

Viktoria ZMYŚŁOWSKA

Dominika WALO

Michał WŁODARCZYK

A woman in a white protective suit and mask is shown in profile, looking towards a baby. The baby is lying down, and a hand is visible holding its head. The scene is set in a clinical or hospital environment, with a clean, white background.

GROWING

film by AGATA WIECZOREK

director of photography Joanna KAKITEK sound direction Jeremy LICCARDO D'ANGELA image editing Magda URBAŃSKA
light design Maxime VELÉ director assistant Lauren OLIEL produced by LE FRESNOY - Studio national

GROWING

Short film, fiction

17'45"

Prod. Le Fresnoy - Studio national
2022

Ewa's life is seemingly monotonous, but the accompanying soundtrack makes for real cacophony. In the foreground, there are calls from a nagging mother, or tirades by nursing lecturers made in a robotic tone.

Exposed to a mixture of good advice, prohibitions and conservative nonsense, Ewa's mind begins to play tricks on her.

„Growing” is a commentary on the limitation of the right to abortion and the related situation of Polish women, which the film discusses in a very adequate horror convention.

SYNOPSIS / FILM'S SUMMARY: PIOTR CZERKAWSKI

NEW HORIZONS International Film Festival

Wrocław, Poland, 2022

In his film, “Hospital Britannia”, Lindsay Anderson (1982) makes a hospital an allegory for a much bigger structure: a country.

For Anderson, the ill-functioning healthcare system reflects Great Britain with its heavily stratified class society and social clashes. Anderson's movie evokes absurd and horror as the title-hospital, gradually disconnected from the external world, is being overtaken by a mad scientist who uses it for experimenting on the living bodies.

Like the hospital in Anderson's film, in „Growing” a medical simulation centre stands for an allegory. The film was filmed in PRESAGE Center for Medical Simulations in Lille, France - one of the many existing, contemporary medical education units where students practice their skills in a simulated environment.

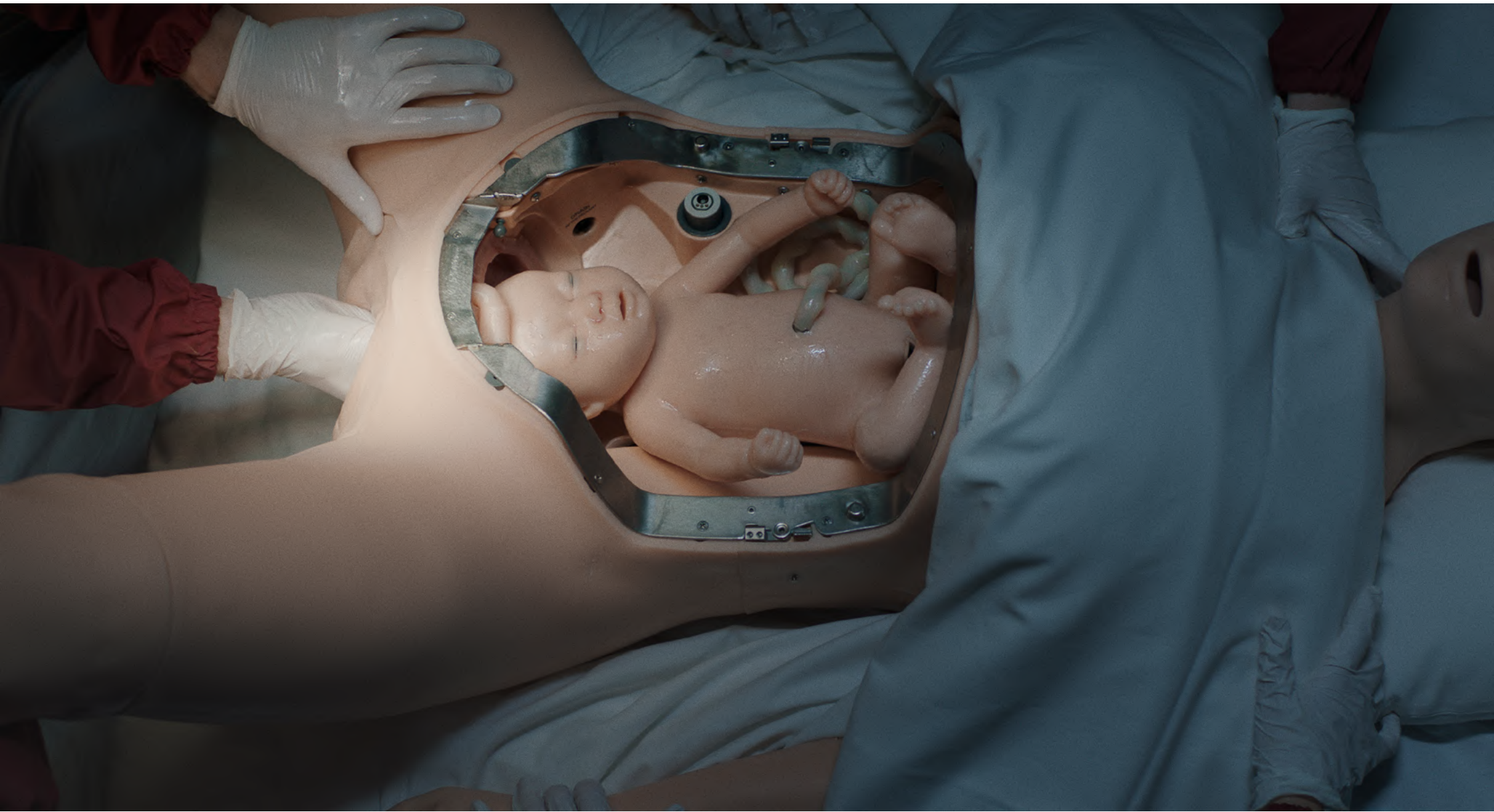
Medical simulations involve role-play, humanoid mannequins and semi-automated props that perform the human body's physical reactions. With its automatic bodies and carnal props, Simulation Centers represent a bizarre, yet applied model of reality where the human body is reduced to its biological potential

