

SEEING DIFFERENTLY: THE FILM LANGUAGE OF THE LATVIAN DIRECTOR LAILA PAKALNIŅA*

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90 The creative work of the Latvian film director, producer, and scriptwriter Laila Pakalniņa (born 1962), who has made almost forty films of various lengths and genres in thirty years of filmmaking and is Latvia's best known film director, can be organically linked with the phenomenon of Anna Lācis and her wider context, as represented in recent studies of Lācis.¹ In her creative activity, Anna Lācis was mainly an outsider resisting and searching for alternatives to mass culture, which is mostly based on an aesthetics of realism. Lācis seemed rebellious and somewhat strange, whether in the theatrical world of the independent Latvia in the 1920s, in interwar Germany where, in 1924, she became Bertolt Brecht's assistant and actress (Paiņx 127), or in Moscow, which by the end of the 1920s was increasingly subjected to the doctrine of socialist realism. During the years following World War II, when Lācis worked in a Latvian provincial theatre in the town of Valmiera, her plays were also supposed to have been "intense, passionate, boldly versatile and colourful, most probably unusual for the theatre of Latvia" (Zole 39).

Anna Lācis led a life that was unconventional for a woman, and her interests, theoretical views, and everything we know about her creative practices place her in the discourse of modernity and the art of modernism, the same discourse in which Laila Pakalniņa has been working since the end of the twentieth century and in which she is still working today. According to Roland Barthes, "Text is experienced only in an activity of production. It follows that the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)" (157). For Barthes, art presents a set of open-ended texts in which chronological and geographical boundaries are insignificant. In this article, I identify the main characteristics of Laila Pakalniņa's oeuvre in order to demonstrate that she and Anna Lācis can be perceived as female fellow-traveller

directors, who are similar both in their aesthetic search and, in a certain way, in their destinies, which to a large extent can be defined by their interest in an artistic language that is alternative to the mainstream and quite often outlandish to a mass audience.

For a wider audience, Pakalniņa's films seem strange because of their alternative form of expression, which is very close to modernism. In this, we see an important factor in her affinity with Anna Lācis, who tried to introduce modernism into Latvian theatre in the 1920s. Lācis's innovations are most closely linked with the theatre concept of Bertolt Brecht. According to the stage director, theorist, and spouse of Anna Lācis, Bernard Reich, the separate principles of Brecht's epic theatre were already evident in Brecht's first stage production of *Edward II* at the Munich *Kammerspiele*, where Lācis was both a director's assistant and an actress: the task of playing *fabula* rather than emotional experience, character, or pure psychology; demonstrative acting clearly underlining the action that will become significant; showing the behaviour of the *dramatis personae* by providing useful and instructive observations; and combining the useful with the entertaining (Райх 133).²

91

The principles of Brecht's epic theatre are among the bonds that link modernists of different times, places, and branches. As András Balint Kovács notes, "Brecht is a genuinely modernist *auteur* whose political commitment is a witness to the moral seriousness of modernism. His strategy of *Verfremdungseffekt* is precisely aimed at directing the attention of the audience to a social reality hiding 'behind' or 'in front of' the theatrical scene. Moreover, the Brechtian theatre is highly critical, not only toward social reality, but also toward theatrical conventions" (226). The aesthetics of alienation that Brecht proposed became particularly relevant in the 1960s and have continued in later modernism, including in Pakalniņa's films. The peculiar comic streak characteristic of her films also brings her closer to Brecht, perhaps more than other modernist authors who usually associate the alienation effect with a tragic and not comic intonation and who deliberately avoid entertainment as a function of art.

In the literary magazine *Domas (Thoughts)* in 1926, a critic described Anna Lācis's concept of theatre as follows, with reference to her own statements:

It is politically oratorical and educational theatre, discarding psychologism of the stage, characterized by absence of stage design, a neutral space for acting, neutral costume design—a blue blouse, a working gesture... All the attention is devoted to the tempo of action, to playing out of certain situations and their arrangement. (R.A.B.C.B. 397)

This discussion of Anna Lācis seeks to emphasize her "discarding of the stage psychologism" and also "construction of situations"; in other words, the structure of her work. These elements, which were important for Anna Lācis, are also essential for Pakalniņa: one of the basic principles of Pakalniņa's imagery is depsychologization, a feature of modernist alienation.

