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In 2012 we published the first English-language edition of *Didaskalia*. We now present the second issue, containing a selection of texts printed in our magazine between 2011-2013. The articles and interviews chosen for publication present the key phenomena in Polish theater, as well as the current academic interests and methodological approaches to theater history and today's theater in contemporary theater studies.

We begin with texts that deal with the reinterpretation of the Jerzy Grotowski's work. *Grotowski, Women, and Homosexuals: Marginal Notes to the "Human Drama"* might be seen as an extension of Agata Adamiecka-Sitek's reflections on gender in Grotowski's theater contained in the "The Gender of the Performer" (co-written by Weronika Szczawińska), found in the previous English-language issue. This time the critic analyzes *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (chiefly based on the recording of the performance), demonstrating the dramatization of the misogynist discourse of psychoanalysis and male homosexuality in the play. This work polemicizes with interpretations to date, and serves as a point of departure for discussions on Grotowski's work and the methodology of researching the history of theater contained in Adamiecka-Sitek's correspondence with Leszek Kolankiewicz.

In the following part we publish texts dealing with the issue of "negative performativity," which appeared in *Didaskalia* in the context of works by Judith Halberstam and Bojana Kunst. Joanna Jopek transplants this concept in the context of Polish visual and performative art by Oskar Dawicki, Joanna Rajkowska, and Cezary Bodzianowski, indicating the anti-political, critical potential of failure that it contains. An important point of reference in her study is a pair of interviews with Oskar Dawicki. In these conversations the author less illuminates the process of making the film *Perfomer* (devoted to his work) than gives extremely different responses to the same questions, continuing his game with the image of the artist.

Part Three, on the other hand, is entirely devoted to new Polish theater, though it closely corresponds with the issues raised in the preceding sections. In the article **"**Embarrassing Performances by Losers: Counterhistories of Political Theater," Marcin Kościelniak focuses on counterhistory theater projects, putting forward the thesis that they "are most insightful in our day in realizing the postulates of political art and are creating the most fascinating and vital movement in Polish theater." Isolating three models of writing counterhistories for stage, the author analyzes projects by duos of dramaturgs and directors: Paweł Demirski and Monika Strzępka, Jolanta Janiczak and Wiktor Rubin, and Marcin Cecko and Krzysztof Garbaczewski. His theoretical reflections are supplemented by a conversation with Justyna Wasilewska on her work on the title role in Marcin Cecko and Krzysztof Garbaczewski's *Balladyna*.

The subject of creating the image of the artist returns in two more texts, where it is shifted into media discourse and its impact on the reception of art. In her article "Covered/Uncovered: Memory Games in the Promised Theater" Małgorzata Dziewulska examines promotional strategies in theaters and the media discourse that accompanied two chronologically remote premieres: Jerzy Jarocki's *Dream of the Sinless* of 1979 and Krzysztof Warlikowski's *(A)pollonia* of 2009. She points out that the discrepancy between the advertisements for the performances before the premiere and the final form of the plays affected the content of the reviews, and ultimately modified the plays themselves. Monika Kwaśniewska, in turn, analyzes Jan Klata's strategies of self-depiction, tracing his statements in the media. Kwaśniewska wonders what happened to make Klata (presently the director of the National Stary Theater in Krakow) the face of the new political theater, thereafter evolving into the "specialist on Polishness," an "expert" on national issues.

The subject of the texts in the final section is the phenomenon of the choir in contemporary theater. The texts by Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska and Agata Łuksza on two projects by Marta Górnicka at the Theater Institute in Warsaw – *[ˈhuːr kobj+]* ("[ˈkɔːrəs əv wɪmən]") (a play made with amateurs, dealing with the place of women in culture) and *Requiemmachine* (a performance that uses pieces by Władysław Broniewski to comment on the neo-liberal labor model) – are summed up by a conversation with the artist. In the interview "I Sing the Body Electric" Marta Górnicka speaks of the concept of the choir, created by individuals. She calls the language in her play a kind of speech cleansed of psychology, recalling the sound of a computer or a machine. The director relates the process of creating a choir, and the work in creating a new actor/performer through training sessions during rehearsals. The motif of the theatrical chorus branches out into various themes, lending itself to feminist, historical, political, and aesthetic reflections, concerning the phenomenon of musicality in the theater. ■

AGATA ADAMIECKA-SITEK

GROTOWSKI, WOMEN AND HOMOSEXUALS: On the Margins of a "Human Drama"

Prologue

Before the narrative of "the return of Christ" begins – to use Konstanty Puzyna's term,[1] of which Grotowski himself approved – thus before the self-proclaimed First Apostle, Simon Peter, gives his comrades Biblical names and ultimately designates Ciemny (the Simpleton), played by Ryszard Cieślak, as the Saviour – the prologue to *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* plays out. It comprises a scene involving a man and a woman, omitted from Ludwik Flaszen's "reading instructions." A battle scene – an agon of the sexes, played out in the space of "unconscious logic" and "mythical figurations" particular to the performance,[2] within the archetypal order of a human drama boldly imposing itself from the outset. The relations between the man and woman are completely defined by relations of sexual difference which determine their roles within this universalised history of humankind, condensed into a single scene. What significance does this structure contain? How does it interpret masculinity and femininity, and what ideological code does it apply to gender constructs? In Ermanno Olmi's 1979 recording,[3] the motionlessness of the inert actors lying or sitting on the floor is broken by Elizabeth Albahaca's whispering. She is soon joined by Stanisław Scierski, reciting words from the Gospel of John on the consumption of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. As he does so, he moves towards the woman on his knees and with a sudden movement he whips his coat from his shoulders to reveal his naked torso. Albahaca lays on the ground a loaf of bread wrapped in a white tablecloth, which she has been holding from the outset. For a brief moment, the woman with the bundle recalls a mother holding an infant. In the recording this image is not foregrounded, yet it must have made a fairly significant impression if Puzyna recalled from this scene a girl who "cradles to her breast a loaf of bread as if it were a baby."[4] They meet, standing opposite each other, on either side of the unfolded tablecloth as if at a table, with the woman placing a knife alongside the bread. As she strikes up a Spanish hymn, he begins to masturbate vigorously and after a few movements freezes in ecstasy. He ravenously licks his own sperm from his hands, as if it were the true life-giving nourishment of which John's Gospel spoke. The woman follows him intently and when, after another series of movements his palm again fills with seed, she falls to his hand

and greedily licks it up. This particularly human communion does not, however, lead to unity or fulfilment, but to a brutal confrontation. The significant asymmetry revealed here reproduces the structure of sexual difference in the classical Freudian psychoanalytical interpretation which perceives in the female sex only a lack and the related necessity of envy of the life-giving organ – the single sexual organ of which the female sex is an empty inversion. The defective female body evokes in the man a fear of castration located in the essence of the fear of death; it is a living symbol of loss, horrifying in its negativity. The following action completes this classical psychoanalytical scenario, ordering the woman to become a literal embodiment of male fears. Albahaca seizes the knife and performs an ambivalent gesture, as if she wanted to stab the man in his abdomen, although he consequently grasps the knife and thrusts it into the ground beside the bread. He subsequently seizes the loaf, lies down on it and performs copulative movements. In her description of the performance, Małgorzata Dzieduszycka decides that "he rapes it,"[5] although this scene – as is the case with the entire performance – cannot be subordinated to such unambiguous readings. Indeed, referring to John's act, Puzyna explained the literalness – and thus the unusual severity – with which religious symbols are treated in the performance, while also locating Grotowski's performance within the context of the artist's expressly preferred mystical discourse: "eating and drinking blood are conceived here as 'real,' that is literally. [...] As a result, even love – a key concept in Christ's history – will be treated literally: as eroticism. Mystical eroticism, of course, as in the texts of Saint John of the Cross, where mysticism and eroticism are synonymous, while the whole matter acquires a somewhat shocking connotation: God is a male lover, He, while John is a female lover, She – the spirit."[6]

The woman reacts violently to this "love" scene, suddenly starting to move, running helplessly like somebody with no idea what to do. Again, for a moment, she recalls a mother concerned for the fate of her child before quickly transforming into an aggressive domina. She grabs the tablecloth and whips the man with it before initiating something resembling a corrida, using the tablecloth as a cape. She tries to take the bread away from the man, but he refuses to let it go. They tussle and the woman, having been pushed away violently, falls. Meanwhile, the man lies down on his back, pushes the loaf to his abdomen and rubs it against his crotch. His body strains to its full potential in sexual exultation. He freezes in ecstasy and then the woman tears the bread from his grasp, runs away, seizes the knife and, kneeling, stabs the loaf several times. Each time the man's body reacts as if he had received the blow.

Viewed today, not from a mystical perspective, as the director desired, but in the context of psychoanalytical inspirations so assiduously hidden by Grotowski,[7] this story of the life-giving phallus and the femme fatale achieves a level of almost parodic dramatisation of misogynistic psychoanalytical discourse. It could quite successfully illustrate the zealous arguments of feminist rebels who in the early 1970s also renounced their obedience to fathers and used their texts to reveal the ideological oppression of women. The female condition depicted in such texts posits both narcissistic humiliation as an unavoidable consequence of a deficient body, as well as the reduction of female sexuality to a reproductive function in which the woman is expected to find partial compensation for that deficiency, with the child becoming a substitute for the penis. This definition of woman is completed by the horror of a femininity which brings castration and death, thus posing a permanent threat to the male subject. In this context, the prologue to *Apocalypsis* proves to be a series of psychoanalytical clichés or – if we attempt to grant it greater coherence – a parable of the symbolic functions of patriarchal ideology which separates masculinity and femininity, raising an impregnable boundary between them which in turn divides sexuality as a life-giving force capable of sublimation from the death drive. Undoubtedly, though, this was not the creators' intention. The medium of film, enabling us to encounter Grotowski's work today, offers no grounds for seeking in the performance any critical potential undermining the patriarchal status quo. On the contrary, the provocative, blasphemous impetus of this sequence was evidently directed against the division of the sexual and sacred spheres, a division rooted in Christianity. The literal combination of the phallus with the Christian motif of life-giving nourishment – the divine body of the Son, the consumption of which means death can be overcome – drastically violated a cultural taboo. The shock associated with the duplicate image of a "corporeal communion" – initially in the form of consuming the seed, and later in copulating with the bread – hid the radically affirmative message which this scene directed towards what culture designates "masculine." The sanctified phallus here stood erect and alone in the centre of the symbolic space, pushing that which was feminine to the margins, into the space of fatal phantasms.

It was not, of course, this scandal that the Polish prelate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński had in mind when, in a sermon issued on 9 May 1976 at Skałka in Krakow, he called *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* "real filth," mentioning it – quite ironically – in the same breath as Tadeusz Różewicz's *White Marriage*.[89] Even Grotowski himself most evidently did not perceive the patriarchal matrix which he reproduced in its entirety given that when he considered the history of the creation of his final performance he declared: "the only seed which I as a director retained from beginning to end in this work was the rejection of stereotypes."[10] In Grotowski's declarations on the functions of theater, the persistent challenging of stereotypes was one of its more important functions because it was connected with the process of tearing off masks, stripping bare and disarmament, all essential in achieving the Total Act. In the text "Statement of Principles," created for new members of the Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski outlined in simpler, more direct terms the declarations from *Towards a Poor Theatre*: "We see theatre – especially in its

palpable, carnal aspect – as a place of provocation, a challenge the actor sets himself and also, indirectly, other people. Theater only has meaning if it allows us to transcend our stereotyped vision, our conventional feelings and customs, our standards of judgment."[11] From a gender perspective, or – to be more precise – from the perspective of relations between the sexes, it is difficult to find evidence for such a definition of the meaning of Grotowski's theater. Absolutely separated, hierarchically ordered masculinity and femininity occupy here exactly those positions which were imagined for them in a male-dominated culture constructed jointly by patriarchal institutions such as the Church and psychoanalysis. Was it not the case that the Polish prophet of a sacred theater equally zealously contributed to the construction of the same edifice? When I observe Elizabeth Albahaca who, in the prologue to the story of Christ's return, takes "communion" directly from her partner's penis before taking a knife and stabbing the loaf of bread which symbolises the body of her child, the body of the personified Christian God and the erect phallus, I am driven to cite a feminist philosopher whose provocative and sacrilegious words were aimed at fathers who – although they might speak different languages – all utter the same message:

> Let us not wait for the god Phallus to give us his grace. The god Phallus, indeed, because even though many people go around saying God is dead, few would question the fact that the Phallus is alive and well. And don't many of the bearers of the said phallus walk around today claiming to be gods no less? They are everywhere, even – and here I shall raise my final question – in the holy Roman Catholic Church where the Holy Father the Pope believes it is right to forbid us once again: contraception, abortion, extramarital relations, homosexuality, etc. And yet, when the minister of that one and only God, that God-Father, pronounces the words of the Eucharist, "This is my body, this is my blood," according to the rite that celebrates the sharing of food and that has been ours for centuries, perhaps we might remind him that he would not be there if our body and our blood had not given him life, love and spirit. [...] But this is something that must not be known. That is why woman cannot celebrate the Eucharist. If they were to do so, something of the truth that is hidden in the communion right might be brutally unmasked.[12]

Mother and Domina

In the prologue to *Apocalypsis*, the figure of a woman recognisable from Grotowski's previous performances appears. She is a protagonist in whom the images of a mother and the fatal domina merge in a disconcerting manner. The construction of Fenixiana in *The Constant Prince* was essentially similar, with the figure of the melancholy doppelganger of Don Fernando – as she appeared in the drama – becoming on stage a ruthless female torturer, literally carrying out the execution of the Constant Prince. The fusion of mother and domina is not initially obvious, manifesting itself in striking contrasts and in shocking and unclear signals – as, for example, in the scene where Fenixiana whips the prince to the rhythm of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, this is precisely the reason why it makes such a powerful impression on audiences' unconscious. Essentially, the entire consistent representation of the relations between the male protagonist and the female character can be described in terms of Gilles Deleuze's concept of contractual masochism.[13] This perspective might initially appear surprising, but it proves exceptionally inspiring in relation to Grotowski's theater, as it combines aspects which are of principal significance in his performance: sexuality and spectacle. Thus framed the relations between man and woman become a contractual agreement between him and the sadistic domina, with this agreement expected to lead to the fulfilment of the masochistic spectacle, realised according to its own principles, with him in the lead role. Is this not a strikingly accurate description of the action of Grotowski's performance – that great masochistic spectacle in which the male protagonist casts himself in the role of the victim, openly realising the divulged phantasm?

But I am in love, my lord	Ale ja się panie kocham
With the death of a martyr	W takiej śmierci męczennika,
Which unbinds a bloody body	Co krwawe ciało odmyka
And releases the spirit unto God.	I Bogu uwalnia duszę.

As we recall, in the dramatic moment of deciding to sacrifice himself, the Prince eats the letter from the king of Spain, who had opted to buy the prince's freedom in exchange for ceding Ceuta to the pagans, and – having destroyed this contract between fathers – the Prince determines the conditions of his own death. He then diligently carries out his project of a masochistic spectacle with the unwitting assistance of the king of the Moors, the prince's captor. In the text, this reversed master-slave relationship is played out between men; in Grotowski's performance, it is shifted to the contract with the domina, who seemingly plays the role of a capricious lady on whom the Prince's life depends but, in fact, merely satisfies his masochistic scheme.

What is the actual goal of this game? Deleuze's answer is particularly interesting in light of Grotowski's theater. The foundation of the masochistic phantasm is the desire for a personal transformation on the way to negating the symbolic rule and social structure within which the subject is held captive. It is a matter of creating a route to a new opening, to a rebirth through prolonged pain which offers the promise of the greatest pleasure experienced in relations with a fetishised "ideal object." In the masochistic theater, the slave becomes a new object, liberating himself, overcoming the limitations of the symbolic rule of the Father. In what way does this particular act of "regressive regeneration" become possible? It is realised, as Deleuze shows, through a return to a primordial, pre-oedipal dependence on the mother, to that extremely ambivalent relationship preceding the father's

proscription. So this is all thanks to giving the female partner the role of domina, whose power over the man places her in the position occupied by the omnipotent mother – the mistress of the life and death of a young subject. Within the sadistic domina there lies hidden the figure of the Mother, while the masochistic spectacle, based on a codified and often literally inscribed contract, is a perverse means of "outwitting" the symbolic figure of the Father and escaping his rule. He is completely negated and removed through the contract located on the route to the law which he himself represents: principally the law of prohibition of this "incestuous" pleasure which is enabled by the contract. The second birth is completed not only without the Father's participation, but indeed thanks to his elimination. The father's power is negated, while he is mocked the moment the contract, which in itself is an embodiment of paternal law, "is symbolically delivered into the hands of the woman" in order to thus enable regression to the material principle.[14] But the maternal law demands that before this desired act of incest is fulfilled – which is at the same time an act of the Mother's exclusive rebirth – the son cleanses himself of all "attributes of the father," effacing all traces of phallic masculinity. This is the source of repeated acts of castration carried out on the stage of masochistic theater, as outlined by Deleuze, who draws on literary and mythological motifs.

The significant shifts which Grotowski implemented in the relations between the figures of the Prince, Fenixiana and the king give a clear indication of the structure of the masochistic model. Fenixiana performs a gesture of castration as early as in the first scene where she encounters the Prince, although the real feminisation takes place over the course of the subsequent acts of the masochistic spectacle, during which her body is consumed by ecstatic pleasure, generating associations with cultural images of mystic female ecstasy.[15] As incest with the Mother is achieved through the masochistic spectacle, rebirth inside a new masculinity becomes possible, a masculinity liberated from Oedipal tensions, freed of the bonds of sexual identity and fully open. Is this not one possible description of the radically non-normative male body occupying the central position in the Laboratory Theatre's performance? A body consumed by limitless pain and pleasure, a passive and masochistic body, yet one which also manages to subordinate all of reality to the realisation of its own phantasm. All of reality – but principally the figure of the woman who has been cast in the fetishising and objectifying role of the Mother-domina, meaning she is thus completely subordinated to the needs of the male subject consumed by his battle for spiritual-corporeal liberation from the restrictive bonds of "social man." Overcoming the limitations of a masculinity constructed in the process of socialisation accompanies the classic device of casting woman in the role of an abject Other. Escaping the gendered conditionings of masculinity is bound to the upholding of the oppressive binary opposition of sexes, revived and sanctified anew in the myth which Grotowski brings to life. Behind the apparent transgression there lies hidden a conservative gesture of strengthening the foundations of the patriarchal order while male freedom is extended through the complete subordination of woman. The construction of a new masculinity demands a mythical narrative which will grant the new structure a universal quality and will sublimate the interpretation, sanctioning exclusion. While *The Constant Prince* fulfils this function in relation to the extraordinary individual – "God's Madman" – *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, on the other hand, evokes a communal myth. Before we explore this narrative of a male community and impossible love, however, let us continue our investigation of the narrative of the Mother and domina and the rebirth achieved through them.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that, as a stake in the masochistic game, "rebirth" – liberation on the way to a return to origins, to the life-giving source, to that first experience of an unknown world in childhood – was a motif to which Grotowski returned in all of his later creative work, giving it different names in various languages at different stages of his theatrical and non-theatrical experiments. In *Action*, the last work on which Grotowski bore influence – albeit not as an author but as a "teacher of performers" – this motif was directly depicted in the form of the reversal of the course of life within the structure of Thomas Richards' performative actions. These led from the birth of an old man who, in evacuating a female body, hobbled using a stick, to a baby lying on its back admiring its hands and playing with a Haitian ritual rattle. This state of infancy, towards which the course of *Action* led, is connected to motifs from *The Gospel of Thomas* which, intertwined with Afro-Carribean songs, provided the textual canvas for the performative opus ("These infants being suckled are like those who enter the Kingdom."[16]) and sets in motion an extensive interpretative field within the order of "mystical births."[17] In this sense, *Action* recalls *The Constant Prince*, while the distance between the tortured body of Don Fernando, which was ultimately "liberated in death" and put on public display alone in the finale of the spectacle, and the body of the performer – embodying an infant, thus "standing at the origins" – surrounded by his partners singing Afro-Caribbean songs of mourning, can be considered the most suggestive illustration of the road which Grotowski took "in search of essence."

What in Grotowski's theater took place on the level of hidden and often unconscious mechanisms set in motion in the living tissue of actors' and audiences' psyches, in the latter phase of his work often took the form of open performative actions structured around directly depicted motifs. Violence, even a form of violation, inscribed in the theatrical experience of both actors and also audiences – certainly a source of the reservations that part of the theater world retained towards Grotowski's art – was replaced by the affirmative aura of Ritual Arts. Did this stem from the fact that the mental energy released in the theater during violent procedures with decidedly sexual foundations – the setting in motion and revelation of phantasms, the breaking down of defence mechanisms,

the shock of violating taboos – and used in violating the individual's cultural limitations, had become over time, and in the course of many years of experimenting with traditional techniques, an object of the performers' conscious work? The goal of art as a vehicle was indeed this particular transformation of low and coarse energy – the sexual or "sensual" energy as the artist called it – into a subtle energy or, rather, the creation of a channel of communication between the two forms, what Grotowski called "the vertical process," which the witnesses, invited in ever increasing numbers, could experience only by means of induction.[18] Explaining the difference between a theater of performances and Art as a Vehicle, Grotowski referred to the metaphor of a lift.[19] He compared the performance to a large lift "operated by actors" and carrying spectators, thus overlooking his own role as the actual constructor and operator of the entire mechanism, something which he had described in great detail on other occasions.[20] Art as a Vehicle is, on the other hand, "like a rather rudimentary lift which resembles something like a basket pulled up by a cable thanks to which those engaged in the action are raised up towards a more subtle energy, in order to move down *together with the lift*, towards our instinctual body." Despite all the differences between the first and final stages of Grotowski's work, the gender structure remained unchanged. The male protagonist, the teacher's chosen one, who always embodied a Christ-like figure, was surrounded by a male choir and one woman who fulfilled maternal functions in relation to him. This structure was so evident that even Grotowski's declared allies noted it.[21] In *Action* it was reproduced with complete precision, something also perfectly evident in the recording of the opus *Action in Aya Irini*.[22] Wearing a blood-red dress, the woman gives birth to the old man – an image striking in its literalness in representing the somatic origins of the female body which, in giving birth to life, also gives birth to death – the escape from which or the separation of which is an essential condition of coming into existence also in the sense of a spiritual transformation. The affirmative, luminous atmosphere of *Action* does not reveal the radical tensions that were connected to this structure in Grotowski's theater, although the binding of the female figure to a schematic role remains striking. This is all the more the case because the woman is ascribed the majority of the "ancillary" tasks connected with lighting candles or carrying the bowl of water, something which created the almost comical impression that the woman was only needed for giving birth and tidying up. In this context, Richards' final work, *Living Room*, is a breakthrough – even in the most elementary structure of doers which comprises three men and three women. Certainly here, too, it is possible to find Christian-gnostic motifs, but *Living Room* nevertheless remains a particularly female work and, as a result, is radically transgressive. It is the female performers embodying the protagonists who are figurations of the "Son of Man," expressly playing out – at least as far as I saw it – the "gender trouble" that had come into existence here. They enter the space of great tradition, inclusion into which was possible only through male gender, and even if they work towards going beyond the particularities of the human social condition, they do so taking into account their cultural status and their direct experience of the female body. Do they perhaps set in motion, to use the language of Alain Badiou, the procedure of truth and create a space for universal singularity? The answer to this question is worth exploring, because without doing so, any gender-focused reading of Grotowski and his direct legacy would be incomplete.

Let us return, however, to the female figure from Grotowski's final performance. In the prologue to *Apocalypsis* she repeats the aggressive gestures of Fenixiana towards the male subject and at certain points – such as during the attempted castration or the corrida scene – it is as if she cites them. Although it is difficult to perceive in this the full structure of the masochistic spectacle which rules supreme over the logic of *The Constant Prince*, here too femininity has been subordinated to the maternal fantasies of the male subject together with their typical ambivalence. The image of the mother will return in the finale of the performance in the figures of the Marys going to the Holy Sepulchre, where they appear as women fulfilling the eternal caring functions, albeit no longer towards a child, but towards a corpse. Maternal womanliness has been depicted here through a grotesque deformation of quotidian actions, through an intolerable scampering of women chasing after everyday life and unblocking a drain, as Cieślak's protagonist notes, borrowing a phrase from Eliot. All this "crashing of pans" which accompanies the great human drama played out in parallel between Simon Peter and the Simpleton acquires the characteristics of an almost comical counterpoint, an impression strengthened by the clearly parodic turn by Molik (Judas), performing the role of one of the women. However, the prevailing emotion which drives these characters is abhorrence towards their own bodies – shrunken, deformed, full of mutual aggression and a will to control the bodies of the elderly women. Before Mary Magdalene dons her habit we see her washing herself in a tin bucket. The mysterious female body demands constant ablutions and can never be fully cleansed of its original dirt. Maternal corporeality appears as dirty matter, excrement – abject.

It is, as Julia Kristeva shows, this persistent reduction of femininity exclusively to the maternal function that is the cause of oppression culminating in explosions of aggression against women which return regularly in Western cultures. The discourse linking woman as a social being with the maternal function not only limits her to procreation but also leaves her open to extreme, unconscious emotions connected to the subject's prehistory. It is a question of the unconscious memory of perhaps the most dramatic events of our life taking place at its outset, so the breaking of the consuming bond with the mother through symbolic matricide. The essential individualising cut, without which the autonomous subject cannot come into existence, is an act almost beyond our strength, while the accompanying sense of guilt can be turned

into fatal aggression against the self. Matricide can be worked through in a particular sequence of transpositions, which Kristeva reconstructs thus:

> In order to protect mother, I kill myself while knowing – phantasmatic and protective knowledge – that it comes from her, the death-bearing she-Gehenna... Thus my hatred is safe and my matricidal guilt erased. I make of Her an image of Death so as not to be shattered through the hatred I bear against myself when I identify with Her [...].Thus the feminine as image of death is not only a screen for my fear of castration, but also an imaginary safety catch for the matricidal drive that, without such a representation, would pulverize me into melancholia if it did not drive me to crime. No, it is She who is death-bearing, therefore I do not kill myself in order to kill her but I attack her, harass her, represent her...[23]

It seems that the image of woman in Grotowski's theater is strongly bound to this mechanism which transforms the matricidal drive into a figure of the death-bearing woman. Essentially the two causes noted by Kristeva overlap here, with these causes insisting that fatal phantasms are unbound in the presence of the female body because the mechanism of projecting the fear of castration works with equal force as it is responsible for "the universal partnership with death of the penis-lacking feminine."[24] Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this fusion is the figure of the *pietà* from *The Constant Prince*: a monstrous protagonist played by Maja Komorowska leans over the genitals of an almost completely naked martyr, recalling the iconic figure of Our Lady of Sorrows while also evoking associations with oral sex and phantasms of castration.

Perhaps the concise phrase used by Richard Schechner as he describes Grotowski's "structural sexism" hits the nail on the head: it "stems from his belief in archetypal differences between the genders and his almost reverential regard for his mother. This attitude fits the Hasidic treatment of women and their view of the Shekhinah."[25] Was Emilia Grotowska – a Catholic-ecumenical mother who raised her sons alone; a mother who in times of hunger during the war "set out to the city in order to find books, because she was convinced that some books can be nourishment," and brought home two which provided her son with lifelong nourishment: "*The Life of Jesus* by Renan and *A Search in Secret India* by Brunton"[26] – this ideal mother protected by the image of a death-bringing domina projected onto women on the stage, thus freeing the creator from a sense of guilt over symbolic matricide? The more Grotowski idealised his mother, the more monstrous the image of woman on the stage had to become, with woman increasingly threatening the male hero and thus deserving to die.[27] Although this mode of including artists' biographies in the analysis of their works is more typical of the first phases of adapting psychoanalysis to research on art, and could in this case be perceived as unforgiveable offhandedness, the temptation remains great. This is all the more so the case because the influence of the mother figure on Grotowski's art has been written about on numerous occasions. Leszek Kolankiewicz, like Schechner, links the figure of the artist's mother with divine manifestations of the womanly element: the Hasidic Shekhinah and Mount Arunachala on which the hero of Brunton's book, Sri Ramana Maharishi lived, seeing in her God as mother.[28] "Grotowski was inspired by his Mother," writes Kolankiewicz, although in contrast to Schechner he fails to recognise that the negative of these idealisations are played out in Grotowski's theater. Ideal or divine mothers from the biographical and theoretical narratives of the artist cannot exist without the monsters represented on stage.

"I do not kill myself in order to kill her but I attack her, harass her, represent her"[29] Kristeva writes, as if commenting directly on the deeds of Grotowski-as-director towards female figures. This violence is located at the peripheries of a great human drama which occupies the centre stage, with researchers, at least until now, having completely dedicated their focus to this centre-stage grand drama. Over time, having departed from the theater, Grotowski himself assumed the position of the Christ-like protagonist in exegeses. As the *ogniokrad* – the "fire stealer" to use Małgorzata Dziewulska's wonderful phrase – Grotowski undertook a lonely battle for an otherworldly kingdom. In his fundamental pessimism and his conviction that the social reality of mankind could not be fixed, Grotowski – as Dziewulska showed – launched a spiritual revolution under the banner of Christian gnosis. Its objective was to ignite the divine sparks smouldering in each of us in order that they may "shine with a more intense light. In this way we can steal the flame which has been denied us."[30] This reconstruction of the artist's dramatic and gallant attitude was accompanied by Dziewulska's declaration, which showed great understanding, that one can only encounter Grotowski "beyond the social world." Until now, the reception of Grotowski's work has developed almost exclusively in accordance with this statement, something that the artist himself permitted. However, I beg to differ. Firstly, Grotowski's theater existed in social reality and – given the artist's charismatic position – influenced it considerably. It is therefore necessary to explore the consequences of evoking these and figures of femininity, and not others. Secondly, the rigorously maintained fundamental asymmetry of the gender structure undermines the universal scope of the drama being played out and – paradoxically – means that sex as a social construct appears at its very centre.

"It Would Be Beautiful to See All This without Seeing It"

> You recall the fragment of Apocalypsis cum Figuris where The Simpleton, strongly associated with the figure of Christ, has a love scene with Mary Magdalene? There is a moment of contact, a way of touching which, if we recall that The Simpleton resembles Christ, could for some people be truly scandalous. For me it is not scandalous, though, precisely because I have great respect for Christ.

> How was this scene realised? A secondary form was imposed on this love game: Mary Magdalene was a bow and it was from such a bow that the Simpleton released his arrows. The allusive arrows were fired towards Staszek who played John and was running on the spot. He ran like a deer but at the same time the sound of his steps rejoined the rhythm of the act of lovemaking, the path towards the culmination of the act of love. And it was exactly at the moment of climax that the arrow was fired.
> We have here a number of elements: the almost naturalistic act of lovemaking between the Simpleton and Magdalene, but within the form of a bow and arrows, we also encounter another element which might attract the audiences' attention, namely the running deer. Yet this running deer creates the sound (rhythm) of the culmination of an act of love...
> Above all, what I did as a spectator depended on distracting other spectators' attention. I told myself "It would be beautiful to see all this without seeing it." But for them, the spectators who attend, this is even more important because they can be left open to many misunderstandings. They might think, for example, that it is about sacrilege in a completely banal sense – not a great sacrilege which might be of value, but a minor, base blasphemy. So I told myself: "This action must change constantly." I can see the moment of contact but when I ask myself what they are doing, I can already see the bow. I am not even sure if I actually saw what was taking place a fraction of a second earlier. This repeats, it starts to work inside me, but now I can already see the running deer. And so it is as in Racine's text where the act of love is transposed into a story of hunting a deer. But no! Because there is that rhythm which thrusts me into another, almost naturalistic allusion. But when I allow myself to be lured in by this allusion, I again find the bow or the capture of the deer, which is a rather refined form and provokes – unexpectedly – something resembling an aesthetic effect.
> When I watch this scene I cannot be sure by the end whether there was in fact an erotic game taking place in it or not. In the depths of my soul I know and everyone knows that it is about a love scene between the Simpleton and the Woman. But it is not at all certain that this love scene took place. It is changing all the time, it is always different. This scene is registered by something semi-conscious.

This is the artist's own description of the famous love scene, presented initially during a lecture in Volterra in 1984 before providing the foundation for an as-yet unpublished Polish text "The Director as a professional spectator."[31] It is also a wonderful instruction manual on how the director operates the "lift of performance", revealing how the artist imagined the modes of reception of his works: a "semi-conscious" surrender to flowing images of great sensual power which set in motion affective responses and suspend critical processes. "This performance connected directly to my nervous system,"[32] was how Marek Chlanda recalled his youthful response to *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, testifying to the exceptional effectiveness of Grotowski's imagined scenario of communication.

However, contrary to what Grotowski said in Volterra, audiences of *Apocalypsis* had little difficulty in recognising the erotic or even plainly sexual character of the actions they observed. In her description of the performance, Małgorzata Dzieduszycka had no doubts and bluntly depicted what she saw, while for Puzyna this was "the most risky and most deeply lyrical love scene"[33] that the critic had ever seen performed in the theater. Puzyna recalled in his text the image of the bow and bowstring which in turn become lovers in the several repetitions of the climax. Thus, Grotowski used Puzyna's metaphor in his lecture, although he modified the description in significant ways, substituting the alternating roles of lovers bonded to each other like the bow and bowstring with the image of the bow which, in the Simpleton's hands, became Mary Magdalene's body while he fired arrows at John. The culmination of the carnal act, whose rhythm was set by the sound of John's feet pounding on the floor, occurred at the moment the arrow reached its target. This is a significant difference.

"What is unprecedented in this sequence is not only the ancient association of hunting with the erotic, but also – indeed above all – the modest cleanliness of the sequence despite the shocking nature of the image."[34] Puzyna's words at this point are the best proof that Grotowski's final performance was indeed an open process and depended on constant changes within which emotions and the senses underwent profound transformations while retaining the same structural framework. Unless – and these possibilities are not mutually exclusive – Puzyna did not see what was being played out in this scene from the outset, but only that which over time acquired clarity and which made this image truly shocking. In Olmi's film we see not a subtle love scene but a form of collective orgy during which homosexual desire circulates between men but is mediated by a female body. The lovers – the Simpleton and Mary Magdalene – are coupled, with all the animalistic connotations of this word, by their comrades. Simon Peter leads the Simpleton to the footlights, which provide the backdrop to the lovemaking scene; John, connected to Mary Magdalene from the very first scene, directs a curt, pimp-like "Go" at her, before presenting the passage from the Apocalypse condemning the "great whore." The man and woman stand opposite each other just in front of the footlights behind which Judas-Molik and Lazarus-Cynkutis are sitting, observing the lovers from an intolerably close position and breathing lewdly. Nothing remains from the register of intimacy and purity.[35] The men's breathing harmonises with John's increasingly loud and quick breathing as he casts off his coat and begins running naked. Through this polyphony of breathing, the men's bodies enter into intimate and live contact with each other on both the auditory and somatic level. What takes places between the man and woman, meanwhile, bears evident traces of reflex actions carried out not so much with brutality as mechanically, and thus in a manner which

kills subjectivity. A precise analysis of the performers' actions forms a precise narrative within which the heterosexual act of love is unmasked as a necessary yet essentially intolerable substitute for male-male love.

Without looking at each other, the lovers carry out a series of actions from the erotic repertoire, throughout which the woman remains passive and inert, again stereotypically reduced to an object of male actions. The Simpleton cradles Mary Magdalene's head in his arms, and kisses it but quickly places his face into the woman's lap. Next, he jumps away suddenly and turns his back on his lover. Kneeling down, he places his arms in front of himself as if he were seeking to grasp something which evades him, which he desires strongly, though it remains unattainable. He then turns towards John, who is running on the spot, and although the men remain as if in separate dimensions it is also evident that there is real communication or, rather, there is a flow between them. Subsequently, the Simpleton again violently grasps the head of the woman and pushes it into his crotch. John's running, taking place in tandem and growing all the more intense, reaches its bodily peak. At the moment of climax, the Simpleton casts Mary Magdalene aside and thrusts his shoulders towards John. The arrow hits its target and everything pauses in silent ecstasy: the men's bodies, directed towards each other in futile yearning for unity, and the woman's body, powerless, lying between them. John moves a few steps, thus forming another diagonal axis linking him to the Simpleton. The whole cycle begins again, maintaining its fundamental structural characteristics. And then it begins for a third time.

What, if not the obviously sexual nature of the interaction between the Simpleton and Mary Magdalene, did the director want to show spectators in this scene, while at the same time sparing them the awareness of what they were watching? "It would be beautiful to see all this without seeing it" – Grotowski told himself and thus represented with striking precision the structure of male homosocial desire,[36] something for which institutionalised Christianity constructs the foremost ideological frame in western culture. In our cultural sphere it is Christianity, frozen into a religious doctrine (which the performance criticised so successfully that it provoked an official response from the Catholic Church) that has ultimately separated men as the sole subjects of social exchange from men as subjects of mutual loving relations, thus sanctioning the separation of the two structures of "male bonds" which, in essence, form a continuum. Male-male love was effaced from the registers of cultural visibility, while a man loving a man could turn towards the other only in secret, mediated through the female body. It is in this way that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes to interpret the classic trope of the love triangle, analysed by René Girard in the context of some of the most outstanding works of European literature. The bond between male rivals within this constellation was essentially stronger and determined their actions more firmly than "anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved," the author notes, drawing attention to the fact that the symmetry of the triangle each time demanded "*suppressing* the subjective, historically determined account of which feelings are or are not part of the body of sexuality."[37] Effaced from this inventory, male homoerotic desire reached the target by way of the female body turned into a passive object of love.

The love triangle scene shows us, with shocking literalness, that such a situation forms the foundation of the social sexual contract – which, I reiterate, in accordance with Flaszen's definition the group of protagonists from *Apocalypsis* was "a representation of humanity." This scene also illustrates another important element of the homosocial structure of which Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, namely its close connection to "the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power."[38] Both suppressing male homosexuality and open homophobia are part of the same system which oppresses women, keeping them in a relation of unassailable subordination to men and excluding them as non-subjects in any social exchange. How evident this becomes in the scene in Olmi's film! More powerfully than even the most extreme rape scene could express, the objectified and abused body of Mary Magdalene could represent this type of experience which becomes the fate of women turned into objects of exchange and channels of mediation between men. It could – but in fact does not, and not only because Grotowski agreed with the fathers of the Church or the fathers of psychoanalysis on women's matters, and had no intention of changing anything. This is also not the case because Grotowski as a director was generally not interested in social change, or at least not the kind achieved through the critical potential of theater. The formula of "unseeing seeing" contains an assumption on the non-revolutionary character of theater which does not intend to change the world but instead brings mental relief, becoming for spectators a safe space for an unconscious confrontation with the repressed. From his position of authority as the "lift operator," Grotowski gives spectators the opportunity to relieve their displaced desires while at the same time extinguishing the critical potential of this experience.[39]

Would *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* not otherwise have become a grand manifestation of homosexuality, the first such radical representation of male homosexuality located at the very centre of the public stage of the People's Republic – in its most alternative and at the same time most prominent theater of Poland, which was then also the country's most successful cultural export? This is all the more the case because the scene analysed here was not – as will be discussed below – the only or indeed the most powerful moment manifesting male-male desire. The strength of the blow it would have struck can be imagined easily when reading the latest book by Krzysztof Tomasik, *Gejerel*, dealing with sexual minorities in communist Poland.[40] In his study, the author seeks to note all the most important direct representations of non-heteronormative sexuality, particularly in popular culture and public discourse. The scarcity and marginal significance of such representations make clear how strict, despite general

awareness and commonplace homophobia, the rigours of cultural invisibility were at that time. For Grotowski's actors as well, work in this field was necessarily a challenge, something most clearly shown in Ryszard Cieślak's 1974 letter to his wife published in the journal *Notatnik Teatralny*, which includes a passage that reads: "I had a terrible journey to New York because I had the misfortune to be sat next to a Pole who lives in New York but who during the journey turned out to be quite openly a fag to the extent that there was a moment when I threatened to call the stewardess to throw him out of the seat. From that moment on he left me in peace. Remember that the plane was full and the journey lasts nine hours and then all of a sudden they turn the lights out and it is very tight. The guy had free rein. And you know how I react to such situations."[41] The final sentence sees Cieślak both reassure his wife of his normative sexual identity while also giving insight into the persistent circulation of homoerotic desire within which he finds himself. For someone who "reacts to such situations" in the manner suggested by the actor, *Apocalypsis* ought to signal – to refer again to Grotowski's words from the Statement of Principles – a chance to "transcend our stereotyped vision, our conventional feelings and customs, our standards of judgment."[42] However, the director managed to channel all this energy and scatter the combustible mixture to ensure that after the performance the audience did gather crumbs and lie down in the puddles of sweat left behind by the actors, but did not articulate any need for social change. This mode of *distracting* spectators' attention, described by Grotowski in his Volterra lecture, was served by the fluid montage of attention in his work. "If you are a director," Grotowski then stated, "and you work with actors, then you need to have an invisible camera which is always on, always directing the spectator's attention towards something. In some cases, like a illusionist, in order to distract them, while at other moments to focus their attention."[43]And so, thanks to the director's abilities as an illusionist, it became possible to overlook this unprecedented Polish coming out of homosocial patriarchy at the turn of the 1970s.

Fraternal Fantasies, or: In the Ruins of Paradise

Of course, social change was of no interest to Grotowski because his kingdom, let us recall, was not of this world. In aiming to create "dramatic experiences of a transformative and transgressive nature' which were to enable "transcendence of death through action in an autonomous sphere,"[44] to use the terms suggested by Dariusz Kosiński following a kind of reception already indicated by the artist in his first theoretical texts, Grotowski was not engaged in transforming the social world. Instead, he constructed a "maximalist project of saving Western man from hopelessness and spiritual collapse."[45] When the theater of performances exhausted, in the eyes of the artist, the possibilities of working on the internal transformation of doers, Grotowski abandoned the stage in order to conduct what he termed "active culture." *Apocalypsis* became a bridge between artistic theatrical practice (which necessarily divided participants into witnesses/spectators and doers), and the encounter, which embraced everyone equally. During the period of paratheatre, Grotowski sought to open up his experiments to numerous participants from outside the group as if, for a moment, he believed that it were possible to construct a counter-culture social movement around his work. Soon, though, he became aware that without actions of the highest, craftsmanlike quality, the experience he sought was impossible. And even then, during the period of paratheatrical opening up, in preparing an encounter the artist created enclaves known as "cultural reserves," isolated from everyday life, where the "the ecology of the interhuman" was to be practiced according to particular rules and in specific conditions.

Was the period of paratheatre free of the reproduction of patriarchal structures of power and oppression? I leave this question, which certainly deserves in-depth investigation, open to future studies. However, even if this were so, then certainly not in the theoretical texts where already on the level of linguistic analysis we encounter impenetrable reefs of universalisation of the male subject through the particular grammatical structure of the Polish language where male gender is synonymous with the universal, a position that was ideologically close to Grotowski. I have written about this in greater detail in the text "Płeć performera" (The Gender of the Performer), citing there notable exceptions where – not by chance – the female subject appeared in Grotowski's discourse for a moment.[46] In the texts of the paratheatre period, "brother" remained the key term, as it defined an other, relations with whom provide the source of the experience of totality, inaccessible in the everyday life of the fragmented subject. And although in Grotowski's explicit intentions "brother" was to signify somebody close and spiritually related, the gendered characteristics of the term were not without significance. Reading about this overwhelming need for fraternity, it is difficult to avoid the impression that we are faced with a further incarnation of the male communal fantasy, so strong in our culture – as Maria Janion has described. In the eminently male culture of Poland "homosocial bonds, bonds of male fraternity and friendship are foregrounded. The ideal models of such bonds include [...] among other things, the noble "brother lords" and knight regiments in old Polish noble culture, while in modern culture we have the Philomaths and Philarets existing in semi-secret associations; nineteenth-century conspirators fighting for national liberation; participants in various youth movements of the twentieth century, many of which adopted Philomaths as their patrons; and, finally, Piłsudski's Legions."[47] Janion then indicates, following the authors of *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, the common trait of "fraternal" cultures with dominant homosocial characteristics, namely a particular attitude towards the mother – her idealisation or even sanctification, which masks the radical symbolic and literal violence women encounter in this culture. When perceived through this register, Grotowski's work can also be included in the traditions of Polish patriarchy.

