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## Antigone in the London office: documentary film, creativity and female agency

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors explore female creativity and agency through the means of documentary filmmaking. *Husband and Wife* is an experimental documentary concerning one woman's journey from Poland to London, England to reclaim the body of her husband after his death. The authors/directors discuss the process of creating a space where the life of the characters and the life of the camera merge. This creative, feminist space is one of mutual influence between themselves, the protagonist and their documentary film.

In their investigation of the protagonist's journey from her Polish hometown to the city of London, they all become affected by the process of filmmaking itself and by the widow's relentless resourcefulness in her mission to reclaim the body of her husband. To understand the widow's tenacious approach of dealing with UK institutions, as well as her mourning, the authors refer to the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler, who offer different conceptualisations of female identity and ethical agency. Drawing upon Irigaray, and Butler's analysis of *Antigone* (Sophocles, 441BC), the cinematic picture of the Polish widow's commitment to her husband's post-mortem civic dignity is compared to the commitment of Sophocles' heroine, who transgressed the patriarchal order attributed only to proper, male citizens. The authors of the paper discuss the definition of otherness, as a mode of creative and ultimate resistance that both Antigone and the Polish widow embody, as women acting in the patriarchal world. In their documentary, the authors-directors articulate Polish Antigone's act of resistance through the angle of female interiority, as defined by Lucy Bolton, which in cinema is more characteristic of male protagonists. In that way they reflect the incomprehensible agency of a woman that is gained through her gendered performance, her creativity and her everyday existence in the world of men.

**KEYWORDS** Documentary; interiority; femininity; creativity; otherness; Irigaray

*Husband and Wife* (Hawkins and Hawkins 2020) is an experimental documentary concerning one woman's journey from Poland to London, England to

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reclaim the body and the dignity of her husband after his death. It is a woman's journey from the space of the family home (*oikos*) to the space of politics (*polis*) and back. In this paper we explore this journey as the physical movement of the protagonist, Beata, in front of the camera and as the relationship between gender, creativity and (bio)politics of life. In our analysis we draw upon the literary figure of Antigone from Sophocles' play (1998 [400–300 BC]), which we bring here to reflect on female agency in patriarchal society and to engage with the feminist interpretation of Antigone's resistance in relation to Beata's journey through London.

The author's filmmaking practice and Beata's journey unfold in tandem, in a physical, geographical space and a creative space, the process of which is framed within three sides: the camera, the people and life. The camera is an instrument that captures action but also instigates the performance of our protagonist and our own performance as researchers and filmmakers. The people are the researchers/filmmakers, our protagonist Beata and all other people involved in the investigation of her husband's death. Life is understood here as *zoe* (Agamben 1998) — the function and energy of raw life that underpins the dimension of nature and home, in opposition to *bios* that relates to politics and the language of city–state. The camera and the filming crew frame an aesthetic dramatization of *zoe*, that is materialized through Beata's story and her presence. The decisions of the filmmakers are influenced by her reactions, her own moods, physical experiences, and imagination. In the space/process of filming, Beata's body is a sign that, like Butler's performative body, is at the same time dramatic and non-referential (Butler 1988, p. 522).

The documentary itself was made by an amateur crew. Whilst the filmmakers are experienced in their fields, the film was made without institutional funding or a large crew. This mode of filmmaking has historically aligned with female practitioners and female centred stories. As Belinda Smaill notes:

documentary (in all its different modalities) is frequently integral to the careers of female filmmakers. It is critical to women's representation in the industry in many parts of the world. Thinking more in terms of documentary pedagogy, nonfiction is also the preferred genre for activists and grass-roots organisers working at the forefront of feminist politics. (2018, p. xiv)

Documentary filmmaking practices conducted outside of major industrial contexts offer opportunities to create work outside of patriarchal structures, thus allowing for a freer emergence of feminist voices and perspectives. Boel Ulfsdotter and Anna Backman Rogers' two volume collection on *Female Authorship and the Documentary Image* (2018) considers historical and contemporary documentary practice as a site for grass-roots activism, female agency and creativity that has the potential to operate against mainstream

patriarchal discourse. *Husband and Wife* is politically and aesthetically aligned with this particular mode of practice, in terms of the narrative and voice presented in the film and the low budget, self-financed nature of the production itself. In this regard, the creative practice can be considered alongside what Libora Oates-Indruchová and Jana Mikats describe as an ordinary creativity (in this issue), directly opposed to professionalized, industrial and capitalistic film production. The film is a product of a meeting of two filmmakers and one woman, the act of listening to and recording testimony and simple observation.