The term "classical modernism" is often used in discussing Latvian painting of the first half of the twentieth century, and this notion "includes a retrospection into

history as well as its contemporaneity” (Lamberga 9), indicating that modernism in Latvia was not characterized by original avant-garde manifestations as it was elsewhere. Modernism in Latvia was, in a sense, nationalized, cultivating some features of world modernist art but disregarding others.

Manifestations of classical modernism emerged in the cinema of Latvia later than in painting, theatre, and other forms of art, but as with these other forms, it followed some modernist cinema trends but not others. Latvian film was also greatly influenced by the Soviet political system. Classical modernism first appeared in Latvian cinema in the 1960s, when innovative approaches to film language, especially in documentary film, were being introduced. This special poetics, based on visual metaphors, came to be known as Riga style or the Riga poetic documentary film school.

92 The notion of late classical modernism is fundamental for the oeuvre of Laila Pakalniņa. She began her directorial career in 1988, at a time when Riga style and Western modernist film had already peaked. According to András Balint Kovács, “The end of an artistic period does not mean the disappearance of its innovations. [...] Modernist films could be made any time even after modernism as a predominant norm has ceased to exist, but—to formulate a paradox—*modernism was not modern anymore*” (204, emphasis mine). It is characteristic of the late modernists that they did not offer radically new technological or artistic means of expression, but instead mainly used elements of the poetics of modernist cinema established in the 1960s. Yet, this does not mean that these films have become mere replicas of the art of the 1960s; originality and contemporaneity are determined by the extent to which modernist language is employed.

The individual cinematic style Laila Pakalniņa developed in her films and the constant basic elements of her “signature style” allows us to explore Pakalniņa’s paradigm in Latvian cinema: a conceptual system that meets the high artistic standards of modernism, yet is at the same time explicitly individual. The basis of Pakalniņa’s paradigm is *parametric narration*, narration based on defined, identifiable, and repetitive means of expression in all aspects of filmmaking—cinematography, sound, and editing—while leaving elements of the plot in the background. David Bordwell chose the term *parametric narration* from several possibilities: “I could call it ‘style centred’ or ‘dialectical,’ or ‘permutational,’ or even ‘poetic’ narration. ‘Parametric’ was chosen in reference to Noel Burch’s *Theory of Film Practice* in which he uses the term parameters to describe what I call ‘film techniques’” (274). Bordwell indicates that the notion of parametric narration partly merges with the notion of cinematic modernism; however, instances of parametric narration are not associated with certain modernist trends or periods, but may emerge in different cultural contexts: “In their ability to change our perspective on films both old and new, the norms of parametric narration epitomize the historicity of all viewing conventions” (Bordwell 310). The use of specific parameters enables us to link Laila Pakalniņa with the film language of 1960s modernism, but the humour that arises from her use of specific parameters is reminiscent of the styles of Jacques Tati or Aki Kaurismäki. Other

parameters she uses, such as human closeups taken from a low camera angle, are a deliberate homage to the stylistics of Soviet montage, particularly in her film *The Dawn*, Pakalniņa's adaptation of the scriptwriter Alexander Rzheshesky and director Sergey Eisenstein's film *Bezhin Meadow* (1937), which in its day was destroyed by Stalinist censorship. Pakalniņa's grandest-scaled and most tragic film can be viewed as a peculiar remembrance of the socialist ideal and of the Soviet modernists of the 1920s, the creators of iconic socialist imagery.

The aim of parametric narration is not to propose ready-made metaphors or ideas, which was characteristic of the style of Riga poetic documentary film. Laila Pakalniņa's parametric narration is more of a self-analysis-focused mode of narration that investigates certain cinematic parameters and their possibilities by using repetitions and combinations of these elements. The category of the parameter in Pakalniņa's case seems appropriate, since the notion itself indicates that it is an entity that is objective and yet can be interpreted.