> There is a sun, a lake, a forest. You are there and he is there, a brother. You have no need to speak, you say nothing. You do not fear each other. What you are doing is like a game. You have no need for sex, but you do not fear it. In your life a certain motif repeats, some kind of vital reaction in various situations. And now it returns. What is happening to you? What is revealed in you? This is very real, like touching. It develops in the course of action towards him. You feel very safe. You are as you are. You are completely – wordless – like a confession. You confide in him and trust in yourself. You do not hide away.[48]

Grotowski writes here about direct experience, free of the game of interhuman encounter whose possibility – lost by man in civilisation – was to return and revive active culture. The grammatical structure of genders, where both "you" and "he" indicate, in the Polish original, male subjects, demands that we see in this scene an image of male-male relations free of all conventions limiting what is possible between people.[49] Relations free of culture's claims that exclude certain spaces of our existence, but also free of all tensions inherent to the mental apparatus and narcissistic defence mechanisms. This luminous, joyous, harmonious "fraternal fantasy" with evidently homosexual overtones, located in the centre of paratheatrical experiences, forms a striking contrast to the experience of the heroes of Grotowski's final performance. After all, they remain under the absolute power of the role imposed on them by the dominant culture, which can be read through the type of cruel game evident in the form "and you shall be..." which Simon Peter pronounces at the opening of the performance. The Apostle-Priest-Grand Inquisitor embodies the rule of the dominant cultural formation and in its name imposes the order of interhuman reality. His bestowal sets in motion the machine of the game in which the unsuccessful attempts at intimacy between men take place in extreme tension and various configurations but in accordance with an inversion of the "fraternal fantasy:"... You fear one another. What you are doing is like a game. You need sex but you fear it...

The most striking one perhaps is the scene between John and the Simpleton towards the conclusion of the performance, providing a supplement to the love triangle scene, analysed above. Stripped to the waist and with his eyes closed, Scierski – as if groping his way around – slowly traverses the space illuminated by just a few candles. Using words from the prologue to Simone Weil's *La Connaissance surnaturelle* ("Supernatural Knowledge"), he evokes an ambivalent vision of the relations which connected him to the man who led him "to this attic." The prostrate Simpleton raises himself from the ground and, as if summoned by this memory, approaches John. He slowly circles the man still standing with his eyes closed and suddenly begins to violently whip him with the cloth towel he is holding. The blows strike John's bare back but he does not react at all, taking the blows without even turning towards the Simpleton. His naked torso does, however, shake with the force of the blows, meaning that the men's bodies appear to be coupled with each other as if in a sexual act. When the Simpleton stops the whipping, John resumes his monologue. At a certain moment he turns to the Simpleton, kneels before him and opens his eyes and issues directly to him the text of a declaration of love:

> I know all too well that you do not love me. But there is something inside me, as if a piece of myself, which in the depths of my soul, trembling with fear, cannot resist the thought that perhaps, in spite of everything, you... me...

Speaking these words, John approaches the Simpleton on his knees, seeking his body using his torso, desperately clinging to him, issuing with difficulty words which appear stuck in his throat. The Simpleton, also kneeling, looks at him tenderly and seeks to respond but when the word "love," hanging in the air, is to be spoken, he suddenly rises and furiously whips John. This love is most evidently impossible without the mediation of the female body, although it is this love which cannot be named that the protagonists desire. Physical violence is a literal manifestation of the suffering which symbolises both men's fate.

Mary Magdalene also finds herself between two other men, almost literally interrupting their act of lovemaking. Lazarus-Cynkutis and Judas-Molik resemble drunken guests at a village wedding when they start to circle each other, abusing each other with words drawn from The Song of Songs: "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair my sister, my spouse." They circle each other, come closer and almost rub against each other before moving apart. Judas seduces in his high-pitched treble: "Flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." Given this signal they finally move directly towards each other singing their shared song, pairing the rhythm and their steps. This joint dance ends with them collapsing to the floor in a mutual embrace, their legs entangled, lying "top-to-tail," as Dzieduszycka noted – but their bodies are separated by Mary Magdalene who suddenly rises up. Her violent, sudden movement towards the men means that although the woman does not physically touch them, an invisible wedge is driven between their bodies.

On the other hand, the gesture of rejection – so forceful in the scene with John – is carried out earlier by the Simpleton but in relation to Lazarus. The resurrected Lazarus upholds the atmosphere of the brutal and vulgar act accompanying the entire sequence. Rising up from the dead, he places a loaf of bread to his crotch, pointing and aiming it in the direction of the Simpleton, as if it were an erect phallus. Later he breaks the bread and pretends that he wants to feed the Simpleton with the crumbs, but in fact he deliberately misses his partner's open mouth, throwing the bread on the floor. His actions are ambiguous, torn between mockery and aggressive pretentions to a superfluous miracle, on the one hand, and an erotic game on the other. Finally, Lazarus hits the Simpleton several times in the face with a crushed ball of mushed bread. When he fails to react, Lazarus starts to grapple with him

and ultimately kneels before him, moving his hands up the Simpleton's bare legs and starts to fondle him. The Simpleton leans back, rapt with sudden delight; but just before climax he violently and suddenly rejects Lazarus who falls on his back and starts crawling around on the floor, gathering up the bread he had crumbled. His hips gyrate, evoking the image of frictional movements, while the sexual connotations are strengthened by memories of the performance's first scene where John copulated with the loaf of bread. That particular "act of love," opening the performance, was also – if we acknowledge Puzyna's argument, which was accepted by Grotowski, regarding the literalness with which religious symbols are treated in the performance – a metaphor of the sexual act between men. The bread symbolises the body of the Son of Man, while love – following Puzyna – "a key concept in Christ's history" is treated in the performance "literally: as eroticism. Mystical eroticism, of course, as in the texts of Saint John of the Cross, where mysticism and eroticism are synonymous, while the whole matter acquires a somewhat shocking connotation: God is a male lover, He, while John is a female lover, She – the spirit."[50] This would be true were it not for the fact that neither the heterosexual matrix nor mystical discourse, to which the theater critic turned, are capable of masking what in Grotowski's performance in fact acquired radically shocking overtones.

Apocalypsis resembles a jammed machine. The male protagonists are left at the mercy of the mechanism which constantly forces them to seek pleasure in male-male love and, at the same time, reject the possibility of attaining it. This relentless urge to seek pleasure, which in light of the impossibility of attainment almost immediately drives the subject into a predatory sadomasochistic satisfaction of his urges, demands that we consider the figure of the adolescent described by Kristeva in which the burning urge for faith, passionate love and the threat of violent self-destruction intertwine so tightly in response to unavoidable disappointment. A group of drunken hooligans from the suburbs – as the protagonists of Grotowski's final performance have been described – immersed in apocalyptic boredom, yet unceasing in their desperate attempts to find an ideal object of love and prepared at any moment to placate their lost faith in the ideal through limitless cruelty – this group appears as an embodiment of adolescents "hurl[ed] into paradise's ruins," described by Kristeva in *This Incredible Need to Believe*.[51]

The adolescent does not exist without "the aptitude for belief', Kristeva argues, and believes in the existence of the "Ideal Object of satisfaction."[52] But this absolute passion of love, precisely because of its radical character, can easily acquire self-destructive and sadistic characteristics. Because the adolescent believes in the relation with the Ideal Object, he "suffers cruelly from its impossibility."[53] The passion of seeking love turns into a passion of punishment and self-punishment. Idealisation of the love relation raises the possibility of "escap[ing] it into an idealized, paradisial variant of total satisfaction. The Judeo-Christian paradise is an adolescent creation: the adolescent takes pleasure in the syndrome of paradise, which may also become a source of suffering, if absolute ideality takes a turn toward cruel persecution [...] The least disappointment in this syndrome of ideality hurls him into paradise's ruin."[54]

The group of men in *Apocalypsis* is controlled by this syndrome. This never-ending party, oscillating between the purest exaltations of love and the sadomasochistic orgy of those who have lost faith indeed takes place almost literally among the ruins of the Judeo-Christian paradise. In the space of a degraded myth to which return those who love "The desert in the garden the garden in the desert/ Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed," as the Simpleton, uttering words from Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, declares. The passion of faith and the passion of love – in the face of absolute disappointment, here become their cruel inversions. The ideal adolescent couple is of course an impossible couple, Kristeva writes, referring to the emblematic pair of ideal lovers: Romeo and Juliet. In Grotowski's work, they would constitute an impossible couple in a different sense, one unable to come into existence in terms of cultural representation, thus becoming a pair of male lovers deprived of their mythical idealisation: Romeo and Mercutio. However, the director's sacrilegious ambitions reach much deeper. The crux of the matter is the lost potential of male love of towards their own sex embodied in the figure of Jesus Christ, lost through the social contract based in institutionalised Christianity. This central "Absolute Subject" of our culture, as Kristeva writes elsewhere,[55] becomes in Grotowski's final performance an Ideal Object of Love and thus radically impossible.

If I were to propose a universalising interpretation which would soften the implications of this inappropriate queer exegesis, seeking to rebuff accusations of vulgarisation, I would write in conclusion that for Grotowski this unsublimated sexual love of a man towards the God-Man was almost certainly intended to symbolise all those aspects of human existence rejected through Christianity's duality of body/soul; that the sacrilegious impetus served to recover a feeling of psychophysical unity which would permit the individual to face another human "such as one is – whole."[56] However, this is not what I wish to propose. The gender structure which accompanies such a narrative leaves no doubt that the challenge posed to Christian suppression of sexuality has no universal dimension. In Grotowski's final performance, male-male desire – excluded from the registers of cultural visibility – was located in the field of radically taboo sexuality, right at the centre of the Christian myth, but at the same time it was directly bound to misogynistic discourse. The director places the knife in the hands of a woman who with a single blow stabs the bread and the body of her partner; it is she who defiantly stands between the male bodies as if an unavoidable and repulsive necessity. Objectified, isolated and trapped in fatal phantasms, doubly excluded – from the grand human drama and also the drama of desire taking place at its margins: this is how woman, as Mary Magdalene, appears in Grotowski's theater.

From a certain moment onwards, performances of *Apocalypsis* became for many spectators an invitation to participate in paratheatrical experiments. "The evenings dedicated to *Apocalypsis* also serve to establish the initial contact with people who will later participate in training," Grotowski specified when discussing the Laboratory Institute's programme.[57] When Simon Peter's words "Go and never return" resounded in the darkness, spectators had an opportunity to immerse themselves in the affirmative atmosphere of paratheatrical experiences and could set out for an encounter with "those unknown," with "brothers."[58]

What about the women who had, after all, seen everything that it would have been beautiful not to have seen – where could they go? ■

This text was written thanks to an analytical workshop run as part of the Author Semesters within the Open University of Research at the Grotowski Institute. My thanks to the organisers for their inspiration, without which I would certainly not have undertaken an analysis of Jerzy Grotowski's final theater performance.
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[1] Konstanty Puzyna, "Powrót Chrystusa," in: *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia. Przedstawienia Jerzego Grotowskiego i Teatru Laboratorium*, Janusz Degler and Grzegorz Ziółkowski (eds), Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, Wrocław 2006.

[2] Ludwik Flaszen, "*Apocalypsis cum figuris.* Kilka uwag wstępnych," in: *Misterium zgrozy urzeczenia*, p. 95.

[3] A recording of the performance was produced by the Centre Ricerche Teatrali foundation in Milan. As far as I am aware, four versions of the recording were created, capturing both Elizabeth Albahaca and Rena Mirecka in the role of Mary Magdalene. The recording was made in a television studio and consciously reveals the process of documenting the performance, which was taking place without an audience, while also most of the time employing professional lighting that did not reproduce the conditions of the actual performance. The film thus bears the hallmarks of an attempt to document the score of activities and retains a deliberate "alienation effect," which exposes the recording situation and makes no effect to create the illusion that what we are witnessing is a theater performance. Grotowski, however, never officially accepted the recordings that were produced in this way – although they were certainly made with his participation and partly under his control. Thus, following his wishes, the recordings have never been made available publicly. I have based my analysis on the recording featuring Elizabeth Albahaca, which was made available to me at the Workcenter of Jery Grotowski and Thomas Richards.

[4] Konstanty Puzyna, "Powrót," p. 192.

[5] Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, *Apocalypsis cum figuris. Opis spektaklu*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1974, p. 8.

[6] Konstanty Puzyna, "Powrót," p. 192.

[7] Grzegorz Niziołek writes in an essay dedicated to *Hamlet Study* about how Grotowski erased terms associated with psychoanalysis in later editions of his texts. Niziołek explains that it was a case of not providing spectators with an effective set of analytical instruments which would enable critical procedures. "Grotowski wanted spectators to be silent in the face of a spectacle of humiliation and torment, while at the same time being powerless in the face of its affective, traumatic power." Grzegorz Niziołek, "Co jest w Polsce nie do pomyślenia," in: *Polski teatr Zagłady*, Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Krytyka Polityczna, Warsaw 2013, pp. 331–332.

[8] One of the first Polish dramatic texts which provided an insightful analysis of the cultural mechanisms of gendering the subject and taking into account the female perspective. Różewicz presents a radical critique of patriarchal institutions, namely the Catholic Church and the family.

[9] Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, "Trzy wieżyce nad Polską. Uroczystość św. Stanisława, biskupa i męczennika, patrona Polski. Kraków, Skałka, 9 maja 1976," typescript, Archive of Historical Records of the Diocese of Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Dawnych Diecezji Warszawskiej), p. 12.

[10] Jerzy Grotowski, "Wokół powstawania *Apocalypsis*," Jerzy Grotowski, in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*, ed. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Mario Biagini et al., Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Krytyka Polityczna, Warsaw 2012, p. 450.

[11] Jerzy Grotowski, "Statement of Principles," in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, preface by Peter Brook, Holstebro: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968, pp. 255–262, p. 256-7.

[12] Luce Irigaray, "Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother," in *French Feminism Reader*, Kelly Oliver ed., pp.241-252, p.251. From: *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian Gill, Columbia University Press, New York 1993.

[13] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, Zone Books, New York 2006.

[14] Gilles Deleuze, "From Sacher–Masoch to masochism," *Angelaki. Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 1(2004), p. 129.

[15] I have analysed this phenomenon in an article co-written with Weronika Szczwińska, "Płeć performera," showing how in Cieślak's role two paradigms overlap: *imitatio Christi* and *sponsa Christi* – Christ's imitators and Christ's spouses, subsequently creating a transgressive figure of a binity. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Weronika Szczawińska, "The Gender of the Performer," *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*, English Issue 1/2012, pp. 48–55, http://www.didaskalia.pl/Didaskalia_angielski_1.pdf.

[16] Gospel of Thomas, (22).

[17] The most in-depth analysis of these themes in Polish scholarship has been conducted by Leszek Kolankiewicz in the essay, "Grotowski w poszukiwaniu esencji," *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 1-4 (2000), pp. 37-116.

[18] Thomas Richards writes about this phenomenon, "Punkt graniczny przedstawienia," in conversation with Lisa Wolford, Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, Wrocław 2004, pp. 26-27.

[19] Jerzy Grotowski, "From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle," in Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Thomas Richards, Michel A. Moos and Grotowski (trans.), Routledge, London/New York 1995, pp. 115–135.

[20] See, for example, "El Montajo en el Trabajo del Director" [Montage in the work of the director], trans. Farahilda Sevilla and Hernán Bonet, *Máscara*, 11-12 (October 1992– January 1993) pp. 56–61; Jerzy

Grotowski, "Reżyser jako widz zawodowy," trans. Anna Górka; idem, "Montaż w pracy reżysera," trans. Beara Baczyńska, in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*.

[21] The unchanging nature of the gender structure in Grotowski's work has been indicated by Richard Schechner in the essay, "Exoduction: Shape-shifter, shaman, trickster, artist, adept, director, leader, Grotowski," [in:] *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, edited by Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, Routledge, London/New York 1997, pp. 462–495. Lisa Wolford also wrote about this in her unpublished doctoral thesis, submitted at Northwestern University in 1995, *The Occupation of The Saint. Grotowski's Art As Vehicle*.

[22] *Action in Aya Irini*, filmed by Jacques Vetter, Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards 2004.

[23] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1989, p.28.

[24] Ibid., p. 27.

[25] Richard Schechner, "Exoduction: Shape-shifter, shaman, trickster, artist, adept, director, leader, Grotowski," in: *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, Routledge, London 1997, p. 486.

[26] "Theatre of Sources," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, edited by Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, Routledge, London 1997, pp. 250–68, p. 251.

[27] It is very difficult to trace these motifs in performances which were not recorded and, because of their extreme violation of social conventions, have not been the subject of critical reflections. Using film materials we can also add the scene from *Faust* where Mirecka, playing Mephistopheles, tortures the male protagonist. Fragments of *Faust* were recorded in Michael Elster's film, *List z Opola (Letter from Opole)*, (State Film and Theatre School, Łódź 1963).

[28] Jerzy Grotowski, "Theatre of Sources," in: *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 250–68, p. 255.

[29] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p.28.

[30] Małgorzata Dziewulska, "Ogniokrad," in: M. Dziewulska, *Artyści i pielgrzymi*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1995, p. 148.

[31] Jerzy Grotowski, "Reżyser jako widz zawodowy," in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 778.

[32] *Grotowski – narracje*, ed. Leszek Kolankiewicz, Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw-Wrocław 2013, p. 150.

[33] Konstanty Puzyna, *Powrót*, p. 195.

[34] Ibid., p. 196.

[35] It is not only a question of recording, with Ireneusz Guszpit also having noted similar changes. Analysing the changes in structure and meaning of performances, Guszpit omitted, however, the question of the construction of gender and sexuality. See: Ireneusz Guszpit, "*Apocalypsis* bez Chrystusa," in *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia*.

[36] I am of course referring here to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept outlined in the book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York 1992.

[37] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, p. 22.

[38] Ibid., p. 22.

[39] Grzegorz Niziołek reached essentially similar conclusions, analysing what was potentially Grotowski's most politically radical performance, *Hamlet Study*. In this performance, where Hamlet was a lonely Jew surrounded by a group of primitive Polish peasants, the most traumatic and also most strictly taboo experiences of Polish society emerged, showing that society's collective participation in the Holocaust. However, a precise analysis of the directorial strategy led the author to declare that Grotowski did not demand from spectators a confrontation and working through that which had been expunged from collective consciousness. On the contrary, Grotowski sent them on their way towards a dream of a "community achieving 'innocence' in a state of libidinal arousal." This was a theater "in which a strong violation takes place and spectators should remain silent about it, while they should find both delight and absolution in their ability to experience shock." Grzegorz Niziołek, "*Hamlet* Grotowskiego…," in: idem, *Polski teatr Zagłady*, p. 329.

[40] Krzysztof Tomasik, *Gejerel. Mniejszości seksualne w PRL-u*, Krytyka Polityczna, Warsaw 2012..

[41] *Notatnik Teatralny*, 1995/10, p. 95.

[42] Jerzy Grotowski, "Statement of Principles," *Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 257.

[43] Jerzy Grotowski, "Reżyser jako widz zawodowy', in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 779.

[44] Dariusz Kosiński, "Doświadczenie przemiany" in *Teatra polskie. Historie*, Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego/PWN, Warsaw 2010, p. 141, 143.

[45] Ibid., p.135.

[46] Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Weronika Szczawińska, "The Gender of the Performer."

[47] Maria Janion "Polonia powielona," in *Polka: Medium. Cień. Wyobrażenie*, Monika Gabryś, Monika Rudaś-Grodzka and Barbara Smoleń (eds), Fundacja Odnawiania Znaczeń, Warsaw 2006, pp. 23–24.

[48] Jerzy Grotowski, "Nie jestem cały, jeśli ty nie jesteś," in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 1025.

[49] Admittedly, Grotowski immediately adds: "It makes no difference if it is a boy or girl. It contains multiple characters, as if there were multiple lives, multiple faces, multiple bodies located in it. It is not a stream. It cannot be defined. Why seek classification?" However, this additional statement lays the ground for homosexual potential using the strength of cultural models excluded from inter-human relations. Ibid.

[50] Konstanty Puzyna, *Powrót*, p. 192.

[51] Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, Columbia University Press, New York 2009, p. 16.

[52] Ibid., p. 17.

[53] Ibid., p. 15.

[54] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[55] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*.

[56] See: Jerzy Grotowski, "Such as One Is – Whole," translated by Bolesław Taborski: *TDR* (2) 1973).

[57] Jerzy Grotowski, „Instytut Laboratorium," in: idem, *Teksty zebrane*, p. 587.

[58] Jerzy Grotowski, "Holiday – The Day that is Holy," trans. Bolesław Taborski, *TDR* 2 (1973), 113-134,p.123, p. 127.

Below we reprint the correspondence between Agata Adamiecka-Sitek and Leszek Kolankiewicz on Agata Adamiecka-Sitek's article for *Didaskalia* No. 112, titled "Grotowski, Women, and Homosexuals: Marginal Notes to the 'Human Drama'." These letters were not written with publication in mind. The editors thank the authors for their permission to reprint the correspondence.

AGATA ADAMIECKA-SITEK, LESZEK KOLANKIEWICZ

CORRESPONDENCE

[18 January 2013]

Dear Doctor Adamiecka,

I read your study titled "Grotowski, Women, and Homosexuals: Marginal Notes to the 'Human Drama'" in the latest issue of *Didaskalia*[1] with great interest. Because it is mainly devoted to *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, we might speak of a coincidence: at any moment my article titled "Blasphemy"[2] will go to print in a book-length anthology edited by Dr. Kamil Kopania of the University of Warsaw's Institute of Art History, and its point of departure was the very same performance. (I wrote the article long ago; I can no longer recall if that was the text I sent you once as material for discussion at a meeting of the Section for Theatre and Performance of the University of Warsaw Institute of Polish Culture.)

It may well be a good thing that someone has finally examined Grotowski and his program from a gender research perspective – at any rate, it is important that it has been done so methodically. And I must confess that your approach is impressive – above all, the seriousness, scope, and thoroughness in tackling the material. The very choice of perspective is surely pioneering and noteworthy – all the more so because it has led you to make some discoveries in your article.

The greatest of these I consider the discovery of the motif of a love triangle *à l'envers*, if I might say so, i.e. a homosexual relationship mediated by a woman. The way in which you show this on the example of scenes from *Apocalypsis* seems convincing, although, I should like to add, not always entirely so. At one point you claim that for this reason this performance had the potential to become a "great gay manifesto, the first such radical depiction of male homosexuality located in the very center of the People's Republic's public stage" (p. 101). And although this certainly sounds too sensational, not to say *provocative*, it is certainly worth considering. Under the condition, of course, that we stress that we are speaking of one of the performance's many motifs – and probably not the most important among them. It is perhaps too little for a manifesto, though we might regard it at least as a manifestation (etymologically: *manifesto*, *manifestare*, "to make visible, reveal") – except that in *Apocalypsis* everything was a manifestation of this sort, as it was the accepted principle of the actors' work. "Here everything is focused on the 'ripening' of the actor, which is expressed by a tension towards the extreme, by a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one's own intimity," Grotowski wrote in the manifesto *Towards a Poor Theatre*. "In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theater, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. It is capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling, and judgment – more jarring because it is imaged in the human organism's breath, body, and inner impulses. The defiance of taboo, this transgression, provides the shock which rips off the mask, enabling us to give ourselves nakedly to something which is impossible to define but which contains Eros and Caritas."[3] Both Eros and Caritas (*agápe*); both the bodily, the physiological, and the spiritual process, the exposure.

I regretted that you have not developed the thoughts on the "depiction of male homosexuality" by projecting this diagnosis against a socio-cultural backdrop and introducing some parallels, such as the biographies and works of famous and highly regarded authors like Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (a wife and two daughters) or Jerzy Andrzejewski (two wives, a daughter and a son), as well as Witold Gombrowicz (a wife, but only just before his death) and Julian Stryjkowski (unmarried, but with a son, though perhaps not acknowledged),[4] and – on the other hand, as it were – Miron Białoszewski. All this reminds us of a statement by Henryk in *The Marriage*,[5] when he tells Władzio that a man perhaps only feels a woman through another man – through his mediation. We ought to wonder if this model of the triangle *à l'envers* was not a way of realizing homosexual desire in those times, with their customs, their repression and suppression, their various sublimations – or if we are rather dealing with, so to speak, an eternally active sexualogical, and thus biological, riddle: indecision between homosexuality and bisexuality.

You must realize, of course, that your paper leads straight to the question of whether Jerzy Grotowski was homosexual? If it were to be asked forthright, I wonder how you would set about answering it. One might imagine an interesting sketch, with two outstanding artists working at the same time in Wrocław, in the same field, *l'arts du spectacle*: Jerzy Grotowski and Henryk Tomaszewski (both unmarried); or two alleged rivals

for the crown of the greatest Polish theater director: Jerzy Grotowski and Konrad Swinarski (married).

But to return to the Laboratory Theatre performance: if I may permit myself a touch of irony, I might ask if it does not strike you as peculiar that it did not occur to the women writing on *Apocalypsis cum figuris* before you – from reviewers (Leonia Jabłonkówna, Teresa Krzemień)[6] to authors of comprehensive descriptions and analyses (Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, Jennifer Kumiega)[7] – to use the tools of gender studies; that they took their places in the choir of male, even phallocentric or patriarchal voices? Was this a result of the fact that the times they were writing in did not provide them with the language they needed?

In the web of gender concepts you use, intermediary phenomena, such as bisexuality, have little chance of appearing. Nor is there place, perhaps, for negative phenomena, for a lack, which in this case – remaining within the sphere of sexuality – amounts to impotency. And yet, if we follow your string of associations, we could imagine a study where the author would analyze the idea of the total nude not only as a sublimation, but above all as a compensation.

However, I appreciate your study for the self-imposed limitation and keeping a safe distance from psychoanalyzing the artist. Such an approach would undoubtedly provide intriguing – perhaps even revelatory – results, like those Carl Gustav Jung achieved through analyzing Joyce's *Ulysses*[8] (it should be noted that Jung knew the Joyces' family situation well, having treated Lucie, James Joyce's daughter, which is why he attempted to diagnose the great writer – though in *Answer to Job* Jung went on to diagnose even the God of the Old and New Testament!),[9] but would require solid data and psychoanalytic competencies. As we know, an amateur approach in this field can bring pitiful results. Nor would anyone be capable of extracting confessions comparable to what Freud achieved after his famous four-hour conversation with Gustav Mahler (in which he not only uncovered the latter's Madonna/whore complex, but, above all, was enchanted by his psychological intelligence): "It was as if you would dig a single shaft through a mysterious building."[10]

I mention these varied possibilities because your article at times seems to hold too strictly to interpretive solutions of a certain type. Some of your interpretations seem a bit forced, they do not persuade me – for example, your interpretation of the first scene of the performance. And it is meant to pave the way for your later conclusions! I do not want to go into detail, because I am no expert on gender studies, but I would suggest taking the artists' words at face value when they say that the performance's action derives from "hung-over fun" (as Ludwik Flaszen phrased it)[11]; critics, Konstanty Puzyna and Jan Kott noted the orgiastic nature of the actions of the actors and the actress. I am unfamiliar with this sort of experience, but I can try to imagine how a single woman surrounded by several men might behave at a decadent orgy whose participants suffer from a hangover, and how they might have behaved – towards her and towards each other. In your paper it bothers me somewhat that every analysis essentially leads to a similar conclusion – the statement: And here we come to the work of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (with a footnote saying: "of course"), Maria Janion... Then a quote – and this is more or less it. As if this were the port in which we have take harbor. Through its repetition this procedure creates a somewhat importunate impression, and the conclusions sometimes seem forced.

However it is not this that disturbs me most, but rather the fact that the whole hermeneutic gender system used in this way begins to seem like a new dogmatism.

The coarseness, and even vulgarity of the scenes in *Apocalypsis* that you interpret are, in part, an important factor in the above-mentioned program of "provocation" toward the viewer, the "breaking of taboos, transgression," but are also in part the fault of the film upon which you had no choice but to base your findings. I will repeat what I once said in public[12]: that film is very poor. It is poor through no fault of Ermanno Olmi's, but because it is a recording of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* at the stage of the performance's total and irreversible degeneration: it was simply filmed too late (this was brilliantly expressed by Małgorzata Dziewulska).[13] No less important is the fact that the camera operator chose inappropriate means for the recording: in *Apocalypsis,* the play of light and shadow were of key importance – the light, first from the spotlights on the floor, aimed upward, then from candles, only two at the end, illuminated the characters and enveloped them in shadows. As such, the actors' actions had more than a single, flat, trivial dimension. Based on Olmi's film you could never imagine the tender beauty of the love scene between the Simpleton and Mary Magdalene – a scene for which the play of light and shadows were of foremost importance, as were the music of mysterious sounds, coming from an unknown source (most of the viewers did not realize that the heavy breathing came from Simon Peter and Judas, whom you can see clearly and easily recognize in the film). In sum, the film does not give us the slightest idea of the mystical dimension of the erotic in *Apocalypsis cum figuris*. (Having clearly perceived this dimension, a critic as subtle and refined as Konstanty Puzyna called it "the most daring and lyrical love scene"[14] that he had ever seen in the theater!)

And here we come to what I see as the greatest untapped promise and opportunity in your article. When you cite Luce Irigaray's statement pertaining to Catholicism, you seem to forecast something much more serious – and further-spanning – than a gender deconstruction of a single theatrical performance: you forecast a whistle-blowing analysis of Catholicism, or even Christianity as such. But you ultimately reject such an analysis in your study, alluding to Grotowski's alleged misogyny… Grotowski's or Christianity's? It would rather seem to me that such an analysis remains to be written. If only on the basis of two works: *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* and Nikos Kazantzakis' *Last Temptation of Christ* as filmed by Martin Scorsese – one of the ten of most "anti-Catholic films of all time."[15] Now that would be something!

Your text contains a few unfortunate errors. Above all, please recall that none of the actors' quasi-sexual acts were literal, as your descriptions suggest, for example on page 94: "he begins violently masturbating," "he licks his own sperm from his hand," "after a few more hand movements he is again covered in sperm"... Some actions were entirely different from what you suggest, for example on page 98: "before Mary Magdalene puts on her habit, we see her wash her privates in a tin pail" – this figure never washed herself in this way, i.e. she did not wash her genitals and buttocks, which is generally done, I suppose, in a squatting position, while *she* washes her legs – from her feet to her knees, at most to her thighs – in the standing position, like a peasant woman returning from the fields before putting on her shoes and heading for church. You also write on page 101 that the viewers "lay in the puddles of sweat left by the actors," which probably never actually happened, as there was precious little of this famed sweat of which Grotowski wrote in "The Theatre's New Testament" ("These drastic scenes happen face to face with the spectator so that he is within arm's reach of the actor, can feel his breathing and can smell the perspiration").[16] You might have confused it with a statement by Flaszen ("they lay down in the sperm, the sweat, the vodka they poured on the ground"),[17] whereas here the puddles on the floor were water that spilled from the above-mentioned pail. And now please imagine that a future gender studies enthusiast will maintain that in the People's Republic, "in the very center of a public stage," after the performance *Apocalypsis* the audience lay down – and perhaps even rolled about – in puddles of water mixed with female secretions; hmm... analytically tempting, isn't it?

I have of course noted the fact that you used texts I once prepared for print, and that you conscientiously mentioned this detail in the footnotes. On the one hand I was pleased that, in this way, they have entered circulation, even before their official publication; on the other hand I envied you that you took the liberty of doing what you did, while I, though having worked on them for many years, have not been free to do so.

With gratitude for an inspiring read and warm greetings,
Leszek Kolankiewicz

[23 January 2013]

Dear Professor Kolankiewicz,

Thank you very much for your letter. Your insightful reading of my article, which yields constructive and inspiring criticism, has brought me much joy. I apologize that I am responding only now. This is a remarkably difficult moment, the culmination of my work on Grotowski's *Collected Texts*;[18] the last chance I have to make final corrections to the layout. The volume is enormous, almost 1,200 pages. The work is simply extraordinary. I am very much aware of the weight of the undertaking. At the same time I know that embarking on it showed a lack of deference or even plain importunity (to which I am no stranger). And yet the opportunity to make so many of Grotowski's unknown texts available to readers, including the fascinating pieces from the volume you edited, *Wędrowanie za Teatrem Źródeł* [Wandering towards a Theatre of Sources], which Grotowski stopped from going to the printers at the last moment, justify any risk and any consequences.

I mention this volume not only because it is currently occupying my time, but also because my analysis of *Apocalypsis* is a "side effect" of that work. Grotowski has never been a fascination of mine. I rather quickly and intuitively realized why this tradition does not attract me, and I was not particularly interested in following the paths of his "critical reception." But when circumstances forced me to become acquainted with Grotowski's writing, I felt that as a member of the editorial team of the *Collected Texts,* I should clarify and reveal my stance.

In the article I pose several questions which I do not answer, while indicating their significance for the reflections I was undertaking. I hope that someone will take them up or otherwise problematize further research into the constructs of gender, desire, and sexuality in Grotowski's practice. Meanwhile, I am not considering devoting more work to Grotowski; I am beginning some entirely different research.

In your commentary to my article you suggest a whole handful of subjects that would require not only individual articles, but substantial books. The remark tied to male homosocial desire in the People's Republic is to some extent discussed in a range of studies in the queer movement, though it has perhaps never been approached in the way you suggest. But the figure of the love triangle *à l'envers* is, of course, significantly older and more widespread, and cannot be in any way linked to the particular cultural context. Girard,[19] to whom I make reference, and whom Kosofsky Sedgwick also cites,[20] analyzes this figure, searching for it in literary texts of many epochs. This motif is also found and recognized by many scholars at more or less the same time; Umberto Eco came up with it in his famous essay on *Casablanca*,[21] seemingly independently of Girard.

I must state, however, that your statement claiming a "whistle-blowing analysis of Catholicism, or even Christianity as such" is the greatest oversight of my text caused me some astonishment. Of course the subject is tempting, and in the history of feminist thought there has already been a great procession of sinners who could not resist this temptation. But the expectation that such "whistle-blowing" could be enacted as an afterthought to a pioneering gender analysis study of Grotowski's final performance is perhaps getting carried away (to put it mildly). I cannot accept the conclusion that at the end of my article I "reject" the possibility of the alleged whistle-blowing analysis of Christianity, "alluding to the fact of Grotowski's alleged misogyny." The meaning of my declaration, stated outright, is completely different. I reject a universalization of the issues I address; I reject a repetition of gestures, as a result of which the gender dimension of Grotowski's practice disappears, obscured by a general human problem, in this case, for example – as I write – "the aspects of

human essence denied in the Christian body/soul duality." I reject it because this is precisely the gesture which Grotowski himself constantly performed, and was repeated in turn by his "faithful" exegetes. On the other hand, your suggestion to compare *Apocalypsis* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* is a splendid one. It is already taking hold in me, though I do warn you at once that this work is not free from "gender dogmatism."

Nor do I agree with the statement that Olmi's film is poor (we must recall that three recordings were made during the period, I know two of them, and the one with Rena Mirecka as Mary Magdalene is indeed far poorer, which is why I consistently used the recording with Elizabeth Albahaca). On the contrary, I believe that it is an interesting document, and the work with the camera, editing, and the whole level of metanarrative are especially noteworthy.

In terms of the divergent appeal of the love scene between the Simpleton and Mary Magdalene, did it not occur to you that it was part of an evolution, and that with the repetitions of the performance, the drama of the male/male desire mediated through the female body increasingly came to the surface? After all, *Apocalypsis* was a process. Might not the beauty and subtlety of the scene have disappeared through the transformations that occurred, as they sought the previously inaccessible levels of experience? Could not this essentially conventional tale of the physical intimacy of men and women, which momentarily tolerates all aggression, have gradually built up and revealed a scene of impossible love I describe in my analysis, so often obscured in our culture?

We should note that the structural changes in this scene are observed by Ireneusz Guszpit, writing about how the performance evolved over time. These are not the result of the filming conditions: "A change in the location of the spotlights. Until now the spotlights stood on the floor, in the corner, illuminating the walls up and diagonally. […] Now the spotlights are midway along one of the walls, half a meter away from it. The above-described scene is played out in front of the spotlights, while between them and the wall sit Judas and Simon Peter, peeping at the amorous couple. They recall the elders surreptitiously observing Susanna. Thus the unambiguous association of the actors with Christ and Magdalene is supplemented by a situation that permits another interpretation of the whole sequence."[22] Clearly, then, the changes were not a result of the filming conditions, but of the process that was Grotowski's final performance. I will leave this issue for the moment when – I hope – we shall manage to meet and speak in person.

I am very glad that our texts have a parallel existence in circulation. Grotowski's last performance has been insufficiently studied. I am certain that there remains much to be said.

I am aware that I have not responded in full to your letter. In my present circumstances this is impossible, and I am all the more hoping we shall have the chance to talk, even if we have to wait...

Warmest greetings,

Agata Adamiecka

[25 January 2013]

Dear Doctor Adamiecka,

Now it's clear: the point on which we disagree first and foremost is the film by Ermanno Olmi. You write: "Nor do I agree with the statement that Olmi's recording is poor." But on what basis do you evaluate the film? You did not, after all, see the performance itself as a member of the theater audience. On what basis, then, do you make your decision? I am almost certain that anyone who saw the performance – as a viewer of the performance in the theater – and who was impressed by it would say that the film is awful. Do please investigate why Grotowski did not agree to have the film distributed (not counting the sole closed screening during the congress in Milan in 1979, which was very poorly received by the congress participants – seasoned authorities on the Laboratory Theater). As for myself, I saw the performance several dozen times over the space of a few years – and so I am, like Irek Guszpit, a witness to its evolution. It was one of the most important theater experiences I have ever had. In Olmi's film I found almost nothing that made up this experience. All that remains is to ask if you would care to accept the information that this performance was – as a performance viewed by theater audiences – different from what it appears to be in that unfortunate film.

Perhaps never and nowhere was it performed against such bright and garish colors. You can have no idea what the famous "Apocalypse hall" on the Wrocław Main Square had become for many viewers: first utterly black, later with exposed brick walls. A theatrical performance always takes place in a particular space, which is its constitutive component, but as a component of the performance this hall was so-to-speak inextricable – and unforgettable. And of course there would be no performance without viewers – spread around the hall in a particular way. They sat right on the floor (I am speaking of the later version), against all the walls, at arm's reach from the actors, seeing each other and feeling each others' presence for the whole time. This hall and those viewers together formed the vessel for the action that was meant to be performed out in the center. The viewers were admitted at the last minute, and when the performance concluded they did not applaud, they left the room slowly, some lingering behind, as Puzyna[23] beautifully described it, also writing that the viewers' reaction was made a part of the play. Because it was! This integration of action and reaction of the viewers was later equaled, perhaps, only by *Awwakum* in the tiny hall of the palace in Gardzienice.[24] These two aspects alone – a different space and a lack of viewers – mean that the film cannot qualify as a recording of the performance.

I was also lucky to see *The Dead Class* at the SARP[25] Pavilion at Foksal in 1976. That too remains an unforgettable experience for me. (Perhaps only twice in my life did I find myself in the audience which, at the end, erupted in such collective enthusiasm: then at Foksal after *The Dead Class,* and earlier, I believe in 1972, after *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Peter Brook, a guest showing at the National Theatre). As

a theater viewer of the performance *The Dead Class* I could say that Andrzej Wajda's film is good – even excellent – while the CNRS recording, endorsed by Denis Bablet, is very poor, and captures neither the character nor the wonder of this work; it does not surprise me, therefore, that it is not distributed.

Could it be that you liked Olmi's film because it supplies you with grist for your gender mill? Even at the expense of imagining the performance as it truly was – as a performance? It gives me pause for thought – and strikes me as remarkably problematic – that your sketch does not address the issue of the medium through which you observe the performance, even with all the discussions and debates that have surrounded Olmi's film. It is also, and perhaps chiefly, problematic because this medium gives no access to the sense of the actors' physicality, including the aura of their genders, which is, after all, the subject of your study!

If I inquired about the female authors who had previously written about this performance, such as Leonia Jabłonkówna, Teresa Krzemień, Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, or Jenna Kumiega – who are largely or entirely absent from your article – it was to ask about the aim of our analyses. Do we reach the meaning of the performance in its socio-cultural context – such as it was at a given time – with its specific imaginings, concepts, tensions, prohibitions, and so forth? Or are we to take an ahistorical approach to the work and place it in a network of concepts alien to it? The latter promises discoveries, sometimes interesting ones, but we must realize that it is extremely hazardous: it is easy to get carried away, to violate the author ;-).

Of course I can imagine, like few others, perhaps, that it must be a tremendous effort to work on the texts left by Jerzy Grotowski. All the more so in that you have received the gift – it must seem heaven-sent, no? – of providing readers access to heretofore unknown texts.

My warmest greetings,

Leszek Kolankiewicz

[12 February 2013]

Dear Professor Kolankiewicz,

I see that I irritated you rather seriously with my comment that I did not find Olmi's film to be so bad. It is a shame, because it does not seem to me that we differ so considerably in this respect. It all depends on our expectations from the recording of a performance, how we define its task. If we expect that it will allow us to share in the experience that the theater audiences had in attending the performance on stage, then we really are anticipating that, to some degree, it will replace the work. This would have to be a case of a remarkably rare congeniality, one whose real possibility is generally regarded as proven by Wajda's recording of *The Dead Class*. This stance raises many doubts, however, for is this sort of aim – communicating the experience that a theatrical viewer might have had through film – at all attainable? At the heart of this recording of special quality that is present in Wajda's film, is there not a successful transfer of the work to the space of another medium, available to the viewer directly in the act of watching the film, and thus an inevitable departure from the theater experience?

I set these questions, which are fundamental in the context of inquiries into the sources for researching theater, to one side, as Olmi's recording in no way sets itself this goal, defining itself precisely as a document of a theatrical work; a document which is not meant to replace, but to stand as a remainder – and one that is quite essential among the other traces of the work. On this self-referential level Olmi's work is remarkably legible and consistent. The first thing we note is the space of the television studio in which the recording takes place. We see the producer's post, with a man seated ready for work, monitors, and lighting equipment. The actors enter very slowly, and outside of the space marked for the performance there are technicians moving around. This prologue of sorts, during which the viewer is given "reading instructions," lasts long enough for no one to be able to overlook it or regard it as insignificant. Of course, there are no viewers, because we are not participating in the performance, we have a recording, and it was clearly important to the director that we did not confuse the two: that the images we were about to see did not seem to us a recording of the theatrical "experience." Of this we learn through witnesses ("That performance hooked up wirelessly to my nervous system," as I quote Marek Chlanda saying about his experience of *Apocalypsis* as a young man).[26] The film shows us a precisely and professionally recorded score of the actors' activities. Certain things are revealed with particular strength, for a film of this sort partly supports the director's strategy of the "invisible seeing," which Grotowski defined in his text *The Director as a Professional Viewer*[27] and which – as we can see from Chlanda's words – worked flawlessly in *Apocalypsis*.

What prompted Olmi's decision? Was this a gesture of self-restriction that arose from the conviction that, where this performance was concerned, there was no way to achieve an equivalent of the theater experience in the film? Could it have been that this outstanding director, who was then claiming major triumphs in his craft, acknowledged that it was better to limit his intentions and openly admit to this incapacity in exchange for the certainty that no one would "mistake" his film for the work itself? I don't know, but when I watch Olmi's work I find much evidence to support this thesis. I appreciate this decision, and I believe that this recording, in a frame which it defines itself, is not a bad one. Please bear in mind the countless recordings of very low quality, filmed with a single camera, with awful sound, utterly blurring the qualities of the space, the relationship with the audience, or the prowess of the actors, which we must make do with in our theater research (for example the film of *The Constant Prince*). They are terrible, yet invaluable, and for all their shortcomings they are remarkably important documents. And in this context I shall repeat once more that I do not see Olmi's work as poor.