We adopt Butler's twofold perspective (performative and empirical) on Beata and her story in the way we film and the way we analyse the filmmaking process and the final output. Alongside Butler we bring to the argument Luce Irigaray's approach to femininity and feminist cinema. Lucy Bolton explains this approach in her book *Film and Female Consciousness* (2011), where she analyses similarities in films by Lynne Ramsay, Jane Campion and Sofia Copola. Inspired by Irigaray's conceptualization of female consciousness, Bolton (2011, p. 3) finds out that these directors concentrate on the 'interiority' of the female characters, 'their inner lives, their thoughts, desires, fears and emotions, and the introspective contemplation of these', rather than the image of the female body. Although our film is documentary not fiction, we follow this approach with the aim of creating a subjective, feminist space for expressing Beata's presence and her consciousness. By acknowledging the difference between Butler and Irigaray's readings of Antigone, we mobilize their insight to femininity as performative and alternative subsequently, which enable us to recognize the socio-historical (see Wilmer and Zukauskaitė 2010) and psychoanalytical (see Griffith 2010) patterns in the desire of our protagonist to 'bring her husband home'. In the argument built around three movements from the film, we indicate that Beata's brave act of salvaging the body of her husband from the pre-formulated space designed for the forgotten, unrecognized and abandoned 'others' is an act of imminent creativity and ethical transgression. We conclude that like Antigone, Beata imitates and resists state powers in which she is entangled, while she also unlocks her own new agency through her imminent creativity that leaves a tangible mark on the tapestry of state relations conceived against her.

Two women and two stories; Antigone, a mythical Theban woman, battles the verdict of the king, Creon, to secure a decent burial for her brother, Polyneices. Beata, a widowed woman from a small Polish city, battles the bureaucracy of the office to secure a decent burial for her husband. Both women decide to take things in their own hands when they find out that a family member is dead. They both made a brave decision of leaving the safety of their home and family, known in Greek philosophy as the space of *oikos*, and face the consequences of transgression into the space of the male

citizens' world, the *polis*. For a woman, whether the heroine of an ancient Sophoclean drama from 440 BC or a contemporary woman living in a small Polish town, the consequences of such a rebellious act are dire and final. For her insubordinate disregard of patriarchal order and her attempt to dignify her brother, Antigone pays with her life, while Beata, exhausted and confused with cultural perturbation in the UK and her personal mourning, returns home to live a quiet life.

When the filmmakers and authors of this paper met Beata, she was determined to discover what really happened to her husband, Adam, and to make sure he would be buried at home — 'no matter what'. By becoming the heroine of the story she became a collaborator in filmmaking, a friend, an actress and a heroine. The documentary film is a legacy to her own tenacity, courage and resourcefulness, but also to her mourning. She knows we are writing her story here and that we owe new film lessons and research breakthroughs to her. She has participated in the screenings of the film in different countries where she actively engaged with the audiences.

### **MOVEMENT 1. The system and the other of the other (or the vomit of the system)**

When Creon finds out what Antigone did, he is shocked and outraged with disbelief. Good citizens do not question his orders and do not develop alternative plots to his dominant discourse. So he exclaims this at the Chorus just before he summons her:

There is no room for pride  
 In one who is a slave! This girl already.  
 Had fully learned the art of insolence.  
 When she transgressed the laws.  
 That I established;  
 And now to that she adds a second outrage-  
 To boast of what she did, and laugh at us.  
 Now she would be the man, not I, if she.  
 Defeated me and not pay for it.'  
 (Sophocles 1998, pp. 478–485)

In Creon's world the binary oppositions must be maintained: one has to be either a woman or a man, a king or a slave, a host or a minority, and this difference clearly defines identity positioning in patriarchal society. Creon cannot understand Antigone's position, as she consciously agrees to pay with her life for the kind of civic behaviour that is accounted to men, not women. He cannot accept that Antigone-woman adopts his qualities and speaks like him, so he calls her 'proud, insolent, and boastful', the very qualities good soldiers, or good male rulers have in any patriarchal order (see Fischer-Lichte 2010, Meyer 2010.). For Irigaray, this traditional discourse of gender binary

