom machinations of those in power are juxtaposed against the grand public pronouncements covered by the media. Once again this plays to Holland's considerable strengths with minute detail and concentrated use of close-up. When looking at later episodes in the series it is this formal and narrative focus that remains distinct. Holland's two episodes cover a considerable amount of narrative backstory, but do so through concentrating upon the harassed and harried outgoing PM Nowasz. Later episodes branch out into wider intrigues and a larger cast of protagonists and antagonists, with the dramatic action switching toward the character of Turski and his rivalry with opposition leader Jan Matajewicz (Marek Frąckowiak).

The show was in fact a commercial failure, even if it did receive some positive reviews. Its low average audience was around 1.22m viewers per episode, giving it less than 20% of the audience share for its time slot. These figures are even more worrying when analyzed as a trend across the series, as the first episode was the peak of the show's viewing figures (2.1m), whereas by the last episode the audience had more than halved to 919,000.[17] In many ways it seems as if Holland may have been slightly ahead of the curve with regard to the ambitious scale of the show. Since *Ekipa* premiered in late 2007 there have been a number of foreign-language drama exports to English-language television markets (such as the UK and Australia), including the surprisingly similar Danish television series *Borgen* (2010-2013) and the complex French crime and corruption thriller *Engrenages* (2005-present) – or *Spiral*, as it is known in English. Although *Ekipa* may appear to have a similar production pedigree and ambition as these shows, it failed to attract a significant popular following domestically – that saw PolSat cancel the show after just one season. Holland hasn't attempted to make another drama series in Poland, despite her proclamations about the need to build a sophisticated array of eye-catching television products within European markets. However, she did manage to

have a good deal more success with a television mini-series produced in the Czech Republic for HBO Europe.

The Assayas Approach – Developing Hořící keř (2013) for film and television

To conclude this article we come almost full circle. The Czech Republic (formerly known as part of Czechoslovakia, alongside what is now Slovakia) was where Holland received her film training in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Outside of short films Holland produced nothing within the Czech film industry, let alone enter into television production within the country. However, as a result of her increasingly strong links with the US branch of HBO (*Shot in the Heart*, *The Wire*, *Treme*) in 2012 she followed up work on AMC's *The Killing* by beginning production upon the three-part mini-series *Hořící keř*. The production was managed by a predominately Czech crew and production team, under the executive direction of veteran British television producer Antony Root – *Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City* (1993), *The Grand* (1997-1998) – who had been appointed Executive Vice President of Original Programming and Production at HBO Central Europe[18] in October 2011. It was a project that had some personal resonance for Holland as it detailed the life and death of anti-Communist political activist Jan Palach, a Prague student of history who committed a harrowing act of self-immolation in 1969 – as protest against the Soviet Union's occupation of Czechoslovakia. Holland had of course been involved in the student protests of 1968, so knew the historical terrain of Štěpán Hulík's teleplay all too well.

HBO Europe had originally commissioned the production of a mini-series of three 75 minute episodes, totaling 225mins of screen time. The production was primarily backed and funded by HBO, but with significant support from Jan Bílek's Czech television and film production company etamp Film Production. etamp Film Production have developed a reputation for specializing in the production of television serials and mini-series that can be given effective international distribution in multiple territories. The Emmy-nominated TV mini-series' *Joan of Arc* (1999) and *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* (2003) are, perhaps, their best-known productions. Their presence among the production companies assembled around the production of *Hořící keř* strongly indicate HBO Europe's desire to see the mini-series transcend its Czech-language and Czech cultural roots, and make inroads into foreign marketplaces. This impression is further reinforced by the additional involvement of Nutprodukce, another Czech-based production company who specialize in 'art-house' feature film and animation production, as well as prestige TV programming, and usually seek to connect two or more Central European film industries in the production structures of their output. Although *Hořící keř* is nominally a Czech television production, HBO Europe is an umbrella organization funneling money into productions from various European partners. Holland's involvement in the production immediately opens up the Polish marketplace to the mini-series, whilst also,

potentially, making the project appeal to a far wider international audience aware of her work within French, German and US contexts. It may prove fruitful, especially in the light of *Hořící keř*'s protracted post-production and distribution process, to consider Holland's work on this mini-series – and throughout her career more generally – in relation to the recent film and television career of French director Olivier Assayas.