The issue where we indeed differ greatly is not tied to my convictions about the film, but to the question which you raise at the end of your letter: "what was the aim of our analyses? Do we reach the meaning of the performance in its socio-cultural context – such as it was at a given time – with its specific imaginings, concepts, tensions, prohibitions, and so forth? Or are we to take an ahistorical approach to the work and place it in a network of concepts alien to it?" This is in fact a question of interpretation and overinterpretation, and I have the impression that, in the famous debate between Umberto Eco and Richard Rorty,[28] it would not be hard for us to identify with the applicable adversaries. In writing of the danger of "violating" a work, you, much like Eco, demand the respect an interpreter should show for a work's cultural backdrop, honoring its "internal coherence." The commentator should consider the coherence of the work, its communication strategy and the receptive competencies that the work requires, otherwise we come to an overinterpretation of the "use" of the work, i.e. we violate it – correct?

Meanwhile, in this debate I decidedly side with Rorty, who proves that there is no difference between the use of a work and even the most humble sort of interpretation, for it is use that is in fact our only form of contact with a work. Every reading means putting the work in some sort of context, in the vicinity of this text or the other, in accordance with the reader's particular interests. Like Stanley Fish,[29] Rorty does not believe that a work is concrete, that it speaks to us from the depths of its coherent interior, demanding the unveiling of the meaning locked within. He maintains the conviction – and I join him in it – that the meaning of the work is created in the act of interpretation, regardless of whether it is a procedure we might call a "binding exegesis" (and thus a reading faithful to the historical context of the work), or an openly arbitrary or creative reading. The work says nothing in itself, it supplies us with stimuli "which makes it relatively hard or relatively easy to convince yourself or others of what you were initially inclined to say about it,"[30] as Rorty writes, and to be honest, I must confess that I recognize myself in a process defined this way. Please note, however: this premise does not, as it may seem, make interpretation an easy and frivolous task. Interpretation cannot be a matter of the author's private whims. It is tied to the effort of publicly defending a particular commentary, as the only form of its verification is persuasive efficacy. No interpretation is more or less true, though interpretations can be more or less persuasive; more or less effective. If an interpretation is effective, it gathers adherents and becomes binding, but always only in the framework of a particular interpretive community. If it sometimes seems to us that a text *means* something in an utterly objective fashion, this is because its significance has been conventionalized to such an extreme that it has become evident. This interpretation always draws upon the "elementary cultural competencies of a given community" – to quote Andrzej Szahaj[31] – and its universality is, in fact, the result of a consensus imposed by violence upon the silent minorities by the reigning majority.

Therefore, there is always an open or covert "game of interests." I much prefer a situation in which the standpoint and aim of the speaker are clear. I identify myself with the position of "political humanities," with its cognitively privileged positions of victims and aim to relieve oppression, to expand the space of freedom. I appreciate the standpoint of being in opposition to the dominant system, to the allegedly universal truths, which are actually a manifestation of anthropo- and androcentric power. Grotowski's work gave me the impulse to construct an interpretation from such a critical position. I in no way attempted to conceal my ideological premises, on the contrary – I displayed them at once, much like the subjective and personal voice in which I speak. This is why the rhetoric is emphatically in the first person, and why the piece ends with the declaration: "If I had wanted to put forward a universalizing interpretation that would have mollified the resonance of this inappropriate gay exegesis […], I would have concluded with the phrase that, for Grotowski, this non-sublime, sexual love of a man for God/Man would probably symbolize the aspects of humanity existence denied in the Christian body/soul dualism. […] But I do not want to." I further explain the reasons for my decisions, I try to publicly defend them, without concealing that this is an arbitrary gesture, and one that serves a political aim – in the broad sense of the word.

When I speak of games of power and of particular interests, I am also thinking of the fact that the positions we occupy in this discussion of interpretation and rape are in no way objective, but derive from institutional contexts, from our different locations in the interpretive community of Grotowski scholars. You hold the position of a witness, a theater viewer, and moreover, a participant in the artist's process and his long-term collaborator, which is why you demand respect for the cultural backdrop of the work, as it was "with its specific imaginings, concepts, tensions." Your position legitimizes your voice as binding toward the interpretive premises which place me in a dubious position. It is in my interests to locate myself in the sphere of reader-response theory and to share Rorty's pragmatism. This is neither a cynical nor a temporary decision made for the purposes of this one interpretation. I have long identified myself with this understanding of the interpretive process and I have expressed as much in my writing. And it is because of this decision that I could decide to write about *Apocalypsis*. We do, however, often make such choices intuitively, "impulsively," because we believe that we are guided by an objective message. It is my firm conviction that these are not innocent.

Speaking of the process of an interpretation coming into force, I partly responded to your question on why the women who previously wrote about the performance did not perceive the content I described. There were neither the concepts, the language, nor the institutional context to allow them to formulate such interpretations. But here I immediately have two reservations. Firstly, I wonder why you ask so persistently about the female interpreters of *Apocalypsis*? It is as though you are essentially linking gender essentionally to a mode of

interpretive revision. I cannot agree with this way of thinking, in which only women could write about the patriarchal matrices and their affiliated oppression, and (for example) only homosexual men about male homosexuality. I confess that I am not much at home in the identity of the homosexual man, yet I devote the majority of my interpretation to male homosexual desire. Secondly, though the text does not focus on the problematics of the reception of the performance, despite what you claim, I do make use of women's writings (as I do of men's). I (polemically) draw upon Małgorzata Dziewulska and cite Małgorzata Dzieduszycka's[32] record of the performance several times. Her work in particular was very important to me, as the author makes no attempt to sidestep the theme of male homosexuality, she writes of it directly. After my first reading of her record, which I came across many years ago, one phrase became stuck in my head: "In *Apocalypsis* love of God is a human need of love (and to be loved) striving for corporeal fulfillment"; that we are dealing with a show of "various indoctrinations to attain the experience of love." I had this in mind when I sat down to write my interpretation.

To conclude: a confession and a proposal all at once. My interpretation of *Apocalypsis* evoked a powerful response. Many voices reached me, as they did the editors of *Didaskalia*, though none was as vital as your polemic. I have spoken to Grzegorz Niziołek about our correspondence and he suggested I consider publishing it in the forthcoming issue of *Didaskalia* (naturally, in a form we both authorize for print). What do you say to this? I would be inclined to agree, but in this case the decision is for both of us to make.

Warmest greetings,

Agata Adamiecka

[22 February 2013]

Dear Doctor Adamiecka,

Olmi's film is not poor because it is not faithful to the performance. Though to tell the truth I could not say why the producer would decide not to have such ambitions, given that Andrzej Wajda could approach *The Dead Class* in such a fashion. Wajda himself, at any rate, had endless conversations with Grotowski about filming *Apocalypsis*; they went on for seven years – seven years! Tired of these negotiations – and discouraged by Kantor's sneering response to the film of *The Dead Class* – Wajda ultimately suggested Jerzy Wójcik in his stead ("There's only one man who could do that: Jerzy Wójcik," he wrote in his final letter on the subject, in January 1979).[33] I cannot understand why Grotowski ignored this suggestion and good advice, and preferred Ermanno Olmi. Wójcik, the cameraman for Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*, Munk's *Eroica*, Kutz's *Nobobody's Calling*, Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joanna of the Angels* – a leading artist of the Polish film school, who became famous again in the 1970s for the cinematography in *Deluge* – would have been a first-class, maybe even a perfect choice. He wanted to film *Apocalypsis* in black and white. How apt! But in deciding on Olmi, Grotowski was not in search of someone who would make a simple document (to use your term) of a theatrical work, as Olmi had just won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, in 1978, for *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*. A year later he was incapable of mustering up independence from Grotowski, as Wajda was capable of doing from Kantor (for which, of course, he was lambasted). As far as I am concerned, to this day I cannot get over the fact that in 1970, or even in 1972, when Wajda became director of the X Film Studio[34] (Puzyna was named literary director) and renewed his offer, he made no film of *Apocalypsis*: as we recall, in 1971 Wajda filmed *Pilate and Others* based on *The Master and Margarita* (people waited in long lines to see it at Wiedza Cinema at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw) and directed *The Possessed* at the Stary Theatre (pilgrimages to Cracow) – perhaps never before nor after was he closer to a performance from the Laboratory Theatre; it is a shame that Grotowski passed this up.

I thank you for the extensive theoretical exposition on the aims and character of audiovisual recordings of theater productions. But did you by any chance formulate it thinking about the publication of your e-mail in *Didaskalia*? ;-) You know all too well that for the last few years, together with my team, I have participated in the creation of the European Collected Library of Artistic Performance (ECLAP), and have, for the past year, run the NPRH[35] grant for the "Production and Analysis of Source Materials in the Performing Arts," in whose framework we also work through these theoretical issues in the Polish Culture Institute of the University of Warsaw.

The basic thing that makes Wajda's film of *The Dead Class* so brilliant is the fact that Wajda filmed the performance in 1976, just a year after its premiere, when it was fresh and good. With the CNRS recording produced by Denis Bablet, the banner and patron were of no help, because the performance of *The Dead Class* was simply poor. But for this same reason the film of *The Constant Prince*, which you so deride, made – as far as we can tell – in 1967, two years after the premiere, when the performance was still fresh and strong, is far superior to the film of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*.

I can imagine why the Laboratory Theatre took this desperate step to record *Apocalypsis* in its state of irreversible degeneration: they probably did it for their fatally ill friend. And I can imagine why Olmi decided, as you put it, to "limit his intentions": when he saw the poor performance that *Apocalypsis* was at the time, perhaps he could not comprehend why it was so famous (and if he knew the story of the negotiations with Wajda that preceded its filming perhaps he could not conceive why the master, Wajda, had wanted to film this work so badly). It is also possible that he simply did not know what to do with it.

I repeat: you decidedly overestimate this recording – evidently made rather heartlessly for a work which, unfortunately, had lost its heart. Like the Tin Man; except that *Apocalypsis* did not meet its Dorothy then.

You say that this does not bother you, because you know that it is only a record of a score which you can then go and supplement with the testimonials of witnesses' experiences. But is this really what you do? Those testimonies – apart from Marek Chlanda's concise confession – do not seem to interest you in the slightest. And why? Could it be because, in your view, all the actual viewers of this performance remained blind to what they were really seeing?

This concept of a theatrical performance would strike me as rather extravagant. As you know, I share Artaud's conviction here: drawing from the concept of "cruelty," he called theater "poetry in space," whose aim is to introduce metaphysics to the viewers' minds – right "through the skin."[36] This is why, in ridding *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* of its space, as well as the presence and response of its viewers, Ermanno Olmi was so very mistaken.

Have you not wondered why, in its guest performances, *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* was so frequently performed in churches? In Paris in 1973 in Sainte Chapelle – just try to imagine it! The next year in Sydney – in the chapel of the Holy Virgin Mary Cathedral, the headquarters of the primate of Australia. In New York in 1969 – in the temple of the Episcopal Methodist Church on Washington Square, in Munich in 1972 – in All Saints' Church, in Philidelphia in 1973 – in the St. Alphonsus Church... Obviously Grotowski wanted this performance to be taken in this context, and no other: he was very much against the context of a theater building – and he was decidedly drawn to Christian temples. Barring that, he tried to find something special – in Warsaw in 1971 he found the Old Powder House.[37] Tell me, does this sort of context – and this intention of the director – make no difference to you at all?

You compare yourself to Rorty to make an elaborate declaration as to the definition of a work and its possibilities for interpretation. Fine, but what is a theatrical work to your mind? Is it the performance, i.e. the famed (as your institutional patron phrased it) work which no longer exists – which existed only for the time when it had an audience – or its score, timeless and distinct from participation, which can be reconstructed as one so desires, when and how one pleases? Is a theatrical performance any different from a painting or the text of a novel? What is the basis of interpretation in these three cases, or, as you prefer, the provider of stimuli for your interpretations? If we level all the differences between Picasso's *Guernica*, which you can see with your own eyes, if you only go to the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, or Joyce's *Ulysses*, which you can read at the Project Gutenberg website, and *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, which you have never seen and never will see, are you not stretching the argument a bit?

Probably the difference between our concepts boils down to the fact that you couch yours in the sophisticated diction of philosophy while I couch mine in the down-to-earth framework of cultural studies. You declare yourself to represent the political humanities – involved in lifting oppression and expanding the sphere of freedom; this is why your interpretations fight against manifestations of androcentric authority. At any rate this is what stands out in your article on *Apocalypsis*: it is saturated with the ideology you have chosen, which gives it a somewhat tendentious aspect. This is why I inquired about other female critics writing about *Apocalypsis*... – I wanted to know if, in your opinion, they were writing under the yoke of androcentric authority. Now I see that they were, and that is why they required someone to struggle for their freedom so many years later.

You say that you always recalled a line from Małgorzata Dzieduszycka's book, that in *Apocalypsis* love of God turns out to be the human desire to love, which strives for corporeal fulfillment; you also confess that Dzieduszycka pointed out the homosexual motif in this performance. If so, then perhaps the motif was not as veiled as you might suppose, and Dzieduszycka devoted exactly as much space to it as it deserves? Perhaps in *Apocalypsis* – as in *The Marriage* – the reality of the human relationships is not one-dimensional, perhaps it is more complex?

"Gombrowicz is never a naturalist, he is a psychocosmologist," writes Danuta Danek,[38] speaking of *The Marriage,* and this also fits Grotowski like a glove. They both masterfully use the dialectic of the lower and the higher.

You yourself quote Dzieduszycka as saying that in *Apocalypsis* the point was to show the consecutive indoctrinations into the experience of love. But this is what you prefer to ignore – the mysterious nature of Eros in this performance. "God is love." In *Apocalypsis* this was – like everything else, even the Eucharist – taken literally, i.e. graphically. Both Puzyna and Kott pointed out the graphic nature of the actors' work in *Apocalypsis*. Puzyna interpreted this as drunken foolishness, wherein everything is shrouded in the "revolting atmosphere of 'drunken revelry'."[39] Kott made a brilliant parallel to the pilgrimages to Kalwaria Zebrzydowska.[40] "Church songs blend with drunken hiccups and the squeal of wenches," he aptly wrote about the Polish folk version of lent practices. "Someone is grappling in the dark with a girl. The sour smell of horse and human urine mixes with the sweet fragrance of incense and the odor of vomit."[41] I would say that if someone has no first-hand experience of this, as a pilgrim or a field researcher, he or she will not come to know about it from the library, not even reading Kristeva's elucidations of the "abject."

For Grotowski this parallel of Kott's must have been important, given that during his Collège de France lecture,[42] devoted, as he himself put it, to the intersection of the tribal – i.e. Polish – myth and his personal myth, he screened a documentary film by Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski titled *A Souvenir from Kalwaria*. Given that then, in January 1998, a year before his death, he described *Apocalypsis* as the fruit of his struggle to salvage this personal myth from being smothered by tribal culture, it could be worth taking this statement into account when we interpret his performance. His thoughts went back not only to his last theater performance, but to the terminology he used at the time – clearly not

only because it was fashionable in the 1960s. In his manifesto *Toward a Poor Theatre* he wrote: "Only myth – incarnate in the fact of the actor, in his living organism – can function as a taboo. The violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth."[43]

As you know, the premiere of *Apocalypsis* was preceded by many years of work with a changing ensemble: first on *Samuel Zborowski*,[44] and then on *The Gospels*. Neither of the two made it as far as their premiere, but apparently in March 1967 there was an open rehearsal of *The Gospels*, and a poster was prepared by Waldemar Krygier (http://www.grotowski.net/node/1052).

I would like to turn your attention to two things. Firstly, there were as many as six women in the cast: Maja Komorowska and Rena Mirecka (as two Mary Magdalenes), Sylvie Belai and Elizabeth Albahaca (as Maidens), Ewa Benesz and Bernadette Landru. You surely recall the scene with Maja Komorowska and Rena Mirecka, filmed in 1966 by Jean-Marie Drot during a rehearsal for *The Gospels*, which he included in his film *Jerzy Grotowski et son Théâtre Laboratoire de Wrocław. Grotowski ou... Socrate est-il Polonais?* It is easy to notice the genetic link between this etude and *Apocalypsis*. As such, it is true that the cast of *Apocalypsis* featured five male characters and only one female (played by two actresses), yet the cast of the performance that preceded *Apocalypsis* and from which it directly derived, the proportions were different: eight male figures (Lazarus was played either by Zbigniew Cynkutis or Zygmunt Molik) and six female characters – and this is almost fifty-fifty! But even more importantly, several scenes were enacted between women – such as the one filmed with two Mary Magdalenes, and no men. Were you not tempted to check if some scenes from *Apocalypsis* did not perhaps take place earlier in *The Gospels* – and if so, with what cast members? And what if this would have led you to the discovery that the scenes which you interpret so unambiguously from a gender point of view had an identical score in *The Gospels*, but with a cast that was utterly reversed, so to speak? What could it mean that the scene here is gay – and there is lesbian, and one scene here is heterosexual, and there it is single-gender, or rather asexual? If you had stopped to ask Maja Komorowska, who, as far I know, had substantial input into work on *The Gospels*, you would surely have uncovered many extraordinary things. Is it not peculiar that, while preparing your article, you made no attempt to contact the actresses who took part in *Apocalypsis*: Elizabeth Albahaca and Rena Mirecka (from the cast), or Maja Komorowska, Ewa Benesz (from the team that helped in preparing the performance)? Were you not interested in what they might have to say about your hypotheses? (Unfortunately neither the director nor a single male actor from *Apocalypsis* is still alive).

The other thing I wanted to point out was that in the poster for *The Gospels*, Waldemar Krygier used a famous illustration from a 16th-century alchemical treatise titled *Rosarium Philosophorum* (engraving number five from a series of twenty illustrating this alchemical *opus*), depicting the *coniunctio* of the Sun and the Moon as the act of the King and Queen's copulation – both naked, decorated only with crowns (http://www.alchemywebsite.com/virtual_museum/rosarium_philosophorum_room.html). A very similar engraving (the eleventh in the same series), on which the King and Queen, still locked in a loving embrace, have grown wings, was reproduced for the cover of Leonard Cohen's album *New Skin for the Old Ceremony* of 1974 – seven years later, but in the same time period. It is said that in the opus, an alchemical work, there is a combination of the male and the female elements; the former is active, but they later switch roles. And then later the two are joined in the figure of a hermaphrodite, winged and standing on a half-moon as a sign of reigning over the lunar powers (engraving ten from the *Rosarium* series).

I hope I do not need to convince you of the significance of alchemical parallels in Grotowski's creative practice. It is not for no reason that Grotowski defined his last work, *Action*, as an *opus*. When you were studying his texts you must have been struck by the (openly archaic!) formulations, such as that in "From the Theatre Company to Art as a Vehicle" (a compilation of statements from 1989-1990), which concern "verticality toward the subtle and the descent of the subtle to a level of reality more ordinary."[45] But Grotowski spoke of a similar process in his first manifesto, a quarter of a century earlier.[46]

And here is another parallel, or in fact, a fascination of Grotowski's. Do you recall what was meant to be the original title of *Polish Thanatos*? *Dostoyevsky Style*[47]. In *Apocalypsis* everything was handled that way – "Dostoyevsky style." Bakhtin analyzed Dostoyevsky's work as an expression of the "carnivalesque" world-sense: the idea and its mouthpiece were put to the test, mocked, even debased – scandal, excess, and madness creep into ordinary life, people in spasms seek meaning anew. This is why Bakhtin associated the carnival with the apocalypse. In such an atmosphere the idea, he wrote, is not afraid to get dirty; that which is most sublime, religious, is mixed with the "slum-naturalism." The same went for *Apocalypsis*. And such a foul atmosphere of drunkenness and rutting – am I still at liberty to say such things? – took place during the Passion Play. That was truly dramatic! Words and actions had a finality, they expressed the whole person.

You will doubtless add that they only expressed men. However, Grotowski – as you well know – was attached to Logion 22, *The Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus says that you can enter the kingdom when two make a unity, when male and female become a single whole – when a man is no longer male, and a woman is no longer female.[48] But what could this really mean?

Warmest greetings,

Leszek Kolankiewicz

P.S. If you believe that our correspondence is worth publishing, then let's do it. LK ■

First published: *Didaskalia* 2013 No. 114.

[1] Agata Adamieka-Sitek, "Grotowski, kobiety I homoseksualiści. Na marginesach 'człowieczego dramatu'," *Didaskalia*, 2012 No. 112. [All footnotes have been inserted *ex post* at the request of the editors of *Didaskalia*.]

[2] Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Bluźnierstwo," in: *Czas Apokalipsy. Koniec dziejów w kulturze od późnego średniowiecza do współczesności*, ed. Kamil Kopania, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2012.

[3] Jerzy Grotowski, ed. Eugenio Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Routledge Press, New York 2002, pp. 16, 21-22.

[4] The biographies and work of the Polish writers named here, all of them living and working in the 20th century, contain numerous homosexual motifs which were kept hidden during their lives. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jerzy Andrzejewski, and Witold Gombrowicz were among the protagonists of Krzysztof Tomasik's book *Homobiografie. Pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX i XX wieku* [Homobiographies: Polish Writers of the 19th and 20th Centuries] (Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2009) – ed.

[5] A play by Witold Gombrowicz – ed.

[6] Leonia Jabłonkówna, "Klucz od przepaści," *Teatr* 1969, No. 18, 16 September; T. Krzemień: "Po Apocalypsis cum figuris," *Słowo Powszechne* 1970 No. 60, 12 March..

[7] Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, *„Apocalypsis cum figuris". Opis spektaklu Jerzego Grotowskiego*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1974, pp. 7-37; Jennifer Kumiega: *The Theatre of Grotowski*, Methuen, London – New York 1985, pp. 239-271.

[8] Carl Gustav Jung, "Ulysses: A Monologue," in: *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1971.

[9] Carl Gustav Jung, *Answer to Job*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Routledge Press, London/New York 2002.

[10] A letter from Sigmund Freud to Theodor Reik of 4 January 1935, in: T. Reik, *The Haunting Melody: Psychoanalytic Experiences in Life and Music*, Farrar, Straus and Young, New York 1953, pp. 342-343.

[11] Ludwik Flaszen, "Apocalypsis cum figuris: Kilka uwag wstępnych," readied for print by Leszek Kolankiewicz, in: *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia. Przedstawienia Jerzego Grotowskiego i Teatru Laboratorium*, eds. Janusz Degler, Grzegorz Ziółkowski, The Grotowski Institute, Wrocław 2006, p. 95.

[12] Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Co lepsze: kontrolowana (przez kogo?) recepcja czy nieograniczona dowolność artystycznych i badawczych nawiązań do jego dzieła?" in: *Sonda: Co dalej z dziełem Grotowskiego?*, *Didaskalia* 2004 No. 64, pp. 20-21.

[13] Małgorzata Dziewulska, "Zawsze źle," in: *Sonda: Co dalej z dziełem Grotowskiego?*, *Didaskalia* 2004 No. 64, p. 21-22.

[14] Konstanty Puzyna, *The Return of Christ*, Instytut Książki, Kraków – Warszawa 2014, p. 18.

[15] http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostatnie_kuszenie_Chrystusa_(film).

[16] Jerzy Grotowski, "The Theatre's New Testament," in: *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., p. 42.

[17] Ludwik Flaszen, *„Apocalypsis cum figuris". Kilka uwag wstępnych*, p. 95.

[18] Jerzy Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, eds.: Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Mario Biagini, Dariusz Kosiński, Carla Pollastrelli, Thomas Richards, Igor Stokfiszewski, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, The Grotowski Institute, Warsaw-Wrocław 2012 – ed.

[19] Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, trans. Y. Freccero, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore 1965.

[20] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York 1992.

[21] Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes*, trans. William Weaver, Vintage Books, London 2014.

[22] Ireneusz Guszpit, "„Apocalypsis" bez Chrystusa," in: *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia. Przedstawienie Jerzego Grotowskiego i Teatru Laboratorium*, eds. Jerzy Degler, Grzegorz Ziółkowski, The Grotowski Institute, Wrocław 2006.

[23] Konstanty Puzyna, *The Return of Christ*, p. 24.

[24] *The Life of Protopop Awwakum*, director, musical dramaturg, and text adaptation: Włodzimierz Staniewski, set design: Małgorzata Dżygadło (based on a concept by W. Staniewski), premiere: 1983 – ed.

[25] The Association of Polish Architects; the pavilion on Foksal Street is the headquarters of the Warsaw Branch – ed.

[26] A statement made during the *Grotowski – Narratives* conference, Warsaw 14-15 January 2010, organized by the University of Warsaw Polish Culture Institute, The Grotowski Institute, and Polish Academy of Sciences Cultural Studies Committee.

[27] A transcript of a lecture in Volterra in September 1984, on the occasion of a symposium organized by the Il Porto Active Culture Center on *L'arte dello spettatore*. The text appeared in Italian as "Il regista come spettetore di professione," in: *Il Teatr Laboratorium di Jerzy Grotowski 1959–1969. Testi e materiali di Jerzy Grotowski e Ludwik Flaszen con uno scritto di Eugenio Barba, a cura di L. Flaszen e C. Pollastrelli con la collaborazione di R. Molinari*, Fondazione Pontedera Teatro, Pontedera 2001.

[28] Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, Jonathon Culler, Christine Brook-Rose, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York 1998.

[29] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text In This Class*?, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1982.

[30] *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p. 103.

[31] Andrzej Szahaj, "Granice anarchizmu interpretacyjnego," *Teksty Drugie* 1997, No. 6.

[32] Małgorzata Dziewulska, *Artyści i pielgrzymi*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1995; Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, *Apocalypsis cum figuris. Opis spektaklu*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1974.

[33] A letter from Andrzej Wajda to Zbigniew Cynkutis, 2 January 1979, in: Zbigniew Osiński, "O nierealizowanych projektach filmów Andrzeja Wajdy o Teatrze Laboratorium. Korespondencja Wajdy ze Zbigniewem Cynkutisem i Jerzym Grotowskim z lat 1963-1964, 1970-1972 I 1975-1979," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2003, Vols. 3-4, p. 263.

[34] Zespół Filmowy X (1972-1983) was a Polish film production studio – ed.

[35] The National Program for the Development of the Humanities of the Ministry of Education is a range of activities to assist the integration of Polish humanities with European and world humanities, and help young academics in developing their academic careers in collaboration with foreign study centers. This program is also meant to spread the achievements of Polish humanities in the world – ed.

[36] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards, Grove Press, New York 1958, p. 38-40, 99.

[37] A heritage building whose history goes back to 1581. In the past it had a defensive function, it was a storehouse. It was rebuilt after World War Two, and ever since the performances of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* it has been a culture center, presently equipped with a theater stage and gallery – ed.

[38] Danuta Danek, *Sztuka rozumienia. Literatura i psychoanaliza*, Wydawnictwo IBL, Warsaw 1997, p. 255.

[39] Konstanty Puzyna, "Pestka," in: *Burzliwa pogoda. Felietony teatralne*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1971, p. 45.

[40] The sanctuary in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is one of the most important sites of the cult of the Passion and the Virgin Mary – it combines the cult of the suffering Christ and the Mother of God – ed.

[41] Jan Kott, "'Czemu mam tańczyć w tym tragicznym chórze...' (o Grotowskim)," in: *Kamienny Potok. Eseje o teatrze i pamięci*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1991, pp. 218, 219.

[42] Jerzy Grotowski, *La lignée organique au théâtre et dans le rituel*, Éditions Le Livre Qui Parle, Paris 2008, CF 950 (MP3), CD2, 128-147.

[43] Jerzy Grotowski, *Toward a Poor Theatre*, p. 23.

[44] Juliusz Słowacki's unfinished "mystical play" – ed.

[45] Jerzy Grotowski, "From the Theatre Company to Art as a Vehicle," in: Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Routledge Publishers, London 1995, p. 128.

[46] Jerzy Grotowski, *Toward a Poor Theatre*.

[47] Polish Thanatos: Incantations – the final stage performance created by members of the Laboratory Theater group. The first presentations took place in Wrocław between 28 February and 6 March 1981- ed. http://www.grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/polish-thanatos-incantations

[48] See: *The Gospel of Thomas*, Logion 22: Convergence.

JOANNA JOPEK

THE PRACTICE OF FAILURE: ATTEMPTS AT NEGATIVE PERFORMATIVITY

Half-Empty is the title of a novel published three years ago by Łukasz Gorczyca and Łukasz Ronduda, devoted, as the sub-title declares, to the "life and work of Oskar Dawicki."[1] This project by Gorczyca and Ronduda (or perhaps just just another project by Dawicki; the authors of the book are referred to as "a pair of robots") was widely discussed as soon as it entered circulation – unfortunately, mainly in art and art criticism circles, as well as the social world surrounding them. *Half-Empty* only partly fits into such a framework: it is a quasi-monograph that liberally blends the "authentic" with deception, gossip, and fiction; the facts can be sought – but without too much trust – in the extremely extensive footnotes. It is also a literary and conceptually refined existential Chinese-box novel, or a chatty and sarcastic satire on the art scene. Finally – and perhaps most accurately – it is a literary response to the work of an artist

who, since his days of working with the Supergroup Azorro,[2] has consistently explored failure, signs of humiliation, and minor confusions. He is a performer, as he calls himself, who always "comes in second." The content of this book, however, takes a back seat to what is not there: *Half-Empty* is literally only half-written. The first part of the book, the five opening chapters announced in the table of contents, do not exist; in their place the authors ("two robots") put a few dozen carefully numbered pages. The title refers to these, and not to the written part, thus establishing a hierarchy of importance in the reception of the book.

A famous paradox tells us that the same glass with water reaching to the halfway mark can, depending on the attitude of the beholder, be defined as "half-full" or "half-empty." The contradiction is only superficial, and rooted in the language: both opinions are accurate, and the discrepancy comes not from the properties of the thing in question, but from a choice in perception. Why is this "empty" and not "full" so important for the authors of the book about Dawicki? There are quite a few potential interconnected answers: reading these empty pages as a kind of self-referential concept, that pertains as much to the work of Dawicki as to the book itself. Here the stakes would simply be a conceptual joke (in a blog devoted to the book the authors warn: "don't pay too much for it, the book really is half empty!").[3] The stakes could also be the participation of the reader: a gesture by Gorczyca and Ronduda that encourages one to fill in the empty pages for oneself. Another interpretation: "the life and work of Oskar Dawicki" has been presented in reverse chronological order – the work begins from the present moment and ends with the beginnings in Kociewie, with Oskar's childhood[4] (together with the protagonist's almost biblical origins). The blank pages at the beginning could also mean the unwritten future and adventures of Dawicki; this is supported by the fact that from the first printing (in 2010) to the second,[5] *Half-Empty* gained an extra chapter at the beginning of the written part. There remain, however, the titles of the unwritten chapters in the table of contents – the empty space could be the result and indicator of erasure, as in the chapter devoted to Oskar's emotional life, in which all that remains of the whole body of text are the references hanging on the blank white of the page (and the content of the footnotes to which they relate). All these meanings of the titular "emptiness" are equal, they cancel each other and overlap. Each comes from a somewhat different reading register, is the result of using a different interpretive key – from reminiscences of the open work theory, to a reading in the spirit of the avant-garde and conceptual art; all, in various ways, "tag," encircle the titular emptiness with discourse. Each is only half full.

In this process, the "empty" – produced by the "two robots" and the readers – loses its absolute quality, the gravity of "nothing" (we hesitate to say: "nothingness"): the book is half empty, but so too is Oskar's refrigerator, which stands open in the first paragraph of the story: "It was, like the novel, and like his life, half-full and half-empty."[6] This "not-entirely-empty" state, this halfway to nothingness, is rather the flip side (of what is written) than its utter negation. Karol Sienkiewicz accused Łukasz Ronduda[7] of celebrating emptiness as one of the themes of Dawicki's work ("'There's more emptiness here than in Kierkegaard"[8]), acknowledging this as a sort of curator-commentator strategy, protecting the artist from being accused of escapism. It seems that when it comes to *Half-Empty* such an accusation (the celebration of emptiness) is misfired: the "emptiness" goes through so many declensions in the novel that it loses all essential, absolute, or celebrated power; it is neither a "Kierkegaardian" emptiness nor a modernist melancholic void, nor a serious Bernhardian "extinction." Sienkiewicz's accusation might set us on one other path, concerning the white pages: the discursive, multifarious disarming of this "void" bears the significance of a performative act – of the practice of the failure of discourse by the "two robots."

In *Half-Empty*, writing about Dawicki is also partial and sentenced to failure. This sphere of a few dozen blank pages might be a performative testimony to the fact of a certain negativity, disaster, a void in the frame of discourse; whether this is Łukasz Gorczyca, the creator of Raster,[9] a critic who keeps close to the latest movements in Polish art and who is seasoned in the tropes and jokes of the art scene, or Łukasz Ronduda, whose work on the Polish neo-avant-garde of the 1970s,[10] aiming to name and to categorize things which are discredited outright in *Half-Empty*.

One of the robots forces upon Dawicki's art the term, "post-essentialism," which, obviously, does not meet with Oskar's approval.

Both discourses of the "robots" bring a performative (and *performed*) failure in attempting to describe Dawicki's work – this failure of known methodology is expressed in the empty half of the book. The multiplicity of discourses (literary, academic, critical) presented in the second part comes head-to-head with the void, which replaces another kind of description – a methodology that is, perhaps, more appropriate, but has yet to exist. The emptiness might not, therefore, relate to the failure that is the foundation and theme of Oskar's work, but the one encountered by authors specializing in critical discourses measuring up to the "life and work" of the protagonist, with regards to whom appropriate means of naming have only recently proved useless (he himself likes to repeat a single sentence when it comes to scholars and curators and their way of speaking: "The discourse fucked me over.")

Lastly, *Half-Empty* presumes and performatively reveals a certain periphery of the (possible) ignorance and inability of the "robots" and the tale they have written, or the inappropriateness and inapplicability of the discourse. This is the unveiled field of idiocy from which rational discourses are tailored; this field interests me in particular. The point is the inevitable failure in attempts to grasp work like Dawicki's with the resources of the theory at our disposal, given that it tends neither toward presence nor toward the void, nor essentialism, nor pragmatism, nor affirmation, nor hardline

deconstruction. Such work also reveals clearly problematic areas for the critical tools of performance studies as well, and consequently, for the way we think about the performative. In this brief outline I will be standing alongside the authors of *Half-Empty* – the "two robots," those who see the glass, the discourse, and their set of methodological apparatus as constantly (perhaps forever?) "half-empty" and not half full. And alongside the void, which is nearer to failure than to a modernist nothingness.

From such premises I would like to take an overview of the realm of negativeness that stretches behind the theories of the performative, to explore the flip sides of its methodologies, the problem spots of the theory. An antidote to the somewhat fossilized and undoubtedly "high" theory of the performative just might be the (not strictly performative) movement of Judith Halberstam's theoretical inquiries in *The Queer Art of Failure*[11] (dedicated to "all of history's losers"). Halberstam suggests a "low" critical approach[12] – weak, uninterested in the divisions between high and low culture, combining theoretical investigation with attention to practices, avoiding interpretive hegemonies and the constant *agon* of the "higher" humanist discourses. Crucially: accepting and conducting low theory is tied to an awareness of the operation of the knowledge-power mechanism, of colonization and establishment of significance through discourse; here the departure and the counter-proposal is in unveiling the oscillation between knowledge, ignorance, intuition, and error, i.e. in exploring the fields of stupidity, forgetting, mistakes, failures, and uncertainty as an attempt to avoid the perspective of the knowledge to date (its categories and discipline). By this approach, knowledge means not only power, but also the result of reproducing meanings and interpretations, a closed circuit and a powerful self-performing system, tightly sealed to innovation of any sort – this can only be brought into it by failure. Departing from the ideas of Foucault and the work of cultural philosopher Avital Ronell,[13] Halberstam indicates the cognitive potential of revealing the limits of knowledge in rejecting the struggle for discourse (or in allowing the competitor a default victory) as particularly important and, perhaps, the most subversive.

The point of departure for this work was in apprehending art practices which, in various ways complicate, decompose, and negate theories of the performative to date (mainly those dealing with artistic activity). The study of the performative oscillates around two axes, which appear to revitalize the paradigms of avant-garde art – essentialist and pragmatic. The essence of the theory of the performative is, after all, either "presence" or (social) "change." One of the most vibrant movements of performance practice seems, however, to go in another direction, which cannot be described with the available categories. In seeking the "half-empty," the field of non-signification, of failure and unproductivity in the framework of performative methodologies, I will then first look at practices in art: performances that in various ways take the reigning paradigm of the performative into an (empty) field, dismantling and disarming the absolutizing concepts of presence or change. A study of these practices (which may also be condemned to failure) should lead toward an initial definition of a research perspective, which might be defined as negative performativity.

The Artist Is Not Present

The dialectic of presence and absence was fundamental to the theory of performativity and performative studies in its present shape, i.e. in the 1990s, after theory discovered the "performative turn" (initiated in the 1960s) as a new (and ever-present) cultural paradigm. In the work regarded as having originated the study of the performative, Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), the key chapter, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" is devoted to the intersecting relationship between presence and disappearance provided by the "ontology" of the performance. Phelan sees a particular and distinctive quality of performance in its status as an event – in the fact that it lasts (only) in the present time and immediately "disappears." This corresponds to its other attributes: ephemerality, individuality, uniqueness, and, crucially, the impossibility of recording, its irreproducibility.[14]

Such a negative "ontology" of the performance makes the event *unmarked*: untranscribed and invisible to the ideological systems and the capitalist policies of visibility. This observation best reveals the countercultural backdrop of Phelan's thought: to her way of thinking performance manages to produce its own field of gravity, unsoiled, distinct, and separate from the reigning ideologies and political system, a place of subjective freedom, a rift in the political system. The political strength of performance is thus in its bipolarity: on the one hand, it involves creating a moment of pure presence, and on the other the performance of absence through the impossibility of reproduction, and thus an insusceptibility to the dictates of the capitalist market.

A decade later an even more fundamental development was the issue of the fundamental (even essential) presence, "here and now," in Erika Fischer-Lichte's outline of performance, in the now textbook *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics,* which applied a normative description. Key to her understanding of performance are the categories of "liveness," materiality, corporal co-presence, and "autopoietic feedback loops," which strongly inscribes the viewers' presence into the events. Co-presence and co-participation – of the artist and the audience – are at the core of this ontology of performance. An example of such an event is described in detail – Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* performance (the gravity of this performance that sets off Fischer-Lichte's investigations is shown by the solemnity of its description; the passage begins with the words: "In her performance of *Lips of Thomas* performed in the Krinzinger gallery in Innsbruck, Austria, on 24 October 1975, Marina Abramović mistreated her own body in various ways").[15] This example is particularly significant in that the "presence" gains the attributes

of an almost sacred act of confirming faith in existence (the tortured body), it confirms the co-presence of bodies "here and now." In contrast with the theses of Philip Auslander, who argued the lack of distinction between mediatization and "liveness," Fischer-Lichte joins Phelan in regarding irreproducibility as an indispensable attribute of performance.

We might regard a widely-known performance by Marina Abramović with heavy media presence, much later than *Lips of Thomas*, *The Artist Is Present* (MoMA, 2010) as the culminating point (one could even call it an aberration) of this sort of sacralized performer presence. This performance lasted two-and-a-half months (from 14 March to 31 May 2010),[16] over the course of which the artist, clothed in one of three Givenchy dresses designed for the occasion, invited viewers one at a time to a table with two chairs. The "autopoietic feedback loop" worked spectacularly: the audience could spend as much time as they pleased with the artist, and their activities were also documented; the media reported that Lady Gaga, Björk, and Sharon Stone, among others, appeared in the line-up for MoMA. The performance became widely known, however, through a documentary film by Matthew Akkers, created during the preparations for at MoMA, titled *The Artist is Present*[17] (the poster features a close-up on Abramović's face, the customary blurbs from New York gazettes and information about the awards received).

It remains a paradox and twist of fate that the performance – which, it would have seemed, fulfilled all the conditions of the "performative aesthetic" – could be recorded and reproduced perfectly well, and the undoubtedly powerful "presence" of Marina Abramović in the performance, documented in a film that is widely viewed and distributed in mainstream circulation, seems not the least bit subversive toward the capitalist markets, not to speak of being "unmarked" (in Phelan's understanding). (We ought to add in passing the rhetorical question posed by André Lepecki during the open symposium at Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw: "The artist is present – so what?").[18]

Jon McKenzie called attention to the fact that a performance need not be subversive, and that the concept had been usefully appropriated by corporations and yoked to the development of the capitalist society, in *Perform or Else: Discipline and Performance*.[19] Abramović's "being present" appears to be perfect confirmation of this principle, given that the marketing of her (the artist's) presence is being carried out through a strictly artistic performance (and one grounded in an arts institution); as such, it is a clear extension of the counter-culture performance scene of the 1960s (to which Phelan and Fischer-Lichte referred). The dictate of performativity as required by productivity is, in McKenzie's reckoning, bipolar: either the performance of presence, or bust, absence, catastrophe. *Tertium non datur*. The activities I would like to discuss do not draw upon this clinch of presence/absence; for these absolutize both categories. The point is not a powerful presence or a total absence: it is more about a gentle shift toward disappearance, renunciation, invalidation; and thus, quite clearly, the performed failure of presence/visibility/productivity. And perhaps equally vital is that these activities are marked by a certain dose of humor and self-effacement, which is particularly hard to find in such "high" performance art (as well as in "high theory") that emerges from the descriptions of Phelan and Fischer-Lichte. Here are a few examples of a performed failure of presence:

1. In 2002, at the Bone 5 Festival in Bern (Switzerland), an interesting and memorable event took place. Oskar Dawicki, an artist who is in the habit of fleeing from his own performances, this time showed his "performance" – untitled. First he put on his now-famous plum-colored sequin jacket,[20] then pulled a cassette tape from one of the pockets. He put it into a small tape deck on the table, pushed a microphone toward it, and sat down on a chair across from it. A voice came from the tape deck: "Welcome to everybody, it is Oskar Dawicki speaking. I have a message for Oskar Dawicki, it will be the instruction for your performance tonight. Please follow the instruction" [*sic* – trans.]. Then the voice put Dawicki to the test, checking his susceptibility to commands (to stand, sit, etc.). Then Dawicki's voice asked a few questions to Dawicki on stage (not without grammatical errors) such as: "Is it true that, as some experts believe, the art of performance is dead?", "Should art have a goal?", "What do truth and art have in common?", "Perhaps the point in art is to ask questions about it?", and finally: "What is art?" To every question Dawicki responded: "I don't know." Then, following the voice's instructions, Dawicki changed the tape; he chose the wrong one, however, and the voice ordered him to change it. Then the voice said: "OK, this one is correct. So you know nothing. People are looking at you. Maybe would be better to run out before. But now it's too late." The performance came to an end.[21]

2. In 2003, in Paris, Joanna Rajkowska,[22] already known as the creator of the famous palm tree on the de Gaulle Roundabout,[23] showed her performance titled *Hello*. First the artist placed an ad in the *Libération* daily newspaper: "Today, beginning at 4:00 p.m., Joanna Rajkowska will be at the top of the A. Coeur Défense tower. She will be visible from the roof of La Grande Arche de La Défense."[24] In accordance with the plan, at four o'clock Rajkowska appeared on the roof of the high La Défense tower, waving a white kerchief to the tourists with binoculars in the viewing square of the neighboring tower and to the people crossing through the square. Naturally, no one paid any attention to her. The tourists were busy admiring the square, the people in the square were focused on their destinations. In spite of the ad that Rajkowska had placed in *Libération* and the enormous number of people accidentally gathered in a given place and at the time of Rajkowska's action, it did not reach any addressee and found no response. The performance came to an end.[25]

3. One day in 2006, in Łódź, Cezary Bodzianowski,[26] a performer two years earlier awarded the *Polityka* Passport in the visual art category, for his "imagination and consistency, for an art that is mild, disinterested, and that jolts us from our everyday routines,"[27] an artist of ephemeral and delicate

urban interventions (which he calls a "personal theater of events"), created his performance titled *Cap of Invisibility*. We know how it went only from descriptions, which overlap in practically the same form in all the sources (in both specialist articles and in Wikipedia): "The artist ducked under every window he passed. He hid, for example, at the police headquarters, the court, the treasury office, and the bank. Thus hiding himself, he walked a path through Łódź from the corner of Piotrkowska and Wigura streets to Kościuszko Avenue at 6 Sierpnia Street, where, with a sense of relief, he straightened up."[28] No other trace of the event – apart from, we might suppose, the artist's memory – has survived.