Laila Pakalniņa's style is in principle parametric because for the past thirty years, she has been consistently using certain means of expression or film techniques, irrespective of the genre or theme of the film, and the techniques she uses makes it possible to recognize her work immediately. Some of her parametric features include a long take by a static camera without influencing events within the frame and without following them beyond the frame of the shot; radical sequence shots that capture complicated combinations of many moving figures simultaneously in foreground and background; sound that is in opposition to the image instead of supplementing or explaining it; emphasis in dramaturgy of microscopic activities; specific points of view (for instance, the point of view of a snake, a rat, an infant lying in a pram, God, or a bird), among many others. The parameters Pakalniņa most frequently uses prompt thematic interpretation, despite Bordwell's argument that "Thematic meaning is only one component in the system, and not necessarily a very important one. The critic who thematizes technique in every film risks banalizing works which take as their "dominant" the perceptual force of style" (282). Circular composition in Pakalniņa's films such as *The Shoe*, *The Hostage*, *On Rubik's Road*, and *Pizzas*, as well as the recurrence of typical elements characteristic of Pakalniņa's narrative and the cyclical nature of these parameters, suggest that the worlds of her films should be perceived as mythological. Everything moves in a circle and eternally returns, a dramatic difference from the linear narrative then dominant in Latvian films.

A distinctive feature of the mythological worldviews of modernist cinema in general, and of parametric narrative films in particular, is a certain kind of fatality, tragedy, and hopelessness. There are very few films during the fairly long period of modernist cinema that have featured any kind-hearted humour; if a comic element emerges at all, it tends to be in the form of satire and parody. In this sense, Laila Pakalniņa's films (until her most recent fictional film, *The Dawn*) are exceptions, since they are marked by genuine sincerity towards ordinary people and their comic deeds. In her films, humour is generated by the choice of parameters: a static camera

that does not follow the protagonists of the film or comparatively important events often grants the narrative paradoxical features and changes its initial meaning, while sequence shots reveal unexpected links among the events of the film or emphasize surprising and frequently funny details. Her uses of closeups and point-of-view footage also help to create humour. For example, in her film *Pizzas*, every situation is presented as if from its opposite perspective by leaving the main event, a twist in the plot, and the point of view of the subject of the action outside the frame. This technique can be compared to the manner favoured by one of the most outstanding humorists in world cinema, Ernst Lubitsch, about whom Francois Truffaut wrote:

And if we stay behind the doors, when everything happens in the room, or we are in a kitchen when the action takes place in a lounge, or we are in the lounge when the action is set on the stairs, or if we are, after all, in a phone booth when we should be in the basement instead, it all simply means that Lubitsch has been racking his brains for a month and a half while writing the script to make the spectator create this script independently together with him, with Lubitsch, during the time of screening. (Truffaut 65)

94

Truffaut calls this technique characteristic of the masters of fairy tale. Apart from Lubitsch, Alfred Hitchcock also used this approach in his films. According to Truffaut, these directors are stylists pretending to be storytellers, while in reality, their main goal is to get rid of the story.

The technique of “telling by not telling/showing by not showing” makes *Pizzas* a peculiar type of fairy tale, whose magical world is filled with archetypal images borrowed both from folklore and from contemporary mass culture. The density of artistically peculiar details gradually transforms *Pizzas* from a comedy into a surreal portrayal of horror. Pakalniņa’s intensive use of parameters in her other films also achieves the effect of turning the comic into the absurd while the comedy becomes a tragedy. This occurs in part, for example, in *The Shoe*, in which the fairy tale of Cinderella and her lost slipper is played out in the grotesque reality of a Soviet border town during Khrushchev’s time. It is also particularly clear in *The Python* and *The Hostage*, in which daily happenings, through repetition, compression, and confrontation, finally lead to destruction.

Discarding a conventionally filmed closeup when a face is filmed frontally or turned by three-quarters, Pakalniņa actually gives up acting—the artificial construction of psychologically or typologically motivated characters that usually culminates in emotionally very expressive closeups. By using distance and giving very simple functional tasks, such as performing certain actions or uttering certain words, she manages to achieve the natural existence of professional and unprofessional actors within the frame. A human being in Pakalniņa’s films is generally depsychologized and reaches abstraction; yet, one cannot say that there are no conventional closeups at all in Pakalniņa’s films. When they are used, it is normally to portray animals and objects, thus achieving, if not quite anthropomorphism, then at least individuality. In her film *33 Animals of Santa Claus*, each of the animals has its own closeup, not only visually but also aurally: we hear every animal’s voice; even the silence of the

fish in the aquarium is made audible. In *Dream Land*, the animals in the landfill are also filmed mainly in closeups, and the culmination of this technique is a rat's hole filmed from within.

