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Disturbing Representations in Cinema and the European Film Awards

Abstract. In this paper, the attention was paid to the disturbing images representing aggressive and violent behavior in the movies awarded with the European Film Award. Among the winners of the EFA awards (1988-2014) is a greater number of representations of violent behavior and death, in various forms. Whether it is about the murder, self-punishment or legitimately imposed penalty, the representation of violence as an act of punishment, lethal, is in the focus of many European filmmakers – from Kieslowski, Amelio, von Trier, Polanski, Haneke to Pawlikovski and others. The causes should be sought in turbulent times and events that have marked Europe in recent decades. Using the examples of European award-winning films, the paper deals with the phenomenon of violence and its representation on cinema, as an individual act but also as an act in which the State punishes the perpetrators, imposing the maximum sentence. Special emphasis was given to the two films that deal with violent deaths and result with death sentences handed down by the law as formal way of violent act: *A short film about Killing* by K. Kieslowski (1988) and *Open Doors* by G. Amelio (1991). It points also to the ethical-philosophical question of prescribing the death sentence. The violence is in function of deterrent and represents a method of social impact, as anticipatory but also as a corrective factor.

Keywords: European film, disturbance, representation of violence, death punishment.

Introduction

European film award and disturbing images

The contemporary media, especially film, abound in scenes showing different forms of aggression and violence, that have become the inseparable part of many audio-visual structures, although representing the explicit acts or at least an implicit notion of harm.

In this paper, special attention was paid to the disturbing images presenting the aggressive and violent behavior in two films that deal with several violent deaths, whether as individual or formal act of violence, handed

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down by the law as a State punishment. *A short film about Killing* by K. Kieslowski (1988) and *Open Doors (Porte aperte)*, by G. Amelio (1991), both awarded by the European Film Academy (EFA)¹, present a homicide as ultimate level of violence. In order to dissect the hostility and destructive behavior with lethal consequences, the theoretical framework in decryption of two chosen films, containing disturbing acts, will use the psychological perspective on aggression, analyses of perpetrators' character and constellations, as well as to the specific social-psychological theories of human aggression (and violence), based on social interaction and cognitive association. In a broader context these theories are considerably overlapping.

The establishment of the European Film Award 1988², coincided with the period of one important historical event³ that highly marked the European soil - the fall of the Iron Curtain, where Europe went through radical change: the fall of state communism and the collapse of old world order, the opening of borders between Eastern and Western Europe, the triumph of liberal capitalism, the creation of new European geo-political landscape, reaffirmation of the European values, etc., made a new socio-political environment and marked the film optic as well. According to Andre Bazin, the film specificity lies in the ability to capture ("transfer") the reality and "makes an imprint of the duration of the object" (Bazin 23-27). Thus, within the films awarded by EFA, many authors answer ethically to the challenges brought by the new political encounters and new order and as well deal with ideas and so-called "intellectual" issues, raising the existential questions, in the sphere of philosophy, ethics, moral and other areas those reflect in the societies. The reading of all these images depends a lot, of course, of the spectator and his "burden" – cultural capital (Bourdieu 241-258).

Representation of aggressive behavior is very common in the today's films, where the invisible and visible social order represent the basement of violence (physical, social, gendered, psychological, etc.). Among the 28 EFA awarded films (until 2015), a different kind and level of unsettlement and disturbance are achieved through different codes (music, sound effects, mise-en-scene, camera angles, editing, etc.) and represented via: atmosphere – crowd in *Lamerica* (1994); burdensome atmosphere of the courtroom in *Open doors*; suspense and mental illness in *Melanholia* (2011); religious subtext in *Ida* (2014); menacing atmosphere in *Hidden* (2005); a kind of emptiness in *Ladro di bambini* (1992), although the film represents hope; color – yellowish in *A Short Film of Killing* (1988), black and white in *White Ribbon* (2009) as well in *Ida* (2014), etc.; sound – mute sequences during Stasi spy activities and investigation in *The Lives of Others* (2006); musicals in *Dancer in the Dark* (2000); classical music vs. jazz in *Ida*; but as well through the scenes of ultimate violence. Fear and menacing expectations, the approach of the strange planet in *Melanholia*, the sudden murders in *White Ribbon* are not explicit neither vehement, neither the suicide of desperate woman/judge/Aunt in *Ida*, or the implicit scenes of rapes in Almodovar's *All about my Mother* (1999) and *Talk to Her* (2002), etc.; the scenes although have an unsettling effect.

