

EDITORIAL

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The 11th European Psychoanalytic Film Festival, postponed from last year due to Covid and hence much awaited in a state of *hope* is finally here, with a rich selection of excellent and challenging movies. They have been selected from those proposed by our European Consultants and we are grateful and indebted to them for the challenging and thought-provoking movies they have shared with us. Each film represents something hopeful, even as they contain much despair and desperation, even hopelessness.

Our **new Honorary President, Agnieszka Holland**'s oeuvre straddles the two spheres, and we are delighted to welcome her to the first festival under her presidency.

On **Friday afternoon** the programme begins with the **OPENING GALA MOVIE, Spoor**, directed by Holland. The film portrays the dilemmas of a middle-aged woman, an independent, spirited animal lover who takes on the 'establishment' in her village: the men who make money out of hunting and the local police, corrupt as ever, who turn a blind eye to this. It is a strongly environmentalist and feminist film about loneliness and aging, but also about finding companionship and love. It may have a somewhat magic realist ending: love conquers all, or, at least it makes life liveable. In this way it potentially echoes the hopeful end of our final gala movie, **Ali and Ava**: finding solidarity with others through lasting relationships, however Other they might be, are our only hope in a dark world dominated by hatred, violence and isolation.

The second Friday movie, **Honeyland**, a North Macedonian documentary, also with a powerful environmentalist message, features a desperately poor middle-aged woman whose care for her bees and awareness of the limitations of our natural world and the need to safeguard its resources resonates as well as contrasts with her loving but occasionally cruel care of her dying mother.

The mostly female directors in these films cast middle aged women: not conventionally beautiful but full of desire and potential for goodness and a capacity to care. We get a sense of internal objects that nourish and sustain these women – hope, indeed, at times of hopelessness.

On Saturday we show and explore movies in three auditoria, each with a theme: *hope and survival, hope and memory, hope and loss*. These somewhat arbitrary divisions – as all these concepts figure in all the movies to a greater or lesser extent – aid our focus on the central concepts in relation to hope.

AUDITORIUM A: HOPE AND SURVIVAL

The programme in this auditorium showcases films from Central/Eastern Europe, which is not any more monolithic than Northern/Western Europe. The radical dividing line between Eastern and Western Christendom, between Constantinople and Rome runs within the region itself. The use of both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets and the presence of Islam among the indigenous populations further complicate the picture.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain – a metaphor of imprisonment as well as an actual electrified metal fence – the film industries of Eastern Europe began to make movies in a more independent spirit but in these films the characters not infrequently struggle with a harsh and almost unendurable historical legacy. Without a free press, and devoid of truly independent cultural institutions and civic life, nations in the Soviet Bloc suffered another three decades of hardship, oppression and their accompanying limitations, to varying degrees in each country

The inhabitants of these countries were much traumatised by the immediate past. As psychoanalysts, we know that the impact of multigenerational trauma persists through the generations. (c.f. Gubritcz-Simitis, I. 1981). It is also clear that societal traumas impact in an enduring and profound way on social and political structures and the people who inhabit them.

We know that traumatised people do not simply recover; trauma remains lodged in their internal world, inhabits them and at times dominates them, and it is only working through its impact over a long period of time that it gradually diminishes its hold over the personality, and then only in optimal circumstances. We know from psychoanalytic research that survivors of massive psychic trauma are often unable to mourn their losses because of their sheer scale and due to survival guilt (Niederland, 1968) Trauma and persecution interferes with a hopeful attitude about others and with a hopeful anticipation of the future.

We find that this is also true for groups and nations: traumatic group experiences such as occupation and war, oppressive regimes, living with state terror (both the terror launched on people by the state and the terror this engenders) leave residues that require collective working through – and film is one of the mediums available for this purpose. In these situations, survival cannot be taken for granted, neither actual survival, nor psychic survival, so it is not surprising that films from this region continue to be preoccupied it, as well as with persecution, terror, traumatic losses and extreme poverty.

Anna's War, a Russian movie shot before the current war in Ukraine, portrays a little girl's struggle to remain alive in unspeakable circumstances during the German occupation of Ukraine. Her ability to endure her suffering with love intact represents hope, as does her feral focus on living from day to day, whilst retaining her creativity and her libidinal investment in her surroundings. We, the viewers are invited to witness the depravity of war and, while the death drive dominates the film, the hopefulness of the life drive is never completely extinguished, even if the final outcome is far from certain.