oppositions is the platform where women should try to gain their voice via mimesis, which means: they should strive towards copying male discourse while reinterpreting it in their own way. Irigaray believes that mimesis will enable the penetration of the borders between masculinity and femininity and creation of a new discourse, where female identity will be freely expressed and unconstrained. In contrast to Irigaray, Butler does not see that potential in Antigone's words, as she regards her speech as conceived and trapped by masculinity. However, they both agree that the act of rebellion itself is a sign of alterity that threatens the sameness of the patriarchal system. In his analysis of Antigone, Jacques Derrida calls this alterity 'the vomit of the system' (1986, p. 62), meaning that Antigone comes from the outside of the system and her actions cannot be accepted — 'digested' by Creon. Likewise, as her visceral quest through London shows, Beata, like Antigone, cannot be neutralized as the Other. By the standard definition of the state, as an immigrant's widow she belongs to the margins outside of the city walls, where typically women, minorities, immigrants, vagabonds and the homeless, are enclosed (see Appel, 2010). By isolating Others within that space, the state reinforces its power over them and reinforces its sovereign position. Yet through her immanent resistance that seeks recognition in death at her own will, Antigone is indigestible to the system and becomes its own noxious hazard. She is incomprehensible, as she falls out of the established system of award and punishment assigned to the Other. Thus Beata-Antigone does not fall under the category of the Other, as she does not mirror the state's discursive position, but rather creates her own positioning which falls outside of the outside of the usual system of power relations, where she stands as an 'irreducible alterity' (Robert 2010, p. 417) that undermines the wholeness of the state.

The filming team observe Beata redirected from one office to another with no clear explanation as to how she can claim the body of her husband. Yet, being driven by her ultimate commitment and imminent resourcefulness, she continues to transgress the boundaries of buildings, laws, and discourses with trepidation and courage. In the film these acts of transgression are symbolized through closed doors, her knocking and the scenes of waiting, while the nervousness of her body and the convulsion of her journey are articulated through camera pans, jump cuts and close ups. To integrate Beata's cinematic presence unfolding in front of the camera, the filmmaking team position themselves behind her, so we can witness what is happening and be ready for a physical shift at any time. Her movements and her decisions, as much as the reactions of random people who happen to be involved in the investigation, are undefined and unpredictable. The instability of the movement of Beata's body through the streets of London leads the camera. There is a physical link between the camera and Beata's body: the camera moves with her, as she turns in multiple directions, weaving through the streets, people and

objects. When Beata stops, the camera stops, too. The speed, the pace and the movement of the camera is a direct response to her ideological struggle and to the internal and external vibrations of her body.

Beata trembles each time she receives a new piece of information from anonymous council officers, policemen, priests, lawyers, civil servants. She is in pain, she is mourning, but she knows she needs to strive through the obstacles. The camera captures her uncertainty and anxiety by concentrating on the details of her body, close ups of objects and through jump cuts. The jump cuts emanate from the vibration of her restless presence in front of the camera: she rapidly pulls a suitcase, she grabs a phone, she shakes her head. Her nervousness disrupts the spatial and temporal continuity of the image. So in the edit we split her movements, fracture her body parts, and combine pictures of her journey through London, pictures of her hometown and pictures from the funeral in a non-linear way to show her transgressing different ideological forces, memories and hurts at the same time. Her body is always in the centre of each sequence as it is her who is experiencing the pain. The unbearable psycho-somatic pain she feels is transferred on the audience who is forced to experience the unpleasant accumulation of fragmented images from Beata's journey, that flicker across the screen, disrupting continuity. It is difficult, almost painful to watch and this effect is amplified by the shifting, dissonant ambient sound, which accompanies every jump cut in the film.

In response to the indifference of the bureaucratic system, she annoys its representatives – the council officers, the police, the funeral parlour and the Polish Embassy – with her questions and constant phone calls. She is kept on hold on the phone for long periods of time. Time and again she is put through to answer machines or cut off, or told that the person she is trying to get through to is on holiday or away for training. In the scene with Beata waiting for an Embassy officer to pick up her phone call, the camera observes her on the phone, framing her at the bottom of the screen. As time passes, the waiting extends and becomes unbearable. This sensation is received by the filming crew who decides to pull the camera down in one slow tilt, so the feeling of time passing and its heavy weight on Beata is articulated visually, as her body is emerging slowly from the tilt from the top to the bottom of the screen. A harsh metallic sound is added to emphasize the physical discomfort and the mundanity of this act. The tilt and the sound continue when Beata's body appears in the frame and starts a conversation with someone in the embassy office who tells her that that is a wrong time and they cannot help her.

When Beata cannot receive any information on the phone, she gets on a bus to travel from one office to another without any direction or advice how to complete her journey. Yet some institutions do not permit entry at all. When she is directed to the building called Public Health and Pest Control, she faces a closed door. Not being able to understand the

relationship between her husband's case and 'public health' or 'pest control' imprinted above the main door, she sits outside the building for hours with us — the filming crew next to her. She sits on the stone steps to the building in stillness, which the camera is closely observing, before she moves again, stands up, knocks at the door, and sits down again. This bodily rota is repeated a few times before someone opens the door and re-directs her to the adjacent building where she is to meet a council officer, called here Mr. Johnson, face-to-face. When he opens the little, rusty metal side door and lets Beata in, we follow them with the camera to an outside building, which more resembles a shed, or a converted outdoors toilet or ex-servants' quarters, than an office space. Beata, like an outcast, or a powerless pest eradicated from the citizens' space, is not permitted to pass through the main building and must passively follow her guide. Her presence there, however, already inflicts a mark on the office of Public Health and Pest Control that did not expect her interference within the border of its building and its discourse.