Some authors, however, deal with explicit, sudden, aggressive behavior that can seriously disturb spectators. Many scenes represent images that affect both, senses and emotions of spectators, whereas the visible and invisible social orders represent the basement of different types of violence – psychical, psychological, social, gendered, etc; e.g. poverty causes children's aggression on an old man in *Lamerica* – they put him in the bunker and set fire, before taking him shoes off ...); setting fire in the building in *Riff-Raff* (1991); activities of secrete services in *The Lives of Others*; violence on woman and children of the authorities (baron, doctor and pastor) ruling the small village in *White Ribbon*; criminals but also children torturing the main female character in *Breaking the waves* (1996); neighbor that murdered a Jewish family in *Ida*, etc.

Some of the EFA awarded films represent the ultimate violence: the two murders as in *A Short film about Killing* (taxi driver as murder and the act of capital punishment), three murders made in sudden and one death sentence, in *Open Doors (Porte Aperte*, 1990), two murders in *Ghost Writer* (the political murder of Mr. Lang and that of the Ghost writer), the murder of Italian mafia representatives relaxing in a tanning salon at the very beginning of *Gommora* (2008); murders in the dream of Gombo and Sergei in *Urga* (1993); the suicide under the weal, of the actress Krista in *The Lives of Others*; the provoked suicide in *Hidden*, where the violence is also portrayed as “strategy of raping the audience” (M.Haneke) by threatening expectation; or the “classical war murders” in *Land and Freedom* (1995); etc.

Each of these films use different themes and the violence is of different kind, as reactionary, necessary, pure, unrelenting or accidental, etc. however ending with harmful consequences. Many of these images are conveying a mix of worry and perplexity and one could say that they are in the same time disturbing, as well as memorable.

Aggression and Violence (theories) / Representation on Film

Many evidences of violence throughout human evolutionary history serve as a reminder that contemporary aggression and violence are not the new phenomena. As Keeley suggests in his *War before civilization: The myth of the peaceful savage* (1996), the early writings of different civilizations provide many details of large-scale of human violence, deriving from a variety of societies, even ancient such as Egypt, Sumer, Greece, Rome, India, and Meso-America. The recent research studies have shown that “antisocial behavior is stable across time and circumstances for a small percentage of people, ranging from 3% to 9%, however yet decidedly unstable for most but, not necessarily, all other groups of birth cohorts, such as those who are regarded as being at moderate risks” (Fergusson *et al.* 90-106).

However, the aggression behavior is one of the most present human characteristic occurring as a continuum, including violence. According to Bjorkqvist “the substantial evidence suggests that female are more likely to engage in indirect form of

aggression, males are more likely to engage in direct physical aggression, and both genders are equally likely to engage in verbal aggression" (Bjorkqvist *et al.* 27-33). The fact is that the most of crime executors are males. The violence is thus, strongly associated with gender; "males not only commit more violent acts, they also are the primary consumers of entertainment with violent themes" (Kruttschnitt 293-376).

According to American psychologist Dollard aggression is "an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism" (Dollard *et al.* 11). Other psychologists, as Baron and Richardson also suggest that aggression is any behavior directed toward other with the ultimate intent to harm, where the target is willing to avoid that behavior, can be interpreted as human aggressive behavior (Baron & Richardson 461-463). Thus, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target/potential victim, although, actual harm is not required.