In the description of Dawicki's performance I made reference to Fischer-Lichte's hermeneutic mode because it seems that, among the above examples, it was he who most strongly struck at the sacralized, "high" presence of the artist and the faith produced, the confirmation of this presence by the audience during the performance. The artist is in fact present ("here and now"), but in a multiplied, and thus questioned and theatrical form: Dawicki's recorded voice, Dawicki putting on a jacket, and Dawicki dressed in his stage costume. His "presence" renounces an ordinary escape, while the previously recorded instructions (with the "errors" written into the performance) clearly expose the script of the "eventness," the authenticity of the ephemeral performance. In spite of maintaining the typical structure of the performance (the performer *vis-à-vis* the audience), the autopoietic feedback loop appears to be interrupted or rather stuck in an empty space: Dawicki's repeating "I don't know" disrupts the significance and the sublimity of the co-presence of the performer and audience on yet another level. There is no way to respond or react to Dawicki's "I don't know" (or, as in the case of performance in Fischer-Lichte's understanding, to confirm, to say "I believe"). The occurrence of presence is painstakingly produced, the performer's escapist tendencies notwithstanding, making its final non-productivity all the more acute. A presence that is multiplying, theatrical, and deceptive is Dawicki's specialty (as seen most clearly in the *Performer* exhibition at Art Stations Foundation).

Rajkowska's work is based on another play on presence – here we find a performed "disappearance," a showing and unveiling of a real invisibility, the absence of the artist – despite the clear advertisement (in the newspaper!) of her presence ("there and then"), nobody looked, and thereby no one confirmed her presence. Rajkowska's performance also brings to a head another issue so important to Phelan's theory, that of reproducibility and documentation: this action went so unperceived by the audience to which it was addressed that its *actual* audience is only those who have read its description or seen the photographs documenting it. Rajkowska's action displays the sphere of the (un)shared present: the lack of real ("here and now") contact, the spheres of transference. This is principally tied to the audience's lack of involvement in the situation, the lack of flow (of information or emotions) between the performers and the audience; we can be sure that the "autopoietic feedback loop" mechanism is not functioning here. On the contrary: this is a performance of its short-circuit, its inefficiency, the impossibility of building relationships, the lack of reception. Both performances also clearly thematize failure, disappointed premises, non-productivity, and a lack of outcome to one's work – things which seem significantly higher stakes in performance than contact or presence.

The third example, Bodzianowski's *Cap of Invisibility,* takes the issues of presence, disappearance, and the "eventness" of the performance to the extreme. This carefully-performed disappearance, the charming evasion of presence by Bodzianowski, probably went unnoticed by everyone (apart from himself); there were no conscious observers of the performance, other than those who read the note on his path through Łódź, and his action could be regarded as a paradoxical execution of Phelan's concept – *unmarked* and invisible, disappearing from sight; and yet the core of the problem is that no one saw Bodzianowski or, surely, had any intention of seeing him; this escape was internal, entirely his own, it was only staged on the outside. Does this mean that nothing happened (and for nothing), if there is no way to describe his actions, if we take the premise of producing/performing presence? Or that the stakes and the aim of each of these three performances that display their own failure is "nothing"? With regard to the ordinary stakes of performativity, it truly is "nothing."[29] This could mean, however, that the stakes and aim lie elsewhere. This is not about presence, nor is it about the other main catchphrase of the theory of performativity – "change" in the understanding derived from political art.

…Practice Failure!

The attempts at "disappearance," evasion, and plays with the field of visibility that we find in the above-mentioned performances by Rajkowska and Bodzianowski, or in Dawicki's *Blackout*, are possible with regard to a certain premise, invisible at first, concerning the public sphere, theoretically identified and popularized by Jacques Rancière in *Dissensus*.[30] This presence touches the *modi* in the framework of the public stage: presence is not an absolute value here, but it means being visible, perceptible; while the distribution of the perceptible is the distribution of presence in the public sphere. "Disappearance" does not mean utter absence – it is more like an open, staged evasion of the politics of visibility (the struggle to make the presence of various viewpoints and subjects visible); one can only vanish from the (premises of the) system, which is based on visibility. Similar premises – that the subversive potential of performance is revealed with regard to the politics of visibility – are taken up by Phelan in *Unmarked*: "I am speaking here of an active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility. For the moment, active disappearance usually requires at least some recognition of what and who is not there in order to be effective."[31]

Phelan's whole project, an attempt to theoretically investigate and describe the unmarked, takes aim at the strategies of

visibility (of arguments, views, ideologies, minorities) as presences in the public sphere. The politics of visibility implicitly presupposes an understanding of the social space in categories of the capitalist system, the *agon* of various arguments, of fighting tooth and nail. Refusing to participate in ideology and to submit to the necessity that stands behind the "politics of visibility" makes Phelan prone to devote herself to what is unmarked: "Visual politics are additive rather than transformational (to say nothing of revolutionary). They lead to the stultifying "me-ism" to which realist representation is always vulnerable. […] Visibility politics are compatible with capitalism's relentless appetite for new markets and with the most self-satisfying ideologies of the United States: you are welcome here as long as you are productive. The production and reproduction of visibility are part of the labor of the reproduction of capitalism."[32] Against the affirmative act of making something visible as a strategy used to date in cultural scholarship (to which it pertains) she puts something that has the power not so much to colonize, to add on more markets, as to really transform. She sees this subversive power in disappearance, negation, effacement.[33]

In such a depiction of the politics of visibility, "change" signifies a successful strategy of making a certain argument visible over and above earlier arguments, and thus an inevitable antagonism, a conflict between various arguments (views, ideologies). This changes the leader, and does not maintain the same model of distribution– as Phelan claims, at the capitalist source – perceptible in the framework of the public sphere. A model which (again) places subjects in the position of winners and losers, while the measure of winning is the power of the strategy to make something visible. A side effect is the unambiguity, the one-dimensionality of the labels, of the flags of the arguments presented. There is no escaping from the field of visibility and the principles of its distribution (in given socio-cultural circumstances), says Phelan, though one can expose how it works, cleanse, negate, and indicate potential for changing the model.

In *The Queer Art of Failure* Judith Halberstam claims that winning strategies are not very intellectually fertile, they reproduce the *status quo* and the capitalist dictate of production (*perform or else,* or in its academic rendition, *publish or perish*) and preclude real change. If "I know," I pass the exam, I negotiate familiar territory and reproduce existing categories. Knowledge always exists, however, in a particular paradigm (which requires and receives constant confirmation), it is never more than a small bundle of discourses cut from whole tracts of ignorance, or in other words: a glass half-filled with water. There remains the half-empty part – the field of folly that exposes the limits of knowledge; we can only access this half through failure, disorientation, forgetting, discouragement, and losing. And then, when the script of behavior and thinking is not evident, when we do not have the codes, there appears awkwardness and confusion. The first stakes of practices that we might call expressions of negative performativity would be cognitive – by this we mean the performance of a cognitive failure, entering the field of ignorance where we find alternative information and ways of perceiving or feeling (as opposed to the reigning knowledge or power). This is why Dawicki's "I don't know" seems more interesting than Abramović's knowledge of/faith in/confirmation of presence.

Other stakes, closely tied to the issue of knowledge and categorization, are methodological: the performance of failure leads to a realm of research into the performativity of fields of negativity. Invariably positive and productive (as it is focused on presence and change), performance has appeared to largely overlook its "half-empty" side – the realm of negation, opposition, and breaking the continuity of the cultural performance. The performance of failure forces us to rethink the positive performative categories.

The most important thing, however, is that the practice of failure clearly exposes the fields of the distribution of visibility, and subversively dismantles the politics of making things visible. The key point of Halberstam's considerations is the use of "queer" as a category of non-signification, of uncertain identification (not striving for unification), of breaking down binary oppositions. In the chapter with a significant title, "Shadow Feminisms: Queer Negativity and Radical Passivity," Halberstam indicates the critical (or perhaps: anti-political) potential of reluctance toward clear and open identification or definition – toward strategies of visibility or performance, and thus, of confirming identity (e.g. female, male, homosexual, heterosexual). Attempts at unifying one's position only confirm the *status quo* (and the politics of visibility). For example, sexual minorities are on the losing side in terms of the heteronormative society – their strength might not lie in an attempt to join the reigning system (by winning: showing themselves and making their identity visible), but in their position as the outsider, the loser compared to the majority. The "queer" is the figure of the loser, the loser is a queer. Failure, the refusal to participate in a world of clear categories, indicates an anti-political standpoint, the critical potential of losing. This is less about "change" (which would place a new leader in charge of the same game, instead of negating the game) than it is about dissolving the categories we know in search of new places and different stakes.

Practice More Failure is the title of a meeting of queer and feminist thinkers, organized in 2004 by the LTTR lesbian performer collective; this is what inspired Halberstam. "Practice failure" is perhaps the most subversive call to arms in terms of the reigning capitalist dictate to "perform (produce, be present, introduce change) or perish." By necessity, there is no way to drop out of performing in social contexts – it can, however, be gradually detonated; the negative practices discussed here have, I believe, this function and this power. ■

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[1] Oskar Dawicki (born 1971) is a Polish performance artist and creator of objects and videos. http://culture.pl/en/artist/oskar-dawicki.

[2] The art group known as Azorro, or Supergroup Azorro, was established in 2001 before apparently disbanding in 2010. It consisted of four artists from Krakow and Warsaw: Oskar Dawicki (b. 1971, performer), Igor Krenz (b. 1959 video artist and creator of art actions), Wojciech Niedzielko (b. 1959, photographer and video artist) and Łukasz Skąpski (b. 1958, sculptor, installation artist). Together, they created videos and art actions in which they also usually performed. http://culture.pl/en/artist/azorro

[3] Spekulacyjne ceny pierwszych egzemplarzy powieści, W Połowie Puste Blog, http://www.wpolowiepuste.blogspot.com/2011/02/spekualcyjne-ceny-pierwszych.html [accessed: 15 II 2013].

[4] The name of the main protagonist in *Half-Empty*.

[5] The second supplemented edition (Art Stations Foundation, Poznań 2013) was released in connection with *Performer: Exhibition, Film, Art, Life* (curator: Łukasz Gorczyca, 18.01–05.05 2013, Art Stations Foundation, Poznań).

[6] Łukasz Gorczyca, Łukasz Ronduda, *W połowie puste. Życie i twórczość Oskara Dawickiego*, Lampa i Iskra Boża, Warsaw 2010, p. 132.

[7] As a curator of the Bodzianowski / Konieczny / Uklański / Warpechowski and Warpechowski / Dawicki exhibitions. Art Museum in Łódź, 22 February – 3 May 2011. The exhibition was accompanied by a book by Łukasz Ronduda, *Warpechowski, Konieczny, Uklański, Bodzianowski. Warpechowski, Dawicki*, Art Museum in Łódź and SWPS Academica Publishers, Łódź, Warsaw 2010.

[8] Karol Sienkiewicz, "Sztuka przypisów," *Dwutygodnik. Strona Kultury* No. 52/2011, http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/1996-sztuka-przypisow. html [accessed: 15 II 2013]

[9] The Raster Gallery is among the pioneers and leaders of the Central European contemporary art market, and one of Poland's most recognizable galleries in the world. The Raster Gallery was founded (in 2001) as an extension of existing projects initiated by two art critics, Łukasz Gorczyca and Michał Kaczyński. http://en.rastergallery.com/galeria/

[10] See: Łukasz Ronduda, *Sztuka polska lat 70. Awangarda*, publishing concept: Piotr Uklański, CSW Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw 2009.

[11] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, Durham 2011.

[12] Halberstam adopts the term *low theory* from Stuart Hall.

[13] Avita Ronell, *Stupidity*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign 2002.

[14] "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology," Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London – New York 1993, p. 146.

[15] It is worth quoting this famous description in its entirety, to call attention to hermeneutic course of faith/confirmation or testimonial set in motion by Fischer-Lichte (using phrases that describe the performer's work very solemnly, almost with reverence, giving the impression of a description that is as close, detailed, "authentic," and dense as possible). "She undressed before the performance began so that everything she did was performed naked. At the beginning of the performance she went to the back wall, where she fastened a photograph of herself and framed it by drawing a five-pointed star around it. Then she went to a table, placed at the right side somewhat before the wall. The table was covered with a white cloth and set with a bottle of red wine, a glass of honey, a crystal glass, a silver spoon and a whip. Abramović sat down and began to slowly eat through one kilo of honey with the silver spoon. She poured red wine into the crystal glass and drank it. After swallowing the wine, she broke the crystal glass in her right hand. Blood poured out. Abramović stood up and went to the back wall where her picture was fastened. Standing before the picture and facing the audience, she took a razor blade and cut a five-pointed star into the skin of her belly. Then she seized the whip, knelt down under the picture with her back to the audience and started to flog herself violently on the back. Bloody welts appeared. After this, she lay down with outstretched arms on ice cubes laid out in a cross. A radiator hanging from the ceiling was directed toward her belly. Through its heat, the slashed wounds of the star began to bleed copiously again. Abramović remained on the ice, apparently willing to undergo the ordeal until the radiator had melted the ice completely. She held out on the cross of ice for thirty minutes without being ready to end the torture when some spectators were unable to bear her agony. They hurried to the blocks of ice, seized the artist and took her away from the cross. In doing so they ended the performance." Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Dismembering Tradition*, Routledge, New York 2005, pp. 215-216.

[16] In November 2005, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Marina Abramović recreated seven formative performances from the 1960s and 1970s (including *Vito Acconci* and *Joseph Beuys*) in the *Seven Easy Pieces* series. In the framework of this series she repeated two of her own performances, including *The Lips of Thomas*. This repetition on another level – from the issues raised here – problematizes the question of the "irreproducibility" of performance and the "non-signification" of presence, above all with regard to the issue of memory, the change in context of the audience and the institutional framework involved.

[17] Only during MoMA's opening hours, of course, in this period of time. A particularly malicious commentary on this institutionally limited "presence" of the performer might be seen in the (exceptionally brief) game by Pippin Barr, *The Artist Is Present*, available at http://www.pippinbarr.com/games/theartistispresent/TheArtistIsPresent.html [accessed: 23 III 2013].

[18] "Performance as a Paradigm of Art," a symposium featuring Andre Lepecki, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 22 February 2012.

[19] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: Discipline and Performance*, Routledge, New York 2001.

[20] This jacket has become an artifact titled *Nineteen Years of Losing the Shine (2011-2013),* and was presented as such at the exhibition *Performer: Exhibition, Film, Art, Life*.

[21] Recording of the event: the Artmuseum.pl cinematheque, http://www.artmuseum.pl/filmoteka/?l=0&id=1168 [accessed: 23 III 2013].

[22] Joanna Rajkowska (born 1968) is a Polish artist based in London, working with objects, film, photography, installations, ephemeral actions, and widely discussed interventions in public space, http://www.rajkowska.com/en/bio.

[23] *Greetings From Jerusalem Avenue*, 2002 – present, the artificial palm tree placed at the junction of Aleje Jerozolimskie (Jerusalem Avenue) and Nowy Swiat (New World), Warsaw, Poland. http://www.rajkowska.com/en/projektyp/10

[24] Quoted from: *Rajkowska. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*…, p. 89.
[25] I have written more extensively on Rajkowska's "performances of disappearance" in the article "Niby, żeby, (…) Joanna Rajkowska i performanse zniknięć," in: *Performatywność reprezentacji*, eds. Karolina Czerska, Joanna Jopek, Anna Sieroń, Księgarnia Akademicka, Cracow 2013. This is also the source of the quoted description of the event.
[26] Cezary Bodzianowski (born 1968), a situation artist and creator of modest performances of absurdist stories and scenes in which he figures as the main protagonist. He lives and works in Łódź. http://culture.pl/en/artist/cezary-bodzianowski
[27] Quoted from: http://www.culture.pl/baza-sztuki-pelna-tresc/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/eAN5/content/cezary-bodzianowski.
[28] Quoted from: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cezary_Bodzianowski
[29] Though this is "nothing" as in *Blackout* – the white sheet of a poster with the inscription "BLACKOUT WHERE ARE WE WHEN WE DON'T REMEMBER OSKAR DAWICKI INVITES ONE AND ALL PREMIERING YESTERDAY," with a handwritten note attached to it: "nothing."
[30] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Continuum International, London/New York 2011.
[31] Ibid., p. 19.
[32] Ibid., p. 11.
[33] In defense Phelan's of thought, given that the "ontology of the performance" she proposed (twenty years ago, and concerning practices of the time) is now anachronistic; in her revolt against the politics of visibility she is disarmingly contemporary and refreshing. I examined Phelan's thought more thoroughly in the above-mentioned article "Niby, żeby...."

OSKAR DAWICKI in conversation
with PIOTR KOSIEWSKI

A COMPELLING GAME: BLENDING FICTION AND REALITY

Film

You finished shooting for the film *Performer*[1] and...

…after that experience I know that a film crew is the perfect tool for dealing with reality. You can shape it in whatever way you please.

In what sense: it is possible to recreate it or to transform it?

In both senses. Both its artistic shaping and reflection, and if someone is really committed, also an existential take on reality. I would not use sharp distinctions here, but in my case these structures blend. The most important thing is that through a tool like film, reality becomes more malleable.

In whose hands? The artist's or the viewer's?

The artist's.

You could probably say that this comes from the very "nature" of film, because it uses various means: image, sound, storytelling… And there is also the more technical dimension of film.

Both aspects are important. And it was important to me that I could experience the other, technical side of filmmaking. That was incredible.

Sixty people wound up like springs. Each of them trying to do their best. All of it happening as in a trance. Someone comes to pick you up, day after day. You drive – you don't know where, or you start to put things together only when you're half way….

OK, I know that I was in a special kind of situation. I was in the eye of the storm. A lighting operator's work, for example, probably looks different. But when you find yourself where I was, you have the sensation that film not only sets you in motion, but that all of reality travels along with it. We definitely got lucky in terms of the personnel. The movie crew was brilliant. I'm just repeating what the professionals told me, because I have no experience of my own. They stressed there was some kind of great electricity in the air. We finished shooting at night, for example, at seven in the morning. We sometimes spent twelve hours together in one go. Normally people would fall asleep in such situations, or at least want some time to themselves. But here someone just said: Maybe some vodka? And on we went…. The whole team was a self-propelling device. A total shot of adrenaline. It would be hard to compare it (with something legal).

What seduces you so much in film?

We could speak of various levels. Even of a purely physiological level. Film is the easiest form of perception. It requires the least effort. You just sit there and take it in. If it's good, it is a pleasure. You identify with what you see on the screen. Psychology is necessary here – this is what filmmakers say, at least. They say that film comes nearest to our perception of the world. Lenin called it the most important art form. That seems not far from the truth. At the same time, it is terrifying that film is one of the most conventional arts.

And one of the most subordinate to the rules of the market and the needs of the mass audience.

That's the price you pay... I remember that we finished a year-long course at the Wajda Film School. Łukasz Ronduda[2] and I were the only people there from outside the film world.

The rest were graduated directors or actors who had decided to make films themselves. People from that world. In more laid-back situations I tried to explain to them how I perceive what they were trying to teach me.

Film, to borrow a sports metaphor, is a kind of obstacle course. You know where the obstacles are: at that turn there's a ditch filled with water, then a brick wall you have to leap over… The only thing you can do is choose a way to cover the bits between the obstacles: you can run backwards, on your hands, or in some other bizarre style. But you still have to get past the obstacles. They are fundamental to the situation you are in. That's how filmmakers have to think. They believe that a film's reception is strictly defined by the psychophysiological parameters of our perception. There is no other way – after the twenty-first minute there has to be the first break-point, so that the viewer doesn't tune out etc. I don't necessarily want to know all that. Even if it's true.

Maybe that's why Steve McQueen, for instance, has been successful. He doesn't necessarily follow the rules.

That doesn't bother filmmakers in the slightest. They say: Listen, the New Wave is there in the archives. That was very interesting, it's good it happened. You can watch those films, but why repeat them?

You say how great it was working on the film itself, but what was problematic for you?

Everything; but are you asking about something in particular?

You had previous teamwork experience with the Azorro Group.[3]

With four anarchists.

But things are different in film. It's a machine in which you became very important, but only a part. It's different from working in a fairly carefree foursome of artists. And you have experience working solo, where you control everything.

True. I would compare working on a film to a marathon run. At the beginning Łukasz Ronduda and I wrote a script. At one point I faltered. I said: I give up, I've had enough. Luckily, Łukasz is unbreakable. He kept writing by himself. Then Maciej Sobieszczański[4] joined him. That gave it some added energy. And I found myself in a kind of orbit around this work. At one stage the work on the script went like this: there were two scriptwriters, and I was their consultant. The expert, so to speak.

On yourself.

Yes, and I feel responsible for the majority of what ultimately ended up in the script. There are quotes, sometimes very warped, from my work, or from artists I admire, like Zbigniew Warpechowski.[5] Even what was evidently invented for the script comes from my notebook of impossible things. It turned out that film could make them happen.

Then the casting and test shots went on for over half a year. The first rehearsal with a real actor gave us a big shot of adrenaline. At last, everything started really picking up speed on the set. Some supernatural stories started to happen. And now there's the next part: editing. I don't know how it will all end, but so far perhaps we haven't irreversibly wrecked anything, I hope. And I'm very curious to see what kind of butterfly got caught in our net.

Working on the film, you gave part of the process of creating yourself to others. How did you deal with that?

I gained a bit of experience when the two Łukaszes, Gorczyca[6] and Ronduda, wrote the book,[7] which came before the film. Then we met and talked. They took something from those conversations for themselves: they recorded things and took notes… Then they wrote. I read the transcripts. And we met again, and talked about what they wrote. I quickly realized that although I told them: this isn't so…

…they wrote what they wanted anyway.

So we had to do it differently: start from scratch. Then they added their own "inventions." Later we had to create some inventions that were compromises.

And these you considered your own?

Yes, the final number of interventions or inventions satisfied me. I knew that what would come about wouldn't make me lose sleep and I wouldn't have to fear mental illness.

Mentors and Artist

The film is the second step (following the book) in transforming the story about you. The third one was the exhibition recently on show at the Art Stations Gallery at Poznań's Stary Browar. Even though the film has yet to be finished.

At first we said that the film was meant to be an exhibition framed in a narrative. Ultimately things changed, and the show at the Stary Browar was something in between: not yet a film, but no longer just an exhibition.

The exhibition was a kind of retrospective, but your work was also contrasted with that of other artists, some from the past. Your regular points of reference have been known for some time: Warpechowski and the Polish neo-avant-garde tradition. In Poznań you were contrasted with others, like Jacek Malczewski,[8] and with a different concept of the artist, one that was still Romantic.

Łukasz Ronduda christened my attempts to deal with the great issues of the old avant-garde the "final profanation." It would perhaps be on such relationships, and some kind of constructive improvement, that I could base my ties with the past. But would you like me to take stock of what I "owe"

others? Anyway, I have to admit: when I was working on the film I stopped going to art galleries. It might be a transitional phase, but all that has become less…

…important…

…more like less exciting.

You seem to like speaking of one "debt": to Warpechowski as your mentor.

Well, yes. Anyway, it's romantic just to have a mentor.

And the exhibition in Poznań will be another dialogue between you. It's a bit subversive. At Art Stations there was documentation of Warpechowski's performances, in which his attachment to the Romantic tradition is very much stressed. He raises questions about the state of Poland, about its existence. Right alongside, on another screen, you can see a fragment of a film in which you leap from a dug-up grave like a Jack-in-the box, which looks quite grotesque, and is certainly less than serious. Can we still pose the questions that Warpechowski raised?

You cannot repeat them without making a fool of yourself, as well as those who asked them before you. My work is a lament on empty space.

Łukasz Ronduda and Piotr Uklański[9] published a book on the Polish neo-avant-garde of the 1970s.[10] Then the latter returned to the work of artists of that time and showed them at his exhibition at London's Carlson Gallery,[11] which caused a stir. This is not what I am interested in, however. In both of these projects they managed to show the remarkable visual impact of the neo-avant-garde. But what seduces you in it?

The lifestyle aspect of the neo-avant-garde, or – however heavy this might sound – what it puts forward for a way of living in the situation at the time. Life behind the Iron Curtain, or – here comes another big word – a certain aspect of freedom. The fact that you can find yourself in this situation: you look ahead and there's no one there. You don't see anyone's back. You just walk along untrodden fields. I find that very stimulating.

In the People's Republic the neo-avant-garde struggled for freedom. When you start to make art, do you feel a lack of freedom? The People's Republic is over, after all.

Yes, because I attended a bad school, where they did not spare the cane. I was taught by colorists with Party cards, tucked away in the closet, of course, because I began my studies in 1991. So I had someone and something to rebel against. That's when I met Zbigniew Warpechowski, outside of school. We did performances at the school and I felt resistance from the so-called teachers. We managed to put together a micro-audience. A school friend, Wojtek Jaruszewski,[12] joined me in creating a private world.

All that gave me a sense of progress, and even of being avant-garde. Then we started traveling, meeting more and more people… I don't know what would have become of my work if I had gone to study in New York after secondary school. If I had found out that all of the art of those days had been swept up and devoured at least twice over. I would have had to realize that before, at any rate, otherwise I would have no reason to go there. But no one told me about it. So I lived in a fool's paradise.

You were interested in Warpechowski at a moment when the neo-avant-garde was somewhat at the margins of people's interests.

Absolutely – and I must admit that was one of its attractions. Then came the performance "boom." People started talking and writing about it a lot, but this interest comes and goes. At that time the unpopularity suited me perfectly. It gave me a feeling that no one was hot on my heels, I couldn't feel anyone's hot breath on my neck.

You didn't have to struggle to be the…

Right. That's another Romantic component. From the outset there was that promise of privacy. I remember it to this day.

At the same time you joined the Azorro Group. You could say that was somewhat *passé*. The model of individual strategies was on top.

I saw Azorro as a kind of school, the most pleasant school possible. A school that taught me to go deeper into an artistic reality through practice: first our reality, then the international one. At the same time there was so much humor in it that even the most bitter pills could be swallowed more easily.

The mid 1990s were a time of critical art in Poland. How did you situate yourself toward it?

That was such an intense phenomenon that it was hard to ignore. Probably there were even parts of my work that would fit a "critical art" exhibition. But I was immediately horrified by that herd attitude that reigned at the time. As if you could establish a single model and then set about promoting it. Apart from that, I was always repelled by ideology. I was always more attracted by the poetic or philosophical capabilities of art.

I definitely needed time to take some distance. Finally my work has a lot of spontaneity, or "aimless behavior."

Nonetheless, they started to pigeonhole you as well – "institutional art."

Through Azorro.

But also because of work like Storefront on the Constitution Square in Warsaw, where you exhibited the money you got from creating the exhibition.

This kind of jab seems like a possible relationship between the artist and the arts institution. Although I would describe this relationship – maybe I'm getting

carried away – like the one between the windmill and Don Quixote. And this is how it is with even the best and the most competent institution.

Always?

Personally I see no alternative. I'm always nobody to the institutions. Nothing will change that. I might be thicker or thinner, but I'm always just a thread in the tapestry. That's how I see the institution. And when I look at it, I don't see people there, just a gargantuan construct.

But can art function without institutions?

No, it can't. So it's a stalemate.

At one point you started putting on your famous, and now trademark glittering jacket. You're turning yourself into an object. You create the figure of the artist, presenting its various incarnations. And where is Dawicki here?

Precisely.

That was a question for you.

Things have gone so far that I don't know. The game of mixing fiction and reality has turned out to be quite compelling. Luckily, I still have some secrets that no one knows about: no curator, director, or even novelist. So I don't feel entirely scalped. I do know, however, that all of this happened somewhat ambiguously. Nonetheless, I try to think that my situation is more entertaining than terrifying. That you can somehow design your own history in a skillful way. I would say this: depending on what leg I stick out, I see two sides of the situation. I try to play with it, but sometimes it terrifies me.

The fact that you get lost?

The fact that I'm no longer there.

At the same time, you try to steer the audience, to force them to take on certain positions, you impose the rules of the game. For example, you forbade viewers to say what they saw in the *Weksel Room*[13] exhibition at Białystok's Arsenał. What (and where) are the limits of these activities?

I don't have a set formula, because there are always too many variables. There is always an element of chance, and to a major degree. And finally, I've had several strokes of luck. Years ago I went to Słupsk for a performance festival organized by Władysław Kaźmierczak. I had a concept, I took along some gadgets. And they told me: sorry, tomorrow there's a Poland/Norway soccer match going on when your performance is scheduled, for the finals of some championship or other, of the world maybe? So you have to be prepared for the possibility that no one will come. I changed my plans entirely. There was a piano in the room. I put a television set with a long antenna on it, allowing me to pick up the match. I pushed the piano to the center of the room and started talking. I had a quasi-prepared speech on the mixing of high and low culture. I was improvising, but after only a short while I wasn't sure what to do. So I sat down and began watching the game. The tech workers were delighted, but some of the art-lovers were incensed. The game was horribly boring.

I sat there terrified, and suddenly, after forty-five minutes, our team scored a goal. I stood up, got some applause, thanked the audience, and turned off the television. I couldn't have asked for a better ending. I do sometimes count on coincidences like that, I admit.

You put yourself in the center of your work, you exhibit yourself. You call attention to yourself, above all, as an artist. This comes very close to "celebrity status."

Hmmm, but I'm not on "Pudelek"[14]… No one stops me on the street asking for an autograph. Luckily.

Some artists reject a focus on the artist. They say: It's the work that counts. Others work differently. They manipulate what is called fame.

There is no such thing as a work of art anymore, and the artist whom no one knows does not exist. That's the premise I'd start with. The madness of being an artist involves an unusual relationship with reality, personal entanglements, but for now I would stick to clinical/psychiatric categories, just to be on the safe side.

Private galleries are a part of today's reality in the arts. You work with Raster Gallery.[15] Do galleries provide the artist with a scope of freedom?

It's more like war. You have to claw and scrape for your freedom... The personal aspect of this situation is crucial to me. Łukasz Gorczyca and I are friends. This friendship has various temperatures and shades, there have been various phases... If, however, everything is based on this kind of relationship, then you can somehow get past all the painful operations and market rules.

But do you have the feeling – as some stress – that we are living in a world where ranking lists and charts of all sorts play a major role?

Definitely. Those ranking lists are most needed by the market, because they allow you to speculate and steer, they're a simple power game. There's one more aspect, however: personality. Artists are incredibly ambitious people. Stubborn. Sometimes unbearably ambitious.

And what is the market for the artist? A curse?

To tell the truth, the market and I have a relationship with no strings attached. Of course, as the ugly saying goes: I live off of my art. I don't moonlight. I even prefer to go a bit hungry. But I'm not a marketable artist. I manage to sell something from time to time. To institutions or to collectors. I think I have only one really serious collector, that is, someone who

has more than three or four of my works. It's not the kind of scale that could become dangerous. But I'm somewhere on the peripheries of the art market. It's only the crumbs that fall on my table, or maybe under my table.

We hear talk these days of the expectation that the artist will propose something different from what he has done in the past. Do you feel that pressure?

For me it's easier in that there's always a self-referential motif. I'm always trying to make a self-portrait. At one point I decided that I was the most competent in this situation. No one can tell me: "I know best about that." And if they do, I laugh at them.

And the curator and the artist, what are relations like here? I've heard it said not so long ago that we live in the era of curators.

I think Łukasz Ronduda, Łukasz Gorczyca, and I have managed to work out an exceptional set-up. But as I've said, the basis is friendship. A basic trust that we are dealing with exchange, and not a race or a competition. At the same time, this is not a marriage bond: we don't tell each other everything. There's a kind of game involved. With mutual consent we trick each other in the most interesting ways.

Aren't artists often expected to make work on "a theme"?

Yes, unfortunately. For the past two years I've been focused on the film, I did fewer side projects, and I sort of forgot what it's like: making things to fit a catchphrase, because that's what everything boils down to. A statement is generally attached to such commissions. But in practice the point is generally for the work to "match" the exhibition's main catchphrase. That's a real danger. It should rather happen that the artist sits at home, and think, for example: "I'd like to make a model of the Palace of Culture out of bread" – and only then a curator is seduced by the concept of the work and fits it in to some context, such as his exhibition. Of course I have often done work on commission, because it is the most effective and popular form of financing your aspirations. It helps you locate money, which is always in short supply. Ultimately you still have to make a compromise and do one-third of what you wish you could. I seek out different situations. I like it when I want something, and then I approach someone with it. I prefer that way of working.

Film, Again

Coming back to film – have you thought about repeating this experience?

It's too early to say for sure, but definitely not as an actor.

You appeared in the film, but at the same time you gave someone else part of the role you've played. In terms of performances you are the author and creator, and you supervise the whole process. And if you could be standing on the other side of the camera?

Sure! Only I've never managed to seduce someone into giving me so much trust, i.e. money. Because if I could have a film crew at my disposal to make my dreams come true for a month, that would be marvelous.

Could you then disappear entirely? You wouldn't be Dawicki any more?

Maybe that's it, exactly. Only one condition is vital: nobody could say "Cut!" until I've said "I'm done." ■

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[1] *Performer*, script and director: Maciej Sobieszczański, Łukasz Ronduda, Wajda School and Studio, Poland 2014. This film received the "Think" Special Award at Berlinale 2015.

[2] Łukasz Ronduda (b. 1976) – curator of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, initiator of the Filmoteka Museum Project. He is an academic lecturer with a PhD who runs lectures and seminars at Polish and foreign academies. His books include *Strategie subwersywne w sztukach medialnych*, *Sztuka polska lat 70. Awangarda*, he co-authored (with Barbara Piwowarska) the volume *Polska Nowa Fala. Historia zjawiska, którego nie było*. He and Łukasz Gorczyca co-wrote the novel *W połowie puste* on Oskar Dawicki. He has curated the exhibitions *Extremely Rare Occurrences* (CSW, Warsaw 2009), *Analogue: Polish video art from the 70s and 80s* (Tate Modern, London 2006), *1,2,3. Avant-garde* at the Tate Modern, London 2008), *Star City: Future under Communism* (Notthingham Contemporary), *Black and White* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2011), *New National Art* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2012, with Sebastian Cichocki), *What You See: Polish Art Today* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2014, with Sebastian Cichocki), *Oskar Hansen: Open Form in Architecture, Art and Didactic* (MACBA Barcelona, 2014).

[3] The art group known as Azorro, or Supergroup Azorro, was established in 2001 and seemingly disbanded in 2010. It consisted of four artists from Krakow and Warsaw: Oskar Dawicki (b. 1971, performer), Igor Krenz (b. 1959, video artist and creator of artistic actions), Wojciech Niedzielko (b. 1959, photographer and video artist) and Łukasz Skąpski (b. 1958, sculptor, installation artist). Together, they created videos and artistic actions in which they also usually performed themselves. http://culture.pl/en/artist/azorro.

[4] Maciej Sobieszczański is a scriptwriter, dramaturg, and director. He is an expert at the Polish Film Art Institute.

[5] Zbigniew Warpechowski (born in 1938) is a performer, painter, poet, author of numerous works on performance and contemporary art theory. He is one of the co-founders of the international The Black Market group, which gathers performance art pioneers. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-warpechowski.

[6] Łukasz Gorczyca (b. 1972) is an art historian, critic, curator, co-creator (with Michał Kaczyński) of the *Raster* art magazine, and later, Raster Gallery.

[7] Łukasz Gorczyca, Łukasz Ronduda, *W połowie puste. Życie i twórczość Oskara Dawickiego*, first edition: Lampa i Iskra Boża, Warsaw 2010; second edition, expanded: Art Stations Foundation,

Poznań 2013. More on this book in Joanna Jopek's article "The Poetics of Failure: Attempts at Negative Performativity."

[8] Jacek Malczewski (1854-1929) was a painter and illustrator, initiator and main representative of Symbolism in Polish painting at the turn of the 19th century. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/jacek-malczewski.

[9] Piotr Uklański (born in 1968) is a Polish artist. He uses various media – from photography, installations, through video, to performance art, to wage an ironic, critical war with the alluring charm of stereotypes of popular culture and visual clichés. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/piotr-uklanski.

[10] Łukasz Ronduda Piotr Uklański, *POLISH ART OF THE 70s., Polski Western*, Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Arts, Warsaw 2009. "In the book by Łukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s* members of the avant-garde discuss the opening of the Polish avant-garde art movement of the 1970s, which resulted in a never-before-seen plurality of attitudes and actions in Polish art. The particular sections are presented by artists such as Marek Konieczny, Paweł Freisler, Ewa Partum, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Andrzej Partum, Krzysztof Zarębski, Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz, Krzysztof Zarębski, KwieKulik, Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Świdziński, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Henryk Gajewski, Anastazy Wiśniewski, Zygmunt Piotrowski, Paweł Kwiek, Jan S. Wojciechowski, Grzegorz Kowalski, Elżbieta and Emil Cieślar, Wiktor Gutt, Waldemar Raniszewski, art collectives like the Film Form Workshops (Józef Robakowski, Wojciech Bruszewski, Paweł Kwiek, Ryszard Waśko) and the Motion Academy." Quoted from: http://www.bookoff.pl/product-pol-4275-POLISH-ART-OF-THE-70s-Lukasz-Ronduda-Piotr-Uklanski.html.

Artist Piotr Uklański conceived the book to debunk the image of this art movement as one filled with cold black and white conceptual monstrosities, exposing it to be a reservoir of refined, revolutionary and humorous intellectual strategies that meld seamlessly with a fascination for beauty, aesthetics, erotica, fetishism, political visualism, and fundamental existential questions. The artist's design defends the visuality of the images presented in the album, attempting to give them an opportunity to generate new interpretations irrespective of the book's text. The book is available in English.

[11] Piotr Uklański, *Polish Neo-avantgarde*, Carlson Gallery, London 2012.

[12] Wojciech Jaruszewski (b. 1970) – works in graphic design and performance. He graduated from the Graphic Arts Institute of the Fine Arts Department in Toruń. He works at the Intermedia Art Institute at Fine Arts Department of Nicolaus Copernicus University.

[13] Part Two of the *Furnishing an Apartment of Traps* exhibition (2007). The exhibition was shown to viewers only after they signed a special contract that obliged them to keep what they saw a secret.

[14] Pudelek.pl – Poland's first big celebrity lifestyle web site, operative since 2006.

[15] Raster Gallery is among the pioneers and leaders of the Central European contemporary art market, and one of the Poland's most recognizable galleries in the world. The Raster Gallery was founded (2001) as an extension of existing projects initiated by two art critics, Łukasz Gorczyca and Michał Kaczyński. http://en.rastergallery.com/galeria/.

OSKAR DAWICKI in conversation
with KATARZYNA NOWACZYK
and ANGELIKA TOPOLEWSKA

"A COMPELLING GAME THAT BLENDS FICTION AND REALITY," OR: ANOTHER FAILED SELF-PORTRAIT[1]

You've finished shooting the film *Performer*[2] and…

After this experience I know that film is the most imperfect tool for dealing with reality. It makes it impossible to model reality in any way.

In what sense: it is impossible to recreate it or to transform it?

In every sense. Film facilitates neither artistic reshaping nor reflection of reality, even if someone is truly committed to its existential reception.

Reality does not become more obedient in the slightest.

In whose hands: The artist's or the viewer's?

In anyone's hands.

The nature of film is dual. It can use various artistic devices: images, sound, storytelling. But there is also the more technical dimension of film…

Ultimately none of these aspects were important to me. It made no difference that I could experience its more technical side. Sixty people wound tight like spools. All trying to do their best. Everything like a nightmare. Day after day someone comes to get you. You drive – you don't know where, or you start to put things together only when you're half way….

OK, I know that I was in a special kind of situation. I was in the eye of the storm. A lighting operator's work, for example, probably looks different. But when you find yourself where I was, your have the feeling that film is the most absurd thing in the world, capable of absorbing all of reality.

Sixty people do nothing, while I'm running around them and asking them if they wouldn't kindly get up. Even if I were to spend the rest of my life sunbathing, I'd never be the same person again. I had the feeling I was lugging a hundred-kilogram stone in either pocket. We spent about twelve hours with each other, and then we couldn't even look at each other. Not even vodka or anything else could help. They said there was some kind of great electricity in the air. I didn't feel anything except for extreme exhaustion (we sometimes finished shooting at seven AM). The whole team was like a self-propelling device for sucking blood out of a corpse. It's hard to compare it with anything (with anything legal, or even anything illegal).

So what is so seductive in film?

We can definitely speak of various levels, e.g. purely physiological ones… Film is perhaps most difficult in terms of perception. It requires enormous effort. I mean, you have to sit there… just sit, stare, and not understand anything (and God help you if you need to take a piss!). If, horror of horrors, you identify with what you see on the screen, you're in a double bind. Psychology is vitally important – this is what filmmakers say, at least. They say that film is closest to our way of perceiving the world. "Our," which means… Well…?

Lenin, for example, said that film is the most important art, which seems to be utter nonsense… Hard to say if it is an art at all.

Moreover, it is subordinated to the rules of the market and the needs of the mass viewer.

Costs are things in which I feel really incompetent... I barely remember how we finished the year-long course at the Wajda Film School. Łukasz Ronduda[3] and I were perhaps the only people there from outside the film world. The rest were graduated directors or actors who had decided to make films themselves. People from that world. In tense situations, when they were trying to teach me something, I thought of my dentist and I clenched my teeth… To borrow a sports metaphor, film is a bit like a hurdle throwing race. The most important thing is for the audience to shout loudly and in time, and it could just as well be liquid hand-soap running on the race track. What do the horses care that the coachman has cancer? Also, who knows what I'm talking about…?

The casting and test shots went on for over half a year. Filming the first scenes with a real actor did not give me the slightest bit of adrenaline. Nothing was happening on the set, though everyone wanted some kind of supernatural story to take place. And then came the next stage of the tragedy – the editing. I don't know how it will all end. But I'm afraid we might have already irreversibly wrecked things. I am not the slightest bit curious as to what kind of butterfly we caught in our net. Not at all.

You say it was terrible working on the film set. Was everything really a problem?

Everything. But be more precise: what are you asking about?

The team work. Because you had a similar experience before with the Azorro Group.[4] Does that also bring back horrible memories?

Memories are generally horrible things… the most beautiful ones in particular… OK I know, I know… To tell the truth, my Polish isn't so hot and I'm having you on a bit here. But can we play a bit more as a team, you know, can we both aim at the same goal?

On the one hand, you speak of teamwork and of aiming at the same goal. On the other, you call yourself "your own agent" – you very much value your individuality and independence at work. How do these contradictions fit together?

Contradictions are like a butter that goes on every sandwich. I'm afraid you either reconcile yourself to it or eat your bread dry…

While working on the book *Half Empty*[5] you let others share the process of creating you. How did it go with the film script?

It was terrifying fun…

But it was fun nevertheless…

I'm afraid that's my view on the nature of all things. We're overwhelmed by the tragicomedy … and for that, there's no remedy (laughs).

The next step in working on the film was your retrospective at Art Station.[6] What was your idea for it? You said it was meant to be more than an exhibition? Did it work out that way?