Beata's stubbornness, relentlessness and creativity do not fit the description of the powerless Other that she is in the eyes of the system. In fact, the more obstacles she faces, the more resilient and resourceful she becomes. She transgresses the borders of spaces and the social rules prescribed for her. She makes her own decisions and employs effective methods, so she can be heard. She refuses to be the Other. In the manner of performative mimesis, she adopts a 'masculine' discourse in order to achieve what she needs. In one scene, the camera observes her speaking on the phone to a Polish Embassy officer, turned away from the camera. Once the conversation is over, she turns towards the filming crew, as if she was addressing some future audience, and she says in English:

I told them a lot of not very pleasant words,  
but it works, it's a method.

but if I would be polite ... I would not achieve anything.

Beata, like Antigone, is repulsed by the whole charade, but knows intrinsically that this is the method that she must use. She weaponises the presence of the camera in her favour, telling the Embassy that she is being 'filmed for television' and that their treatment of her is unacceptable. The Embassy responds to this assertive transgression of social borders by retracting the rules and granting her direct access to the Embassy office. However, this retraction is a temporary one, as she is sent away again due to her lacking documentation that she still needs to retrieve from another part of the *polis*.

Beata refuses to be digested by the system: she is in the space in between where she mimics the dominant discourse and she disrupts it at the same time. The system does not understand either her motivation or her action.



With the camera in place, we have observed how Beata does both: refuses the funeral bureaucracy of the local council and the funeral office and mirrors its discourse to her advantage, so, as in Butler, 'the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses' (2000, p. 11). On the other hand, as in Irigaray's interpretation of Antigone, she speaks from 'the outside of the outside' of the cultural and political discourse that ignores her as a Polish Other in the UK and as widow of an emigrant in Poland. Being a widow of a Polish immigrant, she is pushed out of the centre and persistently grows into a 'nuisance' who cannot be stopped or controlled under any prescribed state agenda, so she becomes, 'a threat', 'a vomit', 'the irreducible alterity', 'the Other of the Other'. When drawing upon her own intuitive, rudimentary, incomprehensible core that tells her to complete her ritual quest, she has become indigestible to the patriarchal system and, as Irigaray said about Antigone, she 'digested the masculine. At least partially. At least for a moment' (1974, p. 274).

## **MOVEMENT 2. *Homo sacer* (can be killed but cannot be sacrificed) and the rights on the other side of law**

Antigone proposed a new version of the universal discourse of human ethics constituted through her particular commitment to love/death beyond political divisions (see Chesi 2013, Irigaray, 2013). In response to Creon criticizing her for glorifying Polynices' over his brother Eteocles, she says: 'I give both love, not share their hatred' (Sophocles 1998, p. 523). She refuses to obey Creon's decree in the name of that commitment which Creon cannot understand:

It was not Zeus who published this decree,  
Nor have the Powers who rule among the dead.  
Imposed such laws as this upon mankind:  
Nor could I think that a decree of yours-  
A man – could override the laws of Heaven.  
Unwritten and unchanging. Not of today.  
Or yesterday is their authority;  
They are eternal; no man saw their birth.  
(Sophocles 1998, pp. 450–457)

In her analysis of the transformative power of Antigone's pre-discursive femininity, Irigaray emphasizes that Polyneices' sister belongs to the sphere of *oikos* that is governed by intuitive, instinctive, beyond-binary forces that make her follow her faith in the divine laws rather than in the laws made by humans. Creon does not understand where Antigone is coming from, or who her 'gods' are, as for him the universal law means the law created by him. Antigone knows instinctively and righteously that she has to bury her brother and no legal edict can stop her. When Creon asks why she did it,

she responds: ‘the god of Death demands these rites’ (Sophocles 1998, p. 518). In Greek mythology, this is Hades, who decides on the passage of souls to eternal life where they find peace and happiness, but most importantly, their existence finds acknowledgement by being formally judged and approved by Hades (see Alter 1996). Nevertheless, as William Robert observes in his analysis of *Antigone* from an Irigarayan perspective, ‘Antigone does not ‘side’ with the divine law of Hades against the civil law that Creon proclaims but that she resists Creon’s disjunction of divine and human legal substance’ (2010, p. 415). Further on, Robert adds, For Antigone ‘aw has an embodied as well as a divine substance, referring directly to the fleshy corporeality of human bodies’ (2010, p. 416). Looking at Beata’s motivation from Irigaray’s point of view, we observe that it lies in both: her sense of moral obligation and her commitment to life per se. Beata, like Antigone, follows the only law that she knows, that one which cannot be defined or explained by the civil rules of Logos. In one of the interviews she says:

I cannot do anything for him anymore, but bury him. He was my husband. He was a human being and it is my duty to give him a funeral.