The researchers distinguish many different typologies of aggression, according to:

- appearance: direct physical, direct verbal, indirect aggression;
- target of aggression, where the aggression can be: self-directed (suicide), interpersonal and collective;
- form of aggressive behavior, where the traditional discussions differ the dichotomous approach and distinctions of aggression such as: affective versus instrumental, impulsive versus premeditated and proactive versus reactive, personological versus situational, etc. and they are in fact overlapping;
- nature/source of aggressive behavior – the prevailing theories of aggression make classification into three groups: innate or biological theories, drive or instinct theories and social learning theories;
- motive – benefits, profit, passion, revenge, etc.

According to its goals, the psychologists, determine the type of aggression, as affective aggression, the "hostile aggression" (Feshbach 257-272), resulted from presumed provocation. It is affective, "emotional", and reactive, driven by the impulsive behavior, anger, etc. with the ultimate goal to harm someone. According to Berkowitz and Geen, the instrumental aggression is more proactive while its goal is not to harm but to reach other target, although is using the same features of aggression.⁴ (Berkowitz, Geen in Anderson and Bushman 29)

Any violence is the aggression but every aggression should not be considered as violence. The violence is conceived as the highest level of aggression – physical aggression at the extremely high end of the aggression continuum, such as murder or aggravate assault, thus having as a goal an extreme harm (e.g. death), and could be defined as:

- rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment;
- the exercise or an instance of physical force, usually effecting oriented to effect
- injuries, destruction, etc.;
- an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power, as against rights or laws, etc.

Thus, many theories explaining the violent behavior could enter into several categories: intra-individual theories, social-psychological theories, socio-cultural theories, etc.

Violence is a social phenomena; an action considered as violent needs a victim or group of victims and perpetrators. The sociology of violence uses the term violence in its broadest meaning, as a range of human activities intended to inflict harm or injury.

Defined by the World Health Organization, violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” (Dahlberg and Krug 5).

Taking in consideration different definitions of violence and referring to the properties of violence⁵, J. Gilligan, in DeKeseredy and Perry’s *A Critical Prospective of violence*, suggests the notion of “emotional pathogens” and enumerates the essential attributes, characteristics, elements, factors, situations, routines, hot spots, conditions, and so on, identified by many ad hoc and integrative theories of antisocial behavior.

Although some violent acts can be attributed to disorders, social situation, interest, abuse or mental illnesses etc., it appears that the majority of violent behavior in societies, cannot be treated as random or aberrant, but functional. The role of functionality triggered many cases of violence. And some acts of violence are spontaneous and informal, occurring without premeditation or structure; others are methodically planned in advance.

Violent behavior serves a purpose and is the result of evolved psychological mechanisms that, based on particular environmental inputs, calculate whether the costs of violence are outweighed by the potential benefits. Violence has its role in the power relations. Therefore, an explanation for violent behavior, including homicide, can be provided also by adopting an evolutionary perspective. For example, “humans often experience fear in response to stimuli that are likely to have been potent threats throughout our evolutionary history (e.g., snakes and spiders), even if they no longer represent realistic threats in contemporary environments [...] whereas [...] psychological mechanisms select the response to these threats” (Öhman, Mineka 483-522). Thus, evolutionary psychologists plead that “the mechanisms function by registering specific types of input (e.g. environmental stimuli, physiological activity, output from other psychological mechanisms), processing this information, and generating a specific output (i.e. physiological activity, information for other psychological mechanisms, or manifest behavior; selected over deep evolutionary history [...])”. (Tooby, Cosmides 5-67). The evolutionary psychology proceeds to generate hypotheses about “what types of psychological mechanisms exist based on defensible assumptions about the selection pressures faced throughout human evolutionary history” (Liddle *et al.* 24-36). These hypotheses include predictions regarding the outputs that are expected to be generated in contemporary

environments (i.e., environments that provide novel inputs that did not exist when these mechanisms evolved). Thus, the violent behaviors are not arbitrary, but rather appear to have been selected for to solve particular adaptive problems. Liddle *et al.* conclude that in a broad sense, violence can be viewed as a strategy employed in the competition for resources. Although this is an oversimplification, it illustrates that there is an evolutionary logic to be found behind most acts of violence, and acknowledging this is an important step toward better understanding why violence occurs (Liddle *et al.* 24-36).