The other basic principle of Pakalniņa's filmmaking is a carefully designed structure that is formed both by internal editing of sometimes very long shots and, increasingly, by the use of the more complex editing technique of separately filmed shots. Combining different parameters—long tracking shots with mise-en-scenes constructed on different levels, where action takes place both in the foreground and background, as well as beyond the frame where the sound informs the action—Pakalniņa ensures the multifunctionality of the stylistic elements of her films and their complex effects on the spectator.

Analyzing Pakalniņa's long-time cameraman Gints Bērziņš's camera style, Līva Pētersone points out the panning camera movement and long shots that Bērziņš considers elements that can involve the spectator in the film space (Pētersone 183). However, these long shots do not have rigid functions in Pakalniņa's films. In *The Linen*, *The Ferry*, *The Mail*, and other films, such shots serve as minimalistic photographic moments of *stopped* time and *empty* space; instead of capturing movement, the camera registers separate excerpts. Elsewhere, especially in Pakalniņa's fictional films, the camera records minutely constructed and extremely dense mise-en-scenes. As Pētersone writes, "The camera is following action that progresses as a cause and effect chain; apart from that, the action evolves also within the frame, in the interactive dramaturgy of its elements which is possible due to baroque abundance of the frame" (189).

95

Baroque style, a label that has been applied to Pakalniņa's mise-en-scene and editing, can also be interpreted as the aesthetic principle of porosity elaborated upon by Anna Lācis and Walter Benjamin and applied to the structure of her films. Beāta Paškevica refers to Ernst Bloch, who has explained porosity as "a Baroque type transition of one form into another which being inconsistent still is not chaotic" (Paškevica 75; see also Mittelmeier). The following passage from Lācis and Benjamin's "Naples" (1925) is applicable not only to the city, but also to Pakalniņa's filmic space:

Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything, they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellation. The stamp of definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended for ever, no figure asserts it "thus and not otherwise." [...] Buildings are used as a popular stage. They are all divided into innumerable, simultaneously animated theatres. Balcony, courtyard, windows, gateways, staircase, roof are at the same time stage and boxes. (Benjamin and Lācis 165-66, 167)

By combining various parameters, including long tracking shots with multilayered mise-en-scenes, complex figural compositions, and dense multigrade sound, Pakalniņa creates multifunctional stylistic elements in her films that demand increased attention on the part of the spectator. It is also characteristic that perception of such long shots is expressly relative: it depends on the viewer's abilities to

concentrate, and also on what exactly, on what level of action, the spectator concentrates her attention.

The school scene in *The Shoe* is a typical example of the complex design of Pakalniņa's films. The shot of the scene is saturated with specific substance details typical of the end of the 1950s and of the Soviet school in general, but it is important to note that, along with historical props that are not shown as inserts but as closeups captured by persistent camera movement, the camera reveals events that have nothing to do with the specific historical period. The behaviour of the children and their relationships with each other and with the teachers, are typical both of Soviet schools and of schools in post-independence Latvia, as seen in *The Python*. Within one shot, the concreteness of the epoch, as well as of the *general human condition*, are represented, characteristic of modernism. The development of the central storyline of the soldiers looking for the owner of the shoe continues simultaneously.

- 96 One of the most technically complex and artistically ambitious scenes in Pakalniņa's films occurs in the climactic episode in *The Hostage*, in which a Song Festival is organized at the Riga airport at the demand of the terrorist and hijacker of a plane, since the terrorist has found out on the Internet that the Song Festival is a special sign of Latvian national identity. As in the introduction of *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958), the camera's continuous movement captures the minutest details of the scene as well as the grandiose overall picture, revealing it both from a frontal view and from "behind the scenes." In a three-minute-long tracking shot, the camera observes a brass band, follows it, makes a circle around the back of the hurriedly-built stadium-type seating in the airport where the last hectic preparatory jobs are being done, firemen take their places, a chorister feeds a child, and wreaths are passed from hand to hand; then, the camera rises above the seating area and heads towards the aforementioned conductor, standing on a plane boarding ladder. The vertical upward rise of the camera raises the action of the film to an almost mythological level, as the mundane activities in the background are encoded into specific time, but *develops* the symbolic, though ironically portrayed, ethnic ritual of the Song Festival from the stadium seating located at the right side.