For Antigone and Beata there is another side of law, where the right to live and the right to die are regulated differently from that which the *polis* dictates. In Beata-Antigone’s eyes the value of life is the same for all people, regardless of their class, ethnicity, origin or gender. They believe in the value of life in its raw form that does not understand politics and divisions, so all beings are equally ‘holy’ in that sense, even a traitor, even a suicider. In the ancient Greek tradition the ‘raw’, biological existence — *zoe* — was typically attributed to women, children, nature and animals, and was an alternative to the political life and power attributed to citizens-men. In the contemporary neo-liberal version of this divide, holding feminine identity and female sexuality in the space of *zoe* defined as dark, natural, irrational and opposite to the space of Logos, still benefits the economic and sexual function of the masculine state. Nevertheless, as Irigaray argues, this alternative approach to life that Antigone represents should not be seen in opposition to the masculine order, but rather beyond any such divisions. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Irigaray emphasizes that female sexuality continues to be a misunderstood ‘dark continent’, always approached through masculine terms, while feminine subjectivity is entrapped within the notion of the subject that relates to the masculine as the ultimate measure of subject validity. Antigone, however, as Irigaray stresses, represents a special historical figure who transgressed the border dividing the feminine sphere of *oikos* and the masculine world of *polis* and spoke against the division between them through her death. Although Beata does not commit such an ultimate sacrifice for her husband, she materializes the ultimate commitment to his life and death by transgressing her own

social and ontological position. Her transgressive response is not understood either by the state, or her friends, or even the audience watching the film. When a viewer in one of the film screenings asked her: 'Why did you need to bring your husband's ashes back home at all?', she replied: 'How can it even be a question?' Her commitment is immanent and driven by a force that she is not bothered to explain as it is obvious and absolute. This force cannot be explained as organic, dark, feminine or irrational, as it derives from the source that does not differentiate the value of being human. Only through her journey to retrieve Adam's body from the man-made system of law, she learns that it is through the political and economic take on the value of life that its sacredness is distributed unequally to different people and their bodies.

As Agamben argues (1998), when 'outcasts' die, they become '*homo sacri*' — people who can die, or be killed, but the sacredness of their lives is taken away from them by the constituting letter of the law. Agamben sees the examples of such 'outcasts' not only among immigrants, refugees, the stateless, and the enemies of the state, but also the disabled, the homeless, the poor, or any other groups that the state reckons valueless, dangerous, unproductive or insignificant. When Agamben explains the sacredness of life in contemporary society, he points at the Foucauldian description of biopolitics which seized *zoe* — the natural, raw life of all beings — for political purposes of the state. The state can change these purposes according to the needs and benefits it can gain from regulating the value of life and the value of death. By leaving Polyneices' body exposed to the elements and deterioration, the state renders his life meaningless and demarcates him as a traitor whose death cannot be acknowledged-sacrificed in the civic sense. The reduced status of Polyneices-traitor is what Giorgio Agamben calls, '*homo sacer*'; a citizen who can die but who cannot be sacrificed, as only patriots and legal subjects, who lived and died in alliance with the dominant values of the state, can be sacrificed and buried in the conduct accepted by the state.

Beata's husband's dead body does not represent much value to the host state, unless the body's worth is translated into the economic terms of the funeral industry. As a Polish citizen, not having citizen rights in the UK, or any economic means to pay for a private funeral in London or to cover the transportation of his body to Poland, Beata is asked to formally abandon the body of her husband, so the UK local authorities can take control of the procedure in line with the law. With no legal or economic power, she must agree to what the state decides upon her. She signs an official document which confirms that arrangement, so in return she can have the cost of her husband's 'pauper' funeral covered by the UK state. Only in that way she can retrieve her husband's ashes and secure a Catholic burial for him in Poland in her parents' grave.