Hope protects Anna against despair, and perhaps us right now, in this most precarious political situation. Her cries of despair are followed by her insistence on staying alive. Her hope is in the waiting for a better future, much though it is repeatedly challenged by the reality of her present imprisonment.

Those who Remained is an unusual post-Shoah movie from Hungary. Rather than portraying the desperate survival of its victims during the war years, this film spans the period from the end of the war to 1953, Stalin's death. Its protagonists, a middle-aged doctor, Aldo, who lost his wife and young children in the extermination camps, and a teenage girl, Klara, not yet able to face the loss of her parents and sister, form a relationship where Oedipal themes and temptations dominate. The film tenderly portrays the formidable obstacles to mourning when re-traumatisation interferes with the elaboration of grief. And yet, by gradually facing the reality of their losses, Aldo and Klara are able to survive the terrifying moments of their present political predicament in Stalinist Hungary.

What is so particularly affecting is that, unlike so many Shoah movies, this film does not traumatise the audience with horrific images of the camps. Instead, we are invited to experience the internal world of the survivors.

Two deeply traumatised people connect in their utter loneliness, and gradually help each other to recover and make more age-appropriate relationships. Here, survival and hope are intricately linked, but the wounds of the past, inevitably, remain.

Father takes place in contemporary Serbia, portraying a father's fight to regain custody of his children against cruel and corrupt authorities. The film is an indictment of the current state of affairs in impoverished post-communist Serbia, and its employment and childcare policies, and at the same time it is a portrayal of a poor, ill-educated and unconfident man's journey as he becomes the owner of his own fate, a man who knows increasingly about his ability to potentially change things and resist and revolt against corrupt authority figures, the social services and his desperately poor but unscrupulous neighbours. His physical journey, heroic and fantastic in equal measure - though it is in fact based on a true story – match his internal journey as he grows in stature and understanding.

No easy endings, no facile hope is offered by these movies. In each case we are unsure of the future, of whether our protagonists will ultimately succeed or fail in their hopeful quest for relationships that endure, for a liveable life. In each movie there are children or young people who struggle with loss and grief and who must rely on their internal good objects formed earlier in better times for sustenance and creativity.

AUDITORIUM B: HOPE AND MEMORY

This auditorium showcases movies from Southern and Western Europe as they interrogate the role memory plays in the life of their protagonists.

In *Remembering, repeating and working through* (1914) Freud describes people who do not have the capacity to remember or verbalise their early experiences. This is not a simple case of 'forgetting' but the memories are available to them only in their actions, in their compulsion to repeat their usually traumatic early experiences.

Psychoanalysts work with memory and its repression in their consulting rooms. We are aware that memory is not accurate; it is not an objective record of the past and it may change significantly throughout the process of analysis. Exploring patients' histories and accompanying them on the development of their personal understanding plays a part in the analyst's work, but these histories are not exact 'facts', though they represent internal truths

nevertheless. It must be acknowledged that there is no simple, all-purpose life history' (Schafer, 1979).

Film as a genre particularly lends itself to the portrayal of memory and time, as it can easily shift backwards and forwards and demonstrate remembering in action, as it were. This point was first made by the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukacs who elaborated it in the early years of cinema (Lukacs, 1913), and has been since then by many others.

Memory is an essential component of hope: without a connection with the past how could we connect with the future? But what if memory is lost or remembering is too traumatic? These hefty questions are approached in moments of gentle humour in all three films in this auditorium.

Madly in Life, our Belgian film, connects three generations. As Suzanne descends into progressive dementia, her son and daughter-in-law are confronted by the reality of this irreversible tragedy. Just as Suzanne loses her connection with the past, new life – a baby - is created in a state of hopefulness. Babies arrive without memory and build their personalities, in 'good enough' circumstances, out of the love and care of their parents. Perhaps then the young parents, hopeful about their own internal resources, present a bridge between past and future.

The young couple's dilemma – is it possible, even permissible, to plan for a new life when an old life is regressing to childlike states? – is resolved in a moment of hope: they mourn and then affirm life while simultaneously allowing themselves to live in the moment and to give up obsessional needs to control the future.