The complexity of its structure makes Pakalniņa's documentary film *On Rubik's Road* akin to the structural films of the 1960s. It is constructed on the principle of the Rubik's cube, where a limited number of elements can be arranged in an almost boundless number of combinations. The name *Rubik's* has a double meaning in the context of Latvia, where it is associated with the Latvian communist Alfrēds Rubiks, who during the Soviet era built one of the first cycling tracks from Riga to the seaside resort town of Jūrmala, where Pakalniņa made her film. *On Rubik's Road* uses a static camera point of view: instead of following the action, it lets the action enter and exit the frame. The shots are relatively short because the parametric structure of the film is dominated by montage, meaning the principles of combination.

There is a certain paradox in *On Rubik's Road*. The film can be considered a structural experiment for the sheer reason that Pakalniņa uses what Eisenstein called

orthodox editing or editing by dominants: combining shots by their main characteristics such as tempo, direction of movement, length of shots and so on (Эйзенштейн 503). Yet, unlike orthodox editing, in which the combined shots enter into mutually causal or conflicting relationships, in Pakalniņa's case, they duplicate each other, and it is this repetition that makes us notice, and enables us to notice, the dominant salient feature of the shot or its main contents. Taken separately, the action (for example, yawning or indistinct cursing) and landscape (for example, a streak of sunlight on asphalt) are often far too minute to be noticed, but if these elements recur in an almost identical situation filmed at some other point in time, the elements gain meaning and generalization.

On Rubik's Road is actually built on shots and their doubles. Usually, Pakalniņa arranges shots and doubles next to one another, but several shots, mainly of planes flying above, as well as the cyclic beginning and finale in the waiting-room at the station, are those punctuation marks that enable one to perceive the complex grid of the structure as a unified composition. Pakalniņa combines shots by their contents' compliance, defining and highlighting the dominants herself. One may only wonder at the inconceivable number of elements that form the contents of what is filmed: the trajectory of movement of people's steps or bicycles, specific gestures, deliberately or inadvertently uttered words, people yawning, scrawls on building façades, the interplay of lights and darks on different surfaces and so on, and above it all, low-flying airplanes. What Pakalniņa demonstrates in *On Rubik's Road*, as well as in many of her other films, is "a special world of secret kinships" (Benjamin, qtd. in Taurens 93), to borrow a phrase from Walter Benjamin. For the epigraph for his article "Naples Passages," Jānis Taurens chose "Das Passagen-Werk," an unfinished text by Walter Benjamin that combines a palm tree and a feather duster, hairdryer and Venus de Milo, champagne bottles and dentures (Taurens 93). Such visualization of seemingly unconnected things and events defines, to a large extent, the uniqueness of Pakalniņa's artistic world.

Anna Lācis and Laila Pakalniņa are also united by the destiny of woman in art. In *Zarathustra's Sisters*, Susan Ingram offers a critical analysis of the tradition of creative women represented merely in their relationship with culturally significant men, devoting a separate chapter to the reception of correlation between the creative activities and private relationships of Anna/Asja Lācis (Ingram 77-90). Although Pakalniņa began her directorial career sixty years after Anna Lācis's, Pakalniņa similarly saw her successes, particularly the uniqueness of her visual film language, ascribed to men, such as the cameramen with whom she worked, while any seeming flaws, such as her consistent resistance to classical narration, were attributed to her. Cinema critics and scholars were at first convinced that Pakalniņa's films were brought to attention by the cameraman Gints Bērziņš, without even permitting the thought that a woman director might have her own artistic handwriting, her own vision. Even though, since the 1990s, Pakalniņa has become one of the most recognizable Latvian film directors in the world, and has been the scriptwriter and

producer of most of her films, the conviction of the dominant male gaze in her films has persisted. This notion was, for example, amusingly demonstrated at the National Film Festival “Lielais Kristaps” in 2012, when the only nomination Pakalniņa’s films received was for Best Cinematography for *Snow Crazy*, which was received by the four cameramen of the film. At the 2016 National Film Festival, by comparison, the award for the best cinematography for *Dawn* went to Wojciech Staroń, and the Best Director award was given to Laila Pakalniņa.