In an interview with Richard Porton[19] the idea of Assayas as a director increasingly interested in the creation of 'globalized' space within the modern world is floated. Assayas responds to this remark by claiming that he:

> wanted to move out of French filmmaking. I was trying to experiment and explore a new globalized space in cinema – a space that was not available to filmmakers until recently. When I made Boarding Gate, I made a film that was shot partially in France and partially in Asia featuring an Italian actress and an American actor.[20]

Until the mid-1990s this was an idea that could have been almost as equally applied to Holland in cinematic works like *Europa Europa* and *Olivier, Olivier* (1992). Holland's interests during this period seemed to lie with ways of looking at the world that lay outside of more conventionalized narratives of ethnicity, gender and nation. Her immersion within the US television industry has also seen her frequently return to Europe for projects that seek to import production structures that stray beyond the strictly national. If Holland can be said to have an aesthetic identity in an auteurist sense, it is surely as a film and television director who works at an intimate and microcosmic level of detail upon projects that invariably facilitate some degree of transnational production structuring. Even amongst her US TV work she has more often than not worked on projects that are adaptations of another nation's television programming, or consciously utilized international casts and crews to cover specifically American stories.

Hořící keř, despite its Czech production origins and historically Czech narrative, had a global appeal that almost saw it submitted to the Oscars as the Czech Republic's Best Foreign Picture nominee (this would have been Holland's second Oscar nomination for that award in three years). HBO Europe, after premiering the mini-series on Czech television in January 2013, agreed to promote a trimmed theatrical release of the 234mins, three-episode program. This edited version was approximately 180mins in length and toured international film festivals throughout late-2013 and early-2014. In a similar way to Assayas and his television mini-series *Carlos* (2010), Holland envisaged the HBO Europe production as a longer-format film rather than a strict mini-series. The restructuring carried out between mini-series and theatrical release is as drastic as that which Assayas performed upon *Carlos*. In effect Holland with *Hořící keř* has taken a production opportunity supplied by a global

television producer, as Assayas did with CanalPlus funding, and has delivered both a television product and feature film.[21]

Just as a figure like Holland freely transitions between different national industries, frequently developing and producing what could be described as 'transnational' product, her productions also demonstrate the increasing convergence of the televisual and filmic mediums. What can be traced in her production of *Hořící keř* are her early professional experiences in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Having trained in the former, she then works in the latter on film and television productions at a time when the State Socialist systems were increasingly failing to distinguish between these two mediums in the manner with which they produced and exhibited work. Technical innovation both in terms of moving image production and dissemination has led to a similar set of circumstances emerging within film and television industries globally, with even the US seeing an ever greater interpenetration of film and television aesthetics and production/distribution structures. Holland can be seen as very much at the vanguard of this tendency, even if she may not be producing work as genuinely ground-breaking as a contemporary global traveler, such as Olivier Assayas.

References

Blaney, Martin 'Agnieszka Holland: crisis of content in European Cinema', ScreenDaily, 27th April 2015 (http://www.screendaily.com/news/agnieszka-holland-crisis-of-content-in-euro-cinema/5087028.article) [Accessed: 13/05/2015]. Holland reiterated this point in a recent interview with this journal (https://eefb.org/april-2015/leurope-autour-de-leurope/interview-with-agnieszka-holland/) [Accessed: 13/05/2015].
PolTel was established by Lew Rywin, a highly controversial and hugely influential figure within Polish film and television who went on to found Heritage Films, a co-production partner on both "Schindler's List" (1993) and "The Pianist" (2002).
Ostrowska, Dorota and Roberts, Graham, European Cinemas in the Television Age (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 116.
It is important to acknowledge that Agnieszka Holland, although born in Poland and emerging to prominence within the Polish film and television industries of the 1970s, was actually given a cinematic education and training within Czechoslovakia.
Lugo de Fabritz, B Amarillis, 'Agnieszka Holland: Continuity, the self, and artistic vision', pp. 96-108 from: Women Filmmakers: Refocusing, eds. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul (Toronto and Vancouver: UBCPress, 2003).
The series was co-produced by Propaganda Films, the music video and film production company that was founded by Michael Bay, David Fincher and