Yet in the case of the death of an immigrant with no family in the UK, the scenario is simple: after closing the police case of a suicide, Adam's body will be cremated and his ashes will be eventually destroyed. In most cases when the body is officially abandoned, after being shelved in metal urns in a local council office, the ashes of incinerated bodies are disposed after a certain time, as no one claims them. While acting from the other side of law, Beata disrupts this simple logic: not only does she map out the trajectory of her husband's body's handling across London, but also, by fighting for the funeral to happen, she reclaims the formal meaning of her husband's existence. From the cinematic perspective, we work with her and with the camera to materialize her husband's body from where it is not and we try to give that absent body presence on her terms. The state has reduced his life to a bureaucratic inconvenience that must be regulated according to the law. So after his body had been abandoned, his existence is delegated to a set of documents to be signed and ticked off. Once this is complete, his remains can be burnt and he can be forgotten by the system. In hostile *polis* both Beata and the camera search for signs of life-zoe and of Adam's existence. Since there is a lack of a physical body, we search for other signs of life in the tactility of his belongings, material objects, religious figures, theatrical props, which we capture in close-up with a focus on Beata's physical, haptic connection with their material and symbolic essence.

When Beata is asked to sign the checklist of her husband's belongings that the police found by his site, she does it automatically without thinking. When she is presented with the artefacts and the list to tick in the council office that deal with abandoned bodies, she signs them one by one automatically and without expressing any emotion. The camera concentrates on the close up of the evidence of his existence: his Polish ID, his UK Insurance Card, European Health Card, UK bankcard, his wedding ring, his phone and the box with his personal things. In the sterile space of an office, Beata receives a bag of material objects that stand for her husband who is gone forever. We feel her detachment and her consternation, so the camera stays passively focused on her signatures and the officer's voice counting the objects. When outside the office and back in the car, Beata puts her hands on his formal documents again in a very different way. She touches them one by one affectionately, says their status and his name out loud to the camera and concludes: 'This is what is left after him'. She repeats the same act in her room when unpacking the box of Adam's personal items: his glasses, old tapes, old pictures, some cables and plugs. She caresses every item, explores it, reshuffles it in her hands again and again as if she was trying to give some life to the markers of her husband, to salvage his presence from the abyss of *polis* that absorbed him. We stay close to her capturing these gestures with the camera. In small spaces like the car and her bedroom, the closeness between us creates a peculiar connection: her body and the

camera react to each other in one rhythm. When she sobs and finally lies down on her bed seemingly exhausted, the camera pauses and we all freeze together in that moment. We feel her pain, her loss and her mourning and that feeling will underpin the editing of the added, specially arranged scenes with Beata throughout the film. From this moment we realize that the missing body of Adam is not only the metonymy of the *polis* that absorbed it, but also the non-referential icon of pain, felt as a poignant absence that can never be filled.

We decide to articulate this absence by adding performative scenes to the film, which Beata is asked to act out. Images of Adam's portrait juxtaposed with recurring images of water are to materialize the sensation of the sacred life she is seeking in *polis*. Especially the scenes showing Beata pulling Adam's portrait from the chapel's fountain and her cleaning his grave with water carry the meaning of the contrast between the feminine order (nature) and patriarchal order (*logos*). Water symbolizes the elemental meaning of life-zoe before it became a commodity (portrait) employed by the system of politics and economy. We apply water as a reiterative symbol throughout the film to illustrate that Beata's motivation and energy originate from zoe — characteristic for the space of *oikos*, that is eternal and outside of men's power, unfolding 'on the other side of law'. By creating visual symbols and icons of Adam's absence from the man-made language of the binary difference between nature and Logos, we articulate Beata's struggle to 'sacrifice' her husband's life in Agamben's sense. So Beata's ritualization of his life and death is twofold: private, symbolized through a series of close ups of her hands caressing Adam's belongings, her hands reaching frantically for his portrait from a fountain of water, and public, captured through the images of official documents and procedures next to the religious symbols involved in the Christian funeral. For Beata, like for Antigone, these two spheres overlap as both heroines see them from the side of the unwritten and unchanging' law that motivates their absolute commitment. For example, a religious ritual is important for both of them, but they reinterpreted its meaning on their own terms. Beata insists on having a funeral for Adam in the UK — which for abandoned bodies is by proxy the bare Protestant rite — not because she is a Protestant, but because she desires a formal acknowledgement of her husband's existence from the dominant UK discourse. By reclaiming it as a mark of the sacrifice that the state grants to proper citizens, she grants Adam equal civic rights that he did not even have when he was still alive. The symbolism of the Church on film, especially funeral memorabilia, the body of Christ and the figure of a priest, highlight the position of the dominant discourse in the process of reclaiming Adam's body to the private domain of Beata's mourning. The upgraded, fully embellished version of the pauper funeral, that Beata managed to secure at the expense of the state, embodies Beata's desire to