Thinking about violence, Žižek as well, identifies several types of violence, visible or invisible – subjective, symbolic and systemic violence (Žižek 7). The subjective violence is “visible” and described also as “obvious”, the symbolic violence is using the language while the systemic violence is hidden within the system. Žižek argues that in our culture the violence is often presented as amusement and entertainment that “he considers largely unethical”. Thus, he points at “danger of fascination” of visible violence.

Bourdieu and Wacquant in the *Neoliberal Newspeak: Notes in the new planetary vulgate*, conclude that permanent exposure to the violence makes a kind of “desensitisation”, where people become accustomed and not anymore shocked with the acts of violence. As ultimate result, people become more open and tolerant for violence in their proper environment, home, work, society. They also argue that the spectators participate willingly in the system of violence. Talking about modern society in the *Society of Spectacle*, Debord pleads that “the concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a *speculative* universe”. Thus, the violence has become a part of our lives as a tacit agreement, but also a kind of entertainment as intentionally generate excitement, in the today’s consumer’s society.

Among the EFA awarded films, several represent violent acts followed by the death sentence. Two of them represent the East and West optics to that issue, although from different epochs: *A Short film about Killing* (1988) and *Open Doors* (1991). The authors considered the different types of violence, the individual and social, however, causing the same result. And, in the most cases the cause of the representation of aggression and violence as seen on cinema are made for some cause or interest, thus with some specific goal.

A Short film about Killing (1988)

The first awarded European film for 1988, and not occasionally, the controversial *A Short Film about Killing*, represents the story of two emotionless executions, however, with different aims – individual and formal. At the first sight, it is a film about senseless murder. Secondly, it is a discursive film in which the author talks about one important social issue, in the middle of debate on a death punishment in Poland but also in other European countries, at the time.

As a part of Kieslowski’s *Decalogue*, project based on Ten Commandments, *A Short Film about Killing* illustrates the fifth one: “Thou shall not kill” where Kieslowski tries

to attract the attention and influence on society through the excessive presence of violence and disturbance that are on the edge of the mainstream conventions. The film goes from an aesthetic of irritation toward scenes of crime. On purpose. The specific use of the ochre- filters connotes the emotional life of the main character Jacek Lazar (Miroslaw Baka), an ordinary youngster with almost depersonalized⁶ identity. The main character encompasses together the phenomena of "alienation", "deviation" and kind of "otherness". Apparent high grade of alienation and the sadistic joy of hurting the others, embarrass the audience with upsetting interruption of conventional: while throwing the stone from the bridge and damaging someone's car, throwing the ice into the glass of restaurant, or while pushing the man in the toilet for smiling him, etc.

With this film, Kieslowski points out one phenomenon that marks modern society, legitimate acceptance of an act of violence, whoever is the perpetrator – individual or system. The paradigmatic initial scenes of a dead rat and a cat hang by the neck – represent the symbolic codes that indirectly pointing out the death and the capital punishment by hanging, as anticipatory in the film.

In *A Short Film About Killing* appear two homicides, both presented as disturbing acts. The first one represents the sudden cold-blooded murder of the taxi driver. A youngster recently came to Warsaw, from countryside and attacks an unknown taxi-driver during the drive. His aggression is suddenly displaced on unknown person, with a length of rope, and bigger stone, as weapons. After entering the car, at final destination, Jacek tries to kill the driver tightening the rope around his neck. He performs it first in the car. Then some passers disturbed him and Jacek is being hiding and had to wait them to leave. The scene unfolds by the river in an uninhabited part of the city, in the underbrush. After this small pause when, the driver was still alive and breathing, Jacek continues to beat him, pulling on his plaid shirt on the face, and continuing to beat the man into the face. He grabbed a large stone and repeatedly was smashing the head of taxicab driver. Afterward, he threw the body into the river and calmly drove the taxicab.