This film is ripe for psychoanalytic exploration; the method of production itself was, not unlike psychoanalysis, an evolving process. The storyline and the characters were developed during the shooting of the film, explored and rehearsed throughout the process until the final outcome emerged, echoing the process of psychoanalysis.

Apples, the Greek entry appears to portray traumatic memories lost and the trauma of having no memories. What is it that cannot be remembered? Why does Aris refuse to eat the apples he loves – the apple of knowledge, Eve's apple even? – when they could aid his recovery? What is the unbearable loss that seemingly casts a shadow on him? A puzzling and

challenging film with reminders of psychoanalysis: by returning to the past via riding a child's bicycle and dancing the twist, by linking up with childhood and teenage memories and perhaps by making a new relationship, albeit for a brief time, Aris reclaims his internal world, finds his way back to his old home and begins to pick up the pieces of his life.

Poignantly, this is a pandemic movie shot during a pandemic. The audience must also contend with a pandemic, its losses, anxieties and uncertainties. The city (Athens) changes beyond recognition as did our own cities; the characters are disoriented and lost, not unlike the audience may have been during those uncertain times.

This film raises many interesting points for the psychoanalytic considerations of memory, loss and denial as well as the possibilities treatment might offer, treatment that in the movie appears rather unlike psychoanalysis. Perhaps this represents a nod to the political realities of the not-too-distant Greek past of civil wars and military oppression as well as the troubling, if inevitable, political changes during our own pandemic.

Interestingly, **Limbo**, one of our British films this year, connects the Western European movies concerned with the microcosm of the characters' lives with the focus on the political backdrop present in movies from further East. This film portrays relationships and internal landscapes in the context of the life of refugees, the dilemmas of immigration and the longing and ambivalence of migrants.

The absurdities of the host country's immigration system are juxtaposed with individual kindnesses by the natives. The refugees, all from war-torn countries, are themselves multidimensional too: some are more preoccupied with their roots than others, some more creative than others, some struggle with their sexuality, but they all must process their losses by working through their memories and former attachments to their families, customs and countries. The refugee's predicament is always based on a complex relationship between memory and hope, between the pain and fear of the past and the hope for a better future: the home country and its culture must be given up but not forgotten while the new country and its language must be accepted.

The film interrogates the complexities of our relationship with the Other, our difficulties in bridging gaps of understanding, our shared struggles with loss, disorientation and hopelessness. Ultimately it presents us with a hopeful stance for the future and the possibility of integration, both internal and social.

AUDITORIUM C: HOPE AND LOSS

In this auditorium the main character in each movie (Carlotta, Oleg, Vitalina) is in search of hope against the background of traumatic losses. They try to regain their vitality despite their grim circumstances, their dislocation and their position as outsiders. Whether it is a case of neurodiversity that may or may not have been caused by unknown trauma, or migration as a result of poverty and lack of opportunities, all three are preoccupied with mourning and grief.

Loss requires mourning and working through mourning carries the hope of recovering internal objects felt to have been destroyed by the trauma of loss. 'Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced' suggests James Baldwin and this is an apt summary of the inevitability of loss and the need to look it in the eye, squarely, but not without pain.

Each of the movies in this auditorium follows its protagonists as they face their despair and loss. There is a central role here for faith: not manic faith fuelled by denial but faith in a relationship that would form the basis for such developments. Additionally, religious faith as possessing a potential for sustenance appears in two of the movies.

In **Lost in Face**, a German documentary, Carlotta begins to understand her condition through the help of a neurologist/film maker and begins to explore and develop her relationship with her mother. What is this mysterious condition – her inability to recognise faces? Is it indeed neurological, or are we witnessing a more disturbing process that might have its roots in secrets, even lies? Whose face did she see and touch and forgot as a young infant? What has happened to her, indeed who is she? Her history would suggest a deeply metaphorical meaning to her disability. These puzzles bring to mind Winnicott's notion of the mirroring function of the early mother and the catastrophic potential when an infant experiences the failure of such function (Winnicott, 1971).

She is sustained by moving pleasures such as her deep love for her horse, her relationship with her young friend and her complex attachment to her adoptive mother. She is further enabled to work through her grief by sublimation, and some unusual creative processes. Her drawing/painting of faces is particularly fascinating as a way of both facing and getting around her lack of face recognition. The film develops in a way that gives the viewer a

glimpse of how she gradually works through the mysteries of her origins and ‘disability’ – again, not unlike patients do in psychoanalysis.