– such as the ability of the female body to give birth. The short film adapts elements of a body-horror genre in order to address the recent abolition of rights to abortion for women in Poland. The film approaches the consequences of living in a bio-political regime from a subjective perspective of its protagonist: an introvert young woman whose reception of the Kafkaesque reality grows into confusion between the simulated model and experience.

Cinema and art in Poland have a long tradition as media for a critical look and commentary on socio-political reality which violence is often illustrated through absurd and a fetishist gaze that connects psychosis, sexuality, death and historical trauma within a vicious circle of events (eg. “Dom Zły”, 2009, dir. Wojciech Smarzowski; “Szamanka”, 1997, scr. Manuela Gretkowska, dir. Andrzej Żuławski, artworks by Artur Żmijewski, Zbigniew Libera, Tadeusz Kantor; etc.).

„Growing” employs elements of genre film in order to comment on an actual reality in which the proximity to fiction becomes disturbingly close.





Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wieczorek - Le Fresnoy 2021



Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wieczorek - Le Fresnoy 2021



Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wiecek - Le Fresnoy 2021



Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wiecezorek - Le Fresnoy 2021



Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wieczorek - Le Fresnoy 2021



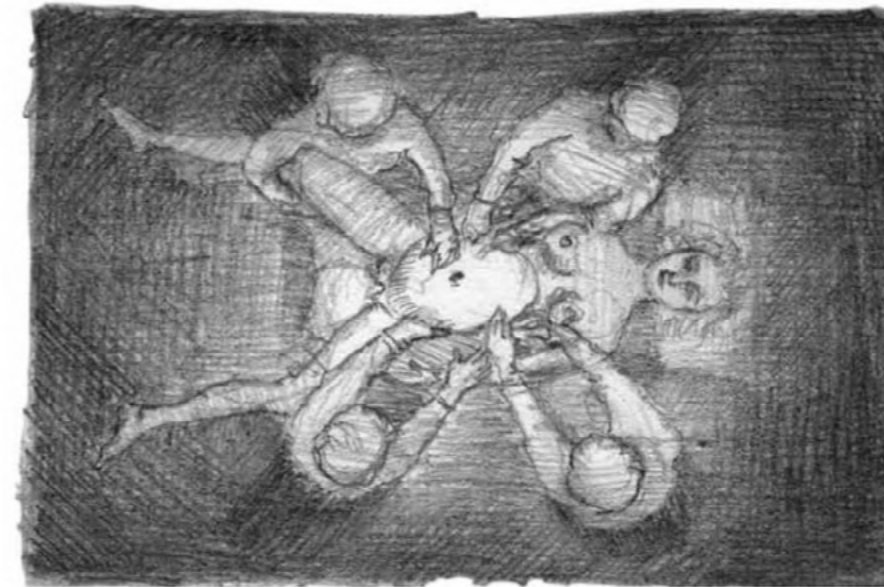
Film still: Growing, film by ©Agata Wieczorek - Le Fresnoy 2021