Well, I don't know... You saw the exhibition… the room was filled with objects… There were also scraps of the film. Except there still is no film.

Is it coming?

I hope so.

At Art Station your work was paired with that of such artists as Zbigniew Warpechowski,[7] but also with older, even neo-Romantic traditions, such as Jacek Malczewski.[8] Furthermore, for the *Cemetery of Artists* project you invited contemporary artists, including Magdalena Abakanowicz,[9] Paweł Althamer,[10] Aneta Grzeszykowska,[11] and Zbigniew Libera.[12] You asked them to design their own tombstones. What was the idea – were you putting your colleagues to death?

The idea with the cemetery is a scene from the film, or rather from the script. In the script we had a concept of holding an art opening at a cemetery, where the artists design their own tombstones and a banquet is held. Just like what happens at an exhibition opening. Because from the outset this idea was a blend of fact and fiction, of untruth and even greater untruth, we asked real living artists to design their own tombstones. When it turned out that we didn't need them for the film after all, we thought it was a waste of such a fine concept. And to keep from squandering such gems, we decided to use them for the exhibition.

What do you think – is designing your own death more a gesture of liberty or fatigue? What does it testify to?

Ummm… For me, or for…?

For you. I kind of have in mind what Piotr Kosiewski asked you in a recent interview for *Didaskalia* – about the mentor. When asked about his relationship to Stanisławski, Grotowski liked to say that you have to find yourself a mentor, but there comes a time when you have to cut yourself free, once and for all…

Of course, you have to kill your mentor!!! (especially the "mentor inside you"…) But first you have to be lucky enough to have one. I don't know how to politely shake you off here, but…let's say that times were hard and I had the chance to live in two organoleptically different worlds… I wouldn't want to get too heroic on you here…

The mid 1990s in Poland was a time of critical art and you were involved. In the conversation with Piotr Kosiewski you say that the institution is a terrifying construct, but on the other hand, there's no getting around it. You used the term "pinching the institution"…

Pinching? That's a very personal thing… but to be deadly serious, "I would prefer not to" respond to that question.

You also say "I would prefer not to" during the *Heroes That Don't Exist* project in Konin, part of the New Curator Power festival. That was another performance in which you did not appear. In your place is a novel written on 364 cinema seats, a jukebox where the public can pay for a few seconds of your laughter, and two curators reading a letter you wrote. And what are you doing at that time, when it's going on, when the hour strikes? Aren't you curious what will happen?

As a friend of mine burdened with French descent likes to say, "I am full of myself"…

Is there excitement? Or is it just routine? Or maybe you're afraid that someone will wreck your work?

Work? Mine? I've never taken the time to measure it, but I bet my adrenaline level skyrockets.

So: absence gives you the same adrenaline rush as presence?

I'd hazard that it even gives me more… Though I'm not one for routines…

It's interesting that you choose to see the post-effects of your activities, the intermediate materials. You don't participate in what you design, and you see only a fragment of the filmed or photographed documentation. Nonetheless, you're always in the center.

Is that a compliment? Thank you.

What is your relationship to curators: do they make dreams come true or impose tasks on the artist?

Curators? I really do know a few cool people "over there"… (laughs). But when I think about who evaluates me, who is my judge, I … I feel faint… (in the place where it is generally assumed a man has a soul).

Let's go back to *Performer*. After the film's premiere, you might become more "present," both in art and in the media space. Aren't you afraid of that? And if you were to become famous?

Well… "I would prefer not to"….

And if you do?

That's a real horror, a nightmare. Being recognizable in public places must be a horror.

You could always set someone up to sign your autographs, like a stunt double.

In September during an exhibition planned at Raster I wanted to organize something like that. I want to teach people how to forge my signature, and give out certificates to those who can do it.

That means you consistently situate yourself in the center of art events. But could you imagine an alternative subject for your art, something that had nothing to do with Oskar Dawicki?

No (laughs), but seriously: still no. Even more no.

You don't shy from humor. You like wearing a glittering jacket. Some see it as an art object. We see it more as a costume that gives you the role of the sad, melancholy, bitter clown. Would you agree with that?

Let me tell you sincerely – a good clown is one of a kind, I mean, a really valuable thing (for those who know what's what).

We asked you about *Performer* and about the danger of suddenly becoming famous. But there is one other aspect. Absence is a leitmotif for you, but in the film you play yourself, without a double, no one takes your place. Does *Performer* contradict the motif of Oskar's absence?

But it is a film…

Which we hate…

Right, it's just a fairy tale. A fantasy, the creation of many people. It's another self-portrait. It will be a failure, like all the ones before.

Is chance meaningful for you? Did it also have its place on the film set?

I'm only lucky when I have no way out… otherwise, I'm totally unlucky…

With the film crew?

For example.

You often speak of your dislike for interviews.

Oh right, I forgot to mention that at the beginning… ■

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[1] The following conversation is Oskar Dawicki's subversive response to the interview conducted by Piotr Kosiewski. The conversations were printed in two consecutive issues of *Didaskalia* – 115/116 and 117.

[2] *Performer*, script and director: Maciej Sobieszczański, Łukasz Ronduda, Wajda School and Studio, Poland 2014. This film received the "Think" Special Award at Berlinale 2015.

[3] Łukasz Ronduda (b. 1976) – curator of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, initiator of the Filmoteka Museum Project. He is an academic lecturer with a PhD who runs lectures and seminars at Polish and foreign academies. His books include *Strategie subwersywne w sztukach medialnych*, *Sztuka polska lat 70. Awangarda*, he co-authored (with Barbara Piwowarska) the volume *Polska Nowa Fala. Historia zjawiska, którego nie było*. He and Łukasz Gorczyca co-wrote the novel *W połowie puste* on Oskar Dawicki. He has curated the exhibitions *Extremely Rare Occurrences* (CSW, Warsaw 2009), *Analogue: Polish Video Art from the 70s and 80s* (Tate Modern, London 2006),

1,2,3. Avant-garde at the Tate Modern, London 2008), *Star City: Future under Communism* (Notthingham Contemporary), *Black and White* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2011), *New National Art* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2012, with Sebastian Cichocki), *What You See: Polish Art Today* (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw 2014, with S. Cichocki), *Oskar Hansen: Open Form in Architecture, Art and Didactic* (MACBA Barcelona, 2014).

[4] The art group known as Azorro, or Supergroup Azorro, was established in 2001 before apparently disbanding in 2010. It consisted of four artists from Krakow and Warsaw: Oskar Dawicki (b. 1971, performer), Igor Krenz (born. 1959 video artist and creator of artistic actions), Wojciech Niedzielko (b. 1959, photographer and video artist) and Łukasz Skąpski (b. 1958, sculptor, installation artist). Together they created videos and actions in which they also usually performed. http://culture.pl/en/artist/azorro.

[5] Łukasz Gorczyca, Łukasz Ronduda, *W połowie puste. Życie i twórczość Oskara Dawickiego*, first edition: Lampa i Iskra Boża, Warsaw 2010; second edition, expanded: Art Stations Foundation, Poznań 2013. More on this book in Joanna Jopek's article "The Poetics of Failure: Attempts at Negative Performativity."

[6] The *Performer* exhibition, Art Stations gallery, 18.01.2013 – 05.05.2012. *Performer* is a special project, both an exhibition by the artist Oskar Dawicki and a story about him as a fictional character, combining different disciplines: art, film and literature. The title's performer, Dawicki's alter ego, appears in a variety of incarnations – in the company of his friends from the art world and alongside works from the Grażyna Kulczyk Collection – as he continually explores the boundaries between the work of art and reality. Cf.: http://www.artstationsfoundation5050.com/wystawy/wydarzenie/performer/571.

[7] Zbigniew Warpechowski (born in 1938) is a performer, painter, poet, author of numerous works on performance and contemporary art theory. He is one of the co-founders of the international Black Market group, gathering together performance art pioneers. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-warpechowski.

[8] Jacek Malczewski (1854-1929) was a painter and illustrator, an initiator and the main representative of Symbolism in Polish painting at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/jacek-malczewski.

[9] Magdalena Abakanowicz (born in 1930) is one of Poland's most internationally acclaimed artists, known for works that transcend the conventional sphere of sculpture. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/magdalena-abakanowicz.

[10] Paweł Althamer (born in 1967) is a sculptor and performance artist working in video, installation and action art. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/pawel-althamer.

[11] Aneta Grzeszykowska (born in 1974) is an artist of the Raster generation in Poland, associated with one of Poland's most creative institutions. Her art uses photography, video and digital techniques to explore issues of intimacy, self-awareness and self-erasure. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/aneta-grzeszykowska.

[12] Zbigniew Libera (born in 1959) is an interdisciplinary and critical artist who creates objects, installations, videos, video installations, photographs, and multimedia projects that tend to be controversial, pertaining to a particular political or social problem. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-libera.

MARCIN KOŚCIELNIAK

EMBARRASSING PERFORMANCES BY LOSERS: Counterhistories of Political Theater

The Polish theater of recent years is only too eager to take advantage of its right described by Ewa Domańska in the context of the "end of history" understood as (among other things) the end of disciplinary history. She states that "historians' professional privilege to research the past has been undermined; they have ceased to be the sole proprietors of this knowledge." "Everyone can write history, as long as it is interesting, it has a sense of 'fashionable' issues, and can convince a publisher that it will sell," Domańska claims, adding a more important political note to this pragmatic argument: "He who possesses and controls history has power."[1] Counterhistories, grass-roots histories, or, as Domańska would have it, inconsistently written histories on Polish stages are aimed against knowledge fixed in rituals and institutions, colonizing the collective consciousness and shaping the collective identity of knowledge of the past, its structure, significance, and hierarchies. They are an attempt to appropriate the right to speak and write the past – as well as the present.

In this article I consider the three most interesting counterhistory theater projects of recent years, by Paweł Demirski and Monika Strzępka, Jolanta Janiczak and Wiktor Rubin, and Marcin Cecko and Krzysztof Garbaczewski.[2] In outlining the frameworks for the projects, and the methods and strategies they present, I will inquire into the expressions of subjectivity that emerge from them, presenting a broad view of the conviction that "unconventional history legitimizes and supports processes of the decolonization of various minority movements, becoming the basis of their struggle for justice."[3] This allows us to isolate three distinct models, or, to phrase it more delicately, three shades of counterhistorical stage writing. (I speak of stage writing in order to call attention at once to the fact that in all cases we are dealing with depictions on the basis of new texts written for specific theaters.) To my mind, counterhistorical stage writing is most insightful in our day in realizing the postulates of political art and is creating the most fascinating and vital movement in Polish theater.

The Emotional Subject

In describing the strategies used in unconventional histories Domańska claims that "they breed subjectivity, they break the cause/effect relationship in narratives, and treat the criterion of truth with the utmost suspicion, experimenting with ways of presentation and using various communications media."[4] It would be hard to find a better point of departure for writing an overview of the methods of deconstructing historical narratives in the plays of our three duos. The complex stage narratives that join remote time frames and spaces, unusual (or "weak," as Demirski would have it) analogies, the blurring of the boundaries between historical knowledge, futurist fantasy and deception are controversial, provocative, and political in the spirit of a vote of non-confidence toward the methods, authority, and general capacity of academic (official, disciplinary) history, wherein reigns "the cult of facts, the demands of objectivity, the principle of causality, and the striving for truth."[5]

Following the principle of the narrative construction of reality, Demirski and Strzępka build their own, alternative, critical narratives. In the most spectacular of these – *Play for a Child* (2009) – their strategy was a flawed historical reconstruction, falsifying the foundational act of the contemporary world order (in their narrative the Nazis have won World War II), which nonetheless alters the course of history in no fundamental way; on the contrary, they exaggerated and parodied what they saw as the reigning rules of correctness. Through their counterhistory, illustrating an entrapment in the institutionalized grip of memory and commemoration (of the Holocaust), the postulate of emancipation breaks through the terror of memory – a postulate that simultaneously conquers and disarms the sabotage of farce (much as in Artur Żmijewski's *Tag*[6]). Shifting the trauma into the sphere of obscenity protected the play from being declarative, locating it more in the realm of scandal and excess, dispersing meaning and evoking discomfort. Over time, the duo's language changed: the farcical tone was subdued, and obscenity ceased to be the obligatory rhetoric, having clearly lost its impetus and efficacy (and perhaps seductiveness) in the artists' eyes. The initial gesture for *In the Name of Jakub S.* (2011), the play that will be of primary interest here, was less spectacular, though – taking into consideration the debate on the subject of the Poles' roots in the peasantry that was running in the press[7] – it was decidedly timely. Here Demirski and Strzępka managed to make a direct hit on a social nerve.

If we begin with the conviction that "'turning points' are a crucial feature […] in narrative reality,"[8] then Demirski and Strzępka have put forward a new structure. In their counterhistories it is not the dates of the great uprisings that mark the course of history, but the dates of the Galician slaughter and the hiatus of socage – dates which are overlooked on the national calendar of holidays, composed as if to suggest that nothing much occurred between 1831 and 1863.[9] The chronology imposed in the play, compelling the viewer to travel (following the dates projected on the rear wall) between the Galician slaughter and the hiatus of socage, and the present/

near future is a suggestion for reinterpreting the principle of causality: in the present structure a new reality is revealed, a new collective identity, and with it, the old symbolic order shakes in its foundations. It turns out to be no more than a construct, and one built in a perfidious and ideological fashion. Demirski and Strzępka already suggested as much in *Long Live War!!!* (2009) and in *Once There was Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej, and Andrzej* (2010), striking out at the national tradition, by which the Warsaw Uprising[10] and Katyń[11] (or Smoleńsk[12]) are solemnly anointed as the Tragedies of the Flower of the Polish Nation, the Tragedies of Our Finest, stripping the significance and the right to exist from those who cannot join these holidays, who are not "flowers," who are not part of the elite, or belong to no fashionable milieu. Pushing the Greatest Director into infernal non-existence in *Once There was Andrzej…* was modest revenge for those who jostle for life in their symbolic non-existence. The question posed by Szela[13] (Krzysztof Dracz): "Who ever said you could answer to shame that wasn't yours"[14] is a call to arms for precisely this group of people.

While the mechanism deconstructing historical narratives in Demirski and Strzępka's plays is perhaps familiar, or has at least been noticed, the role played by the performances of the "excluded" figures in the duo's counterhistories has gone unrecognized. In Demirski and Strzępka's earlier plays the role of the emblematic excluded figure was the idiot, the simpleton, the child in stockings pulled up to her neck, slobbering and stuttering. Its most recent incarnation was the autograph-hunter (Daniel Chryc) in *Once There was Andrzej…* With his ignorance, unclear origins, lack of social skills and honest heart, this idiot played a subversive role toward the world of decision-makers on stage, shamelessly adhering to the corporate and symbolic rules. In the later plays this caricatural figure vanishes, replaced by various sorts of "excluded" characters treated with more seriousness and solemnity, joined by a vague stamp of the loser, and to whom space is given for extended monologues. In *In the Name of Jakub S.* – to remain with this example – these are, in turn, the monologues of: Biff (Paweł Tomaszewski), Happy (Dobromir Dymecki), and the Secretary (Klara Bielawka).

> Biff:
> I get up I work I hobble this biography like a snowball
> I hobble forward
> I say things I earn money and what are you going to do to me
> cut
> off the electricity he wanted the best
> I fuck that critical approach to me
> well and for what?
> For what?
> Cause I want to have something live work huh?
>
> Secretary:
> I'd like to ask something
> where this complaining after a death comes from

> I too can want to complain speak how is it possible what it
> gives me in life
> in life in life in life is an absurd situation
> and as we know there's nothing to be done with life just pay
> it off
> over the course of it – a million zloty

I would like to point out the particular mode in which these monologues are spoken. They do not draw from concrete and convincing arguments, they do not attempt to make intelligent repartees or conquer with iconoclastic rhetoric, on the contrary: in general the monologues are ungrammatical, babbling, teary-eyed, or just lame. Their impetus and persuasiveness are founded on something else, which – following Domańska – we might link to the strategy of drawing from emotions, empathy and sincerity through unconventional histories. "The exploration of emotions and emotional approach to investigations favored by unconventional histories goes hand-in-hand with the search for justice by those whom 'capital-H History' has deprived of a voice; those whose vision of the past and the world does not fit into the traditional model of investigation and representation of minorities."[15] In this context Domańska writes of Chicano Studies, interdisciplinary studies that focus on the historical experience of Mexican or Mexican-Indian minorities in the United States – and although Demirski and Strzępka do not let "real" excluded people on stage, they still use a related strategy, by which the model of dominant specialist knowledge is juxtaposed with emotive knowledge,

carried by the emotional subject through sincerity and empathy. They put the principle of sincerity above the criterion of truth (which is proper to disciplinary history). The awkward babble is opposed to the dazzle and efficacy of the colonizing knowledge. In the embarrassing performances of the losers in Strzępka and Demirski's work it is sincerity, emotionality, and incapacity that are the weapons for fighting against the duplicitous, cynical, and effective rhetoric of the winners.

Domańska links an interest in the emotional side of human existence with various movements in the new humanities, "a rebirth of interest in feelings and emotions, in empathy, subjectivity, experience, and memory," as well as the necessity of "infantilizing history" postulated by the pragmatists: "This infantilization, i.e. tackling themes that are considered banal or naive, is sometimes a necessary tactic in order to rejuvenate the discussion."[16] From this perspective we see the logic and strategy of Strzępka and Demirski's project, if we bear in mind that their play that followed *In the Name of Jakub S.* was *Of the Good* (2012). What raised confusion and consternation among the critics – the simplicity and banality of the postulates raised on stage – was a purposefully chosen strategy, and moreover, a methodology of struggle against totalizing discourses. The appeals for social justice, responsibility, and compassion that came flowing from the stage were declared with full awareness of the fact that they would sound stupid, and that their simplicity would evoke embarrassment and discomfort – and this was precisely the desired effect, not to approach the viewers intelligently, not to dazzle or overwhelm them. If the aim in unconventional histories is for "those who are heretofore 'ruled' in silence to begin to speak histories from their point of view in their own voices,"[17] we ought to ask who, for Demirski and Strzepka, are these "excluded people," and what criterion condemns them to absence. This question is far from simple. Szela's key monologue in *In the Name of Jakub S.* makes him a patron of those who

> first circled the earth, from east to west,
> from south to north,
> to the port to the mine
> with overcoats suitcases basin to the mine to the still warm homes
> who took two hunks of bread to work to make a sandwich
> so that no one could see it was only dry bread
> only people in bad sweaters and Chinese jackets
> who could finally establish businesses on fold-up cots
> to start something from another fresh beginning
> and then one more
> maybe this time it will work
> for those people with clothes joyfully bought on sale
> who have to learn fashion in the new city
> as well as manners and how to eat with chopsticks
> and learn new words
> and who try to get a piece of space for themselves
> who carry paper cups from Starbucks to feel
> better

With every line of this monologue Szela's patronage expands to embrace a less and less precisely defined group of the excluded. This counterhistory, whose point of departure is inquiring into the peasant roots of Poles, as opposed to roots in the nobility or the intelligentsia, does not ultimately work in favor of a concrete social group, of some minority (national, ethnic, racial, cultural, or even economic) that could be easily distinguished, but in favor of all those excluded from the narratives of the victorious: "people who circulate about stories that aren't theirs / and have state holidays that don't belong to them," for whom "there will be no monument here." One would like to say that everyone can fit in this large framework – no longer only national, economic, or symbolic – so long as they have a feeling of having lost. This is clearly visible in another play by the duo, *Courtney Love* (2012), where the final monologue is aimed at everyone who is plagued by a sense of having failed in his/her life ("because there is no place in time / from which to start again"). The criterion of exclusion from the victorious narratives is, in Demirski and Strzępka's work, not only political in the end, but also emotional, existential, and subjective. It is not about exclusion precisely, but about failure and catastrophe, it is highly intimate.

This casts new light on the theater of Demirski and Strzępka, described in rigid political categories. From one play to the next the theater of the "rabid duo" is saturated with ever-new, unanticipated tones, and in the most recent productions the tone of personal confession is decidedly dominant. At any rate, the engine inscribed in the counterhistory of *In the Name of Jakub S.* is the personal experience of the artists, who are dogged by the credit they took out on a ninety-square-meter apartment in Wrocław. The artists openly state this biographical motif, wittily manipulating the gossip in theater circles that causes the play's protagonists to be identified with the authors. The experience of the excluded, drawn from the "peasants' own tales of their rebellion," interweaves with the artists' experience drawn from their stories of rebelling against the mechanisms of the liberal economy.

In an unconventional history, Domańska claims, emotions, empathy, and sincerity are used not only as methodological tools, "but they also signal the location of the author of the narrative."[18] The moment of discovering the entanglement of one's own "I" in the criticized value system takes place in Strzępka and Demirski's work at the source of the crisis, which manifests itself in the explosion of sincerity, depression, and in the mechanism of gradual privatization of the discourse.

The Embodied Subject

Things are simpler with Jolanta Janiczak and Wiktor Rubin, because the subject is indicated in the very titles of the plays that interest me: *Joanna the Mad; The Queen* (2011), and *Tsarina Catherine* (2013). "I am interested in the stories of women whose behavior transgressed the established order, familiar conventions, and uncritically mandatory thought patterns,"[19] Janiczak declares. The duo's plays are, alongside such

productions as *Komornicka: A Seeming Biography* by Bartosz Frąckowiak and Weronika Szczawińska, or *Aleksandra: A Piece on Piłsudski* by Marcin Liber, part of a movement of staged counterhistories, which are tales of women against the phallocentric and ideologized history written from the point of view of men, to commemorate their great deeds. This kinship, visible at a first glance, swiftly turns out to be problematic, and the unconventional history by Janiczak and Rubin reveals its originality. For insofar as, in a play that is typical for this movement, Libera chiefly weaves microhistories of woman subjects pushed to the background of the great historical narrative and breaks its monopoly by giving voice to those who did not have it for political and cultural reasons, Janiczak and Rubin, in *Tsarina Catherine* (obviously), but also in *Joanna the Mad*, give us stories of women who commanded great attention in history – and appeared in its foreground. The political impetus of the duo's plays is grounded in something else.

Janiczak says here: "The story of Joan strikes at the essence of how the body functions in culture, the body subject to the tortures of passion, illness, death, decay, unable to control its obsessions. Hungry, demanding bodies, violently clawing at the tangle of other existences, lives, and carrion. The body consumed by obsessions versus the body shorn of biological life, cold, hard, slumbering."[20] This staged "feminist project of 'herstory' opposed the logocentric 'history' (and traditionally tied to masculinity)"[21] is grounded in inscribing the (primarily female) body into the historical narrative.

Ewa Partyga is only partly correct in perceiving this as a "typical point of departure for the history of women as a variant of the counterhistory which speaks of society as a Foucauldian battlefield."[22] Of course, in Janiczak and Rubin's counterhistories the exhibited place is occupied by the Foucauldian, discursive body, conceived as a space for inscription, a place imprinted with cultural and political significance (which is captured in the catchphrase "the management of desire" in *Tsarina Catherine*). But Janiczak's writing decidedly transgresses the horizon of physicality defined like this. In her passion for "physiology, breakdowns, illnesses, and obsessions" she gradually pushes the margins of the bodily, attempting to grasp what is material and extradiscursive in the body. "Kiss me, hit me, love me, fuck me, hide me, screw me, bind me," Joanna cries out, and her mother cautions: "Despite my warnings he's got you so wrapped around his prick that for forty years you won't move your hunk of meat and bones."[23] This is only one of a whole gamut of examples from Janiczak's writing. The point, however, is not in reaching the body "marked by history" and "history ruining the body," as Foucault would have it[24] – but in reaching the material, physiological, breathing, excreting, and scandalizing body (Joanna: "I open the coffin. I screw someone, I can't say who"). We might say that Janiczak, following the latest feminist tendencies, tries to cross the horizon of the "social body" toward the "body as experience," sharing the opinion of Elaine Scarry that "bodily practices have

a physical reality which can never be fully assimilated into discourse."[25]

This can be regarded as a specific (counterhistorical) and scandalizing variant of body-writing, which "through what is fragmentary, flawed, […] through disruptions, contradictions" can be "identified in terms of resistance against what is official, with disrupting the cultural discourses" and "functions by undermining what is phallogocentric […] and thus what is institutionally dominant."[26]

What is fragmentary, flawed, what works through disruption and contradiction, would, in Janiczak and Rubin's work, concern the structure of the historical narrative, which "opposes Logos, which assembles history in a series of cause-and-effect, with […] hysteria – a scattering, a lack of hierarchies or of facts, passion and madness."[27] The bodily and the semiotic dislocate the symbolic. It is not mere coincidence that in Janiczak's text Joanna is situated between the figure of the Father, who, as Ferdinand informs us, is "key to art, science, not to mention religion," and the figure of the Mother. Though we ought to mark at once that these are not clearly oppositional figures. What is tied to female corporeality, which Janiczak sees as stretching between copulation and birthing, does not side with harmony, but rather with compulsion and trauma. "The mother is not an object, the mother is an altar, mothers are harmless in their shredded bodies, in the heads glued onto their lactating breasts," says Joanna, experiencing the trauma of childbirth and confinement, which

Janiczak captures in particularly graphic language, speaking of tearing, excrement, spitting, and "expunging shit."

The patron of this sort of "body-writing" could be Marian Pankowski, whose counterhistorical concept in *The Death of a White Stocking* involved unveiling cultural practices and exposing the naked fact that Jadwiga was given to the Jagiellonians[28] as a twelve-year-old child. Pankowski describes the wedding night in his characteristic bawdy and rapacious language, which leaves the reader in no doubt that we are dealing with a brutal rape scene.[29] We should add, however, that in spite of the clear affinities, particularly on a language level, Pankowski's unconventional history (unlike Janiczak and Rubin's) has a clearly anti-national sting, as it is situated in the realm of one of the founding myths of the Polish nation, under the patronage of the Catholic patron saint of Poland. In the finale of *Tsarina Catherine* the attempt to supplement the counterhistorical narrative with an anti-national plot was unsuccessful, chiefly because the artists did not convincingly demonstrate why it is Stanisław August Poniatowski[30] who should be its (rebellious) patron but the very attempt informs us that Janiczak and Rubin are aiming their theater at the same target as Demirski and Strzępka, and recently, Cecko and Garbaczewski as well.

The set design concept in *Tsarina Catherine* is significant: period costumes are hanging about the stage, while the actors play in their underwear, half-naked. It swiftly turns out that this is not only about a conceit that rhetorically frames the semantic fields written on the stage of this unconventional history, but about "exposure," which serves to gain access to what might be called the experience of the body in history – and also to what will be the experience of the body in the theater.

Playing Catherine, Marta Ścisłowicz is naked or half-naked throughout almost the entire play. Perhaps because we quickly get used to her nakedness, it becomes ordinary, everyday, stripped of meaning. It is decidedly more shameful (for the viewer) than alluring. In the second part of the play Ścisłowicz hangs a model of the Kielce theater around her neck and opens the curtain, behind which we see holes cut out for the breasts – and thus armed, she walks out among the viewers, requesting that they touch her. They do, but not without hesitation. Because this Catherine is not unambiguously a victim in the counterhistory, but more like someone who accepts roles that have been thrust upon her, at the same time capable of skilfully carrying them out – the viewers are not being accused in this situation, as people resorting to violence, but on the contrary, they are shown how easily one can be manipulated and debased by the power of convention.

Being familiar with *Orgy* (2010), one would have to say that Janiczak and Rubin have become specialists in this field of dialogue with the viewer. I would like to point out something else, however: in all three of the projects discussed here, the vehicle of the counterhistory is an actor's performance that explodes the conventional stage/audience relationship. This also determines the strength of persuasion, the efficacy, and the significance of these projects.

The Nomadic Subject

In an interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Krzysztof Garbaczewski called the collective he works with on various performances "savages."[31] The core of the group, alongside the director (undoubtedly the leader of the ensemble), is made up of dramaturg Marcin Cecko and actor Paweł Smagała, as well as video operator Robert Mleczko. Actors Justyna Wasilewska and Krzysztof Zarzecki have worked several times with Garbaczewski.

Savages – what could this mean? If we assume that the point of departure here is Bronisław Malinowski's[32] *The Sexual Life of Savages* (which served as the basis for a play of the same title, 2011), we might say "savage" means "Other." This formula came sharply into focus in Garbaczewski's recent plays from the "Nation for Itself" series, *Balladyna* (2013) and *A Handbook of Polish Kings* (2013), where otherness is defined against what is national.

"This is the essence of ritual – repetition. This is the source of memory, and from it, identity" is heard in the context of national history in *A Handbook of Polish Kings*; "I prefer the present to identity. Neither the past nor the future, just the present. That's where I have to feel at home," the savages respond (through the mouth of Anna Radwan-Gancarczyk). In light of this declaration calling oneself a "savage" means wanting to see oneself beyond the community. Wanting to look at the community's affairs through the eyes of a person who rejects understanding and solicitude. Savages do not want to be drawn into the community, they are violated by it – they want to remain savage to the community. In the language of savages, "we" means, at most, a small circle of people: friends, co-workers, people known by their first and last names, joined by shared interests, not just by an idea. This community of friends is pragmatic and ephemeral, no other form of "we" exists here.

The theater of savages thus crosses beyond the frame of the general definition of political theater in that it only tends to itself. It despises the majority, pays no heed to the minorities. "The nation for itself" – and we'll take care of ourselves, we might add in the name of the savages, we each go our own way! It is not a coincidence that Garbaczewski staged *The Possessed* (2008) and *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia* (2012). For if we were to seek a patron for the egoism of the savages, it would surely be Gombrowicz with his sacramental "I." Though it is true that in Garbaczewski's work, the "I" has its own anarchist and narcissistic tone, and it cannot be mistaken for Gombrowicz's "I."

This egoism does not arise from a cognitive modesty (on the contrary: modesty is an unknown virtue in Garbaczewski's theater), but rather from a revulsion toward all that is national and, more generally, communal. In the second part of *Balladyna* a "pregnant" man (Piotr B. Dąbrowski) runs onto the stage with a soccer ball stuffed under his Polish national

team shirt. As soon this representative and representational Polish specimen has given birth, he proceeds to fiercely thrash the ball into a garbage container, and then, just as fiercely, he drills Balladyna (Justyna Wasilewska) and feeds her patriotic, chauvinist, male gruel – all this under a neon sign, hanging low from the ceiling, that reads "The Nation for Itself," a copy of the inscription placed on the facade of the Polski Theater building, now put in a new context. In light of the fascist drill presented on stage, the nation appears as an idea larded with phobias, violence, and rape. It is no coincidence that the "Nation for Itself" sign was provocatively written in the form of *Arbeit macht frei…*

Cecko and Garbaczewski make no effort to explain this provocation, to supply reliable evidence – they are after something else: a gesture that is loutish and dashing, which strikes a nerve and sparks opposition (in which, as we know, it was successful). We might also say: arguments are dispensable when we are dealing with revulsion and retorsion. The basic political tool for the savages is repulsion, which allows them to separate the individual from the collective – fully conscious of the fact that this operation can never succeed once and for all. For if a savage wants to be only for themselves, they will simultaneously be convinced that this is impossible. In this regard, the savages, though strictly interested in themselves, paradoxically speak of the community, with unusual insight and acuity. The theater of the savages is a real goldmine of knowledge about Poland – backward, nationalist, national.

A moment earlier women rule the stage of *Balladyna*: Justyna Wasilewska informs us that the interiors of the Polski Theater, called the "candy-box" because of its décor, resembles her pussy (she asks the viewers on the balconies to do some gentle sitting down and standing up, to exercise the Kegel muscle); she is accompanied by a hip-hop duo (Dominika Olszowy, Maria Toboła) singing *Dry Pussy Scratch Squad* and *I Like Shit*. The profanities are called for here: they are a sharp feminist tool for dismantling the patriarchal rhetoric that colonizes femininity. After all, it is Balladyna[33] – the anti-heroine about whom, as Wasilewska says, "we learn in elementary schools" – that becomes the patroness of the counterhistory here, taking on an anti-national form; hence the anti-patriarchal manifesto: obsessive, unapologetic, impudent.

Interestingly enough, Wasilewska's performance keeps to an entirely different register: there is no insolence or bravura; on the contrary, we find weakness, uncertainty, frailty. "Marcin's Balladyna is brave and impudent. I give her my doubts, weakness, and fear,"[34] Wasilewska says. Another deciding factor here is that the scene is improvised; it is always played according to changing and adapted rules, making the performance less a well-oiled machine than a sometimes confused and babbling show, while Wasilewska, one feels, is ready at any moment to cut herself off, capitulate, compromise herself. This makes her embarrassing performance remarkably effective and compelling. The uncertainty and weakness Wasilewska mentioned come in part from the fact that she speaks in a borrowed language, one taken from a man (Cecko),

and the rhythm of her performance is marked from the balcony by another man (Garbaczewski), and in part from her personal predispositions ("For me a conversation with another person is a challenge, let alone a public statement").[35] At the same time, this weakness becomes an expression of a general conviction of the efficacy of counterhistories, of which the savages speak in *A Handbook of Polish Kings* (through Radwan-Gancarczyk): "How to slip out of it!? You stick your hand into the wheel of history and in the end I guess your hand'll get…?". As with Demirski and Strzępka, so too the counterhistories of Cecko and Garbaczewski have their pole of depression.

If we take into consideration the opening gesture, i.e. placing Hans Frank among the Polish kings, though we know that in fact that he held court at Wawel Castle during World War II, we can say that the strategy of unconventional history in *A Handbook of Polish Kings* is not unlike that employed by Demirski and Strzępka in *In the Name of Jakub S.*, and involves taking a critical vision of history from the point which in the official, national, institutionalized version is overlooked, unacknowledged, passed over in silence, and treated as a place from which to make an attack on the sanctified knowledge of the Poles' collective identity. And here *A Handbook…* is an extension of *Balladyna*: Hans Frank is a medium that unveils the violence in thinking in national categories of community – the Polish identity included, obviously.

The anti-narrative Garbaczewski (and the team of dramaturgs he works with, including Cecko) proposes gets to this point by a winding road. On the one hand, we have a range of gestures which can be read from a simple, critical perspective. Placing on the stage a gigantic, beating heart (the heart of the Polish nation beats in Wawel castle) or a barrier (given that the Germans are the modernizing capital) are clearly ironic gestures. The role swap performed by Marta Ojrzyńska, first the wife of Hans Frank, and thus (in the world put forward by the creators of the play) the Queen of Poland, later the Mother of God, Queen of Poland, could be ceded in favor of a rational argument, recalling the act of Poland's baptism, which made the country independent from the Germans, though this argument does not suffice to pay testimony to the provocation and temperature of this decidedly indecent gesture. On the other hand, we have a range of more complex operations which do not betray the legible intentions of the creators, whose tendency towards provocation and profanation is not, most surely, the only thing that drives the play forward.

Here I have in mind the huge portions of the play where we are dealing with a kind of historical deception and whimsy. The kings (or perhaps insurgents under pseudonyms?) rise from their graves to save the tapestries; the consecutive rulers, like politicians at rallies, declare their attributes and compete for historical primacy; the remains of a frankfurter found in some teeth are meant to supply the Nazis with proof of the Piasts' belonging to the Nordic race; black masses and dance clubs are held alternately in the cellars of the royal castle… The narrative here is complex, incoherent, it wantonly mixes truth, semi-truth, and fabrication, and, as such, it does not suggest any structured knowledge of the historical past: not in the meaning of the facts, of legible meanings, in this cause-and-effect structure or another. Not everything here, after all, can be compressed into the initial concept, that we are dealing with a film made by Hans Frank. History in *A Handbook of Polish Kings* is a swamp that offers us no ground beneath our feet. It is a vote of non-confidence not only against history, but against counterhistory as well, against the writing of history as such, as the production and shifting of facts and the establishment of this or that stable narrative. The enormous screen set on the proscenium, separating us from the stage, could be the equivalent of this experience: the separation from the history that can be represented or structured.

"Faith in history is faith in a specific subject and his/her stable identity," writes Ewa Domańska, claiming that history "will be necessary for as long as we believe that in some way it shapes, guarantees, and legitimizes our identity, be it through race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation, state, or continent."[36] By the same token it marks a personal stream of investigations into "the end of history," concerning the role of history as a guarantee of identity. It is on this lack of trust and faith in the structuring and significance-producing power of history that Garbaczewski's unconventional history is based. It is driven by an identity crisis, whose source is the symbolic and metaphysical lack of roots in the corroded structures. We might say that in the eyes of the savages, "history conceived as human self-awareness, speaking of what it means to be human, cannot deal with the crisis of subjectivity and the collapse of the humanist concept of man, whose story it has written."[37]

In the mode of Garbaczewski's counterhistories the traditional, stable subject, who has shaped their identity with regard to tradition and the past, begins to disintegrate. His play is a manifestation of the post-modern subject, who does not construct his/her identity on ties with a native culture, who is a "nomad" ("I prefer the present to identity. Neither the past nor the future, just the present"). "The post-modern subject is 'other,' hybrid, 'monstrous,' 'post-human' […], and thus the knowledge that guarantees its identity must also go beyond modernism."[38] Here we return to the elementary definition of the word "savage" (Other) – and to the *Sexual Life of the Savages*, where in a quasi-anthropological mode (Malinowski) of assorted, post-humanist variations on the theme of the limits and definitions of man any sort of capacity for founding identity is dissolved. We return to the original question of Garbaczewski's theater, which was clearly articulated back in *The Possessed*: "Who are you?" A question which, in every new play, leads Garbaczewski to manifest a fluid, postmodern identity, is posed in a fiery spirit, definitely rejecting a postmodern sense of distance.

In the "Nation for Itself" project this question is saturated with new, predatory content. It is no accident that the anti-community, anti-patriarchal, anti-national manifesto of the second part of *Balladyna* (and, in turn, *A Handbook of the Polish Kings*) emerges from a post-humanist fantasia. In the context of the "Nation for Itself" series, based on the design of a schizophrenic, nomadic subject opposed to the stable, collective subject of fascism, it becomes clear that the post-humanist strands in Garbaczewski and Cecko's theater have political significance, as they genealogically derive from a critique of the myths of humanism itself: they see it as a project shouldering the burden of the 20th century's nationalisms, whose ghosts continue to haunt us. ■

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[1] Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2006, pp. 42, 40.

[2] Most of the plays mentioned in the article I have reviewed for *Tygodnik Powszechny*; I often draw reference to the arguments I made there: "Pokolenie wieszaka [*Opętani*]," *TP* 8/2009; "Najbardziej bezczelny duet w polskim teatrze [*Był sobie Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej i... Andrzej*]," *TP* 29/2010; "Tajemnice ciała [*Życie seksualne dzikich*]," *TP* 17/2011; "Czego nie robimy [*W imię Jakuba S.*]," *TP* 51/2011; Żenada, śmieszność I inne żywioły [*O dobru*; *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda*]," *TP* 52-53/2012; "Rewolucja i depresja [*Courtney Love*]," *TP* 2/2013; "Genetyka i polityka [*Balladyna*]," *TP* 6/2013; and "Polska rasa [*Poczet królów polskich*]," *TP* 13/2013.

[3] Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne…*, p. 55.

[4] Ibid., p. 54.
[5] Ibid.
[6] A work by Artur Żmijewski, 1999.
[7] The "Nie wstydź się swojego chłopa" series of articles in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.
[8] Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 144.
[9] The "national" calendar notes the dates of the uprisings for national liberation, aiming to free Poland from the partitioning powers: the November (1831) and January (1863) Uprisings. It does not take note of the Galician Slaughter – a peasant uprising against the nobility in 1946 (Galicia is a former region of Poland).
[10] The Warsaw Uprising (1 August – 3 October 1944) – an armed revolt against the German armies occupying Warsaw, organized by the Home Army. Its political aim was not only victory over the Germans, but liberation of the capital before the arrival of the Red Army, as a first step toward self-establishment. The uprising ended in tragedy.
[11] The Katyń Crime – at least 21,768 Polish citizens were shot in the spring of 1940, including over 10,000 military officers and police, on decree of the Soviet high authorities. The crime took place after Soviet armies crossed into Polish territory on 17 September 1939 and occupied part of the country on the strength of a secret pact with the Third Reich (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The execution of the victims, regarded as "enemies of the Soviet authorities," shot in the back of the head from short range, was performed by the NKVD Soviet secret police. From 1940–1990 the USSR authorities denied responsibility for the Katyń crimes, but on 13 April 1990 they officially confessed that this was "one of the major crimes of Stalinism." To this day, however, some details of the act are classified, and the Katyń crime remains among the major flashpoints in Polish-Russian relations.
[12] The Smoleńsk catastrophe – a flight disaster that took place in Smoleńsk (Russia) on 10 April 2010. Ninety-six people perished, among them leading state officials, including Poland's President, Lech Kaczyński, and his wife Maria Kaczyńska. The passengers of the flight were headed toward a ceremony to commemorate the Katyń crime. Official reports speak of oversights and mistakes made by the team preparing the flight, of the pilots and navigators from the airport. Some of the right-wing political community rejects the findings of the report, believing that the Russians were responsible, and they symbolically link Smoleńsk with Katyń. To this day, the catastrophe is a flashpoint in the country's internal politics and in relations with Russia.
[13] Jakub Szela (the Jakub S. of the title) – leader of the Galicia massacre.
[14] All quotes from theatrical texts are taken from the scripts, unless stated otherwise.
[15] Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne…*, p. 63.
[16] Ibid., p. 64.
[17] Ibid., p. 40.
[18] Ibid., pp. 54-5.
[19] Quoted from: *Gazeta Teatralna*, S. Żeromski Theater in Kielce, No. 28, p. 2; http://www.teatr-zeromskiego. com.pl/application/images/gazeta/Teatralna_28.pdf, access 17.05.2013.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Joanna Jopek, *Z intelektualnym zapleczem*, http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/128891.html, access: 17 V 2013.
[22] Ewa Patryga, "Wolność i suchy fakt," *Dialog* 4/2013, p. 48.
[23] Quotes from *Joanna the Mad* from: Jolanta Janiczak, "Joanna Szalona; Królowa," *Dialog* 4.2013, pp. 50-74.
[24] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in: *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow, Pantheon Books, New York 1984.
[25] Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice*, Cornell University Press, New York 2006, p. 174.
[26] Anna Łebkowska, "Samopoetyka," in: *Kulturowa Teoria Literatury 2*, eds. T. Walas, R. Nycz, Universitas, Cracow 2012, p. 117
[27] Joanna Jopek, *Z intelektualnym zapleczem*.
[28] Jadwiga of Anjou (1373/1374-1399) – crowned King of Poland in 1384; in 1386 she married Jagiełło, the great Lithuanian prince. The Patroness of Poland, an object of cult worship since her death, and a Saint of the Catholic Church since 1997.
[29] Jagiełło: "You've pricked yourself on the spearman... fear not... The hoopoe will make it into the knothole, until his feathers start to puff! […] Remove that blouse, I tell you, for I want to dust up our little princess in three shakes of a lamb's tail!" (M. Pankowski, "Śmierć białej pończochy," in: *Nasz Julo czerwony i siedem innych sztuk*, Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, London 1981, pp. 148-9).
[30] Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732-1798) – King of Poland in the 1764–1795 period; the last ruler of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
[31] "Prawdziwy Polak, czyli kto?", K. Garbaczewski in conversation with A. Berlińska, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 March 2013, p. 14.
[32] Bronisław Kasper Malinowski (1884-1942) – a Polish social and economic anthropologist and traveler. *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* is one of his documentary works of research conducted in the Trobriand Islands.
[33] Balladyna – the title heroine of a play by Juliusz Słowacki, one of the masterpieces of Polish Romanticism. Marcin Cecko's *Balladyna* was a rewrite of Słowacki's work.
[34] "Z ducha pozytywnej kompromitacji," J. Wasilewska in conversation with K. Lemańska, *Didaskalia* 2013 No. 114, p. 7.
[35] Ibid., p. 9.
[36] Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne*, p. 43.
[37] Ibid., p. 42.
[38] Ibid., p. 48.