The main actor expresses a high level of cruelty in the excessively violent scene of strangling and beating the man, without premeditation and seemingly without any reason. The torture is as long as the generated anger persists. After several minutes of continuous violent act, the covered visage of man is obviously smashed and bleeding. This act is too hard to be justified and will result with death penalty by hanging. The whole scene is lasting about seven minutes and represents one of the longest murder's scene seen in cinema.

The act is provoked and can be explained by both, as cognitive act, raising his emotional instability and anger, and the social interaction – with an event that marked him in the past. The last talk to the lawyer reveals the frustration provoked by the tragic death of perpetrator's sister, as *agent provocateur* for the violent act.

Demonstrating the nonsense of murder and undertaken responsibility, Jacek says:

“Probably nothing would happen if he didn’t previously have drink with the tractor driver,

If she (little Mary) were alive, I wouldn’t left village, *et al.* Maybe, I would have stay.

Everything could be different.”

According to Berkowitz, within the Cognitive association Theory (CAT), he interprets that “an unpleasant event or a negative stimulus occur to an individual, such as provocation, frustration or other, may cause feelings such as depression, sadness, frustration or even pain, etc.” Thus, the psychological response to such type of feeling is its development into anger or other negative emotion that furthermore exhibit an aggression. (Berkowitz, 494-503).

The first aggression is cognitive and emotional response triggered by previous death of Jacek’s sister, that we knew at the very end of film. It is a hostile aggression driven as an (un)planned, violent impulse full of anger where the ultimate motive is harming the targeted victim as a kind of compensation for guilt.

On the other side, as Tedeschi & Felson suggests in their Social Interaction Theory (SIT), the aggression is conceived as socially influenced behavior. Aggression and violence represent a method of interpersonal or social influence, as an expression of severe dissatisfaction and an attempt to obtain or maintain the desired picture. (Tedeschi & Felson in Anderson and Bushman 32). In the frame of this theory even the act of hostile aggression can be rationally explained.

The scene of the second violent act is a formal punishment, done “reciprocally” by the State. It represents an institutional form of murder by the officials, where the perpetrator now becomes a victim. Thus, the violence is considered as a method of social influence as corrective factor. The exposure to violence in that scene of execution is about five minutes.

After being caught and imprisoned, and despite the efforts of his lawyer, Jacek is found guilty and sentenced to the death penalty by hanging, as anticipated the dead animals (rat and cat) at the beginning of the film. The spectators face the scene of execution in the jail. The sentence is read once again, Jacek is given the last word of a priest and is offered a last cigarette. Before the act of hanging Jacek breaks free for a while, but very quickly was overpowered by the guards and the sentence was carried out. He is quickly hanged with bureaucratic efficiency. And while he slaughtered on the gallows, bellow him, there is a dark stain, witnessing his last moments of fear. Although quick, the disturbing scene leaves a bitter taste of justice. The doubt expressed in the film is whether the legal system, in the name of the people, has the right to makes revenge and reciprocally kill with cold blood?!

According to Berkowitz and Geen, the second murder could be declared as instrumental aggression, as a burocratical answer to the previously committed act

of murder. The instrumental aggression is mainly proactive (Berkowitz, Geen in Anderson and Bushman 29). Also, although, one can be treated as “aberrant” and other as “normative”, the second one represents a kind of “the State *lex talionis*”⁷, Kant’s fundamental moral principle of proportionality (Kant 102-106), where governs the basic rules of “eye for an eye” justice. Thus, in the same time, the film represents the individual and the collective acts of violence, where the state gets its revenge. Seemingly, the State makes the same act for which the doer of the crime is convicted as gesture of the justified revenge.