Selected press articles

IN 2020 THE POLISH ARTIST AGATA WIECZOREK, IN RESIDENCE – STUDIO NATIONAL DES ARTS CONTEMPORAINS, PRODUCED A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND A COURT METRAGE CALLED *GROWING*. ESTELLE BENAZET HEUGENHAUSER, THE PROJECT'S PRODUCTION MANAGER AS WELL AS AN AUTHOR, TALKS ABOUT THE FILM AND ITS SCOPE.

COLD ROOM

ESTELLE BENAZET
HEUGENHAUSER



In a surgical area, nurses work around a mannequin with its legs spread out on stirrups. Hands work in unison, peel back the belly like the lid of a trunk, and, in the middle of the plastic and metal structure, a small humanoid ready to be born appears. Other hands, on the side of the silicone vulva, attempt to extract the little body, a piston mechanism is activated and gives birth to it. Behind the one-way mirror, Ewa simulates the breathing of the humanoid giving birth.

Filmed at the PRÉSAGE simulation centre in Lille, a place of learning for future doctors, this first sequence directed by Agata Wiczorek exposes the rapport between humans and machines, reminding us that science fiction plays a significant role in the present. Using high-tech mannequins, we learn by simulating treatments. Our diagnoses are becoming automated, we are turning into cyborgs, and with this advanced method used by the applied sciences, the generation of knowledge occurs like any other machine operation.

After the scene portraying the delivery of the humanoid, Ewa, the protagonist, a medical student, faces the little one: the child's mouth moves as if to express something, but it is simply a pneumatic reaction of the silicone being. Drops bead on Ewa's forehead. Her complexion looks paler and paler. She faints. Then the atmosphere changes – the cold, cottony white is superseded by red-orange light. Next shot: Ewa, lying on a hospital bed, undergoing an ultrasound. She is now also pregnant but denies her pregnancy. The doctor congratulates her and refrains from mentioning the possible choice of abortion. Ewa goes home. Later, in her flat, blood runs down her legs. Ewa gives birth alone. On the floor where the clots of flesh have spread, she uncovers this abject and shiny being that she has given birth to. She grabs a knife and chops it up.

Above: "Growing" - storyboard frame, drawing, 2021,
Agata Wiczorek
P. 13-23: "Growing", film by Agata Wiczorek,
17'25", 2021
Produced by Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts
Contemporains, supervised by Athina Rachel Tsangari ©
Agata Wiczorek - Le Fresnoy - Studio National - 2021
P. 24-20: From the series "Artefacts", photography, 2020

**THE BRUTALITY OF THE IMAGES
IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE RESPONSE
TO THE VIOLENCE SUFFERED
BY ALL THESE WOMEN WHO HAVE
A MOTHER'S DESTINY
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A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MECHANISM.**

A former student of the National Film School in Łódź, where Polanski also studied (*Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby*), Wieczorek is the heir to a cinematographic heritage of horror. Sweat, lymph, metal, blood: her film borrows from body-horror (a sub-genre in which bodies are shown to transform violently under the effect of events such as illness) and from slasher (another horror sub-genre, in which a psychopath who kills with a knife is often portrayed); but it also seeks to reinvest them: unlike the women in these films, who are usually given a passive role, here, the character of Ewa makes a choice: she kills her alien to survive.

Faced with the vision of a contagious pregnancy, and then the mutilation of a little being, it is not disgust or fear that seizes us, but a fever, like after a beating. The brutality of the images is the only possible response to the violence suffered by all these women who have a mother's destiny imposed upon them by a social and cultural mechanism. It is also a way of alerting us to the current political context in Poland, where the right to abortion was abolished in October 2020. It should be remembered that 42 per cent of women in the world still do not have access to this human right.