JUSTYNA WASILEWSKA in conversation
with KATARZYNA LEMAŃSKA

IN THE SPIRIT OF POSITIVE DISGRACE

What were the beginnings of your work with the Garbaczewski & Cecko[1] duo? You met while working on *The Sexual Life of Savages*?

Right. Mateusz Kościukiewicz was supposed to act in the play. When he called me, the cast was almost complete. Nonetheless, he arranged a meeting with Krzysztof.[2] I was sitting in on the rehearsals, and only later was I invited to take part. That was an interesting experience. I had never worked like that before – to make a space and not "make a play." *The Sexual Life of Savages* was madness, we got a rehearsal space, our "gray zone," on Puławska Street.[3] That's where we shot

and watched films and made music. It was a time of total freedom. A commune of marvelous people was created – they came there "after hours," sat around, read, exchanged ideas, sang, and danced.

And how was it with *Balladyna*?[4] Were you invited to play the main role at once?

Yes. I participated in this process from the beginning. It was not as though the rehearsals ended and we could forget about it. We were immersed in it the whole time. Of course, to a large extent I was just sitting in.

What was your response after reading Marcin Cecko's script?

The text appeared fairly late. The second part really came to be when rehearsals were already underway. The final version discards half of the original text of the script we were working on. After Part Two, the text came about only four days before the premiere, affected by our performance gesture of rebelling against a certain structure. But you asked about my response after reading the text. I really admire Marcin's writing, how it builds significance, his poetic style, so from the outset it was an interesting read, with lots of blank spots. And blank spots are what I like the best. I know that the text, the material we get as actors, is never the final word, but rather something we can keep rebuilding and using to search for new meaning. This is what is so remarkable in working with Krzysztof and Marcin. At the same time, this is a risky business, resulting from the fact that everything is constantly in flux.

Did you know off the bat that you would have two roles – Goplana as well?

No, absolutely not. But at one stage of work it turned out that Goplana was the personification of nature, the flip side of Balladyna and her potential for fulfillment. We can test, modify, and harness nature, but ultimately it controls us. Goplana is a reference to this elemental and incontestable strength.

You said that the script was developed during rehearsals? Did it recall "writing on the stage"?

There are directors who work that way. But in Marcin's case it works differently. The script is created independently, but while working on the play we discover new spaces and we build certain things along the way. Marcin is open to this. We talk and try to reach certain compromises.

What was the process of working together like?

We spent a long time wondering what regions we wanted to access with the figure of Balladyna. Ultimately we drew from Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun*, from the phenomenon of depression as complete exhaustion. What is it, where does it come from, and what are the consequences of depression? Then we went on to Clarissa Pinkola Estés's *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. We spoke of the archetype of the primordial woman. These were the main themes, and they remained present. In spite of her depression, Balladyna begins to feel something through the murders, as a result of which she gains everything – Kirkor, the theater – but she has absolutely no idea what to do with it. The script had scenes of "palace life" with Kirkor and without Kirkor, who was always away on business. New characters appeared – Asia and Kasia – who were meant to help Balladyna pass the time and to teach her to find the woman in herself. That was meant to be a process that would lead to making Balladyna independent, but it didn't work – we didn't want to do that kind of theater. It suddenly turned out that the second part was an incredible, fictional tale. Five days before the premiere we really brainstormed, convinced that it needed changing, going to the next level. And the second part came about from private conversations. At night, while I was asleep, Marcin shut himself up in his room, dressed in my things, took out his tablet and began recording himself – he was trying to be me. To think my thoughts.

I only got scraps, attempts, fragments of his nighttime performance. When you work with someone you've known for a long time, you really can read each other's thoughts.

During your monologue you ironically say that women speak the words of Coetzee and Słowacki, and yet you yourself are speaking words a man wrote for you.

Balladyna rejects the male narrative of women, rebelling against words that come from men, and yet she does not speak her own words. Marcin created the figure of Balladyna, who rebels against this structure, she frees himself from it. But it's true that this is still his perspective, his imagination. My task is to render it in terms of my personal relationship to his imagination. Balladyna written by Marcin is plucky and bold. I give her my doubts, weakness, and fear.

So this is a "text for improvisation"?

Yes, a text for improvisation that I don't always take advantage of.

Is this how you break out of the patriarchal discourse?

The very attempt to struggle with this discourse is valuable. And the result? Well, I'm working on it. Balladyna's inability to make a bold statement is, to a large degree, my own.

Is that why you asked the girls from cipedrapskuad to sing something?

They have courage, and a remarkable sense of humor. It's fascinating because both of them are primarily artists, performers, and only then rappers. In the context of their work and how they operate in the field of art, their performance has a broader meaning. But as they say themselves, they are more interested in "pure" reception, without the context of their previous work.

In the second part it is hard to separate the character of Balladyna from the actress and from you yourself.

Those boundaries are fluid. Balladyna/I/the actress (always understood in those three configurations simultaneously) is dressed in cliches and constructed of stereotypes. She suddenly comes to the theater/palace, kills (or pretends she kills) Kirkor, and can speak to the people, whom she inherits, as it were. This Balladyna reveals the phenomenon of the murderess who, owing to her crime, can speak. She does not have her own voice, she wants to stop speaking in a male language, even if she sacrifices some content along the way. Balladyna is both trying to expose herself, to compromise herself in her confidence in speaking that she has nothing to say, and to expand the "here and now" with her body, her cunt, her sadness. And now: which is which?

This is why I suggested the definition "a text for improvisation," because this is a text you change by yourself. This is your female gesture, not only as an actress, but also as a private person – an attempt to break free of the patriarchal discourse.

Yes, it really was such an attempt. I don't know which performance you attended, but a lot depends on the state I am in, how I'm feeling. How much strength I have. All that affects how things work out. When I break through Marcin's text and I enter "my own zone," I sometimes catch myself basically speaking about me. Because what does it mean to go in front of people and start telling them about women, about yourself, from the heart? Here and now, in a prearranged theatrical situation. It's very strange. When you break through that structure and start following your own stream it suddenly turns out that it's not yours at all. I catch myself saying words that paraphrase, for example, some lines from Kafka or something that has etched itself strongly in my head.

And again you mention a male writer...

Of course, I should have said Virginia Woolf – scratch that!

What else is part of that canon? What helped you construct the role?

I almost thought you said "castrate the role" – and that would be a very apt phrase. But getting back to the canon, you want a list? It was a process: conversations, reading, and endless discussions.

I hesitated because with your role it is hard to speak of "constructing the role" (or rather roles) of Balladyna. I wonder what criteria we can use to describe the tension between the stage presence of Balladyna and your physical presence. Your acting constantly crosses those borders.

I associate construction with screws, spans, bridges, blueprints, parts that ideally fit together. There are no blueprints here, nor a place we hope to get to on the opposite side. I myself wonder how to speak of this sort of process. It is not building a character based on some kind of equation – creating something that is meant to generate a defined effect. It takes place from the other side, this effect is the product of establishing the capabilities of inhabiting, delving into, and expanding boundaries. I don't build anything according to a plan. This might be a problem, maybe I should construct, but wouldn't that be the end of the journey? It's a mystery to me.

Tell us something about your interaction with the audience. In the first part, when you mainly play to the camera and this contact is mediated, the viewers are still constantly present, you speak to them directly.

To my mind, the viewer in Part One works like a "black sun." Black strength hidden in a lake, Goplana, who suddenly begins taking control of my character. When Balladyna turns to face the camera it is as though she stares into her own warped, dark reflection.

How do Poznań audiences respond to the second part, then? When you step out onto the stage as Balladyna-Wasilewska and call the Polski Theater a cunt/candy box. Then you ask the viewers sitting in the first balcony to imagine they're the Kegel muscles and they begin to exercise – getting up and sitting down. What happens? Do you sometimes convince them to do it?

They always stand up. Almost always.

At the performance I attended they didn't stand, and some people walked out.

It happens, but generally they do stand up. You asked how they respond. Often with distance and a sense of humor, but sometimes we get a nervous laughter, as if they were embarrassed for me. There were a few times when I saw from people's faces that they were shocked and put off when I said the word "cunt." As if they had heard it for the first time. The word "cunt" is beautiful, after all. It is also an important part of the female body, which is why we oughtn't fear the word. When I hear that this gesture is scandalous and vulgar, I wonder all over again what we mean when we say "scandal." Maybe my very presence is so vulgar and scandalous, but that would be simply too flattering.

Are you staging an attack on the temple of art?

I would like to. Art should rebel and overthrow its temples.

You mix serious themes with gags, with funny scenes. Kostryn carries a soccer ball under his shirt to look pregnant, while you reject the right to give birth and ask for the man to "take the birth upon himself." Who are you mocking?

We're playing: house, field, playing "Poland," playing girls and boys. A game according to set rules, and one that ends with a shot in the back of the head. We do it ourselves. Who are we laughing at? At ourselves.

Your feminist/patriotic discourse is thus less than serious. Most feminists would take exception to your ironic slogans.

I hope so, because it's often discord we're after. It is hard for me, as an actress, to speak of the repercussions of the play

and of what feminists might have to say about it. I'm in it. To my mind the whole feminist/patriotic discourse of the second part is a tale of powerlessness.

Of your powerlessness as a woman?

You're born a woman in this country, not anywhere else, and you get all this cultural baggage. And with it you set off on your journey through life. We're molded from a patriarchal, Christian clay, you can't just wash it off. Or maybe only methodically – slowly, step by step. I have a powerlessness in me that I try to struggle with. To reconstruct myself, not as a Pole, or a woman, but a person. To stop the voices that are speaking through me in replicated words, strange gestures revealing my feminine weakness, gestures that I keep making. On the one hand I long for a constant struggle for myself, and on the other, there is the awareness of inevitably losing in a country where some are more equal than others…. In one of my favorite films by [Wojciech] Has, *How to Be Loved*, the main protagonist says: "everything that happens to us we initially call life, and only after some time it turns out to be our country." It always strikes me: however far you flee, however much you delude yourself – it always gets you. Is there a choice of freeing yourself from your past, your nationality, your identity? And is it really a question of freedom? Maybe it's more of an attempt to know, to love, and then to reject. Just like in life. The meaning of my search is in struggling with my own inability, my weakness. Balladyna receives a present in the form of the theater, it is her only chance to speak, but it turns out she has nothing to say. Would it change anything if she did have something to say? I am not someone who is actively involved in feminist and class politics. For now those subjects interest me only on an intellectual level. I'm at the stage of fighting for myself – for finding out the position for starting a struggle for something.

Based on what you're saying, you can't hope to carry out any kind of positive program, to break through the linguistic and cultural oppression. Does this mean your play is not a disaster, in neither an aesthetic nor an ideological sense?

I don't know how to tell you what this play is about or what effect it creates, but I do wonder what an ideological victory would mean, what it would be. I would be more prone to say that this is my private fiasco than to make judgments on the play as a whole.

What do you have in mind when you say your "private fiasco"?

I have tentatively called my space of activity an "expansion of the field of disgrace" – of positive disgrace, on many levels. The moment I go out on stage with the tools I have – text, body, costume, theater – is a trial for me, which ends unfulfilled. When I go out to the people I have a great need to give them something. Simple as that. To fill them up with something. I know it will never happen the way I'd want it to. That's why I call it a fiasco.

And what do you wrestle with as an actress?

I constantly wrestle with myself, with my body, my voice. I try to put myself to the test, to find my strengths. I've got chaos and uncertainty inside of me, so I look for certainty and structure that won't simultaneously turn into convention or emulation. I learn courage. When I was growing up I practically didn't speak at all, I mean, I didn't express myself. I had problems with articulation even in terms of physical speech, I had a nasal voice, I didn't enunciate. I didn't know how to express myself at school, from the start till the finish. I was afraid that people could get impatient and not hear me out till the end, because I would be incomprehensible. This is my stigma. When I went to a speech therapist, she told me that I would never become an actress because I had a cleft palate. She advised me to find other pastimes and interests. I began working on it. I later brought her my recordings, in which I sang to accompaniment. After listening she said it was impossible that I spoke in such a way with my defect, let alone sang. It turned out my need to speak was so enormous that I found another pressure point for the sound. I put my tongue somewhere else, and I use a lot more strength to make my voice come out. It turns out you can still make a change even when you start at a disadvantage. But it's a slow, gradual process. In my case there was an inner-revolution, but not without its consequences, because in fact I am still afraid to speak. I am always learning to construct my ideas into my voice from start to finish. Often when I'm speaking a monitor will switch on: "Oh God, he's not listening anymore." I have to constantly keep my trauma in check. That disrupts the process of thinking further: I lose myself in my thoughts, because I go to another level.

A metalinguistic one.

Exactly. And I lose touch with what I say. For me a conversation with another person is a challenge, to say nothing of a public statement. This is why I became an actress, to speak under a flag. On the stage I'm someone different, and as someone different I can speak, because as myself I would not have the courage. I don't have the ability to divide myself, as you can hear yourself. And now this conversation has become a meeting with a psychoanalyst.

And you were resistant to the idea that the second part of *Balladyna* would be built around your improvisation?

No, I thought right away that this was an interesting concept. I'm not afraid of such challenges, I adore them, and yet I'm afraid every time I go onto stage. I know, I'm contradicting myself, that's how it is. This part is a challenge – strange, difficult, but exciting. I like pushing the sphere of humiliation. I humiliate myself completely, so that I can move on.

I remember a phrase from a review of one of your previous plays. It spoke of the "acting of a very young, girlish actress." It would be hard to say something like that about you after the premiere of *Balladyna*.

But I am very young and girlish! Terribly! ■

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[1] Krzysztof Garbaczewski (1983) is a theater director, set designer, and author of stage adaptations. He makes interdisciplinary plays, installations on the verge of performance and visual art. He has been working with dramaturg Marcin Cecko since 2009. Garbaczewski's plays are defined as "theatrical installations," because they are based on improvisations with the text and experiences of corporeality and the physical presence of the actor. Marcin Cecko (1981) is a Polish poet, dramaturg, writer, and performer initially tied to the neo-linguistic movement. In the theater he has worked with the most important directors and choreographers of the younger generation. Cecko has worked with Krzysztof Garbaczewski on the majority of the latter's interdisciplinary projects. His texts are an attempt to build a new poetic narrative and to find new contact with the viewers and actors.

[2] Justyna Wasilewska is a theater and film actress. In the years 2011-2013 she appeared at the Jaracz Theater in Łódź. Since 2013 she has been an actress at the National Stary Theater in Krakow. She has appeared in plays by Krzysztof Garbaczewski: *The Sexual Life of Savages*, *A Handbook of the Polish Kings*, *A Stone Sky instead of Stars*. In *Balladyna* she played a dual role – the title protagonist and Goplana.

[3] Presently the Small Stage of the Nowy Theater in Warsaw on Puławska Street 37, run by Krzysztof Warlikowski.

[4] Marcin Cecko's *Balladyna* (premiere 25.01.2013, Polski Theater in Poznań) was inspired by the classic Romantic play by Juliusz Słowacki. The action of the play, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski, was shifted to a small research center on the edge of a wilderness on Gopło Lake, where young scientists (the author of the script retained the original characters from Słowacki's drama: Alina, Balladyna, Filon) are genetically modifying the seeds of crops. In the first part of the play the actors are mediated by camera images, the viewers see almost all the action on the screen. In part two, after Kirkor is killed, Balladyna delivers her monologue. The artists introduced feminist/political themes, as well as those concerning the human condition in the post-modern world, sensitized through media. The play features performers from the feminist cipedrapskuad tandem (Maria Toboła and Dominika Olszowy), whose songs use vulgarities as a means of communication.

MAŁGORZATA DZIEWULSKA

COVERED / UNCOVERED: Games with Memory in the Promised Theater

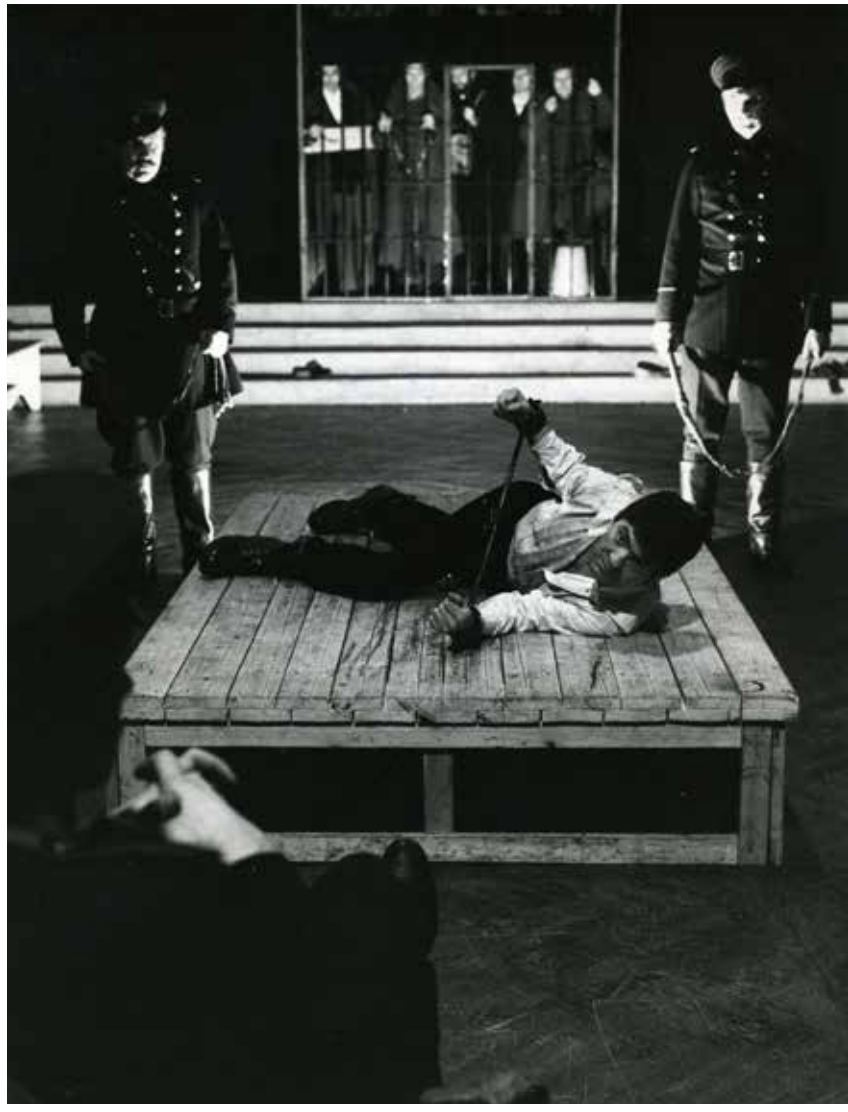
The Promised Play 1979: The Dream of the Sinless

The Dream of the Sinless directed by Jerzy Jarocki was a play that was promoted to a greater extent than was the custom at the time. Two months before the premiere there was an interview with the co-author of the script, who predicted a "great theatrical spectacle"[1] based on texts on Poland's regaining of statehood in 1918. Subsequent press advertisements used the catchphrase "a great spectacle on the regaining of independence." Józef Opalski stated that "it attempts to show how civic/patriotic consciousness is shaped in the nation," "displaying all the tragic contradictions," and he also – without concealing the script's intention to revise the national mythology – stressed the significance of one of the two main figures as the scornful conscience of the nation. But Krakow in 1979, when ideological control had relaxed, was rather preparating for the an on-stage celebration of the 60th anniversary of the regaining of independence, which had previously seemed unthinkable. Memory of 1918 had not found official forms of expression. It was privately commemorated, in churches, or in small circles of readers. It was stamped as forbidden, even illegal, because it was often linked with distrust or hostility toward the regime.

The theater's gesture was an emphatic one: it was closed for over a month for rehearsals; almost the entire ensemble was involved; and the design, following Swinarski's legendary *Forefathers' Eve* of 1973, covered the whole of the space in which they performed, and even extra areas. An atmosphere of the extraordinary was consciously created around the production.

In the introduction to his *ex post* description of 2001, Rafał Węgrzyniak still includes the sentence: "*The Dream of the Sinless* – a great spectacle depicting the history of Poland in the years 1864-1939." He compares the reception of the play with the mood in the late 1970s, suggestively adding his own recollections. Unaware that the date of the premiere had been changed, he traveled to Krakow on 11 November, whereupon he "experienced emotions akin" to what he had expected at the play, taking part in a mass at Wawel Castle Cathedral, "surrounded by aged legionnaires in uniforms, descending to the underground crypt with Piłsudski's coffin."[2]

Jerzy Jarocki's idea for a play about the "regaining of independence" was, after all, an evocative idea with social



resonance, and the result of an active civic intuition. He mobilized major forces and assigned to theater and himself the task of reformulating the stance with regards to public affairs. This was a year and a half before August 1980.

And yet – curiously enough – the promoted title of the performance, probably formulated by the director himself, was entirely different in tone, and even *contrasted* with the soaring phrases in the press. It read: "*The Dream of the Sinless* – a work for the theater in two parts, composed by Jerzy Jarocki

and Józef Opalski, based on texts by Stefan Żeromski, documents from the time, and literary quotations." A bloodless, precise, and restrained title, insinuating a certain distance through its subtle archaization. We ought to note the discord between the intention of the initial gesture and the limited obligations of the title.

A Utopian Dream

Jan Paweł Gawlik, the head and art director of the theater, had a modern notion of how to run a theater, which he had expressed back in *Forefathers' Eve*. *The Dream of the Sinless* was perhaps one of the first examples in Poland of the art director's name appearing on the poster. The head's tactic also involved political diplomacy, combining everyday compromises and bold intentions, and the determination to persuade the authorities to follow them. In an event as unusual as "a spectacle for the anniversary of independence" this strategy had to strike a balance between sparking patriotic sentiments to build the legend of the play, even before the premiere and, on the other hand, putting a lid on careless references to the present, which could well go too far. The audience had to be heated up, but not past certain boundaries.

The day before the premiere, Gawlik published an article of his own in *Dziennik Polski*, titled "The Dream of History."[3] He wrote of the Poles' mythical sphere as a dream: "[…] It is important that we keep dreaming the same dream, drawn out into thousands of episodes, with a wealth of prodigals and protagonists – the dream of Poland and the dream of history. But not of that Poland we see outside the window, the Poland of our worries and hopes, but the Poland of our fathers, the Poland of our grandfathers, because in the process of life, which is also the process of history, our 'today' affects our 'yesterday.' […] And thus it is a vision of history, thus we are dreaming, while awake, a dream of the past, in which there appears, in turn, a dream we cannot make come true, of an ideal society and an ideal state – a state without sin and a society without vice – with all the qualities of a dream. Grotesque and precise all at once." The category of the dream was used here for a tactical aim: it removed the reality of the question of independence, making it a dreamlike and grotesque illusion.

The premiere arrived not on the November anniversary date, but only on 20 January. The size of the undertaking would seem to be a natural explanation for the delay. We cannot exclude the possibility, however, that at some point during the preparations the Kracow authorities – knowing neither the content nor the tone of the play – suggested the shift, to avoid any risky overlap of theater and anniversary emotions. The latter was an unstated fact which all the forces involved were confronting. If someone on the top was worried, after the premiere they could breathe a sigh of relief.

On Stage

Not all the viewers had managed to remove their coats when they were reminded that the Poles mobilized in 1914 put on the despised uniforms of their partitioners. This was enacted in the cloakroom by Jerzy Stuhr, a presenter, photographer, and provocateur, the Beelzebub from Swinarski's *Forefathers' Eve*, the most active figure in the performance. He was the cynical antagonist of Konrad the warrior, lording over him, because of the texts and situations assigned him, with an ambiguous and truculent attitude. The entourage of exiles, led by Konrad (Jerzy Trela), begged for a general war for the freedom of the people, using the words of Mickiewicz's *Pilgrim's Litany*. On the ground floor, around the altar, an honor roll was performed, which resembled the ritual from *Forefathers' Eve*. Then some audience members took part in a propaganda speech, in which the Speaker, using a broken projector, presented the icons of Grottger's *Polonia*. Others were witnesses to the interrogation of Konrad-Czarowic (based on *The Coming Spring*), where the varieties of Russian stocks and shackles were demonstrated. In the large room there was the ball scene of the Warsaw elite from *Rose*, carried over in time to the outbreak of the First World War, concluding with a dance around a haystack (an allusion to Wyspiański's *The Wedding*). After the outbreak of the First World War and the response of the three Emperors, Józef Piłsudski and his legionnaires posed for photographs taken by the demonic Kosma. Then came the trial of the participants in the Kracow riots in 1923, during which the workers were attacked by the Uhlans, who had only recently been defending independence. In the finale Kosma triumphed, now as a director and MC of a provocative cabaret. It closed with a song about a train speeding toward inevitable catastrophe.

Dialog in the Theater

Having read Gawlik in the morning, and attended the play in the evening, after the performance the viewer could turn to the program with the text by Jan Błoński, the literary director.[4] According to custom, Błoński was to write this after having seen at least one rehearsal. This text was a counterpoint, it was even slightly irritated, as if the author had decided to express his doubts as to where the play was headed. He stressed from the outset that enough had been already written about Polish shortsightedness and pointless heroism, and that the subject really need not be addressed once more. Secondly, he expressed the conviction that society was placed, at the time, in a remarkably difficult sort of game, where not only endurance and strength were shown, but also a sense of strategy and mental agility. "But to enter into such a game, great faith is required," Błoński also stressed – and this was a factor which one sought in vain in the play. "It was renewed in shared rituals. These sometimes were conspiracies and attacks, where – as we might suppose – sometimes it was more a matter of manifesting dignity than of gaining immediate success… Sometimes these were also ceremonies, funerals, jubilees… yes, even those scorned Kracow jubilees […]." In conclusion, Błoński stressed that the true history of independence is the history of myth, reborn in rituals, and not a play on ambiguous motifs. He also remarked upon how the audience was treated in the performance – that the position of the

onlooker is creative neither in life, nor in theater. The program ran the first polemical review.

The Newspaper's Double Loyalty

Before the premiere, *Gazeta Południowa* provided as accurate information as was possible. The notice it ran after the premiere, however, on the one hand used magical/patriotic words on the one hand, and on the other included touches of deference to the law. The message of ideological imperatives had been digested: "Poland – invented, won over, and sinless in the dreams of the independence fighters, is shown in this theatrical production as a living body, born in struggle, in pains. Broniewski said, 'The homeland has wounds to settle.' This quote, which we place here quite deliberately, also holds the significance of yesterday's performance."[5]

Some time later, when the resonance of the performance had ceased to worry the authorities, *Gazeta Południowa* – now drunk on its own words – printed a large insert: "A gigantic spectacle – Sinless, i.e. Poland. The dream of the uprising generations under the partitions – the dream of Romantics and anti-Romantics, contrasted with reality. Pathos in words and sobriety in facts. […] Rebel pilgrims. Those who fell for their dreams of the sinless. Mickiewicz's Konrad, Wyspiański. […] And then awakening... into a new dream of legionnaires, new myths, new debates, democracy without democracy."[6] This was a campaign to draw viewers to the next series of performances, for which expectations were raised once more.

The Critics

The conflict between the expectations and the contents of the performance was described thusly by Rafał Węgrzyniak from the perspective of time: "[…] Jarocki did indeed question the false interpretation of Polish history imposed by the communist powers and made his mark in the restoration of the society's memory that was begun by the opposition; but at the same time, he undermined collective myths or imaginings that derived from the interwar period. [I]n a period of a growing oppositional movement, the audience expected a rehabilitation of conspiratorial work and armed struggles that had been bypassed in silence […]. Instead, they received a lesson on the futility of desperate actions of the independence fighters in struggling with the violence apparatus of the partitioning powers, the ruling diplomatic and military powers, and finally, the indifference and opportunism of most of their own society."[7]

The emotions stirred were turned, in part, against the director. In a sense, the performance shared the fate of the anniversary plays in the People's Republic, which turned out to be different from what information seemed to indicate. Marta Fik's critique worded it succinctly: they announced a great spectacle on independence and gave us a lesson on historical sobriety. According to her, the atmosphere in *The Dream of the Sinless* could be summed up as "a martyrological museum visited by a fairly large tour group," and the division of the audience was reminiscent of choosing students for classes.[8] The result was a harsh museum lesson on falsified memory, drawing up a list of national sins. Something like a *Lehrstück*, we might add, in a Museum of Independence. Marta Fik understood that more was expected of the play than was possible (because of censorship), yet she could not forgive the legionnaire episode, in which Piłsudski "only dashed across the stage." The roles, she felt, were colorless, shorn of individuality, personality, or passion. "Everything was smothered in bland blather, differences in standpoints were effaced, the concept of 'guilt' became abstract and intangible." In light of the critical assessments following the premiere, the contrast with the soaring advertisements and the bitter taste left by the production remains intriguing.

A New and Astonishing Response

What bothered Błoński in January and Marta Fik in April was apprehended more gently in December at the Warsaw Theater Meetings. Perhaps the patriots' reluctance at the beginning of the year was less a result of excessive skepticism toward the play itself than a sense of insufficient resistance toward the official image of Independent Poland? Or did they perceive a touch of collaboration in the production of such an unfortunate image? Or perhaps the actors now finally managed to reach the audiences, in spite of their "bloodless" roles. After the Warsaw Theater Meetings we read of a play that was, indeed, stylized, and even dry, but which had expressive moments of pathos and sentiment. Perhaps, then, things were different: The Warsaw audiences were more receptive to Jarocki's criticism and less vulnerable in their dreams of independence? It was only half a year before August 1980.

When the play was performed during Martial Law, things were better still. *Więź* reported the restaging of the performance on 11 November 1982, treating Błoński's text from the program as a commentary that fit the play perfectly! "In this performance history is a ritual, a spectacle, a game... The spectacle is a polemic with myth – in defense of myth. […]. It is an attempt to strike a dialogue with history and its rumors, but also with the truth and legend of the other performance, its continuation rendered from the perspective of facts, not poetry, while also, in the end, claiming that the poetry was right."[9]

And so, did this "harsh museum lesson" show a flexibility toward Martial Law? The actors, notwithstanding the script, had "personality and passion"? Did Jarocki direct things differently? Or perhaps the Martial Law reviewer heard the same text differently? The current collective emotion can be decisive in the theater, and we cannot measure it. It will have its way with any text.

Jerzy Jarocki's Performance about a Dream

The director could be a harsh teacher himself, as well as a clever student. A few months earlier, at the beginning of Martial Law, in the archcathedrals of Warsaw and Krakow, he had done a brilliant rendering of Eliot's *Murder in the*

Cathedral. He created it as though he had believed Błoński. Or perhaps it was the series of events that had changed his attitude. He no longer questioned the national ritual, as at the premiere of *The Dream of the Sinless*. The king's knights, who were compared to the ZOMO divisions, murdered Beckett on the steps of the altar. The play, seen in the nervous anxiety of the first months of Martial Law, became the stuff of legend.

Later, in 1983, revising the gesture of *Murder in the Cathedral*, he made one of his finest productions. In Calderón's *Life Is a Dream* he was now working with insinuation, not demonstration. Dream and waking, history and myth were no longer clinically divided, and there arose a lively dialogue on the loss of freedom. The performance provoked the press of the regime, which was particularly sensitive during Martial Law. The *Żołnierz Wolności* newspaper wanted no part in celebrating the fate of Prince Sigismund, who did not know how to use his freedom. On the whole, the reviewer had major doubts: Jarocki, a mannerist apostate, had added his own "random historiosophy" to Calderón. *Słowo Powszechne* got lost in the ambiguities: Who is the ruler, who is the clown, and who the politician? Who is directing, who is dreaming, who is dancing the lifeless, silent mazurka in the finale – and why? *We* knew.

Rafał Węgrzyniak complained that when, in the new political system, another in a series of "historical" plays (*The History of the People's Republic according to Mrożek* in 1998) showed behavior from the People's Republic era that had been repressed in the collective memory, there was a hostile response, because the debate about responsibility for crime or devastation did not interest the public. "As if the theater after 1989, going against the grain of long-term tradition, ceased to be a place for shaping or revising historical consciousness."[10] These words from 2001 ring differently in the light of the latest wave of performances that radically revise Polish historical memory. A culture with self-criticism at its disposal creates irregular trends, which, when the time comes, spill out into cycles. "The time will come" means when there are more favorable tides among audiences. For collective expectations mean not only subconscious forces building up to a historical eruption. They also include behavioral forces of the kind Węgrzyniak described.

Years later, Jarocki's clashes with Polish audiences might be more comprehensible. Jarocki's specialty was paralyzed protagonists, trapped in a closed structure. The viewer of the 1960s was very tolerant of theater that negated his freedom of choice. The viewer of the 1970s no longer was. He could not bear the suggestion that – to borrow Mrożek's expression – he acted as if a spring were wound inside him. The audiences of *The Dream of the Sinless* no longer wanted to be passive. Ten years later another audience appeared, one that was different again.

The Promised Play 2009: *(A)pollonia*

Krzysztof Warlikowski's *(A)pollonia* of 2009 and *The Dream of the Sinless* are divided by historical periods and political systems. They are diametrical opposites as plays, as they belong, one might say, to different theatrical systems. As public events, however, they had one attribute in common. In both cases the directors created the main ideas and co-wrote the scripts, and the intentions, pertaining to social issues, went beyond the limits of the stage. Both productions created an exceptionally complex audience situation. Only now, the moments of mediation between the theater and the audience or, in more general terms, public opinion, were more frequent. We might say that the reception began even before the premiere.

The Dream of the Sinless was created in a period when the People's state had definitively lost its ideological monopoly. Not counting the sharp return to tools of direct repression in the first year of Martial Law, the government apparatus gradually began focusing on manipulation through blackmail, privileges, and media. Through some rather astonishing logic, the Polish theater chose Jerzy Jarocki to invade the free territory after this ideological evacuation. The result was not what the public expected.

Thirty years later, Krzysztof Warlikowski, having declared himself a social outsider, felt prompted to make a performance which he called a national mystery play. This time the audience expected a vision on stage that would illuminate some unresolved, murky affairs from the past, tormenting the "young democracy."

In *(A)pollonia* we can again observe the mechanism of the double gesture, in which the artist/director releases a catchphrase even before the premiere, causing a wave of interpretations of his ideas, and then presents a play that surprises everyone. Hitting a nerve in the collective fabric, something that makes the community a bit ill, sets in motion a discourse of mediations, which ultimately infringe upon his artistic intentions (by simplifying them). Then, if he seeks to hold onto his world, he must renege on his own first formulations.

Of Myths and of Poles

Those who picked up the issue of *Gazeta Stołeczna* announcing the premiere *(A)polonia* first read the lead: "In Gazeta Café Krzysztof Warlikowski spoke of how a myth from a play by Euripides unexpectedly cohered with a story from World War II written by Hanna Krall, of God and gods, and of a sense of guilt and pangs of conscience."[11] A lead is meant to be clear and concise, understandable to all. Meanwhile, what the director said at the meeting could in no way be encapsulated in such a sentence.

The meeting was a fairly unconventional one – the director, generally a mild-mannered person, was fairly quarrelsome and truculent a few days prior to the premiere.[12] He made not a single mention of a "sense of guilt" or "pangs of conscience." He spoke of the characters, he kept from morally appraising them, or implying significance. He demanded that the listeners perceive the autonomy of every human situation, because "both dying and murdering is difficult." He indicated the spontaneity, absurdity, or difference in reading meaning into every situation, whether in Euripides (grotesque) or in Hanna Krall (terrifying). He said, for instance: "that was an unbearable situation for him" or "I don't know how he could make such a decision," or: "the son cannot cope with the moment when they buried her, and he starts biting his father." When the host asked: "And do you give them some hope in this play?" he replied: "I'll put it more simply… you want me to interpret. You people will come and see if there is hope or not. I don't want to say in advance that these are your problems, my problem, these are Greek and these are Polish… I'm saying that everything is difficult, in general, for women and men, and for Jews and Poles, and I want to bring this all together somehow…".

The text of the media information ran as follows: "This is the most hectic period before the Saturday premiere of *(A) pollonia*. The director has, however, found a moment between rehearsals to meet with our readers. And he gave an astonishing lecture on subjects ranging well beyond Greek mythology. The host, Remigiusz Grzela, discreetly fell silent for a longer period, leaving Krzysztof Warlikowski to give a longer exposition, stressing that, although mythology and reality blend in the play (…) the play is about us Poles. These are our problems, our choices. 'And would you give your life for others?' the director asked his listeners."

The question "would you give your life?" was importunate. The director fired it after the second question from the audience. The first was innocent: "Could you tell us something about the upcoming premiere of *King Roger* in Paris?" He was irritated by the disproportion between his own thoughts, the media's simplifications, and the conventional question.

What Would You Do in Her Place

On the day of the premiere *Duży Format* came out, and in it a conversation with one of the authors, Hanna Krall, and the director.[13] There were questions not unlike those which later became the leitmotif of the discourse on *(A)pollonia*. Hanna Krall began: "We are recalling the story of Pola to make every one of us ask what they would do in her place, finding themselves in Kocek." A question (to Hanna Krall): "And have you wondered what you would do in Pola's place?" Hanna Krall: "I wouldn't take the risk, not if I had a child." Question: "And

in the father's place?" Hanna Krall: "Here the response strikes me as simpler. Almost everyone would take the blame to save his own child." The author thought it right to respond at once. The granddaughter of Apolonia Machczyńska, whose story was later published in *Wysokie Obcasy*, initially had this automatic reflex to step up to the blackboard, but later began to have doubts: "I remember when I took the medal of the Righteous among the Nations on Pola's behalf, a journalist asked: 'Would you do what you grandmother did?' The question struck me as an important one and I tried to respond. Today I would surely reply: 'And you?'"[14]

While we are picking on journalists, we ought to recall that the same happened (twice, I believe) in the play itself. The second time, Admet, thinking of Apolonia's father, who survived because his daughter gave herself up, sarcastically insinuated to the audience something like: "You wouldn't have accepted this sacrifice, right?" This is a kind of provocative dialogue that exemplifies the special pact this theater has with the audience, who are open to being abused. Do I have a problem when a character on stage poses this question to the viewers? Perhaps I give the theater more moral freedom to provoke than I do the press. The whole situation is characteristic of the world of *(A)pollonia*, where we must take care not to be too quick to adopt the role of judge.

The Metaphor of Poland

With such an elaborate context for the reception, the individual experience of the reviewer was liable to to get blurred with the pressure from the press ads. He or she succumbed to hidden blackmail based on a sense of guilt. The reviewer was thus the first to be "tested" by a rather vague tribunal. Several got lost in the ambiguities the play purposefully generated. Caught between absurdity ("meaning cannot be salvaged") and a human reflex ("this simply cannot be"), the writers tried to meet the challenge as their consciences dictated, though it was hard to make everything fit together. A Lublin reviewer, for instance, began on a very bold tack, that Majdanek, Bełżec, and Sobibor were here, and the local inhabitants were accused of participating in the Holocaust, so here people see things differently. He did not persevere alongside his co-inhabitants, because he felt the need to express his reverence for the victims. He was glad that Apolonia Machczyńska was inscribed into "the space of the great mythology and ancient magic of life and death," and that the play "lifted the figure of Pola out of Kocek, thus raising her to the mystic rank of all those who acted like this mother of three children, who was killed before their very eyes." Again he expressed a bold idea when, referring to Elisabeth Costello's lecture on slaughterhouse animals, he condemned the whole epoch: "[…] a victim is a cry […] raising the alarm on the system in which we live." A moment later, however, this "system" became historical and Nazi-related, stamped by a general complaint: "[…] the fate of Pola from Kocek is a metaphor for Poland, for this situation revealed by the Holocaust, a borderline situation in which there are no winners, for every step brings the destruction of fundamental values that constitute humanity."[15]

Two Languages

In a conversation concerning his next play, Warlikowski expressed doubts that appeared after the experience of *(A)pollonia*: "I am currently making a play less anchored in current events, less supported by public facts, which easily impress us."[16] Warlikowski uses at least two languages. One is a powerful use of synthesis, a radical unveiling of taboo. This language sometimes emerged in the glossy magazines, where, with his characteristic presence as both celebrity and life teacher, he made for good headlines. Warlikowski's other language is less resonant, it is intimate, it loathes to situate itself above its protagonist and above its viewer. Do these two languages perhaps correspond with the two phases of the creative gesture of *(A)pollonia*? The first plays with the collective imagination and functions as a public voice, the second accompanies the work, defends human beings whatever they may do, and sets viewers a task without overstating the point, for the conscience is a delicate affair. Here the director's speech refuses to directly address the thing itself, to name it – for it prefers to lead people to the thing itself.

A Play of Cynicism

Warlikowski's *Hassliebe* takes a different approach toward the national habits than Jarocki's. What can he not bear? At the Gazeta Café meeting, one of the more interesting moments came when he recalled the award ceremony where the Order of the Rebirth of Poland was given to sixty people who saved Jews during the war. Warlikowski noted that what he could find out about these brave people depended on the speed with which they made their way from their places to the spot where they received the medal. When they read out a name, that person moved (he or she had to go down some stairs), but to fill the "dead air" while they walked, someone read out information about the person's story, the fates of their loved ones and the Jews. His attention turned to a woman with a gray braid, who, as it happened, walked too quickly. When she was walking down the stairs, there was only time to read of the rescue and denunciation. When the Order was presented, that is, somewhat too late, came the phrase "they killed her father and they killed the Jews." When she turned around to go back to the line-up, they still had to read, alas, of her house being burned down. "These are beautiful stories," said Warlikowski, concluding his description of the ritual marred by haste. Their moral decisions were reduced to copy-and-paste. Warlikowski spoke of the cynicism of a procedure where orders are given while skimping on time to explain their rationale. He is fascinated by the contemporary spectacle of cynicism that we often see in his performances. Courtly cultures are cynically conscious of ritual convention. This theme goes back to Shakespeare, whom Warlikowski has staged more often that others.

Contradictions

The director told Joanna Derkaczew that: "The reasons for doing *(A)pollonia* were most concrete. I do wonder, however, if clear reasons are always necessary in order to deal with inner anxieties, to fall into the trap of guilt or responsibility...".[17] He complained to someone else that he suffers the consequences of the private games that are played on culture web sites, that he had not predicted "what would happen to mass culture, the content of television programs, the content of glossy magazines etc… […]. And in which the more radical way of speaking of mankind would begin to be smothered."[18]

Theater runs the risk of being swallowed less in mass culture than in the great testing ground of marketing, economics, and politics, which wage a relentless offensive; one of their techniques being emotional manipulation. What is the mechanism of the "trap" or this "smothering"? The media latch on to a thought, offering a forum upon which they pour grudges, illusions of correctness, oversensitive reactions, interested motives, hollow gestures. The work's media life gains independence and sometimes we have the impression that it seeks to take its place. It can spark moral debate, or it can merely provide twisted entertainment. It is impossible to evaluate in general if it is one way or another, because this reality is fluid and undefined.

The director is in the position of the sorcerer's apprentice, standing before a contradiction. He/she counterattacks with the performance, from behind the poster, which is based on his/her idea. The result is a curving trajectory between the idea, its rendering, and the performance. Who renders the poster? The press, which seeks to represent the society, but also educate or excite them, or perhaps both one and the other? Is it some almost undefinable collective power, something between the nation, the crowd, and the television audience? Whatever it is, the artist does not recognize his own message. It has been seized from his hands with his own cooperation, creating a platform for dialogue upon which the message blurs and is smothered in people's babble. The director might begin to worry that he/she has been robbed of his/her performance, that it will begin to look like the poster. Perhaps the play should be made more expressive, its critical counter-story should be sharpened? But only a few days remain. In this sense the mediasphere can interfere in the play.