Making parallels, no matter that one is provoked spontaneously as an act of individual violence and other, provided by the law; both scenes are explicit, very detailed, disturbing and harrowing. No matter if there is a question of ethical or juridical law, at the end the result becomes the same – the inflicting death. The director’s words confirm it as well: “It’s wrong no matter why you kill, no matter whom you kill and no matter who does the killing... Inflicting death is probably the highest form of violence imaginable; [...]” According to the author, formal theorizing about violence should both assist in understanding in order to, as well make abolition to a capital punishment in Poland.

The film thus refers to the basic cultural values, against violence, that are in focus of today’ Europe and that lie already in the Judeo-Christian ethic, that clearly stated “Thou shall not kill” (Blumenthal *et al.* 14). Thus, apart from its artistic and aesthetic value, the violence on film has an obvious communicative purpose.

Open doors (1991)

Only three years later, appears the awarded film *Open doors (Porte Aperte)*⁸, coming from the West – Italy, that also deals with the disturbing scenes and inflicting death.

Although, the context is different, the main delinquent characteristics and behavior in Amelio’s film is very similar to previous Kieslowski’s: aggressive, lack of fear while executing, lack of empathy, desire for excitement, increasing fear while being a victim... It seems that the main character, ex-clerk in Confederation Building, Tommaso Scalia (Gian Maria Volonté), a Sicilian Fascist, comes from the margins. His attitude, in executing murder, as well as his reactions in the court, indicate that his coming from the delinquent milieu.

According to Reiss and Roth, violence seems to be more common among groups who are excluded from the mainstream (Reiss & Roth 63). In fact, the perpetrator is the low profile man who conducts the revenge on his wife, her lover and one accomplice. The three acts of murder in *Porte Aperte*, are sudden and quick, however not all too explicit although disturbing, anticipating death (knife, blood, scream behind the door, etc.).

In the *Open Doors* appear three homicides, made in similar ways, from the back.

The representation of the first murder unfolds in the office of the Court. Tommaso Scalia, a bureaucrat who became the scapegoat, kills his ex-superior, the lawyer

Spadafora Vincenzo who has recently fired him. The victim is observed to the desk and the perpetrator is behind his back, pretending to be leaving. The victim is shielded by the perpetrator who executes the crime. The audience sees the wave of the perpetrator's hand holding the knife and hears the blunt shot. The body falls on the table to the map of Sicily. The executor wipes the knife on bloody map that symbolically depicts the ambience.

The second act of killing is a murder of the accountant Speciale Antonio, who replaced Scalia, for being an accomplice in adultery of Scalia's wife. It is unexpected violence, however obvious, although not explicitly visible. Except the bayonet and shadows behind the semi-transparent glass door, the audience does not see the act. Again, the blunt shot of the falling body.

The third representation of murder is the execution of his wife for adultery with his former chef, the murdered lawyer Spadafora. Thus, after two murders already, Scalia takes his wife and drives the car through a lonely road. He stops and pulls the wife from the car. He rapes her on the field and finally, after hesitating for a while, he fires a bullet in her head. Again, the victim is semi-shielded by the perpetrator who is behind her back. The scene is from far away, the woman remains to lie motionless. The execution is done. The fact that the murder rapes his wife, before killing her, enable as well the discussion of the misogynic discourse in the film. The very act of rape enters as well in the frame of using physical force and violent conduct with ultimate aim to harm. It is affective and reactive, hostile reaction which representation is traditionally used as anti-feminist because, within the media culture women is mainly observed and represented as object.

The three homicides made by one person will be treated as only one, because they were inspired by one motive – passion. Hereby appears again the Kant's principle of revenge ("lex talionis"), as one of the most often motive of violence and murder (Kant 102-106).

And according to Berkowitz and Geen, the three explicit murders represent the combination of both, hostile and instrumental aggressions. The knowledge that the wife of the accused was in relation with one of the victims, his superior, and furthermore covered by the other victim, his colleague, give a reason, to the violent act. In both, Kieslowski's and Amelio's film, the murders, are provoked deliberately as acts of individual hostility and violence but, according to Tedeschi & Felson, they are also provoked by social interaction (SIT), that conceive the aggression as socially influenced behavior.