Dominic Sena, among others.
Interview with Agnieszka Holland carried out for the Visual History section of the DGA website. Interview conducted: 09 November 2007 by Robert Markowitz. The interview is available, with transcript here: (http://www.dga.org/Craft/VisualHistory/Interviews/Agnieszka-Holland.aspx) [Accessed: 11/05/2015].
From Chapter 7, [12:37 – 14:39] Visual History Interview for the DGA. Interview conducted: 09 November 2007 by Robert Markowitz. (http://www.dga.org/Craft/VisualHistory/Interviews/Agnieszka-Holland.aspx) [Accessed: 11/05/2015].
King, Susan, 'On the Set : On a Hot Chandler Night : SHOWTIME ADAPTS "RED WIND" AS A "FALLEN ANGELS" PROJECT', The Los Angeles Times, 26th November 1995 (http://articles.latimes.com/1995-11-26/news/tv-7139_1_red-wind) [Accessed: 19/05/2015].
See: McNeilly, Kevin 'Dislocating America: Agnieszka Holland Directs "Moral Midgetry"' pp. 203-216 from: The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television, eds. Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall (New York and London: Continuum, 2009).
By Season 3 of "The Wire" a prolonged stand-off between an undercover police unit and a Baltimore project's drug-dealing operation has been further complicated by the unconventional policing implemented within this project's police district by Major Colvin. Trying to tackle the drug-dealing operation head-on Colvin devises a police policy whereby any drugs trade and drugs use that occurs within one specific square block of the projects will effectively be ignored by the police officers of the district. This geographically limited and informal decriminalization of the drugs trade sees the area in which the policy is adopted come to be known as 'Hamsterdam'.
MacNeilly, 2009, pp. 207.
The film and media academic Michele Hilmes makes a distinction between serial drama and series drama that is worth taking notice of. It is best explained in her answers to a television survey that appeared in Cineaste magazine:'Rethinking Television: A Critical Symposium', Cineaste, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, 2014, pp. 26-38.
It is interesting to note that arguably Holland's worst US television production was the recent TV mini-series of "Rosemary's Baby" (2014), originally filmed in 1968 by her friend and compatriot Roman Polański. Placed in charge of directing a two-part drama – in effect a lengthier TV version of the film – Holland's virtues of economy, precise detailing and meticulous focus upon performance were almost completely drowned out by a histrionic sense of bombast and excess.
In this regard Holland is very much like fellow Polish émigré filmmakers Jerzy Skolimowski and Andrzej Żuławski, as all three have helped their progeny to break into the film and television industries.
The only significant Polish television forebear within the genre was the mini-series adaptation of Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz's lightly absurdist novel

“Kariera Nikodema Dzymy” (1980), which was produced by the film unit Zespól Filmowy Silesia.

All figures supplied by Polish media analysis site www.wirtualnemedia.pl . The article covering Ekipa’s poor viewing figures was: ‘Serial political fiction Polsatu nie porwał widzów’, 11th December 2007 (http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/serial-political-fiction-polsatu-nie-porwal-widzow) [Accessed: 24/05/2015].

The presence of a sub-division of HBO Europe, known as HBO Central Europe, points toward the atomized regional approach this US-based television producer and broadcaster has undertaken abroad, which simultaneously draws national television industries into more co-ordinated transnational production structures.

Porton, Richard, ‘Demystifying Carlos: An Interview with Olivier Assayas’, Cineaste, Vol: XXXVI, No. 1, 2010 pp. 16-22.

Porton, 2010, pp. 22.

Holland worked for most of the 1980s within the French film industry, during a period when CanalPlus was becoming an increasingly influential source of production funding for French film. Thus, the convergent production conditions that had been experienced by Holland in the State Socialist Polish motion picture industries were echoed, to some degree, within her later experiences of the French motion picture industries. Assayas benefits early in his career from the closer involvement of television and film industries, as his 1991 feature “Paris s’éveille” is produced in partnership with CanalPlus.