"[…] so it began with recognizing that I was making things quite murky, and that they understood why I was being so murky, because ultimately that's what it's all about: breaking the viewer away from himself and his set thought patterns, that's what theatrical stories are for," Warlikowski said in *Viva!*.[19] In a situation where the processes of public communication are murky to the extreme, this task is made complicated indeed. ■

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[1] 'Sen o Bezgrzesznej' na scenie Starego Teatru. Z Józefem Opalskim rozmawiała Ewa Widota," *Echo Krakowa*, 22 XI 1978.

[2] Rafał Węgrzyniak, "Lekcja historii w Starym Teatrze," *Teatr* 2001 No. 6.

[3] Jan Paweł Gawlik, "Sen o historii," *Dziennik Polski*, 19 I 1979.

[4] Jan Błoński, "Gra, rytuał, widowisko…," program for the play *Dream of the Sinless*, Stary Theater, Krakow 1979.

[5] Olg. Jędrz. [Olgierd Jędrzejczyk], "W Teatrze Starym 'Sen o Bezgrzesznej'", *Gazeta Południowa*, 22 I 1979.

[6] BOB, "Sen o Bezgrzesznej," *Gazeta Południowa*, 7 II 1979.

[7] Rafał Węgrzyniak, op. cit.

[8] Marta Fik, "Grzechy Bezgrzesznej," *Polityka* 1979 No. 15.

[9] Agnieszka Magdziak, "Sen i komentarz," *Więź* 1983 No. 1.

[10] Rafał Węgrzyniak, op. cit.

[11] dow [Dorota Wyżyńska – footnote to a response on e-teatr.pl], "Warlikowski opowiadał o mitach i Polakach," *Gazeta Wyborcza Stołeczna*, 12 V2009.

[12] Audio recording from a meeting with Krzysztof Warlikowski at Gazeta Café on 11 V 2009: http://warszawa.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34889,6596610,Warlikowski_opowiadal_o_mitach_i_Polakach.html. Unauthorized text.

[13] "Rzecz, która nie lubi być zabijana. Z Hanną Krall i Krzysztofem Warlikowskim rozmawia Roman Pawłowski," *Gazeta Wyborcza – Duży Format*, 16 V 2009.

[14] Grażyna Plebanek, "Poznaj Polę," *Wysokie Obcasy*, 18 IX 2009.

[15] Grzegorz Józefczuk, "Konfrontacje Teatralne. '(A)pollonia', czyli o Poli z Kocka," *Gazeta Wyborcza – Lublin*, 21 X 2010.

[16] "Jestem Żydem. Jestem homoseksualistą. Jestem winny. Z Krzysztofem Warlikowskim rozmawiała Joanna Derkaczew," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 IX 2010.

[17] "Coming out winy."

[18] "Warlikowski. Z Krzysztofem Warlikowskim rozmawia Piotr Najsztub," *Viva!* 2011 No. 7.

[19] "Warlikowski. Z Krzysztofem Warlikowskim rozmawia Piotr Najsztub."

MONIKA KWAŚNIEWSKA

FROM A REBEL TO AN EXPERT: THE MEDIA IMAGES OF JAN KLATA

The beginning of Jan Klata's career dawned with the new century. This was a time of a breakthrough. While the first years of free Poland could be labeled as the "end of the Romantic paradigm" declared in the famous article by Maria Janion,[1] the moods that held sway in the second decade appeared to disprove this thesis. Janion herself, in *The Uncanny Slavs*,[2] writes of the resurrection of the post-Romantic rhetoric in 2004, on the occasion of the accession to the European Union and the elections for the European Parliament. It would seem, at any rate, that European integration reinvigorated debates on the topic of Polish national identity – whether going back to the Romantic legacy or critical toward it (the latter is most frequently encountered in Polish theater). It was decidedly unpopular to speak of Poland in the 1990s, but in the following decade talk of Poland dominated the public discourse. Zbigniew Majchrowski, for example, writes of it in the introduction to his book *Trans-Polonia*, indicating the numerous Polish publications devoted to the topic, such as *What's Up with Poland?* and *Poland, You Fool!* by Tomasz Lis, *Reading Poland* by Kinga Dunin, and *Poland for Trade* by Przemysław Czapliński.[3]

A crucial turn also took place at the beginning of the 21st century. The moment of Klata's debut – *The Government Inspector* at the Dramatyczny Theater in Wałbrzych in 2003 – marks the symbolic beginning of political theater in Poland. The emergence of the new movement was linked to a range of diverse phenomena and debuts. Various theater scholars have established the breakthrough at a different point. To avoid being smothered in the thickets of conflicting reports, I will try to name those which, to my mind, have left their strongest mark on the memory of the period: the directorship of Piotr Kruszczyński at the Wałbrzych theater (2002-2008), the directorship of Maciej Nowak (2000-2006), and the Fast Urban theater by Paweł Demirski (2004-2006) at Wybrzeże Theater in Gdańsk (premieres of Demirski's plays directed by Michał Zadara in 2005 at the Wybrzeże Theater were also important for this movement: *From Poland with Love* and *Wałęsa: A Jolly History Which Is, for This Reason, Enormously Sad*), the first edition of the EuroDrama festival organized in 2002 by Paweł Miśkiewicz – then the director of the Polski Theater in Wrocław – where Jan Klata staged *Grejprut's Smile* based on his own script, a project by Teren Warszawa produced at the Rozmaitości Theater in the 2003-2004 season, the premiere of Przemysław Wojcieszek's play *Made in Poland* (21 November 2004) at the Helena Modrzejewska Theater in Legnica, under the directorship of Jacek Głomb, who more and more emphatically, both through the program of the theater and through his own plays, began identifying with the political theater movement…

In this atmosphere, Jan Klata's talk of society, politics, Polishness, the community, identity, and the past, both in his plays and in his interviews, met with enthusiasm and approval. Klata entered the discourse that was created along with his theater. His language was direct, pointed, full of catchphrases; Klata did not cling to artistic issues, but focused on social and political matters. He is inextricably linked with the image of the warrior director. Jan Klata staged an attack on the Polish theater, dressed in a military overcoat and Doc Martens, with a mohawk hairstyle. His approach to reality, declared in an extraordinary number of interviews, was also bellicose.

What happened to make Klata in particular the face of the new political theater, and then evolve to the role of a "specialist on Polishness," an expert on national issues? What was this metamorphosis from rebel to mentor? Responses could (and must!) be sought in the performances. The critical perspective I have adopted here will only cover, I would like to stress, the discourse created by Klata and about Klata in the media, it does not analyze his creative stance. I am researching his "revolutionary" language, and not the performances. It seems to me, however, that it is not only the performances that have determined and continue to determine the symbolic position he occupies.

Klata the Rebel, or: A War for the Theater

In 2004, in an issue of *Notatnik Teatralny* devoted to "war in the Polish theater," Jan Klata published a manifesto: "The artist requires fodder and an opponent. I have fodder, I'm glad that the war is on."[4] Several months later, when Łukasz Drewniak asked him about his opponent in this fight, he declared it was "People who go to the theater to relax a bit

before supper."[5] From the outset he was taking aim at a viewer whom he tried to define and to describe. The audience, to his way of thinking, could be divided into two categories. The first was those viewers who came to relax: "These are people who do not want to change. They do not want to talk. And this is a problem for the artist. Concrete won't get along with concrete. So we kiss them goodbye, see you later alligator."[6] The war declared against the conservative viewer is a dubious one, as Klata has repeatedly declared that he does not want to activate a lazy audience, he wants to drive them from the theater:

I don't invite viewers to my plays, they don't have to come, and if they've come already, they can get out. We always have a few controversial scenes for them in the first thirty minutes of the play. This is so they can painlessly go elsewhere to nod off.[7]

These words might surprise us, all the more so in that Klata has stressed in interviews that he is most concerned with activating and involving the viewers, in striking up a serious conversation with them:

[…] I am not inviting the viewer to the theater for an *apertif*. If someone is being treated seriously, then you also speak of painful things.[8]

Theater is not for us to pet each other, but for us to speak of reality, often in a violent and stormy way.[9]

It's important that I don't tell fairy tales. And that I mess a bit with the viewers' so-called preconceptions. Pose a few questions. Because we're trying to treat this play like a kind of conversation, and not a sermon.[10]

This conversation is meant to lead to the transformation of the viewer – one that is social and political, not artistic:

Jan Klata: I'm talking about something that totally pisses me off.
Łukasz Drewniak: You say that it pisses you off, and that's it?
J.K.: That's it, because if you watch my plays then *maybe you'll go to the elections and vote differently* [emphasis: M.K.].[11]

Thus, at a glance, we can see the general aspect of Klata's declared aims. A fundamental contradiction lurks in the director's statements. He longs to strike up a conversation, to disturb preconceptions, and ultimately, to change only those viewers who seek such a thing, and who come to the theater for this reason. This can, of course, be read as a signal that he expects open-mindedness from his audiences. Nonetheless, the war which is meant to preach to the already converted, removing from the audience all those who disagree with the director's views and aesthetics, seems neither useful, nor particularly radical as an undertaking.

We might also ask what viewer preconceptions Klata seeks to change, given that he wants to draw audiences that normally keep a safe distance from the theater, and who thus have yet to acquire any real habits. It is worth taking a look at the director's model viewer. Only in terms of subtext is this a receptive viewer, open to conversation; Klata's sketch of the "desirable viewer" is limited more to the environment he/she comes from and his/her appearance:

Jan Klata: […] We have to activate audiences that have never gone to the theater, because they think it's super-lame, and also those who got pissed off with the old declamatory style theater. Just a few years ago I myself didn't go to the theater. I preferred rock gigs.
Łukasz Drewniak: How do you want to reach the freaks? Are you counting on *them* finding *you*?
J.K.: Word of mouth. After *Hamlet* at the Gdańsk Shipyard, word got around that it was a twisted play. For example, it became popular among turbogolfers. People came who looked so insane that next to them I look like a member of the Polish Business Council.[12]

The desirable viewer is thus a person who goes to rock gigs, cinemas, and participates in alternative city games. Klata equates such young people with those who are open to conversation. He doesn't want to draw them with the subject matter, but with rumors that the show is "twisted." This outline of the desirable viewer, together with the director's declaration that he wants to remove theater from the ghetto seems a paradoxical combination: Klata only shifts the borders of the ghetto. The war for the theater means making it a place that is fashionable and popular. And although there is nothing wrong with this, such declarations seem a far cry from the desire to strike up a serious conversation and bring about social change.

The language and means of problematizing this "war" seem largely inspired by the language of the media – from the description of his aim through the sharp polarization and categorization of viewers, to their characteristics, concentrating mainly on the visual (their appearance) and commercial (fashion, popular and alternative art) aspects.

On the other hand, Klata's revolutionary premises were mediated – both by the press, which kept evoking the image of Klata the rebel, and by the director himself, who was happy to confirm this pigeonhole, with perhaps the summit of absurdity coming during the Klata.Fest festival, which took place in 2006 in Warsaw. It suffices to look at the photographs promoting the festival, in which the director, with a carefully trimmed Mohawk and a bare chest into which "KLATA" has been cut with a razor blade, provocatively stares at the viewer… Klata the rebel thus became a commodity, an idol, and his image – a kind of logo. Klata perhaps did not realize at once that this image, perhaps meant to be self-effacing during the festival, during a time when Klata confronted audiences that were truly hostile toward him, could eventually become a filter through which the artist would be almost universally perceived. This rebellion was picked up and cleansed of all its distance and irony. From the outset, Klata clearly enjoyed the comparison with the image of a rock star – the idol of rebellious youth:

> Cezary Polak: Your plays gather crowds of viewers, you have real fans that follow you around Poland. How do you explain this?
> Jan Klata: It's a perversion of the once oh-so-refined theatrical taste, good breeding, and a total degradation of customs. […] There are people who quote dialogs from the plays I direct – they hit the punchlines before the actor has a chance. There are viewers who go to see the same play twenty times. It's a total scandal.[13]

He stresses the innovation of this attitude with an ironic approach to his critics. When he is asked directly about his promotional strategy, however, he avoids answering and prefers to hide behind the back of Grzegorz Jarzyna:[14]

> Maja Ruszpel: […] you were the first director in post-war Poland to be promoted through the same avenues as a pop star. That's what I have in mind when I say "sold."
> Jan Klata: Grzesiek Jarzyna was the first.
> Maja Ruszpel: Not to the same degree. There was no talk of how Jarzyna dresses, combs his hair, prays, and Warsaw was never plastered with his portraits before anyone in the city saw his plays.
> Jan Klata: I don't see anything wrong with the fact that Klata. Fest, which was the first time my plays were shown in the capital, was promoted.
> Maja Ruszpel: I don't see anything wrong with it either. The point is that music labels promote records the same way – we know who is singing but we don't know how he sings. It's the first time such a niche as theater used such major marketing. […]
> Jan Klata: You know what? I know artists who sit there in a dark theater with no windows, they do their rehearsals quietly, have quiet premieres, they don't want to "sully" themselves with the pop culture Babylon and the repulsive mass media. An artist like that sits there and, excuse the expression, "carves his 'philosopher's stone'" feeling all repulsed. He doesn't come out into the light of day, doesn't let himself be photographed, because he's so super-duper niche, and so, in effect, barely anyone knows that he's made a play.[15]

Klata's resistance to questions like this exhibits all the more strongly that, seen in this light, he becomes a commodity; his rebellion, it appears, is part of a marketing strategy. It is also significant that, in order to save face, the director adopts a confrontational stance with another, presumably inferior attitude. Klata explains his strategy through the fact that the times have changed. A comparison with Grzegorzewski[16] is instructive here:

> Maja Ruszpel: Several years ago Grzegorzewski worked that way at the National Theater. […]
> Jan Klata: You bring up someone that is very important and dear to me. Grzegorzewski, with all due respect, was from another epoch. Times have changed. […] Everything is subject to commerce, consumption, media. And we have to deal with this reality somehow. If only for purely pragmatic aims, which I define like this: I want to have an audience in the theater for my plays.[17]

In light of the above statements we might somewhat doubt the purity of Klata's rebellious stance and his declarations of the war he seeks to wage with the theater and audiences. Everything – the manifesto, appearance, and preferred model of the viewer – comes together to form a fairly precise strategy arising from a familiarity with the media mechanisms. In the last sentence of this statement Klata admits that the viewers and holding their attention are most important to him. And it is the viewers who, to a large extent, mark out the range of subjects of the director's performances:

> When I make plays I also wonder if it will be interesting, and how the viewers will feel about it. […] You also have to think about, firstly, what can be communicated, and secondly, what will interest the Polish viewer. It's like crop rotation….[18]

And although this stance might seem pro-society, in essence it has nothing in common with a war to spark a new sensitivity in the theater. We have to recall, after all, that the "war period" only lasted for the first years of his work. Then Klata declared victory:

> Marta Kuźmiak: Your private war with the institutional theater and with the consumption-driven viewer gradually changed into a public war for the theater. Is the war still on?
> Jan Klata: That war is already won. The subject is closed.[19]

Two years later Klata added to this declaration, claiming that he had managed to drag theater out of its ghetto and win new audiences:

> Dariusz Łukaszewski: […] do you not regret having gone to become that sort of "theatrical priest" and closing yourself in the theatrical ghetto. […]
> Jan Klata: But I don't see […] the theater as a ghetto. Maybe a few seasons ago there was something like a theatrical ghetto. Now […] people who recently would have avoided the theater come to see plays. I flatter myself to think that maybe these are people who would not have gone to other theaters, people who are more aware, both of what is happening all around them and of the other options they have in terms of events, they're more conscious than those who go to other theaters. This is no longer a ghetto.[20]

But have audiences really changed so much over the previous two years (the first fragment quoted comes from 2004, while the excerpt from the "Nail Factory" interview, which contains the declaration of victory, comes from 2006)? After all, the process of changing the status of theater began at the

end of the 1990s, owing to the Rozmaitości Theater under the direction of Grzegorz Jarzyna, as Klata himself has pointed out. What happened, therefore, to make Klata begin to unfold such a staggeringly optimistic vision of audience involvement?

> Theater has become an important field of culture in Poland […]. This is because audiences have appeared. Crowds have been storming plays for some time now. In December 2008, during the Boska Komedia Festival[21] in Krakow, truly Dantean scenes erupted before the doors – tickets ran out and desperate people tried various ways to to get in, under various pretexts. At times I had the impression that the Rolling Stones were in town.[22]

> We're in a marvelous country, at a marvelous time for theater, because there are people here, audiences come, and they have an effect on what plays get made […].[23]

> I am lucky to work in the theater at a time when it is important. Theater can raise topics for social discussion.[24]

We should note that statements like this appear regularly – beginning in 2006, through 2008, up till 2011 – as if nothing changed during this time. They are accompanied by Klata's gradual, though consistent retreat from the stance of a battling artist,[25] a point on which he spoke rather openly in an interview concerning *The Wedding of Count Orgaz*:

> Monika Kwaśniewska: *The Wedding of Count Orgaz* came about at a time of major and rather controversial events in Poland. Did that affect its final shape?
> Jan Klata: I don't see the point in making a play that directly comments on recent events in Poland.[26]

All this was in spite of the fact that, in 2011, the situation in the theater did not encourage optimism. During the Warsaw Theater Meetings[27] in 2012, theater people began a protest under the slogan "Theater is not a product, the viewer is not a client," opposing the government policies with regards to the theater-going public, which, according to the artists, critics, and theorists who signed the letter, poses a threat to the existence of artistic theater in Poland. And though this protest was directly prompted in a decision by the Marshal's Office of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship to "change the statutes of Lower Silesian theaters and to fire the present directors of those stages, replacing them with managers from the business world," it is clearly stated in the letter that this is also a response to the government's cultural policy. People working in the theater people read this letter of protest while the festival performances were on. Among those reading it was Jan Klata.[28] We ought to ask, therefore, where this previous optimism came from, given that a few months later Klata signed the protest? Why this optimism in times when the development of private theaters was reinforcing the division between "types" of theaters and their viewers? Does Klata's success mark the fact that "lazy" audiences abandoned the public theaters in favor of private stages, managed by stars? Perhaps not… It seems more probable that, after two years of playing the role of the battling artist, in 2006 Klata began seeking less and less effective change, limiting and depleting the image that was slipping through his fingers and was taken up by the media. It is significant that one of his first statements concerning the victorious war (in the above-quoted interview, "Nail Factory") and Klata.Fest took place in December 2006. The declaration of the war's end could have thus been a response to the final appropriation of Klata the rebel by the promotional machine. As such, the claim that the war for the new theater was won paved the way for him to take a new stance.

The Specialist on Polishness, or: A Few Words on the Community

The image of the "specialist on Polishness" is, to a large extent, the result of a gradual expansion of the sphere of reference – from the theater and art to the "nation." This shift was not a radical one – Klata had already been regarded as a director who dealt with "what was imaginable in Poland." Increasingly – both in his plays and the statements that accompanied them – Klata stressed less the contemporary, political, and concrete reality than the sphere of mythical, communal imagination. Thus, while in the former period he more frequently remarked on audiences, over time his definitions began to envelop the national community, both present and of times past, already the stuff of myth. This shift in the sphere of reference modified his own way of positioning himself in the collective. In Klata's attitude toward the community we can observe even more clearly a fundamental contradiction in the artist's stance: it is simultaneously populist and elitist. He had once divided theater audiences; now with equal conviction he created clear social divisions, situating himself with the elite, evaluating from a "higher" position:

> Jan Klata: […] the people are indifferent. And they never take the side of the defeated. The people chiefly want to go shopping at Tesco. […] the population wants to consume, to enjoy what they've scored, and be left in peace. They want to munch chips, relax in front of the television, and watch the playoffs.
> […]
> It seems they're not interested in politics. They want to cruise the highway to the shopping mall. And they don't want to bother to ask themselves about the meaning of what is happening all around them. […] In terms of participation in the sphere of culture, we've been in regression since 1989. We're dealing with an invasion of mass culture […]. People trouble themselves much less, and they are more and more focused only, exclusively, and purely pragmatically on whether something sells. That was not the case before 1989,[29] if only for the fact that the market situation was totally abstract.[30]

As such, Klata decidedly differentiates between the civilization of before 1989 and the contemporary one, unambiguously criticizing the latter. It seems he sees the cause of this crisis in capitalism. One can hardly deny, however, that he uses stereotypes and cliches to the effect of "everything was better in the People's Republic." Another matter is the categorical nature of this vision of society – as if it were a uniform monolith. We also find statements, however, in which Klata points out the social divisions, applying equally strict and simple criteria:

> I try to delve into what might come out of the clash of views between Poland's contemporary inhabitants. They live at distant poles, one of which is Radio Maryja,[31] the other is Radiostacja.[32] Simple people listen to Radia Maryja, people on the verge of religious fanaticism. Radiostacja is for young people who divide the world into pretty and ugly, poor and wealthy, and unambiguously prefer pleasures. There is nothing that connects the listeners of the two stations.[33]

Klata divides society using the names of concrete media. We might turn our attention to the profiles of the papers in which he makes his statements. The decisive majority of Klata's statements can be found in *Rzeczpospolita* and in *Gazeta Wyborcza* – i.e. right-wing and liberal media. Moreover, he writes columns for *Tygodnik Powszechny*. None of these papers is radical, but they all have ambitions linked to the intelligentsia. Klata is therefore speaking to people who do not unequivocally identify with either of the sides of the social *agon* he depicts: with the elderly and ultra-conservative listeners of Radio Maryja or the younger listeners of Radiostacja, promoting independent music. He makes no attempt, meanwhile, to define the "people in-between." He seems to make his readers understand that, like himself, they avoid simple categories. He suggests that if someone comes to one of his plays, they still have this vanishing need to expose themselves to culture. His "venomous" social critique does not concern them. It concerns those radical "others." On the other hand, the cultural profile and intellectual ambitions of the newspaper's serving as Klata's platform do swing closer to the listeners of Radiostacja. So too does the profile of the potential viewers of Klata's plays. This suggestion flatters the readers' egos, as they would doubtless prefer to identify with the rebellious teenagers who listen to the alternative and very fashionable music (in 2004, when this statement was made) of Radiostacja. Particularly given the fact that the accusations against them are easier to swallow, while Klata – perhaps unconsciously – to some degree identifies with them, thus replicating the "sin" he attributes to them. After all, he himself reproduces the strict social divisions. The constancy of his views on this topic might be proven by the fact that he reiterates them in

consecutive interviews – in 2010, for example, commenting on the events on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street after the Smoleńsk catastrophe:

> But I didn't take my children to see the cross[34]... I wasn't able to seriously join those people. Nor was I able to do what the Varsovians and the tourists so often did, looking at those people like animals in the zoo. Look: they've come from the villages, from the eastern provinces, they don't know how to behave in our shops and cafes, clutching their rosaries […]. And we take our most prized possessions to them, our *Star Wars*, our Elvis, we offer our white roses so we have something to laugh at and to put on YouTube. No, I didn't want to play that role.[35]

This time Klata does not identify with either group; he allows for a certain sphere between the division he creates. We find the same thing in a statement from 2012, in which the director claims:

> In Poland we have several parallel societies at present. This country exists in a few different time zones.[36]

He does not expand on this statement, and other fragments of the conversation contain very generalizing opinions on Poles:

> After 1989 we went into "fast-forward" mode. But there were never any questions asked as to how our society was to look, what this brave new system was to be, though we were immersed in it and infatuated by it, in an unrequited way.[37]

He also lists qualities of Polish people (a proclivity for victimhood and pathos), explaining:

> […] In Polish literature shaped by Romanticism there is tons of pathos, though it vanished from the theater after 1989. We felt its inadequacy. Until 10 April 2010, when it made a strange comeback. And that was a surprise – there was a sudden return of 19th-century messianism.[38] It looks as though we are condemned to constant repetition. Certain models are so deeply rooted in our cultural heritage that there's no escaping them. […] I regret to say that we want to be victims. It's our karma.[39]

In Klata's concepts it is interesting that he divides society into two polarized factions, denying the existence of any kind of community:

> We ought to think about the state of our community. It would be good to form one. Just look at how the state functions. Everything around us testifies to a lack of thinking in terms of the common good. This is the story of the Polish block of flats, where the shared stairwells are filthy and stinking, but as soon as you get inside the apartment, it's beautiful and cozy.[40]

Reading these words we might hop to the conclusion that Klata's views on the community are quite progressive and arise from civic thinking: the community is defined by a common goal and an identification with the collective. A range of other statements emerge, however, from a more traditional sort of thinking. We conclude this by analyzing Klata's statements on the *Trilogy*,[41] which, to his mind, allows us to define a basis for a communal understanding, because to a large extent it started this way of thinking:

> […] I believe that if we are looking for a greater narrative, something that gives meaning to our existence as a community, then we have it in Sienkiewicz.[42]

Klata believes, it seems, that deposits of shared emotions are encoded in almost every Pole. What he said about the nonexistence of the community, however, expresses the conviction that these spheres of collective values and emotions have been pushed onto the margins of the contemporary Polish identity. Although Klata speaks fairly critically about "our national attributes," he nonetheless prizes them above the consumer model of contemporary society. The *Trilogy,* meanwhile, in his opinion, contains and releases communal emotions, through which it consolidates the Polish community:

> I don't understand the phrase "explain yourself for the *Trilogy*." You think that we Poles have to explain ourselves for the fact that Henryk Sienkiewicz imprinted us in the *Trilogy* and that this fascinates us – and me? […] For generations on end the *Trilogy* was in the core of our national, patriotic, and family consciousness. On the one hand, it helped us to survive the vicissitudes of history; on the other it made us less rational-minded people. There's no need to explain myself, it is a thing worth analyzing. Every nation has a work that constitutes it.[43]

Klata thus regards the *Trilogy* to be a fundamental work. This thesis is confirmed by the unwavering conviction that it is widely known, though fewer and fewer people read it:

> […] it seems that the generation younger than me only reads the *Trilogy* to have it down pat. Because of this work Sienkiewicz is more of a pop figure, through Hoffman's adaptations and DVDs that come with newspapers.[44]

As such, it is worth having a careful look at the content Klata finds in the *Trilogy*, as it outlines his way of thinking about the national community. Klata believes that the *Trilogy* also contains a matrix of collective attributes – appearing on a civic level and deciding on how the state functions:

> Because what does this book say about the foundations of Polishness? It speaks of a hopelessly weak state, the main protagonists operate in a pitiful situation – in every possible sense. [...] But this is the eternal Polishness: no strong state

> structures, self-servingness, corruption, free will, and the loutishness of the upper classes.[45]

And individual attributes, inscribed in various individuals who build the community:

> It takes place in a situation of oppression, of real danger for the Polish civilization, whether cultural, economic, or identity-based. And what was written in that situation stayed with us, regardless of what later happened to Poland. Now the *Trilogy* is […] a kind of last ditch for us, to which we can turn when we are struck by war – when we go to the barricades we always take the pseudonym Kmicic.[46] […] The *Trilogy* is deep down in us – even if we have changed.[47]

The younger generation can also find models for their identity:

> Zagłoba[48] speaks most to my peers. He is a slick character, a pragmatic businessman of a transformation period, the most intelligent among them.[49]

Klata sees the *Trilogy*, therefore, as a work that universally defines the state of the national community. There is no escaping from the consolidating myth in the *Trilogy*, the "foundation of Polishness":

> Joanna Lichocka: But perhaps Poles are coming to the conclusion that a community is quite unnecessary. Perhaps it would be better to blend into the European identity, to get away from Polishness.
> Jan Klata: You think we can get away from it? Our whole play is about the fact that there's no getting away from it. You can't. And that this is a blessing and a curse, this attachment to a certain anarchy, a wide margin of freedom and an even greater mistrust of authority. This is why Kmicic turns our crank the most in the *Trilogy*. We Poles are generally partisans, permanent Kmicics.[50]

And thus, despite the diagnoses of the collapse of the community, there still exists a creature whom Klata calls "we Poles," which has its consolidating narrative, characteristic attributes, and obsessions, traditions, and modes of behavior deriving from the past. The director's opinions are anachronistic, and yet they evoke no clear protest… On the contrary – journalists increasingly refer to Klata as the "specialist on Polishness," a man who enters a critical dialogue with the communal myths. The headlines of the reviews of his play after the premiere of *The Trilogy* bear testimony to this: "Jan Klata Liberated from Polishness," "Klata's War: Poland vs. Poland," "A Polish Battle in a Shopping Mall," "How Much Poland in Poland," "Poland Like a Glass Trap," "Poland Out of Order, or: Klata Light"[51] (we should note how frequently the director's name appears in headlines), as do the interview headlines: "Victims of Polishness,"[52] "I'm Condemned to Polishness." Klata has also been invited for talks, for example, about Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz[53] and his vision of the Warsaw Uprising[54] and the Polish national community,[55] his views of Polishness are juxtaposed with those of Andrzej Żuławski[56] in the popular magazine *Gala*, and in a magazine for men – *MaleMEN*. In an electronic version for the Onet Facet web site, the lead claimed that he was "changing the sensibility of Poles."[57] A confirmation of a certain softening of Klata's image and theater could be, for example, the sold-out tickets and positive responses of the viewers – among them often a majority of high-school students – to the *Trilogy*. It seems, therefore, that once again – consciously or not – he ideally suited the social mood. This also resulted, perhaps, from his vision of Polish ambivalence, which, on the one hand, effaced the radicality of his views, and on the other, broadened the opportunity of identifying with his opinions. For while Klata has no doubt that there exists something like the foundation of Polishness, his evaluation is now incoherent – this "foundation of Polishness" can be both a "blessing" and a "curse." For at the heart of Klata's deliberations on the national community and Polishness is the motif of the victim, which he presents and evaluates in various ways. Sometimes he categorically severs himself from this motif. At other times, in characterizing the community, he ties in to a discourse made up of both Romantic and post-Romantic literary *topoi*, and contemporary historical politics with the Institute of National Memory[58] and the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising,[59] which the director highly praises. At the same time, he links his plays to this sacrificial archetype. In speaking of the *Wedding of Count Orgaz* he notes that the American Havemayer must become a Pole to sacrifice himself. He also says that only his sacrifice has the power to form a community. Responding to the question why Havemayer must become a Pole before sacrificing himself, Klata makes a nimble transition to deliberating the Polish past and mythology:

> Many claim that my beloved Museum of the Warsaw Uprising is arranged to create the impression that we won the uprising – the question is if this is not ultimately the truth. I have heard from my father since childhood that this uprising was necessary so that we could be reborn and preserve our identity. If our fathers died for these values, then they must be sensible and we should be true to them.[60]

He does not stop at linking the play's themes with national archetypes. In another interview Klata notes that his *Trilogy* has the power to evoke admiration for sacrificial attitudes:

> There was an old lady with crutches in the first row […] her reaction was fantastic […]. And then came the last part: *Mr. Wołodyjowski* […] – the vow begins. That we won't give up, that we won't be buried... we, the Polish kamikazes. And the woman got up. And she stood through the vow of Michał, and then through Ketling's[61] vow. The actors rang me up in shock, because that was not the sort of response we expected.

> Actors who had only given Sienkiewicz ONR[62] potential, who warned me that they had never picked up these books in their lives – these same actors felt a sudden connection to history, that they could think about a man who decided to bury himself and all the rest under rubble without contempt or irony. A Polish kamikaze…
> […] I'm dying and you are also dying, my dear, and that child you have in your belly – it's dying as well. For the homeland. It's terrible, and yet this old woman stood up. *And it is hard to say whom she represents*. I know that we have to respect her gesture. *This gesture of transgression hits upon something that is also in my actors and in me, something I myself am unable to get rid of* [emphasis – MK].[63]

Thus, although Klata almost always distances himself from Polish victimization, he seems to acknowledge it as an attribute that is almost essential, inscribed in every Pole.

He returns to this topic frequently, in very diverse contexts. One of his most comprehensive replies on the subject is found in an interview on the work and ideas of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz of 2008 (half a year before the premiere of the *Trilogy*, which seems a response, of sorts, to Rymkiewicz's ideas). In this interview he unambiguously speaks out against the view (which he himself declares elsewhere!) that victimization is the foundation of Polishness. It would seem, therefore, that in this matter – as with the issue of how the artist functions in the media – Klata modifies his opinion to fit the circumstances. Although in no other interview does he sever himself so radically from the vision of Polish victimization, he admits that, like Rymkiewicz, who sees the foundation of contemporary Poland in the massacre of the Warsaw Uprising, the sacrificial myth also bound him to Polishness:

> Every sensitive person catches themselves thinking that way. I'm from Warsaw, I graduated from the Batory Secondary School, I know that subject. When I go for a walk with the children, I too hear the people who died howling under the pavement.[64]

Klata points out, however, that this vision of the foundation of Polishness is a result of education – he stresses that it is not absolutely universal, and is, at any rate, being modified by the educational system. This reservation allows him to raise doubts:

> What are they shouting? "Be like us!" or "Don't be like us, be smarter than us"?[65]

And then, in a now unequivocally critical way, he describes a vision of Polishness suckled on the blood of heroic sacrifices:

> This is consent to tribalism, to a tribal way of thinking. I would not sign up for a tribe like that. […] It's vampiric. It's some kind of witchcraft. […] This really cancels the baptism of Poland. We slaughter each other to build a totem pole. And the difference between us and them is that we will eat our dead, while they will eat ours as well. Because we're weaker, because we Poles are good for nothing else. If only this distinguishes us from animals then it contradicts any and all Christian ideas. […] It's a kind of voodoo. This devouring of the dead, this dance with vampires in Samogitia. These are water sprites or noonwraiths...[66]

The discrimination between the Christian and the pagan, or the superstitious, is worth pondering here. Perhaps the critique of Rymkiewicz's vision comes from the fact that it does not in fact belong to the "foundation of Polishness," as his vision of sacrifice is not Christian, it is tribal, pagan. To emphasize what is particularly dark and unsettling in it, Klata introduces an entirely different rhetoric. Speaking of the motif of the sacrifice in Rymkiewicz, he summons an image of dying children and translates it into contemporary and personal reality:

> But this is the reality of our monument in Warsaw, of a child with an oversized helmet and a machine gun. How close this is to terrorism – persuading one child to shoot and making hostages out of all the children in the city. Should this be my foundation of Polishness, the model that I pass on to my children? […] Poland comes to me. To me, to Abraham, and says: "Listen, now you have to take your daughter and lead her to the barricade. Give her a grenade and let her try to throw it." Obviously she wouldn't be able to do it, the grenade's too heavy, someone would waste her first, but she will be an innocent victim whose praises the bard will sing... Where's the divinization here? Sorry, but something's not right. You always have to understand things on your own terms, not theorize, because when you theorize everything looks fantastic […]. But when it comes down to it, will I be ready to kill my own children? Or ask that others are?[67]

Thus, when he wants to criticize the myth he draws from graphic examples. Shifting the responsibility to the parents who sent their children to death opens the possibility for criticism. When he wants to defend the idea of sacrifice, on the other hand, he evokes the example of people who consciously decided to give their lives for the freedom of the nation:

> I am duty-bound to remember those people who were burned alive.[68]

Then he situates the motif of sacrifice in the context of a conscious death that cannot be ignored, mocked, or unambiguously criticized... (He does not eliminate the possibility, after all, that historically speaking, we won the Uprising).

One of Klata's basic obsessions, around which he most often builds his reflections on Polishness and national history, is the Warsaw Uprising. He returns to the subject speaking

about many projects and plays. He defines his dealing with the subject as the repayment of a debt:

> For the anniversary of the Uprising I staged the play *Triumph of the Will* in the museum, dealing with the murder of 40,000 residents over a few days. It was based on the reports of German soldiers. No other work I have done has given me such a strong sense of repaying a debt.[69]

Moreover, it is in the uprisings that Klata sees the source of contemporary independence. While appreciating the director's rhetorical flair, we ought to ask which of these contradictory stances is his real view. This question was posed by Joanna Derkaczew:

> J.D.: I'm trying to feel the difference. You rage when a priest says that children should become "like heroes who die a martyr's death." And yet you have a sentimental attachment to the notion of sacrifice and the "Polish kamikaze" instinct.
> J.K.: I'm in constant dialogue with myself about that feeling. You can call me Jan "Ambivalent" Klata. After all, I'm not going to move to some kind of mental Düsseldorf.[70]

We have yet to discuss one other issue of Klata's, language itself, which is incapable of expressing all the complexity and ambivalence of his stance, and simultaneously sets traps. Always seeking to be bold and radical, the director easily slips into one-dimensional declarations and simplifications. This strategy is very much his trademark – in interviews he describes the world in images of contrasts and antagonisms, glossing over what is undefined or in-between. And although we might gain the impression from some statements that he is conscious of his simplifications, he maintains them nonetheless. As if letting himself get carried away, on the one hand, with words, and on the other, with the expectations set before him. Wanting to be radical, he often slips into old, deep intellectual ruts and ways of speaking, and recycles traditional discourses full of cliches and simplifications, sacrificing clarity and originality.

In this contradiction was can see a certain method. Since the beginning of his career, Klata has kept from unambiguous ideological declarations. After the collapse of the PIS[71] government he did admit to having voted for the party.[72] This open statement was, however, based on a negation. Klata spoke of his political decisions in the past tense. It is important that these statements accompanied work on *Tailors at the Gate* – a co-production with Sławomir Sierakowski, editor of the left-wing journal *Krytyka Polityczna*. Klata was mixing the signals, preventing an unequivocal definition of his views. His theater's clear engagement with political issues and the radicality of his social diagnoses make the art of the theater recede into the background, making way for world issues. On the other hand, an element of ambiguity builds up the interest of the media and colors the director's image, indicating conflict, contradiction, and ambivalence – basic attributes of the archetype of the Romantic artist. He captures an involvement in the national tradition, a sense of the continuity of traditions and a debt toward history, and a strong tie with the past and with one's ancestors in a metaphor borrowed from Wyspiański: "a faith in the spirit of the forefathers," which appears in *H.*

Apart from this Romantic stylization, Klata sometimes adopts the attributes of the positivist:

> If we want to continue to be in Europe, we have to do the work instead of sitting here adoring death. […] I know that what I am saying is going to come dangerously close to a modernizing cliche – but so that there's hot water in the taps and highways it is better to prevent than to cure... But it all depends on the context. For us this is a reconstruction of the society, of the material culture, this is an incredibly heroic, an almost unattainable life's goal, probably far more difficult than yet another collective suicide.[73]

As we can see, Klata happily signs aboard various ready-made, almost ritualized identity projects and world views. The countless formulae he repeats preclude pigeonholing him – insofar as the personality of "Jan Ambivalent Klata" is not one of them, particularly given that Klata defines the formulae he evokes, though they are contradictory, in a fairly straightforward fashion. The director himself is aware of their banality – he mentions it, as if wanting to cut others to the quick. This use of cliches is interesting in that Klata uses them to define his involvement in communal life. Building his "modern" image of the political artist, he draws from old cultural archetypes, taking a language to define his place in the community. Is this testimonial a lack of individual language, or a rootedness in the culture, or perhaps a strategy that aims to introduce new ideas through inscribing them in a well-known formula? Each of these possibilities seems probable. I am most struck by the lack of a new and resonant language to define the aim of Jan Klata's theater. On the other hand, if the main subject raised in his theater is meant to be Poland, the two remaining strategies seem equally justified, because to some degree they testify to the director's cultural competence.

The media image of Klata the revolutionary is exhausted, and the image of Klata the specialist on Polishness has also become banal. If Klata.Fest might be seen as the limits of endurance of the former image, then Klata's conversation with Andrzej Żuławski published in *Gala* perhaps marks the end point of the latter. The exchange of pleasantries and cliches on the subject of political involvement with national issues that accompanies the declarations of their iconoclastic attitudes bears the apt title "Victims of Polishness," and in the lead it is described as "more essential reading than the majority of political debates!"[74] Both of Jan Klata's images have been attractive for the media, while neither has been effective as a critical language.

■

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[1] Maria Janion, "Romantyzm blaknący," *Dialog* 1993, Nos. 1-2.
[2] Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2006
[3] Zbigniew Majchrowski, "Trans-Polonia," in: *Trans-Polonia. Z Gdyni w świat. Jubileuszowa Sesja Naukowa w Teatrze Miejskim im. Witolda Gombrowicza w Gdyni*, ed. Agnieszka Osiwalska, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2011, p. 5.
[4] Jan Klata, *Notatnik Teatralny* 2004 No. 35.
[5] "W oku salonu. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia łukasz Drewniak," *Przekrój* 2005 No. 8.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] "Dorosnąć do widowni. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Dorota Kardasińska," *Notatnik Teatralny*, 2004 Nos. 32/33.
[9] "W oku salonu."
[10] "Nie opowiadam bajek. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Dorota Wyżyńska," *Gazeta Wyborcza – Stołeczna online*, 20/04/2006.
[11] "Patriota rocznik '73. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Jacek Cieślak," *Rzeczpospolita*, 04/06/2005.
[12] "W oku salonu."
[13] "Rewolucja u bram Polski. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Cezary Polak," *Dziennik* 2008 No. 53.
[14] Grzegorz Jarzyna (b. 1968) – a Polish theater director. Since 1998 he has been the director of the very popular TR Warsaw (previously the Rozmaitości Theater). Alongside Krzysztof Warlikowski, he is one of the most important representatives of the generation of directors who marked the way forward in Polish theater at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. http://culture.pl/en/artist/grzegorz-jarzyna
[15] "Majster Klata. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Maja Ruszpel," *Warsaw Point* 2007 No. 11.
[16] Jerzy Grzegorzewski (1939-2005) – a director and set designer; one of the most important figures in the Polish theater of the latter half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. He worked as director of (chronologically): Polski Theater in Wrocław, Studio Theater in Warsaw, and the National Theater in Warsaw. http://culture.pl/en/artist/jerzy-grzegorzewski.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Chodzi o płodozmian wrażeń. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Ewa Niewiadomska," *Polska Metropolia Warszawska*, 2010 No. 62.
[19] "Fabryka gwoździ. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Marta Kuźmiak," *Didaskalia* 2006 No. 76.
[20] "Jeśli chodzi o taką wojnę, polegającą na wywalczeniu sobie swojego miejsca, na zawołaniu do establishmentu: Chłopaki, halo! Posuńcie się! To chłopaki się posunęli. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Dariusz Łukaszewski," *Morele i grejpfruty* 2008 No. 2: http://www.moreleigrejpfruty.com/Jan_Klata,84.html.
[21] An international theater festival in Krakow that provides an overview of the most interesting Polish productions of the current season, judged by an international jury. The director of the festival is Bartosz Szydłowski. The first edition was held in 2008. https://en.boskakomedia.pl/.
[22] "Jestem skazany na polskość. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Iga Nyc," *Wprost* 2009 No. 10.
[23] "Jeśli chodzi o taką wojnę...".
[24] "Chorzy na polskość. Rozmowa Andrzeja Żuławskiego i Jana Klaty," *Gala* 2011 No. 23.
[25] This is suggested, for instance, by Marcin Kościelniak in his review of *Kazimierz and Karolina*: Marcin Kościelniak, "Gdzieś indziej," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 X 2010; Paweł Schreiber expands on this subject: "Tańce buntu," *Didaskalia* 2012 No. 108.
[26] "Powrót do mocy pogańskiej. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Monika Kwaśniewska," *Dwutygodnik* 2010 No. 33: http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/1292-powrot-do-mocy-poganskiej.html.
[27] Warsaw Theater Meetings – an overview of the finest Polish plays from the current season, organized continuously since 1965.
[28] http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=379698165394746&set=a.375396062491623.91115.375364919161404&type=3&theater
[29] A reference, of course, to the events of 1989 (known as the Revolutions of 1989), which began a system change in Poland (as in the other countries of Central-Eastern Europe) that reworked it from a "socialist country" to a "democratic state of law."
[30] "Kłótnie obciętych głów. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Joanna Lichocka," *Rzeczpospolita*, 12/04/2008.
[31] Radio Maryja – a Polish socio-Catholic radio station, founded in Toruń in 1991 by monks from the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists); the station director is Father Tadeusz Rydzyk.
[32] Radiostacja – a radio station active between 1998 and 2008, created by Justyna Depo in cooperation with Norwegian station P4 and the Polish Boy Scouts' Union. The creators of Radiostacja defined it as alternative radio, presenting the latest music that could not be found on other stations. During its first years of existence Radiostacja tried to create new trends in music, and several now famous Polish radio and television hosts debuted here.
[33] "Różaniec może odwrócić losy świata. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Małgorzata Matuszewska," *Gazeta Wyborcza – Wrocław*, 09/01/2004.
[34] The cross in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw (the "Smoleńsk Cross") – a wooden cross placed in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw by activists from a scout organization on 15 April 2010, five days after the Smoleńsk catastrophe, to commemorate its victims. The cross stood by the sidewalk on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street until 16 September 2010, when it was taken to the Presidential Palace chapel. Previous attempts to remove the cross sparked protests by a group that called themselves the "defenders of the cross." Both the opponents and the supporters of the cross's presence in front of the Presidential Palace organized rallies and demonstrations; the latter set up twenty-four-hour vigils over the cross. The cross ultimately ended up in the Loretan Chapel of the church at St. Anna Street 10.
[35] "Żądam dostępu do włazu."
[36] "Mój kraj żyje w wielu strefach czasowych. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Olaf Krock," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 08/03/2012.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Messianism – a movement in Polish philosophy which flourished in the 19th century, when Poland was partitioned and did not exist as an autonomous country. This is a special Polish philosophy based on the belief that the Poles, as a nation, have remarkable qualities, and that Poland is the bulwark of Christianity, an asylum of freedom, and the breadbasket of Europe. Nineteenth-century Romantic messianism

drew upon the vision of the tormented Jesus the Messiah, who was meant to save and unite the sinners (the other nations of Europe). Messianism played a major role in shaping the Polish national identity, also during the People's Republic period.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "A, wysadzamy się. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Joanna Lichocka," *Newsweek Polska* 2009 No. 14.