Agata Wieczorek's practice combines film and photography while moving between constructed documentary and documented fiction. She frequently operates with concealment and visibility, by entering and working with hermetic industries and socially marginalised groups in order to explore unexposed production and consumption of cultural 'fetishes' — artefacts that represent tabooed desires and utopian endeavours with reference to the body, gender and identity.

Estelle Benazet Heugenhauer is an author. She lives between Paris and Tourcoing in France. She writes unruly texts, which are widely distributed. Her short story *Bêcher son visage* was published in September 2020 by Éditions de la Chambre Verte. At the same time, she works for the production and writing of contemporary art films, notably at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains.



CURTA-METRAGEM

Growing: um filme de terror para falar do aborto na Polónia



Os primeiros minutos da curta-metragem *Growing*, realizada pela polaca Agata Wiczorek em 2021, revelam um cenário frio, asséptico, onde manequins desmontáveis assumem o papel de mulheres grávidas prestes a dar à luz bebés de látex. Num centro de simulação médica real, o *Presage*, na Polónia, a personagem principal do filme de docuficção, uma jovem estudante de enfermagem chamada Ewa, é treinada para assistir na acção médica, repetindo maquinalmente os procedimentos de auxílio ao parto.



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O filme de 17 minutos é, nas palavras da *realizadora*, "provavelmente a única forma de demonstrar como um assunto muito íntimo se transforma num trauma colectivo, social". A alusão ao endurecimento da lei do aborto na Polónia, que tornou permitido abortar legalmente apenas em casos de violação, incesto ou quando a gestação representa risco de morte para a gestante, é evidente no filme da realizadora polaca. "Estava mais interessada em trazer para o ecrã os sentimentos íntimos e subjectivos que estão associados ao aborto de quem vive numa realidade biopolítica [semelhante à que se vive na Polónia]", diz ao P3 a artista que combina o cinema e a fotografia e que explora os limites das linguagens do documentário e da ficção.

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Agata Wiczorek aponta a solidão como "uma das experiências mais marcantes para as mulheres que procuram e experienciam o aborto". "A violência institucional torna possível a sensação de invasão de privacidade e a convivência [de quem interrompe a gravidez] com a estigmatização do procedimento." A estigmatização, enfatiza, culpabiliza a mulher ao comparar o aborto ao infanticídio. "Essa acusação é tão errada quanto violenta", sublinha.

Com *Growing*, *Wiczorek* quer demonstrar que todos os factores externos favorecem, hoje, na Polónia, a apresentação da experiência do aborto como um "pesadelo íntimo e profundo", algo para que não encontra justificação no presente. "Numa altura em que existem meios para tornar o aborto apenas num procedimento médico normal, humano, decente que existe e está disponível", o recurso ao procedimento noutros moldes, potencialmente perigosos para a grávida, "é simplesmente injusto". "Mesmo porque proibir o aborto não reduz o número de gestações interrompidas. A ilegalização provoca apenas o aumento do número de abortos realizados em condições perigosas e do número de mulheres que têm de se sujeitar a maiores dificuldades emocionais, financeiras e físicas para consegui-lo."



Da série fotográfica que a artista desenvolveu paralelamente "Artefacts" AGATA WICZOREK

A curta que foi exibida a 15 de Março em Portugal, integrada no ciclo expositivo *Director's Cut* do projecto *Parallel*, da entidade portuguesa *Procur.art* - e que está de momento a fazer o circuito dos festivais, com passagens por França, Itália e Índia - funde assim duas realidades que merecem, para a realizadora, uma reflexão. "No centro do mecanismo de violência está a objectificação: está em ver outros seres humanos como coisas que podem ser manipuladas, relocalizadas, geridas, multiplicadas ou reduzidas em número."

Para Agata, que se apoia num *slogan* das Marchas Negras, na Polónia, em resposta à reforma da lei do aborto, "os corpos das mulheres não são simples incubadoras". "A lei polaca transforma a gravidez humana numa mera etapa de procriação e reduz os corpos femininos a objectos sem autonomia." Tal como o eram os manequins na sala de simulação médica. "Esse lugar parece ficcional, mas é perfeitamente real, existe. E parece, afinal de contas, que vivemos dentro dessa ficção."