Our Latvian entry features **Oleg**, an ethnic Russian butcher from Latvia who is trying to earn a living in Brussels to provide for his beloved grandmother and for himself. The film (and several films at this festival) reference, and examine, the gaping hole between affluence in the West and devastating poverty in the East – and the middlemen who exploit the desperation of migrants. In the midst of this Oleg, an almost mythically good man, fuelled by his deep faith, tries to do his best for himself but, importantly also for others.

His identity as a sacrificial lamb, juxtaposed with the Ghent alter piece, perhaps represents the sacrifice people from Eastern Europe make to serve us; our affluence is dependent on their poverty. This almost holy character, as if from a Dostoyevsky novel, is contrasted with the cruelty of the butcher’s existence. Animals are processed in gruelling detail and fingers are chopped off, the blood intermingling with that of the carcasses. Oleg’s attempts to find a home, perhaps even a spiritual home, end in loss but arguably not in despair. He has tried and failed, but tried he did and, in the process, he has learnt from experience and changed. The ending of the film, politically controversial for some and deeply religious and moving for others, provides much food for thought.

Vitalina Varela, a verbally sparse movie is another portrayal of the fate of the immigrant. It is about the heroine’s hopeful waiting for decades for a call from her husband that never came. Her lifelong yearning is now giving way to facing loss, not just of her husband but of her illusions about what might have been.

We observe our Vitalina’s ability to slowly create her own space in the slums of Lisbon. Her face, motionless and yet hugely expressive, is at the centre of the film, constructed as a painting of sorts. The audience is invited to share her initially empty gaze and silent resignation as it gradually gives way to a more profound engagement with her fate and the life instinct, instead of giving in to despair.

Vitalina’s strength appears to be, again, in her resilience and immense courage and her profound wish to make links with others. She starts again, begins to build a future, while getting in touch with her ability to manage alone. Her rage is tangible, but she never surrenders her dignity.

He can’t live without Cosmos is a charming and compelling short film from Russia.

Our **CLOSING GALA MOVIE, *Ali and Ava***, will round off the programme **on Sunday**. Its location, Bradford in the North of England, forms the backdrop to the unlikely relationship between two lonely, melancholic people who are, nevertheless, full of zest for life and longing for intimacy, in the context of all the contemporary dilemmas of multicultural Britain. The relationship develops despite the constraints of family, race and class, and against the odds it emerges as a love story between two middle aged people. It is warm, sad, hopeful, despairing, uplifting and oppressive all at once. The themes – second generation immigrants, domestic and racial violence, social deprivation – are explored without any hint of preachiness.

The film's music speaks of a particularly hopeful, creative aspect of Ali. He uses it to diffuse a racist moment, he dances to it in a moment of anguish and grief and it creates a link between him and Ava. The ending implores us to imagine various possible outcomes to this heart-warming but occasionally threatening film.

The movie will be preceded by a short documentary that was shot in the same area and therefore provides another perspective on the realities of life in the North of England.

The gala discussion will include the directors of both films and will, I hope, provide us a fitting ending to the stimulating programme of *epff 11*.

The themes of the three auditoria as well as the opening and closing programmes link up with each other: as previously described, memory connects the past with the future. Loss, the inevitable and central feature of the human condition could not be borne without the presence of hope and hope sustains us and makes survival possible. Irrecoverable loss may not be reversed, but it can potentially be worked through and, in the process of mourning, hope may begin.

I am reminded here of Roger Frie's book, *Not in my family* (2017). The grandson of a Nazi and now a psychoanalyst and academic, he writes about our obligation, indeed the moral and psychological necessity of memory and remembering, and the transmission of memory, as a duty. These thoughts then connect loss, survival and memory in a profoundly ethical way.

As Andrea Sabbadini explains (Sabbadini, 2007, p.4): ‘..all films represent some sort of loss and, indeed, are themselves (among many other things, of course) forms of mourning and of recovering lost objects.’

We are offering this festival at a time of profound societal losses. Our freedoms (the pandemic), our Earth (the environmental catastrophe), our very existence (the war in Ukraine) are under threat but we hope that our audience will leave the festival refreshed and enriched by the films as well as by the discussions and dialogues between film makers and psychoanalysts.

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