Pakalniņa’s cycle of short films, *Elements*, consisting of the films *Water*, *Fire*, *Stones*, and *Silence*, occupies a special place in her oeuvre. Her initial intention was to make a fifth film, *Air*, after which these cinematic novellas would have been united into a feature-length film, but the cycle was not finished for financial reasons. *Elements* is a film about a woman, not a woman as cherished by masculine culture who happily plays with dolls in her childhood and after growing up becomes a submissive object to the male gaze, but a very real female character who must survive (swim through)

98 the world controlled by males, manifestly represented in *Water* by a swimming pool.

The gaze of the main heroine of the cycle, Marija, is dominant in both the direct and figurative senses. It appears as a catalyst for action: already in childhood in *Fire*, Marija’s gaze occasionally causes shock, and objects she looks at sometimes catch fire. In *Water*, her gaze seems to cause a man who spits (Gundars Āboliņš) to fall into the pool, while in *Stones*, the Director (Pēteris Krilovs) is unable to stand Marija’s gaze, and he makes her turn “with her eyes towards the forest.” Marija’s gaze is also special because she sees God: “Look, there is God!” says the little girl in *Fire* and points upwards; meanwhile, the adults tell her, “There is no God.” Yet the high camera angle used in all of these films becomes something like a peculiar proof of the existence of God, as it is God’s eye that watches and observes Marija’s world. Time and again, when Marija looks upwards, it is as though her gaze and God’s gaze are talking.

For the most part, the observations made by Marija and also the vision presented by Pakalniņa herself are horizontal and slow-paced. The gaze notices microscopic details and also hears the tiniest noises, such as the buzzing of flies in the operating room at the far end of the lobby in *Fire*. The director’s gaze and hearing are special for the film’s stereoscopic character, and here again we can draw parallels with Lācis and Benjamin, with their concept of porosity and Benjamin’s Riga sketch “Stereoscope.”³

In Pakalniņa’s stereoscopic vision, as in Benjamin’s case, objects, sounds and people function on several planes, forming sometimes harmonious, sometimes absurd coherences. Mise-en-scenes in Pakalniņa’s fictional films are actually hyper-realistic; it is impossible to perceive them fully by watching them once. Using almost no analytical montage, specifically not foregrounding isolated details from the overall space, Pakalniņa allows the spectator’s gaze to float freely, and thus every viewer creates his or her own subjective environment in the framework of her films.

Objects in Pakalniņa’s films are not only significant, but also characterizing and telling elements, and on most occasions, it is the objects and not the action, the text, or the editing that carry the main dramatic burden. In *Silence*, the spectator first sees

Marija at the National Museum of Art from behind, as part of the composition in Eduards Kalniņš's painting "The Rafters"; men are playing cards, Marija is watching. At the moment Marija is trapped, she is looking at Jānis Tīdemanis's painting "The Divorced Wives"—it should be noted that we do not really know anything about Marija's adult life—but the fourth panel brought in by the workers displays the horrifying visions of Teodors Ūders's "The Artist's Death" and "Death." Suddenly, all the paintings in the narrow cage of the museum become full of despair and horror, emanating death. The previous comical observation of Marija—a young girl creating her own painting of a jolly and colourful spring landscape, turning it on her canvas into a gloomy, colourless autumn—now becomes a foreboding sign, like the message on the back of her grey T-shirt: *Innocence...*

Pakalniņa's fictional films are marked by cataphores: objects or situations that signal the development of events. In *The Shoe*, in fact, every episodic character, the inhabitants of Liepāja city, is seen twice, and the first incident becomes a peculiar announcement for a second one that will take place after a longer or shorter time. For example, we first see the man on the telephone pole through a soldier's field glasses, but at the end of the film, he appears at the height of the telephone wire pole as someone seen by God's eye, and he himself becomes a kind of God's assistant; in reality, we see the solution of the shoe mystery from his perspective. There is the whole cataphora of objects; for example, a girl at the school gives a candy to a soldier ("give the candy to the dog"), but later the soldier gives a candy to a boy riding a bicycle; similarly, the comb that the Estonian soldier wants to buy is bought at the end. The central object is certainly the shoe that is both the story's catalyst and a cataphora. In other words, the film can happen only because a shoe was found near the sea, and it also signals the end of the film: the other missing shoe will be put by the sea to make a pair, and everything will begin again.