Agata Wiecek, Growing, Artefacts. © Procur.arte, Lisbon. Courtesy Procur.arte

ART & CULTURE , FEATURED

The body dwelling in me

👤 Maria Eduarda Wendhausen

According to Giorgio Agamben, contemporaneity is an “anachronism that allows us to understand our time as a “too soon” that is also a “too late”, an “already” that is also a “not yet”^[1]. This statement is quoted by Rémi Coignet in the opening text of the edition *Changing Times: Art Facing a new world*, in the 2020 volume of *Parallel Atlas* published by The Eyes, which includes the short film for which this essay is devoted: ‘*Growing*’ by Agata Wiecek (Poland, 1992). The work, from the perspective of body-horror, a sub-genre of horror, heralds one of the major concerns of our amorphous time: the virtualisation and alienation of our bodies.

The *Parallel Atlas* editions are one of the last stages of the *Parallel* platform process, led by Procur.arte in Lisbon. Since 2017 it has united European creative organisations with intercultural exchanges and mentorships, starting with the recruitment of new artists and curators via open calls. Once connected, these actors seek new discussions to embed the contemporary photography scene.

Besides publishing, exhibitions are held at the cultural associations belonging to the project. The exhibition *Growing*, at [Procur.arte](#) until May 6, displays the expanded universe of Agata Wiecek’s homonymous short film.

The artist’s ‘praxis’ resides in the human body. As a subject, it is thought in an emancipated, sometimes political perspective, in threshold situations. For instance, when Wiecek explores the signifier of the body constantly exposed to technology, immersed in a virtual context. What is left of the real?

Agata Wiecek presents an extensive portfolio guided by criticism of consumer society and the dogmatism of the family. For example, in *Artefacts* she uses human moulds made of silicone to question the evolution of the organic body, intrinsic to the intersection between medicine and the technology industry.

For the artist, this constant attempt to go beyond the human body’s finitude is justified by the ceaseless quest for economic growth, where multiple solutions are devised to meet the needs of new infrastructures, in a constant and infinite cycle of superfluous creations.

My first contact with Wiecek’s work was through *Second Skin*, following an investigation into artists who, from a feminist perspective, dealt with the depersonalisation of female bodies reliant on the consumer society. The self-portraits where the models mask themselves with silicone suits (usually worn by men who practice female fetishistic masking) question depersonalisation as a form of masochism.

The abject side of Agata Wiecek’s work shares a specific root that goes back to her time as a university student. The artist was a pupil at the National Film School in Lodz, Poland, where Roman Polanski, author of *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), also studied. The horror genre, like abject art, explores the unpleasant in opposition to the tendency to aestheticise the world^[2]. Abject art also has a strong feminist backdrop, where women’s bodies (in the broad queer sense) are subjugated to patriarchal social orders. This is the case of compulsory pregnancy and the prohibition access to

A few years ago, the context that allowed women to have a legal and safe abortion in Poland, the artist’s home country, changed. Before, the voluntary interruption of pregnancy covered cases of fetal malformation. A situation that was eventually overturned by the Polish Constitutional Court in 2021, leading thousands of women to the streets of the country in protest against the ruling. Now, in the country, abortions can only be legally performed in cases of rape, incest or if the mother’s health is at imminent risk.

The change in the court ruling was justified by conservative Catholic precepts in Poland. It is the European country where access to abortion is the most difficult. The European Parliament condemned the decision, considering it a fierce attack on the country’s rule of law.

‘*Growing*’, a 17-minute short film about something growing inside the body (or pregnancy), emerges in this troubled womb, where the watchword is anguish from beginning to end. The film follows Ewa, a medical student who spends her time interning in a student prep lab with ultra-realistic silicone-made models of human bodies. In an interview to promote the work, Wiecek outlined the violent side of using the moulds for this purpose, as it reduces the human experience of an individual to the carnal limits of a body that can be massively reproduced. Interestingly, but not coincidentally, the short film was shot at the *Presagesimulation* centre of the Henri Warembourg Faculty of Medicine at the University of Lille, France. Here, medical students prepare daily for their profession without touching any human... body.

The protagonist, constantly warned via telephone by her mother about the danger of diseases and parasites in the day-to-day world, is suddenly struck by an epidemic. She is pregnant, with no explanation or imminent genitor, rendered helpless to remove the foetus and yet forced to feel happy.