However, there is a representation of another violent act, at least announced, as the fourth one in the film. The verdict is pronounced – a death sentence against triple perpetrator. Once again, the motive is revenge and the principle is "eye for eye", except the fact that the murder's capital punishment is provided institutionally by law, as a kind of State revenge. Thus, G. Amelio uses the violence in order to depict

the nonsense of the society where still existed penal code, as well as in Kieslowski, where the final result is the same – inflicting death.

Although, not believing in the effectiveness of the death penalty and considering it crueler than murders committed by the accused, the judge Di Francesco, despite everything, managed to obtain a life sentence for Scalia, however, the film ends with reports that Scalia will be sentenced to death and shot on appeal. Thus, the act of State violence won't be visible although, it provokes a kind of disturbing impact on spectator. According to researchers, there is an obsession of the audience, by the violent acts and a kind of their consent is well pronounced by the sentence of the old judge:

“All they will remember is that a murder was punished by the law with the extreme penalty.”

The action is set in Palermo in the 1930s and it is not coincidence that the film unfolds in the South of Italy where the public opinion of the small communities is even more powerful than the law and the most important is fulfilling the expectations of the masses, although it is an act of violence.

Conclusion

Every representation of the aggression and violence via disturbing scenes in the films awarded by the European Film Academy (1988) has an artistically appreciated author's seal and expresses a specific cinematic language that highly contributes to the significant philosophical, ethical and other socially important questions.

Respecting the specific poetics, supporting the narratives that encompass the essential social questions, as freedom, ethics, justice, virtue, knowledge, as well as the issues of love, passion, honor and honesty, but also of violence, crime, corruption, punishment, fascism, Holocaust etc., raising the new questions and even, bringing a kind of new ethical premises, moral codes or set of values, EFA awards – especially the European Film of the Year⁹, besides the excellence and artistic justification, point out to the proactive attitude and social engagement of the authors and narratives. Thus, the themes concerning violence, crimes (*Gomorra*), capital punishment (due to debate in Europe – e.g. Poland in 1988⁹); invisible violence and aggression on women and children (*White Ribbon*); Holocaust (*Ida*); political dissidence and secret services (*The Lives of Others*); searching for identity and struggling against violence (*The Land of Freedom*); etc. but, also the narratives about friendship (*Urga*), human dimension and hope (*Ladro di Bambini*); etc. deserved to be prized, due to the film quality at the first place, as well as due to the contribution to the significant issues that concern whole society. Taking into consideration the enumerated film scenes of the film awarded by EFA, besides the authors' concept and aesthetics, the general assumption is that the social context and historical circumstances had a significant impact on the artistic creation and characters of the awarded European films. Thus, the conclusion

could be that the award is not only artistic but is as well for the socially engaged author's attitude. Each visual representation of violence was created with clear aims and functions, and explainable, as suggested, by the social theories of aggression: the Social interaction theory (SIT) and Cognitive association theory (CAT).

In this work special attention is paid to the violence and scenes with inflicting death.

Whether it is about the representation of visible or invisible violence, with different targets, forms, natures or motives, the violence on the film is always conveying a direct or indirect message. Thus, an important fact that points out the consciousness and responsibility, is that with a distance of only three years, EFA prized two films on violence and treated the topic of capital punishment (in Poland¹⁰ is abolished 1989 and in Italy¹¹ in 1994), expressing the actual disagreement of wider society, according to a developed public discussions.

By excessive representation of violence, both authors, Amelio in *Open Doors* as previously Kieslowski in *A Short film of Killing*, react to the socially important issue arguing that life is an attainment that must be defended. EFA recognized the authors' intention and attitude and rewarded them, taking into account primarily the artistic quality of the films. The possible changing of place and role of perpetrator and victim indicates the diverse perspectives of understanding violence under the different conditions. The choice of two films was with the aim to show that EFA from the very beginning had the idea of having the responsible attitude toward maintenance of the European values. In both films, within the constellation murder-victim-justice, the representatives of justice fail to defend its clients that in a way announced the failure of the concept of punishment.