In *Elements*, cataphoras, words that refer to or stand for words used later, have special significance. They make it possible to perceive the separate novellas as a single film, as well as providing hints about the possible developments of events. On the shelf in her flat, next to the doll she has not managed to get rid of, Marija has a porcelain fish (simultaneously a prop from childhood and a reminder of the fish in the pool), a personal ID card, car keys, a mobile telephone, photographs, and other objects that have been or perhaps will only be important at a certain point in Marija's life.

"Hush!", the warning call familiar to every Latvian since early childhood, is that which makes us stop and freeze in the museum (*Silence*), as Pakalniņa's frequently used method shows, when all that remains from a person is only his/her photograph or a still. Even so, Marija rebels against the monumental custodian in the museum. Marija has been a fighter for freedom of expression from an early age; like her creator Laila Pakalniņa, she has fought against stereotypes and authoritarianism.

An authoritarian woman resembling the museum custodian appears frequently in Pakalniņa's films. For example, Marija's mother is authoritarian by definition and, for this reason, humanely understandable. In *Fire*, the mother of little Marija is

played by *big* Marija—the actress Guna Zariņa—thus showing the almost inevitable transformation of every daughter into her mother. Marija’s mother is irritated by the noise her daughter makes; she is disappointed that Marija does not like the posh doll brought by Santa Claus; she is annoyed at all the dangerous situations into which Marija gets; and yet, she also feels guilty that the child seems so irritable.

In *The Shoe*, the female school principal (Vera Šneiderē), unlike the other characters, appears only once, but when she does, she completely suspends the flow of the film, including the sound. Her horrifying yet fascinating portrait is one of the most impressive closeups in Pakalniņa’s films. The school principal in *The Shoe* seems to have inspired the subsequent film *The Python*, in which the frightening authority figure is played by Lācis’s granddaughter Māra Ķimele (born 1943), a distinguished theatre director and sometime actress, who belongs to the same discourse as Anna Lācis and Laila Pakalniņa. Ķimele positions herself as an outsider within any political or bureaucratic system: “I feel like an antagonist, but I always feel that way because
100 I do not like systems in general, and that is my choice” (Zole 15). It is interesting that Ķimele’s largest film role was in Pakalniņa’s *The Python*, an ironic story about an authoritarian school principal who is devoured at the end of the film by the eponymous python. The image of the school principal created jointly by Pakalniņa and Ķimele becomes an expressive metaphor of and a grotesque exposure of the totalitarian system, an important theme in Pakalniņa’s and Ķimele’s creative works.

There is also a connection to make between *The Python* and Lācis. The film’s implicit pathos is similar to the one expressed in Anna Lācis and Walter Benjamin’s “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre” (1928), which Joanna Crawley characterizes as follows:

[In the program] they’ve argued that children should grow up without being imposed any external moral instance, on the contrary, they should base on their experiences to develop their own moral code and their own identity. Only this way, they can become the independent thinking, self-aware, critical citizens of the democratic state. (Crawley 123)

In conclusion, reading Laila Pakalniņa’s films as an unlimited textual field creates a natural bond with Anna Lācis and the modernity/modernism discourse in which she lived and created, and about which we actually know quite little. Approaching Pakalniņa’s *text* as a Barthesian methodological field draws attention to the need for deeper research into Anna Lācis and film, for example, concerning Lācis’s concept of the role of cinema in children’s upbringing, her work in *Sovkino* and the Soviet representative trade office in the Berlin Film section, as well as her co-operation in the filmmaking of Erwin Piscator, Fritz Lang, and others.

NOTES

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1. Some of these studies have been published in the proceedings of the Academy of Culture of Latvia, "Culture Crossroads," Issue 8 (*Kultūras Krustpunkti*).
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
3. Beata Paškevica discusses this further in her article in "Culture Crossroads" (76).

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Dawn (Ausma), 2015

Dream Land (Leiputrija), 2004, documentary

The Ferry (Prāmis), 1994, documentary

Fire (Uguns), 2007, short

The Hostage (Ķīlnieks), 2006

The Linen (Veļa), 1991, documentary

102 *Mail (Pastas)*, 1995, documentary

On Rubik's Road (Pa Rubika ceļu), 2010, documentary

Pizzas (Picas), 2012

The Python (Pitons), 2003

The Shoe (Kurpe), 1998

Silence (Klusums), 2009, short

Stones (Akmeņi), 2008, short

Snow Crazy (Sniegs), 2012, documentary

Water (Ūdens), 2006, short