Watching the film, we feel the influence of the horror genre on the screen, whether by the growth of the foetus reminiscent of *Rosemary’s* anguish, or its parasitic insurgence as an icon of *Alien* (1979).

For reasons we won’t mention to avoid spoilers, the protagonist regains power over her body, using a means no less violent than the one that abused her.

‘*Growing*’ emphasises the emergence of body-horror as an accusatory mechanism of a system of situations that strike half the world’s population on a daily basis. They dress and undress, rape, restrain, take, place and remove women’s bodies. The short film ‘*Growing*’ is a critique through the virtual body of contemporary reality. The exhibition, until May 6 in Lisbon, is a must-see expanded account of it.

[1] Agamben, G. (2008). *Qu’est-ce que le contemporain?*. Rivages.

[2] Lipovetsky, G., & Serroy, J. (2015). *A estetização do mundo: Viver na época do capitalismo artista*. Companhia das Letras.

RETOUR SUR COURT MÉTRANGE 2022

18 OCTOBRE 2022 LAURE DION | LAISSER UN COMMENTAIRE |

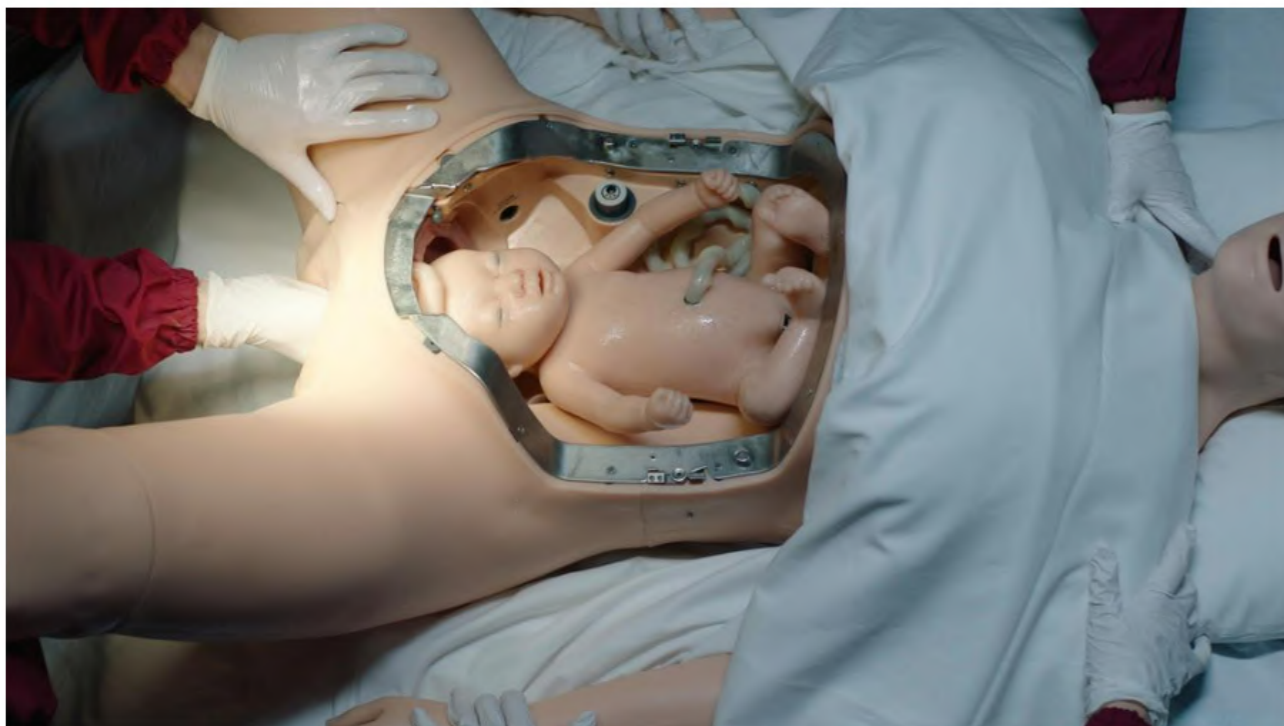
La 18ème édition du festival Court Métrange situé à Rennes, s'est close au début du mois, accordant un Méliès d'argent au court-métrage français de [Dayan D. Oualid](#), Chimera, et un Méliès d'or à Growing, un court-métrage polonais de Agata Wiczorek sur lequel nous reviendrons. A travers une palette de films insolites, fantastiques et délirants, le festival breton met à l'honneur la créativité, l'audace et l'originalité des réalisateurs. Revenons ici, sur quelques court-métrages marquants de l'édition 2022.

