

Document Citation

Title	Imperativ (Imperative)
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	1983 Nov 04
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Zanussi, Krzysztof (1939), Warsaw, Poland
Film Subjects	Imperativ (Imperative), Zanussi, Krzysztof, 1982

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RECENT FILMS FROM WEST GERMANY

November 4- December 4, 1983

Sunday, November 27 (2:30) (The print of MILO BARUS has not yet arrived. We are hopeful that it will be here for its other scheduled screening on Thursday, December 1, at 6:00.)

IMPERATIV. (IMPERATIVE). 1982. Written and directed by Krzysztof Zanussi. Produced by Telefilm Saar. Photography by Slavomir Idziak. Editor: Liesgret Schmitt-Klink. Music by Wojciech Kilar. In English. 96 min.

With: Robert Powell (Augustin), Brigitte Fossey (Yvonne), Sigfrit Steiner (professor), Matthias Habich (theologist), Leslie Caron (mother).

"The cinema of Krzysztof Zanussi explores a continuum of conflict ranging from the individual and interpersonal through the larger social order. He explores the relationship of the individual's conscience to society's norms of morality. Appearing as himself in Krzysztof Kieslowski's CAMERA BUFF (1979), Zanussi says that he feels an obligation to question why the corrupt manipulators are the survivors. His is a provocative, cerebral cinema, objectifying its characters through both attention to detail and cool observation of the stages of conflict. During this process Zanussi demands the intellectual participation of his audience, and ultimately its response. The spectator should attain the level of self-awareness that his protagonists reach.

Zanussi has worked chiefly under a system of government subsidy in his native Poland. He has headed one of the three Polish film units. Active in Solidarity, he has been directing mostly abroad since its demise. West German television has produced many of these non-Polish films, but they are still subject to Polish government approval. His films have therefore occupied that space between individual self-expression and government tolerance. Prior self-censorship has been a factor in both his message and the discourse which conveys it. No clear separation exists between the private world of Zanussi the artist-intellectual and the public realm in which he operates.

Three major types of conflict permeate the films. The first is that between determinism and free will (often clouded by chance). He elaborates this as the bridgeable gap between empiricism (rational analysis) and Catholicism (grace) in, for example, ILLUMINATION (1973), THE CONSTANT FACTOR (1980), and IMPERATIVE (1982). Zanussi's background in physics and philosophy strongly influences these films. Conflict continues as that between the individual and the corruption of (contemporary Polish) society in CAMOUFLAGE (1976), THE CONSTANT FACTOR, and CONTRACT (1980).... The third major opposition is between the individual's self-awareness and the invisible (yet pervasive) pressures of the immediate social milieu; this is strongest in SPIRAL (1978) and CONTRACT.

...What distinguishes (Zanussi) as a filmmaker is his particular deployment of the technology of the cinema as a vehicle for his thematic concerns. His orchestration is meticulous... In CONTRACT Zanussi adds both an aural and a visual dimension to the conflict between the son and his family. The handheld camera follows his attempt to burn down the family home. Zanussi intercuts this obsessive behavior with the repetitive sound of bells from the sleigh which carries his family....

In all of his films these moments of cinematic self-consciousness alternate with long takes of intellectual debate and questioning. During these probing conversations Zanussi is least obtrusive in the application of cinematic techniques. The irony is that during these verbal conflicts the ideological imprint of the director is most overt."

---Howard Feinstein (to be published in St. James Press Films and Filmmakers Series)