materialize Adam's political, physical and divine presence. On film, the image of the figure of Christ crucified on the sculptured cross, juxtaposed with Beata's voiceover recalling the pain of Adam's final moments, represents the climax of that desire. Through that image we articulate Beata's mythical, sexual and creative power to possess Adam, surrender to death and embrace life. From the psychoanalytic point of view, it is an image of *jouissance*. In the Lacanian sense (Eagleton 2010): *jouissance* is the excess that belongs to the unconscious, so it cannot be articulated in the Symbolic order, yet it surpasses the Symbolic order. But Beata is not just driven by the unconscious, as she also creatively negotiates the Symbolic order for her own ideological purposes. She draws upon *jouissance* that Cixous (1986) defines as a fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political. As Ettinger indicates, this kind of feminine *jouissance* is 'not a happy covenant but one laced by phantasy and trauma' (2010, p. 227). The way we record the figure of Jesus on film is the effect of Beata's phantasy and trauma on us. The image comes after Beata admits that she could not do anything to help Adam but to bury him. She tells us in painful detail how she imagined Adam's last moment when he was dying. In the edit we add her voice to the image of Jesus's half naked body, stretched on the tall cross, recorded in the chapel, where Adam's funeral took place. In this way we make a direct connection that Beata desires for her husband, namely one between a wasted life and a sacred life. When the figure of Jesus emerges in the film through a slow bottom-to-top tilt, we realize that it is in direct opposition to the movement of Beata's body emerging from the top of the screen in the scene with the Embassy official. It is obvious that we are under the influence of Beata's emotions and her physical presence that we formulate aesthetically as a film crew, but we also produce a new film language of her own interiority that we do not necessarily control or understand ourselves.

The presence of the markers of the unconscious and of the symbolic illustrates Beata's painful transgressing from *oikos* towards her independent arranging of the ritual of sacrifice in the realm of *polis*. Regardless of the contrast between *oikos* and *polis*, masculinity and femininity, citizen and outcast, conscious and unconscious, pertained for the state's benefit, which makes the transgression so challenging, Beata, like Antigone, reclaims the difference between these divides through her own presence and by following her own creative and ethical drive.

### **MOVEMENT 3. Performing mourning: *jouissance* and creativity**

Beata's journey through London and her participation in the filmmaking process unveils the layers of her creativity and resistance which feed into own agency. In the film, the dramatized signifier of Beata's body is a site of performative resistance which the protagonist negotiates with the

filmmakers. Like in her unyielding battle for her husband's body, Beata is never a passive subject of filming. In fact, she is much more than a subject or a partner in the filmmaking process. When she needs to, she takes the filmmaking process into her own hands. In one scene she takes away the power from the filmmakers and from the council officers in one short walk across the office space and across the line of the camera.

In the scene in the shed of the Public Health and Pest Control Office Beata asserts her agency through her staged performance, which is at once an expression of her creativity and of her active reclaiming of power over the situation in which she found herself against her will. Her response surprises us all, as she is physically constrained in that scene by being positioned in a small space between the council officer and the camera. She signs the documents where asked and sits passively surrounded by piles of paper, against the metal cabinets filled with abandoned urns, empty coffee mugs and unfinished lunch sandwiches. Using only one camera, we need to make a quick decision whether to follow the image of the urns on the cabinets' shelves, or the poignant, growing presence of Beata in front of us. The camera captures the back of her head and glimpses the papers on the table. When the whole procedure is almost completed, Beata unexpectedly asks about a suicide letter that was allegedly left by her husband. This question disrupts the smoothness of the procedure and catches Mr Johnson off guard. He hesitates before remembering that there was some little piece of paper that he decided was not important, therefore he had not included it in the post mortem check-list. He goes back to the cabinet and passes the crumbled paper to Beata. What he assumed might have been a shopping list written in Polish, or 'something like that', on inspection appears to be a personal, poetical note from Adam, to which Beata clings with full attention. When presented with that note, Beata unexpectedly reclaims her voice and her agency with a physical move through the office space and across the line of the camera. Unprompted, she grabs the note and moves across the room towards the window where there is more light. We, as the filming crew, do not understand what is happening, but we pan across the room and point the camera towards her, accordingly. She moves from camera left to camera right, so her frontal body is in view. To use the language from narrative fiction film, we can say 'she hits her mark'. In cinema, this is often the position for heroes who have a voice. In fiction film, the director, camera team and actors work through a scene before it is shot in order to decide how the actor will move in relation to the camera. This process is commonly referred to as 'blocking'. In observational documentary, scenes are not blocked, but rather unfold in real time to be observed by the camera. Beata moved through the room as though the scene had been carefully blocked. When the dynamic of the scene shifts and it's time to read her lines, she hits her mark and turns to face the camera.