Growing de Agata Wiczorek (Pologne)

Le festival Court Métrange a décerné son grand prix, le Méliès d'or, à un court métrage engagé et audacieux : Growing de Agata Wiczorek. La réalisatrice polonaise, en filmant la descente aux enfers d'une femme enceinte contre son gré, qui aboutira à une fausse couche, évoque la violente politique de son pays où l'avortement est maintenant interdit, sauf en cas de viol ou de danger pour la mère. La loi s'est endurcie depuis 2020, puisqu'il était également possible d'avorter en cas de malformation du fœtus, un droit désormais révoqué en Pologne.

Le film retrace le parcours d'Ewa, une sage-femme en formation. Elle travaille dans un centre médical où les infirmiers s'entraînent à donner naissance sur des mannequins en silicone. Lorsqu'elle se découvre enceinte, Ewa souhaite avorter mais sa demande est rejetée par la médecin qui lui assure qu'il s'agit d'une « chance ». S'ensuit une fausse couche douloureuse et violente pour la protagoniste.

Le message est explicite de la part de la réalisatrice qui, dès la première séquence, braque la lumière sur le vagin artificiel d'une mère-mannequin en train de donner naissance à un nourrisson en silicone. Le sujet porte sur la condition des femmes et le libre arbitre de leur corps.



Artificiel semble bien être le mot clef pour décrire le monde qui entoure Ewa. Les mannequins en silicone, l'organisation et l'ordre au centre médical ne laissent aucune place à la chaleur humaine. Chez Ewa, seuls les cartons de déménagement jonchent le sol, et les murs blancs épurés ainsi que l'absence d'effets personnels évoquent un lieu sans vie et sans chaleur. La réalisatrice nous plonge dans un monde désincarné, où les dialogues sont remplacés par des monologues qui dictent à Ewa ce qu'elle doit penser ou faire. Son professeur au centre médical rappelle dans un discours qu'ils « sauvent des vies ». Sa mère, à travers des appels oppressants, tente de lui dicter son comportement à distance. Enfin, la médecin d'Ewa ignore sa requête sur son propre corps et l'oblige à garder son enfant. En centrant de cette manière le point de vue sur Ewa, Agata Wiczorek souligne efficacement la violence des injonctions sur le corps de la femme.

A l'image des mannequins du centre médical, Ewa est manipulée et semble dénuée de joie de vivre. Le parallèle est d'ailleurs explicite dès la première séquence entre la mère faite de silicone qui donne naissance à un bébé artificiel et Ewa. Pour rendre l'entraînement plus réaliste, cette dernière doit simuler la respiration de la mère-mannequin. Puis elle contemple cette femme artificielle à travers une vitre, où la réalisatrice à travers un plan évocateur, montre le reflet d'Ewa se fondre sur la silhouette de la mannequin. A travers cette association, Agata Wiczorek dénonce la manière dont une femme peut être considérée comme un pantin pour la société. Elle est sensée répondre aux attentes de cette dernière, ici procréer sans protester, sacrifiant ainsi ses études et son épanouissement. La réalisatrice révèle la violence infligée aux femmes dans la conclusion de son court-métrage : une scène symbolique et particulièrement rude d'une fausse couche qui causera inévitablement à Ewa un traumatisme profond.

Agata Wiczorek signe ici un court-métrage d'actualité puissant qui ne peut pas laisser indifférent, à moins d'être fait de silicone et plastique. Elle ose critiquer le système de son pays qui a rendu l'accès à l'avortement quasiment impossible, montrant, sans pudeur, la violence et les traumatismes infligés aux femmes. A travers un sarcasme apparent, elle dénonce la manière dont l'accouchement est toujours considéré comme une « bonne nouvelle », forcément réjouissante par la société. Elle ne manquera pas de contredire ce discours dans un final percutant. Le court-métrage résonne avec l'actualité des États-Unis également, et gagnerait à être visionné par le plus de personnes possible.