Both main characters, in Kishlowsky's and Amelio's film, feel repentance after having heard death sentence, both judges representing the murders are against the capital punishment, however express it in different ways. Thus, the word "failure", should be here decoded by relating it to the value of the European culture. And the concept of failure emphasized its opposite – the success, as a need of struggling for more human response to the committed violence and perpetrators. Both films balance between Kant's deontological principle of "the absolute prohibition of killing and consequentiality attitude that treat, as morally justified in killing a murder, represents an act which has good consequences" (Kant).

Although the cinematographic representation of aggression and violence are the phenomena that disturb spectators, the fact is that they mainly represent and encompass the socio-political circumstance and possible consequences as kind of "voice of reason". Thus, in the awarded films, with different cinematographic languages, the violence mainly has the social role in order to raise the question, enhance critical opinion and reflexion. It reveal the deeper strata of societies where the individuals or community feel unsafe, disoriented or, also, strong and powerful,

even beyond the law¹², and thus undertake the acts of violence (*Gommora*, *The Lives of Others*, *White Ribbon*, *Ida*, etc.).

In analyzing violent film images, the film critics mainly fall into two categories. Ones that see the representation of violence in film as superficial and exploitative, arguing that the audience can become desensitized to brutality and increase the aggressive behavior. The other critics see violence as a type of content, or as a theme, claiming it is cathartic and enable a positive social impulse against violent behavior.

Thus, EFA with its award emphasizes the positive impact and the notion “European” in reflexive, human and moral senses, as well as the values that this term carries, asking the questions, for almost 30 years and certainly, and somehow influencing decision-makers by its decisions... In fact, it is not the art that is brutal but the society is violent and the art is just the mirror, and sometimes, could be a corrective factor, that EFA with its award well anticipates.

Endnotes

- 1 *Felix Awards*, until 1997 / in reference to the award’s trophy statuette/.
- 2 The films must have a director who was born in Europe or has a European passport. The criteria whereby a film qualifies as European are based upon the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production, Appendix II, issued by the Council of Europe. According to the Convention, a film qualifies as European if it achieves 15 points out of a possible maximum of 19 from a schedule of European elements.
- 3 the Fall of the Berlin Wall (9.11.1989)
- 4 The FBI classifies violence resulting in homicide into criminal homicide and justifiable homicide (e.g. self-defence).
- 5 The property of violence may include negative emotional states involving feeling of alienation, shame, humiliation, mortification, rejection, abandonment, denial, depression, anger, hostility, projection, and displacement. They usually includes a lack of emotional states associated with the property of nonviolence such as empathy and compassion stemming from positive experience of love, security, attachment, bonding, identification, altruism, mutualism, etc.
- 6 His clothing encodes the poverty and negligence and village origins.
- 7 1590s, Latin “law of revenge or retaliation”, from *talionis*, genitive of *talio* (see *retaliation*); meaning “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”.
- 8 The title of film refers to the Fascist ideology, according to which the “open doors” represent the state where the death penalty would be a sufficient deterrent to ensure that Italians could live with the open doors, even at night.
- 9 Restricted to European cinema and European producers, directors, and actors.
- 10 The assumption is that the social context in Poland in 80-ies had a significant impact on artistic concept and creation of this film. From 1945 until 1989 Poland was marked by the Soviet communism, low standards, economic depression, political struggle and social unrest, repression and reforms where difficult for young people.
- 11 Capital punishment remained in Polish law until April 1, 1998, but from 1989 there was a moratorium on executions, with the last execution taking place one year earlier. The death penalty is now prohibited in Poland for all offences.

12 In Italy in 1994, Death penalty is abolished completely, and substituted with the maximum penalty, the imprisonment for life sentence. In 2007 a constitutional amendment was adopted and the Article 27 of Italian Constitution was changed to fully ban the death penalty.

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