Undisturbed and self-composed, Beata looks at the note and reads the Polish words out loud. In this moment she is not only a bereaved widow of a Polish migrant, but the heroine of her own story. She acts her part out for the future audience. It is the camera to which she speaks and the creative, imaginary and physical space in front of the camera in which she is performing. But it is also a non-referential space of her existence over which she wants to have control. The words are very moving and she knows she is being recorded. Beata has now become the actor, the director, and the editor of the scene. She decides how she wants to be filmed and she knows we will follow. Her performance is delivered on her terms and as such it is created against Mr Johnson's ignorance and to rebut the oppressive approach of the dominant order that has brought her to this point. We can see Beata is in pain and at the same time we observe she deeply enjoys her acting, and also gaining her control over us and over Mr Johnson and his office. It is that painful and liberating kind of enjoyment that we identified as *jouissance*. Importantly, her *jouissance* surpasses the symbolic order, whilst simultaneously employing the symbolism of the cinematic discourse of Hollywood to her advantage.

Thus we can observe that Beata's performance is 'unconscious' (that is from the other side of law — instinctive, embodied, organic, mythical) in an Irigarayan sense and also 'symbolic' in the socio-historical sense of Butler. By being practically and creatively engaged in the filmmaking process, Beata resists traditional mourning and the standardized space and conduct ascribed to a woman in her position. Yet, she still acts out her traditional roles defined by the masculine discourse: that of a wife, widow, carer, nurse, which she is both telling and embodying on film. Through the process of filming, the embodied relationship between those roles, her own creativity, and her resistance are performed and negotiated. We regard her creative engagement with the film as an expression of her entanglement in the dissonant fusion of her gender, her ethics and aesthetics, which Cixous (1986) accounts to *jouissance*. As the film crew we are part of this fusion too, and we are also, like Antigone's body before Creon, an intentionally organized materiality and a historical situation that acts out, dramatizes, and reproduces what it resists. In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler shows that Antigone's 'agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honour his [Creon's] command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses' (2000, p. 11). In our interpretation of Beata's act on film, it is the performative aspect of our interaction that reproduces and transcends the borders of both: traditional documentary and the patriarchal system that brought us together. As researchers, film directors and Beata's friends we are responding to her story and her embodied performance in front of us with aesthetic tools that we create through



constant negotiation. We artistically create the organizing and disorganizing conditions of her own socio-bodily materiality in the film narrative that, like with the patriarchal discourse in which she is entangled, she resists and readapts for her own satisfaction.

## Conclusion

Beata's continuous reappearance in the unprepared ranks of the police, the court, the funeral parlour, the embassy, the local council, and the Public Health and Pest Control Office does disrupt their complacency and poses unwanted questions on the value of immigrants' life and death. Beata's desire to live, to exist, to commit to living and to surrender to dying, to create, to feel joy, to overcome pain is there unrecognized, but it also tarnishes the dominant discourse through small stains of resistance. As we said above, Beata and Antigone resist, readapt and reinterpret masculine discourse to give voice to their own identity that resides outside of the outside of the system. Speaking from the other side of law they undermine the binary differences on which the state is built. Creon knows that he needs to mobilize his defence against such position when he says:

The whole crew must close ranks.  
The safety of our state depends upon it.

(Sophocles 1998, p. 23)

When others are encouraged to act under the agenda of otherness, for example, the dominant discourse of women's creativity or ethnic difference, there is a risk those others will reproduce the sameness of the state. This is because such intentionally 'othered Other' does not pose a threat to the centre. For Irigaray, Antigone illustrates the resistance from a different plane, where sexual difference unfolds fully outside of Creon's state. As Robert explains 'This other side is the side of an other of difference — an other rather than another' (2010, p. 413). By recognizing Antigone's resistance as motivated outside of the usual margin assigned for Others, Irigaray, Butler and Derrida bestow, incomprehensible in the masculine discourse, power to Antigone. In the same vein, Beata defies the description of the usual 'Other' and becomes a nuisance, a vomit, the Other of the Other that the system cannot digest. It means that Antigone-Beata achieved what Butler wanted to see as 'some form of demand that the unconscious necessarily makes on law, that which marks the limit and condition of law's generalizability' (2000, p. 33). On the micro scale of her tribulation in the space of London *polis*, Beata has achieved that for other immigrants too. Through her transformative passage from *oikos* (home) to *polis* (state), Beata learns and teaches us the value of life and death. This focus is subversive in that it addresses both the (im)possible agency of non-citizen (immigrants), against a focus on

passivity, victimhood and 'bare life', and equally accounts for the changing nature of citizenship from below through active transgressions.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Marta Hawkins and Matthew Hawkins* are an academic filmmaking team working across documentary, ethnography and experimental film. As activists engaged with grassroot communities, they are committed to issues of belonging, migration, and social justice. As critics, they investigate those issues empirically and philosophically, while looking into the potential of narrative, affect, and representation in theory and practice.

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