[41] A series of historical novels written by Henryk Sienkiewicz, published in 1884-1888. Their action takes place in the First Polish Republic, in the late first half and early second half of the 17th century. The *Trilogy* includes the books *By Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge*, and *Mr. Wołodyjowski*. The author wrote the *Trilogy* out of a conviction of the significance of tradition for anchoring a national consciousness. This series was written when Poland was partitioned, and the partitioning forces were intensifying the process of denationalization. The author wanted to restore dignity to the nation and to write, as he put it himself, "to fortify men's hearts." Sienkiewicz's series was also popularized by film adaptations directed by Jerzy Hoffman in 1968, 1974, and in 1999.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Andrzej Kmicic – the main protagonist of *The Deluge*. A typical representative of the nobility of the day, descendent of a powerful noble family. Kmicic is a dynamic figure: at the beginning he is shown to be a drunk and a troublemaker, he ultimately "matures" to patriotic and heroic deeds.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Jan Onufry Zagłoba – a figure who appears in all parts of the *Trilogy*. He is the incarnation of the stereotypical Polish nobleman: he has a proclivity for drinking, litigiousness, mythomania, and idleness. At the same time, he is faithful, patriotic, good-natured, inventive, clever, and witty.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] See (respectively): Joanna Derkaczew, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 08/01/2011; Jacek Cieślak, *Rzeczpospolita*, 10/01/2011; Marta Wróbel, *Polska Gazeta Wrocławska*, 26/10/2010; Aneta Kyzioł, *Polityka* 2010 No. 46; Sebastian Krysiak, *Nowa Siła Krytyczna*, 15/04/2009; Joanna Derkaczew, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13/05/2009; Katarzyna Kamińska, *Gazeta Wyborcza – Wrocław*, 12/05/2009.

[52] Andrzej Żuławski, Jan Klata, "Chorzy na polskość," *Gala* 2011 No. 23, http://www.gala.pl/gwiazdy/wywiady/zobacz/artykul/andrzej-zulawski-i-jan-klata-chorzy-na-polskosc.html.

[53] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz – (b. 1935 as J.M. Szulc) – a Polish poet, essayist, playwright, literary critic, and professor of philology. The reference here is mainly to his historical essay, "Kinderszenen," published in 2008. The two motiifs of the work are autobiographical strands and scenes from the Warsaw Uprising. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/jaroslaw-marek-rymkiewicz.

[54] The Warsaw Uprising (1 August – 3 October 1944) – an armed uprising against the German army that was occupying Warsaw, organized by the Home Army, ending with a capitulation. The Polish army's losses counted 16,000 killed and missing in action, 20,000 wounded, and 15,000 taken prisoner; from 150,000 to 200,000 civilian inhabitants of the capital perished. As a result of the battle and the systematic destruction of the city by the Germans most of Warsaw's buildings were leveled. Owing to the tragic outcome of the uprising, the issue of the appropriateness of the decision to begin the fight remains a heated subject of debate.

[55] "Guślarz w mudurze Jüngera. Z Janem Klatą rozmawia Cezary Michalski," *Dziennik – dodatek Europa*, 2008 No. 20/21.09.

[56] Andrzej Żuławski (b. 1940) – a Polish film director, writer, scriptwriter, and actor; described as "controversial and uncompromising." He has made thirteen films, published almost thirty books. His films are described as visionary, violent, and oneiric. Cf.: http://culture.pl/en/artist/andrzej-zulawski.

[57] Rafał Geremek, "Jan Klata: jak wznieca się pył," *MaleMEN* 2010 No. 9; reprint: http://facet.onet.pl/znani/oni/jan-klata-jak-wznieca-sie-pyl,1,3209234,artykul.html. This text emphasizes the controversy and rebellion of Klata's play just as strongly, however.

[58] Institute of National Memory – a Commission for Investigating Crimes against the Polish Nation (IPN) – a scientific institution entitled to conduct investigations, created in 1999. Cf.: http://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-institute.

[59] Museum of the Warsaw Uprising – a modern, interactive historical museum in Warsaw, opened in 2004. It documents the history of the Warsaw Uprising. It runs scientific/research and educational activities devoted to the history of the uprising, as well as the history and activities of the Polish Underground State. It is meant to be a tribute to those who fought and perished for a free Poland and its capital, showing later generations of Poles the significance of those events. Cf.: http://www.1944.pl/o_muzeum/o_nas/?lang=en.

[60] "A, wysadzamy się."

[61] Michał Wołodyjowski and Ketling, Hassling-Ketling of Elgin – protagonists of Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy*; the reference is to the vow they make before battle, that they would not surrender the fortress, even if they must die under its rubble.

[62] Radical-National Camp (ONR) – at one time a national/radical political group, presently a social movement.

[63] "Żądam dostępu do włazu."

[64] "Guślarz w mudurze Jüngera."

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] "Żądam dostępu do włazu."

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] The Law and Justice Party (PiS) – a Polish political party created by brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński. The party's declared ideology is a combination of conservatism and Christian democracy. From 2005-2007 Law and Justice ruled the country, which ended with a rift within the party, a series of political scandals, and early elections.

[72] Cf.: Jan Klata, "Aniołowie o brudnych twarzach," *Gazeta Wyborcza Świąteczna*, 24-25/08/2007.

[73] "Guślarz w mundurze Jüngera."

[74] Anadrzej Żuławski, Jan Klata, "Chorzy na polskość."

EWA GUDERIAN-CZAPLIŃSKA

[ha'reɪ]

Zbigniew Raszewski Theater Institute
[ˈhu:r kobja+]
concept, libretto, direction: Marta Górnicka
score: IEN
literary collaboration: Agata Adamiecka
project I: *This Is the Choir Speaking* (premiere: 13 June 2010)
project II: *Magnificat* (premiere: 27 June 2011)

This women's choral project created by the Theater Institute (two consecutive editions: *This Is the Choir Speaking* and *Magnificat*) promised to be something remarkable even when the cast was still being filled out: there was an open call for all women who wanted to work together, regardless of age, profession, appearance, and vocal abilities. An interesting idea: applying for a choir without voice training, music reading abilities, and all the other prerequisites – and finding one's place within it. I suppose that the "other prerequisites," meaning an elementary feel for rhythm, were desirable, but undoubtedly professional music education was somewhere at the bottom of the list for recruiting participants. And on the top of the list was, perhaps, the need to do something new, to act, though in a direction that was not strictly defined. In the end the choir was made up of women who were beautifully diverse and beautifully united. There were very young girls, middle-aged women, and somewhat older women, with voices clear as a bell, or – for variety – with gravelly textures, each one different, each with its own personality, which, in a peculiar way, less obscured the unity than brought it to the fore. The attire of the choir singers seemed like work outfits, ordinary and comfortable, but not identical: cotton shirts, leggings or pants, sometimes a shirt; here a "trashy" style, there a bit of class in a more decorative blouse. On the stage, an empty white landing gently sloped toward the audience. They grouped in various formations: they created a shared front or scattered into smaller units, sometimes stepping up for a solo. The women stood, sat on the floor, knelt, lay down; face front, sideways, or backs turned. They controlled their facial expressions, but sometimes their faces twisted in anger or cracked into a smile. Of course, sometimes they also sang (in the traditional sense of the word), but seldom; they more often chanted, whispered, screamed, produced multi-voice combinations or tore out evenly in musical declamations through the alternating arrangement of high and low sounds. They did, then, sing unabated – if we call singing the simplest predetermined way of producing sounds, unlike ordinary speech. Particularly given that there was a precise score, minded by a conductor who remained in taut, intense contact with the whole group.

In the first edition the patchwork libretto included recipes (*Ćwierczakiewiczowa*[1]), a summary of Moniuszko's *Halka,*[2] a parody of Sleeping Beauty, Lara Croft and her "phenomenally short shorts," fragments of *Antigone* (the song on the power of love), and advertising slogans. In the second edition – now quite theme-oriented – the textual collage included quotations from the Bible (including the *Song of Songs*), fragments of prayers, statistical data on "non-religious, though practicing" Poles ("71 per cent choose church weddings, 74 per cent baptize their children"), excerpts from press articles and statements by priests, as well as "defenders of the cross"[3] or praising the Colossus of Świebodzin,[4] the description of the new dress and crown of the Black Madonna[5] (decorations were added in September 2010 in the form of diamonds, gold, bits of meteorites and a fragment of metal from the presidential Tupolev); but there were also quotes from *Forefather's Eve*, Marilyn Monroe assured us that her heart "belongs to daddy", Elfriede Jelinek cut through, and alongside her, a recipe for meat gelatin *chardonnay* was seductively proffered by Nigella Lawson; the Mother of God took the floor, also advertising herself ("I am the logo of the Polish Church, I am a brand name you can trust"). All these scraps of text – hissed, chanted, screamed, sung – are arranged in carefully constructed

counterpoint, so as to critically ascertain (in the first edition) what languages we still use to speak of women, and in the second edition, to "face off" with the "image of the Holy Virgin Mary. With its ideological and aesthetic authority. With the magnetic power of this holy icon of femininity," as the director claims.

In this performance the most important, basic ingredient is the choral form. It is, however, surprising and reconstructed.

A great deal of strength is generated through its reshaping, through the act of giving (restoring?) it a social function. Marta Górnicka calls this form "post-opera" and, as I see it, this is not only a question of changing the concept of musicality (sound quality), but above all, of constructing a play based purely on the work of the choir: there are no orchestra or soloists, the choir does everything by itself. This is a play of body and voice (an orchestra in itself: through sampling, murmuring, snorting); when necessary, a soloist or a small group steps forward. But it never ceases to be a choir: the women are one body, their breaths ideally balanced, their movements precise, in all the texts the voices come together and hit the mark, the conductor marks and sets the tempo. At the same time, it is not a choir for an instant, because it does not create a unified "collective character" – on the contrary, it exhibits the individuality of the choir singers, giving the impression that each one is speaking in her own name, that this female collective is operating as an "I." This also changes the meaning of the conductor's participation, as this is not a relationship of dependency, but one of partnership; nor is the audience excluded, as the conductor stands between viewers in the first row, and thus is "among us," sharing her energy with both sides, making the two groups (audience and choir) come closer together.

On the poster for the project the words "chorus of women" are written in a special kind of lettering, often used by the Theater Institute – using punctuation marks in place of some

letters, reversed symbols. But here the name is also placed in square brackets, emphasizing its phonetic transcription. This strategy – similar to the tactics of the Futurists, who launched an attack on conventional writing – also reminds us what the choir is speaking up about. For this is not entirely obvious – though at a first glance it seems the incarnation of discord and rebellion, a passionate protest against the objectification of women, against the constant demand of submission. But it is not as though we have already learned this lesson. The phonetic inscription is to show us how we really hear something; it tears us from the orthographic norm developed by the culture of writing. The same goes for the choir: introducing texts from glossy magazines or sermons into a context where they do not belong allows us to hear them "in square brackets," it takes them from their natural environment and shows how they work. But ultimately it uses them to speak of the fact that there remains no female language; that there are persuasions and usurpations manipulating the image of women according to the needs of a male world.

To achieve the effect of "hearing the lack," the choir needed to be specially constructed. In *The Taming of the Shrew*[6] directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, the last scene (Katherine's confession) is so compelling because the whole play works toward it: we must know how a slave becomes a slave, how it was possible that she chooses to enter the cage, allowing herself to be shut away in it, and now, from behind the bars, she declares her happiness. In this scene everything formed a startling counterpoint: the text, which gave the lie to the voice and to the tears, the humiliated body in the wedding dress, the bride with no life. *[ˈhuːr kobj+]* ("[ˈkɔːrəs əv wɪmən]") is constructed like the final scene of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but without the action that comes before it – we go at once to the counterpoint and contradiction, but with different vectors: here women are fully aware of their own strength, but they have no language to support it. Surrounded by recipes and Church admonitions one can lose this strength and even forget it exists. The task of the choir is to restore power to women in the face of this lack and oppression. To restore the public right to use their voices and bodies.

The strongest argument here is the choir singers themselves. Because they have regained this power and can share it with us, they convince us that we can do it too. These are not professional actresses, with many performances behind them; they surely had to break through a great many prejudices and fears before they took the stage and released a scream. When we hear a choir conducted by Stuligrosz,[7] for example, the delight in the beauty of the rendition blends with regret, derived from the certainty that we are excluded from something, that we ourselves will never sing in such a way. The distance between them and us cannot be crossed. When we listen to the Chorus of Women we feel that this revolt is also within the capabilities of our bodies. With Stuligrosz's choir we enter a sphere that maintains the social oppression, reproducing cultural models. With the choir of women, on the other hand, we drop out of it, see ourselves in a new configuration. Yet this choir is equally precise, practiced, focused, it counts down to the second. The difference is that it has put forward its own model, its own vision of culture.

All this is well and good, you say, except that we buy tickets, we sit in our seats, the division between actresses and audience holds firm – so what is this new model if so much of the cultural framework has remained intact? This "normal" sort of participation in a play is another part of the game – the sad message implied by the performance is that there is no way beyond the limits of culture. The choir singers again (as in inside the play) operate in the field of the "hot" and "cold" revolution: the former wins us back our body, we know that we can scream, whisper, sing; the latter helps us to perceive and to understand the oppressive side of culture. The "ordinary" aspect of participating in a play says so much that there is no new world invented here, but rather it tries to get involved in its framework. The choir infringes upon no social norms, it does not transgress or provoke – but it does show how we can tinker with the social division of voices without stepping outside the limits of the theater. ■

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[1] Lucyna Ćwierczakiewiczowa – a remarkably popular author of nineteenth-century cookbooks and books for housewives (her best-known work, from 1858, *365 Dinners for Five Zloty*, was reprinted over twenty times).

[2] A Polish opera with music by Stanisław Moniuszko and a libretto by Włodzimierz Wolski, first staged in 1848 in Vilnius (as a two-act opera), and in 1858 in Warsaw (after being reworked into a four-act version, which is preferred for staging in our day). It tells of the love a highlander village girl, Halka, for the nobleman Janusz, who, despite his promises, abandons Halka (with their child) and marries the rich noblewoman Zofia. On their wedding day, Halka is deranged with despair and wants to burn down the church, but ultimately (affected by the sublime song emanating from the church) forgets her revenge and commits suicide by throwing herself from a rock into a raging river. *Halka* was the first work by Moniuszko – today called "the father of Polish opera" – and its most popular fragments (such as the *mazur* from Act One, or Jontek's aria *Szumią jodły na gór szczycie*) are not only known to opera-goers, but widely recognizable.

[3] The defenders of the cross movement – a wooden cross was placed in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw five days after the crash of an airplane which, on 10 April 2010, held a delegation of state rulers flying to Russia for a ceremony marking the anniversary of the Katyn crimes; the plane crashed near Smolensk, none of the ninety-six people on board survived. Among the victims of the catastrophe was the reigning President of the country, Lech Kaczyński, and his wife, Maria. Flowers were laid and candles were lit in front of the palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, while the cross, placed there by boy scouts, was to mark the spot where a monument for the victims was to be located after the mourning period had ended. Three months later, when newly-elected President Bronisław Komorowski decided to remove the cross from the street "to a place more suitable for a religious symbol," a "cross defense movement" was initiated:

people protesting against the intent to remove it, holding constant vigil, demanding the swift erection of a monument – in the same place – who refused to accept the verdict of the investigations into the catastrophe (that it was an accident) and who were unable to part with their own narrative (an attack on the airplane). A group of "defenders of the cross" repeatedly clashed with groups representing those in favor of moving the religious symbol to the church (to reclaim the secular space of the city) and with the forces of law and order right outside the Presidential Palace. On these dramatic events see, among others, Dariusz Kosiński's book from a performance and theater perspective, *Teatra polskie. Rok katastrofy*, Kracow-Warsaw 2013.

[4] The world's tallest figure, the gigantic Jesus Christ the King of the Universe statue erected on the outskirts of the town of Świebodzin (around eighty kilometers from the Polish-German border) in 2010. Situated on a sixteen-meter-high mound, the figure itself is thirty-six meters high (three meters taller than the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro). The initiator of the project was the local prelate priest, Sylwester Zawadzki, who made the construction from parishoners' contributions as a "sign of gratitude for the jubilee year of 2000 and the enthroning of Christ the King in Świebodzin lands." The monument is presently becoming a pilgrimage site.

[5] This picture (icon) depicting the Mother of God with child is known as the Image of the Częstochowa Mother of God or the Black Madonna. Legend attributes the work to Saint Luke the Evangelist; the picture probably appeared in Poland in the fourteenth century and was held in the Paulinist monastery on Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. It is the best known Christian symbol in Poland, famed for many miracles and cures (as shown by the signs of gratitude that have hung for centuries in the Jasna Góra chapel). The cult of the picture involves clothing it in expensive "dresses" (there are nine, including ruby, diamond, gold, and amber), as well as crowns. The most recent dress and crown were placed on the picture as an Offering from the Nation during the great ceremony on 4 September 2010, on the centenary of the crown given to Mary of Jasna Góra by Pope Pius X; the decorations were made by an artisan goldsmith and amber craftsman from Gdańsk, Mariusz Drapikowski; alongside gold, silver, amber and precious stones he used shards of meteorites to create Mary's robes and crown, and at the bottom of Jesus's robes he placed a "ring thrown from a cattle car by a prisoner being transported to Auschwitz to be killed, and a fragment of the airplane from the Smoleńsk catastrophe, with a checkerboard-pattern of the fragments arranged in the national colors of the Polish air force. These two offerings, hidden in the folds of the Child's robes, speak of joining in His mercy and praise" (quoted from: Z. Rozanow, "Nowy strój Częstochowskiej Pani," *Tygodnik Niedziela*, No. 36, 05.09.2010).

[6] A play directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, produced at the Dramatyczny Theater in Warsaw in 1998, in which femininity was "taught" to Katherine by a trio of drag queens, and the basic issue concerned the mechanisms that constructed gender in culture; it was one of the first Polish plays, following the system change of 1989, to contain such harsh reflections on the repressive cultural norms and to question a faith in a defiant individual's capacity for self-determination within its structures.

[7] Stuligrosz's choir, properly known as: The Boys' and Mens' Choir of the Poznań Philharmonic, also known as the "Poznań Nightingales" or the "Stuligrosz Choir." They have existed continuously since 1949, when Professor Stefan Stuligrosz brought the choir (established during the war years) its first major performance at the Warsaw Philharmonic. The choir is renowned around the world, plays many concerts, has recorded dozens of records. It has a very broad repertoire: from Medieval and Renaissance vocal works and the masterpieces of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, to the Romantic compositions of Chopin and Schubert and contemporary works. Following the death of Stefan Stuligrosz, the legendary conductor and head of the ensemble, the choir is presently led by a student of the professor, Maciej Wieloch.

AGATA ŁUKSZA

A CHORUS LACED WITH BRONIEWSKI

Zbigniew Raszewski Theater Institute in Warsaw

REQUIEMACHINE

libretto based on the writings of Władysław Broniewski, concept, libretto, director: Marta Górnicka, score: IEN, literary consultant: Agata Adamiecka, choreography: Anna Godowska, set design: Robert Rumas, costumes: Arek Ślesiński, premiere: 24 March 2013

"Got nothing to buy the food and the drink / you've got to work if you want to live." Thus begins Władysław Broniewski's[1] "Unemployed," a poem written for the play *Suburbs*, staged by Leon Schiller[2] at Warsaw's Polski Theater in 1928. Three years later, when Broniewski and other members of the Communist-leaning *Miesięcznik Literacki* were arrested, he heard "Unemployed" in his cell – it had already turned into an "anonymous" popular prison song, with a much more proletarian sound than the original. In this revolutionary version "Unemployed" was published in various volumes and recited by the author himself.[3]

"Got nothing to buy the food and the drink / you've got to work if you want to live," shouts the "modern tragic chorus" headed by Marta Górnicka. "What have I got to do, where have I got to go? / All I got to feed my belly is this pile of stones," complain the colorlessly dressed *choreutai* with tired faces, and in this complaint we hear frustration mixed with anger, sadness, and spite. Górnicka's latest play, *Requiemachine*, employs an art form used to good advantage in The Chorus of Women (*This Is the Chorus Speaking*, *Magnificat*), but this

time the feminist protest is replaced by a critical reflection on the neo-liberal labor model, based, according to the director, on strategies turning us into an "army of workers / of robots." Górnicka subversively seizes upon Broniewski's agit-prop poems from the 1920s and 1930s – the libretto uses not only "Unemployed," but also, for example, "Hard Hands," choosing fragments that most clearly reveal the hybrid figure of the worker-machine-soldier. "Hard are the hands, hard the machines!" chants the Chorus, "We work through hardship and toil / […] / every day to work, till our blood starts to boil."

The subversiveness of the whole operation is in the appropriation of the meanings inscribed in these shards of Broniewski's interwar poetry. Today a phantom hovers over these works, that of the marriage between the poet and the People's Republic rulers, and the bankruptcy of the communist ideas, they echo with the lines of "A Word about Stalin."[4] This is not the place to ponder Broniewski's relationship with the authorities after his return to Poland in 1945, but it is curious that the most political and powerful poems he wrote in the socialist (or communist) spirit came about when the poet was battling the government, and not when he was serving it. As Mariusz Urbanek has observed, in Poland Broniewski's interwar poems were essential reading for political prisoners: his poems circulated from cell to cell, smuggled like illegal goods.[5]

Górnicka defuses the revolutionary power of these works, editing the concluding strophes from both "Unemployed" and "Hard Hands," the ones that call for battle and the promise of the socialist paradise. The result is a description of mechanical and soulless, tortuous and ultimately pointless labor, which in *Requiemachine* chiefly gives us an image of contemporary corporate workers and the ethic of efficiency that structures these institutions. Broniewski's words from before World War II, urging workers to fight the capitalist system and to gain a dignified life and job, are transfigured into the resignation and frustration of today's "wage slaves." The question arises: What language should the left speak in the twenty-first century, and the Polish left-wing in particular? What should be the language of a chorus of incensed, unemployed, corporate "robots" who have had enough, given that the language of the revolution has gone bankrupt, and words have been warped or appropriated by the neo-liberal system? Marta Górnicka has said that her inspiration for *Requiemachine* was, in part, last year's Benetton "Unemployee of the Year" advertising campaign, for which a foundation tied to the company was to give one hundred unemployed contest winners 5,000 euro apiece to launch their own business. In this totalizing fashion Benetton absorbed and neutralized the protest language of the young and unemployed, as most powerfully expressed at the end of the film to promote the campaign: "My job doesn't define me, what I fight for does"…

In a discussion published in *Dialog*[6] ("A Chorus of Scholars"), dealing with Górnicka's previous productions, at the intersection between such categories as voice and logos, the individual and the collective, form and content, rule and emancipation, the concept of the Chorus of Women emerged as a "paradoxical subject," a "subject in crisis," ambivalent and conscious of its own ambivalence (and grappling with the issue of what to say and how). Agata Adamiecka argued that the Chorus "displays female non-presence on the stage of history, and singing out its powerful song in the audience's face it mocks the system that has condemned women to silence."[7] In *This Is the Chorus Speaking* and *Magnificat* Górnicka posed the question (through a chosen form of art) of whether and how the female voice could appear and function in a patriarchal system, and particularly in the Western theater. The paradoxical subject spoke in a paradoxical form. Ewa Partyga's research shows an image of the chorus as a sign of both tradition and experimentation, while the chorus is situated on the verge between the stage and the viewers, becoming either the voice of the community, the margins, or the artist's "megaphone"; it is associated with sublime words of poetry, but its physicality is also admired. In short: it questions divisions and gives us an opportunity to go beyond the optic of dualism. Moreover, as Partyga claims, if we were to seek a patron for the chorus in the contemporary theater, "it could well be Dionysus Zagreus, who creates himself from his own scraps, from everything that once was, and from what now is."[8] Górnicka's chorus of women used almost all the above-mentioned fields of tension, creating a heterogenous collective body that exuded sensuality and formed itself in a "stolen" language.

In *Requiemachine* we again see the desire to give the floor to a group that has been systematically repressed or condemned to silence, or to create such a voice. The facts in Broniewski's biography thus take on a symbolic gravity in the performance: censored by every ruling power, even the one that raised him on a pedestal (and locked him in a psychiatric hospital in Kościan when it deemed this proper),[9] and sometimes jailed for his convictions, he died of larynx cancer. The chorus recalls Broniewski's illness, it coughs and chokes, repeating "I am mute," and Marta Górnicka performs a spectacle of power, silencing the various chorus members. There is a captivating sound to the lines of the poem "Silence": "I am silence, be quiet, brave. / I'll take you to your grave." This search for language (song) – a language that will be effective – also appears in the choice of works in which Broniewski ponders the strength, necessity, and character of his own poetry and the role of the poetic word as such. At the same time, it seems that *Requiemachine* might be seen as an extension of Marta Górnicka's previous projects, and not only in a formal sense, but an ideological one as well, even if the chorus has ceased to be made of women. I would even risk the thesis that we are dealing with a "male" chorus, revealing "masculinity" in crisis, in a physical, gesticular, symbolic dimension.

Nonetheless, there is no denying the impression that this Chorus is weaker. We could say, of course, that this is the result of an inevitable exhaustion of a formula, which has

gradually lost its revolutionary potential. *Requiemachine* no longer has the powerful, physical power of Górnicka's previous productions, it no longer strikes us so painfully, nor inescapably infects us. Doubtless, in *This Is the Chorus Speaking* and *Magnificat* this kind of intense, uncanny experience partly came from the materialization of the obscene phantasm of a polyphonic community of women, from which Górnicka has departed in *Requiemachine*. I suspect, however, that the reason for the weakening of this chorus is rather to be found in the upset balance between form and content: this time the subject, albeit paradoxical, emerges with great difficulty, for it is clearly laced with another subject: Broniewski. And Broniewski swells and grows in this play until he finally swallows both the Chorus and the Chorus Leader herself. "Broniewski: A Pole, a Catholic, an alcoholic" – these are the last words spoken on stage, words with which the poet used to introduce himself.

"The libretto uses the poems of Władysław Broniewski, fragments of speeches, letters, children's counting rhymes, which the CHORUS clashes with philosophical texts, advertising slogans, a Social Realist song, and heavy metal," states the official description of the play. It might well seem as though Broniewski would be only one of many voices in a multivoiced (as always) Chorus, that his poetry and his biography would emancipate themselves during the performance. Words can, after all, be stolen, processed, transfigured (something that was done successfully in the interwar revolutionary poems), while Broniewski's biography is easily turned into a metaphor: here is the fate of the Polish left, here is the history of Poland in a nutshell, even the essence of Polishness, distilled like a shot of vodka. And it was certainly the director's conscious decision to keep a tight rein on Broniewski, and not to present more personal events in the poet's life. She does not highlight how his wife, Maria, died twice over, because the poet received false information that she had perished in Auschwitz, nor the tragic and untimely death of his beloved "daughter-flyswatter," Anka. Nonetheless, Broniewski does grow out of *Requiemachine*, becoming the protagonist of the Chorus's songs, shunting the emerging collective subject into the background. It is not the army of worker-robots yearning for a reality in which not everything succumbs to market forces that sinks under the skin, but Broniewski and his poetry, "written in emotions," as Marcin Świetlicki[10] phrased it. No other words than his remain in the memory, none of the speeches, the children's songs, the advertising slogans... "In my head are other / things, ones that give me the creeps, / they make my heart grow cold, / but they are mine to keep." ■

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[1] Władysław Broniewski, 1897-1962, a Polish poet of left-wing sensibilities, author of numerous revolutionary poems. In post-war Poland he was officially marked by the socialist authorities as the nation's leading contemporary poet.

[2] Leon Schiller, 1887-1954, a theater director and theorist. One of the most important figures on Poland's interwar theater scene.

[3] A recording of Broniewski reciting "Unemployed" opens the *Broniewski* album published in 2006 by Raster Gallery. Broniewski's poems were arranged and sung by Marcin Świetlicki, Muniek Staszczyk, Pidżama Porno, Pustki, and Mass Kotki, among others.

[4] "Słowo o Stalinie" (1949), one of the epoch's typical panegyrics in praise of Joseph Stalin.

[5] Mariusz Urbanek, *Broniewski. Miłość, wódka, polityka*, Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warsaw 2011, p. 83.

[6] A magazine devoted to theater and drama.

[7] "Siła Chóru. Niesterowane głosy," Agata Adamiecka, Agata Chałupnik, Ewelina Godlewska-Byliniak, Jagoda Hernik-Spalińska, Joanna Krakowska, Ewa Partyga, Dorota Sosnowska," *Dialog* 2012 No. 1, p. 29.

[8] Ewa Partyga, *Chór dramatyczny. W poszukiwaniu tożsamości teatralnej*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Krakow 2004, p. 333.

[9] Broniewski's internment in Kościan is detailed in a documentary film by Maciej Gawlikowski, created in the framework of a TVP Errata series.

[10] Marcin Świetlicki (b. 1961), a Polish poet, writer, and musician. A member of the "BruLion" generation.

MARTA GÓRNICKA in conversation
with JUSTYNA STASIOWSKA

I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC

The CHORUS utilizes the sound of computer generated voice, which becomes the basic vocal technique, stripping the speech from any gender, or human attributes that would allow us to characterize it. It focuses on itself and refers back to itself. It sounds like a text-to-speech converter, which breaks every sentence down into words without paying attention to meaning. How did you create it?

The basic tool the CHORUS utilises is rhythmic speech, or, in the language of our rehearsals, "comp" speech, which recalls the sound of a computer or a machine. This is a kind of speech that oscillates around a single sound. But the point here is not to strip the language of meaning, but to create distance, to debunk the direct meaning in order to demonstrate the ideology within it. This sort of speech stratifies the message and cleanses it of any psychological content.

The original principles for the rhythmic speech came about at the beginning of the work, when I was creating the *Chorus of Women* project and I wanted to find a contemporary way to speak from the stage, how to "use" the language, but also how to recreate it. It was one of many strategies, along with mixing genres, shattering clichés, using musical quotations, counterpointing words. These various resources went to form the language of the CHORUS. At the same time, our goal was not to name the language, but to act upon it. In the *Requiemachine* project, rhythmic speech was taken to an extreme and became a theme unto itself. Broniewski writes in a way – particularly in the pieces from the 1920s and 1930s – that is marked by a special sense of rhythm. Broniewski lets his language be sucked in by totalist cogs, and wind up a remarkable machine. His language fires like an automatic rifle, the words are like bullets. The syllables hit robotic registers, they grate. On the other hand, he has a sense of the fallibility of words. He cries: "I am mute." The contradiction between grasping the meaning conveyed by language and experiencing it as both a rhythmical structure and individual expression of one's entanglement in a specific political context, unveiling the relations between ideological mentality and historical reality – all of this corresponded perfectly with my way of thinking about the CHORUS. This conjunction with regards to today's reality, terrorized by unemployment and the entanglement of each of us in a system where "everyone wants to be valued and everyone has his/her price," struck me as exciting. So I constructed *Requiemachine* from scraps of Broniewski's poetic language. It was an utterly new strategy for the CHORUS – to build a political message "using" almost solely poetic language. After that experiment the CHORUS is able to say anything on stage, I suppose.

"The language of a robot" sounds like the vision of a cyborg depicted by Donna J. Haraway in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, where the hybrid connection with machines allows one to separate oneself from the category of man (culturally understood as male) and to discard the patriarchal model of society. Departing from this perspective, I wanted to ask why, in *Chorus of Women* and *Requiemachine,* the robot language becomes central? What does this language provide? Is this a kind of language that starts from scratch?

In my projects, I show language as an ideology, not something that starts from scratch. There is no simple analogy or parallel here with Haraway's fantasy. Her cyborg crosses the boundaries of the dominant ideology, it goes beyond the network of binary oppositions. The scenario I have in mind is not that optimistic, though I am tempted by something like faith in the (im)possibility of creating a "Newspeak"... I think that in my performances, this temptation or hope is made tangible.

The critical aspect is central here, however. This is why I am constantly trying to deconstruct language. In my first performances it was about compromising the language, about the radical demonstration of its ideological mechanisms, which would explode them. Mechanisms are led to denouncing themselves, by means of their vocal expression.

In *This Is the Choir Speaking* and *Magnificat* the words are spoken by particular women on stage, so there is always an individual aspect of who is speaking on stage. In *Requiemachine* the language is robotic, superhuman, and artificial, but it also verges on extreme emotions. I myself become

a machine, soulless and attractive, all at once. A sensual, human machine. All of the statements made by the CHORUS are constructed in a way that brings out the tension between language and text, and voice and body. This relationship is always semantic.

It seems to me that the performance is about the choir itself and the way it operates on language. Your ancient chorus is a machine. How did you build it? How do you construct a choir?

Yes, the CHORUS is powerfully self-referential. How much can be vocalized by it? What are its limits? Is there an individual in the CHORUS – this is what I ask myself. The CHORUS uses its power, but as a machine, it accuses itself, denounces, is repulsed....

It seemed that in order to demonstrate the totalitarian mechanisms of the contemporary work system I had to unleash a total machinery on stage. A multi-cog song. The ambivalent status of the CHORUS could also help me suggest the ambivalence of such a human machine, of language, of the subject, of history etc... In *Requiemachine* the CHORUS is unusually silent, and fights to gain a voice with more determination than usual.

In terms of the practical dimension of the work, the group was practically rebuilt from scratch for the new project and the development of form. During the casting period I chose a twenty-eight-person group, who have only been working for a very short time with each other, at least by the standards of a theater choir – a few months or so. But it has progressed incredibly quickly. There are also eight women from *Chorus of Women* who have worked with me for the last three years, have gone through choral training, and as actresses are very conscious of this form, with a great deal of experience. The group is very diverse – some people are making their first appearance on stage. They all had to go through a very solid kind of training, based on a method which was developed during the time spent on my previous work. In this new performance I wanted speech to produce a more dense sort of physicality. I wanted to find a "robotic" equivalent for body language – and this was an enormous contribution from Ania Godowska, the choreographer who developed these ideas and gave them a solid artistic shape.

It seems to me that you have built a specific model of theater with strictly defined rules; could you define the foundations of this system?

I am restoring the CHORUS to the theater, giving it its own form. I place it on stage as a single protagonist. The CHORUS is meant to create a strong political message, it is meant to touch us – and I believe it is capable of restoring the totality of the theatrical experience. How to build such a CHORUS? By creating a completely new actor/performer on stage. And by trying once more to create a language to speak in.

The actors' many months of training is meant to build a strong, focused, and intense presence on stage. The ensemble has a program made up of exercises which enhance work with the living voice within the body, building a stability on stage. The voice is very consciously guided through the hands, the hips, and down to the feet. I always think about it spatially, I see it as solid matter – multidimensional. The eye-ear relationship is also important, as it is the actor's main source of expression. But of same importance are the three points in the body, which are involved and stretched out in opposite directions. I call this sort of work with body/voice static work, though it leads to the creation of an animated, dynamic, and very energetic body/voice. I am constantly in search of a certain quality of the body linked with the voice.

This training[1] is a kind of basis for working with various techniques of singing or speaking. The chorus speaks in a heavy metal convention, tries to sing opera or pop, to whisper, to scream noiselessly, to vomit words... speaking in terms of craft, it has to be both flexible for this work, and develop solid foundations.

Training also builds the performer's consciousness on stage. Every actor/chorus member learns about ways of working with language in a chorus. Ultimately they are bringing out the language on stage, making it present, and joining it with elements of static muscle work.

Another important matter is that the CHORUS exists only through individuals. Through very diverse people with various biographies, of different ages. I am far from thinking of the CHORUS *en masse*. As a result, the voice of the CHORUS rings out not only in unison, but also in duets, trios, and solos. And if it comes out in unison, then this is a very important decision, and the CHORUS will communicate using this device only. The whole work process is extremely demanding and time-consuming. Before beginning the project I meticulously described my foundations for thinking about the CHORUS and its particular way of functioning on stage in *Document of Principles*, which will perhaps be published someday.

It seems that you are making a human machine to grind down language.

This is only one dimension of the CHORUS. Indeed, on stage I evoke machinery which is meant to powerfully demonstrate language, while trying to go beyond it. I blend texts, juxtapose them, pile them up; meanings are most often constructed in between various scenes, in a clash between – for example – ancient texts and advertisements – this is where most things happen. Dramaturgy always derives from the theme, and this is what sets the course. Musicality, in turn, creates an opportunity to go beyond language. Portatos, glissandos, and staccatos are here to break the neck of words. "We are workers[2] / robots of the word" – this phrase by Broniewski brilliantly describes the work – "we have to say what others are unable to say."

Additionally, the CHORUS always has an intense physical dimension. I believe that it brings to life a sense of tragedy on stage, one that is missing in contemporary theater. That the

CHORUS, through its political nature and power, can be moving, that it has enormous cathartic potential. Another important thing is the issue of the relationship between myself and the group on stage. All this weaves the tale that makes up the CHORUS.

For me, the performance was a shattering experience. There is a tension between the poet revealing his individuality and the pressure of unification. The creation of language equates the death of the individual. Individuality is reduced to general categories: "I, a Pole. A Catholic. An alcoholic."

In the finale there is no language... There are only clichés, labels, shards. The machine cuts off and ghoulishly repeats things. It goes forward then back. But the foundation for the words which we hear in the finale is ecstatic: "I am silence, oh thou proud and brave, I shall take thee to your grave." A CHORUS between death and bliss. A CHORUS both total and crushed....

And when the chorus sings can we make out who sings badly?

Well, it's difficult, but you can... Except that everything depends on what you mean when you say "bad singing." The finale of *Requiemachine* was written to create a powerful dissonance – there are cascades of consecutive semi-tones, and this sound should hurt hard. So in this case, I would prefer to ask: Does it hurt? If it doesn't clash, if the CHORUS is not "off-key" – it's bad! Nothing happens. There's no tension! *Magnificat* ends "differently." The chorus beautifully sings a fragment of Bach's *Magnificat* in D-major, though it is not pure song, as in case of a classical opera choir. Nor is the point to sing badly or offkey. Singing "badly" can also be great, and again a kind of quotation closes the performance.

Creating a male choir would give you the possibility of using lower registers, but you don't use it that way. You use high sounds, which have a powerful effect on the ears and the brain.

The point of departure for the chorus is natural speech, which is its natural level of sound. We use the scale at length, but I did search for sounds meeting the criteria of being particularly grating for the brain. If it works that way, then great. The sound suggested itself as evident during the rehearsals. Because sound made by the CHORUS is mainly supposed to be haptic. I check the results on my own body.

How did you arrive at this particular timbre of the piece?

Language is the most important material here, and the ideas how to "use" it emerge at the stage of writing the libretto. I began writing *Magnificat* when two words appeared on the paper: "God" and "pay." I work with the composer IEN, who creates a kind of sketch of the score for the libretto and puts her own ideas into this form. We also use the Document of Principles, which I created when work was just getting underway, and in which I made a concrete list of formal strategies and also the general vision to the CHORUS. The sketch of the score is not written in notes, though sometimes the staff appears, such as when there are musical quotations, when the CHORUS is meant to sing a fragment of a Disney song, or an important fragment from Sophocles's *Antigone*, but it is basically a text parsed into syllables. In the course of the rehearsals we lay this frame into the voice and the body. Together with the choir singers we test and form the final shape of the play.

That reminds me of a performance lecture. Your theater is not something we experience so much as critically analyze on a deeper level, in the spirit of Brecht.

I relate to the performative approach. I think of the choir members on stage as I would of performers, who know the techniques of choral work on the voice/body, and who know how to "use" a text. Yet the aim is to make the choral theater touch us, strike us. I could definitely say that I take something from both movements.

In terms of sound this serves as an affective force to rouse the audience, to shake them up. What is this meant to bring about? Not a c*atharsis,* surely? Is the viewer meant to be moved by the fate of Broniewski?

I don't want to eliminate any type of response. If someone sits in the audience with a lump in their throat, that means the CHORUS is working. But this is not about the viewers being moved by the fate of Broniewski! Maybe by their own fates – that's more like it. The point is in the experience having another dimension to it. Even if in the previous projects viewers drew upon what was shared, feminine, the critical machine was still powerfully present there. Both these registers operated at once – this is fundamental to me.

If the CHORUS speaks of "man" in *Requiemachine*, perhaps this subject will have, for some, Broniewski's alcohol-swollen face, but on the other hand, the viewer might mobilize a critical way of thinking. Simultaneously, the experience of the CHORUS always has a very strong physiological aspect – in part through the voice. The acting training lasted several months and aimed to set in motion a certain potency of the tragic nature of the CHORUS. The point was for all these layers to work simultaneously.

The chorus appeared at the Congress of Women[3] and it functioned in an entirely different manner, in the context of a social movement. On the one hand you offer a machine that has the power to move through sound, but this machine also deconstructs, for example, the concept of femininity as essential. It is used deceptively.

The CHORUS is not a simple tale about a community. Of course, to begin such a discourse on stage, to demonstrate certain mechanisms of power, the CHORUS has to build a strong community in terms of their work in the theater. That is our basis. But we do not affirm such community movements in a simple way, because the CHORUS shows the danger in

latching onto such categories; it demonstrates the reigning mechanisms behind the community, exclusion among them. Apart from this, the CHORUS stands on stage as a collective, but it is above all a collection of individuals, who might not even be listening to each other on stage....

Is this "listening" of the people in the chorus a question of the members not listening to themselves or not listening to the others? Do they see they themselves as a community?

I had in mind the image of the contemporary CHORUS in the theater, not the practical aspect of the work. The CHORUS is a gathering of individuals fighting to create a community on stage, but this community is conscious of its limitations, it is to some extent (im)possible. ■

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[1] Besides working with the Chorus of Women Górnicka runs workshops using the choral form for working with a given community. This sort of work comes closest to applied theater. Thus far she has run workshops with the Roma society in Slovakia ("In the frame of X-APARTMENT: THE CHORUS OF ROMA PEOPLE" 2013) and in Israel ("Mother Courage Won't Keep Silent: A Chorus for Wartime Participating Groups and Choirs" 2014).

[2] The Polish word for worker, *robotnik*, makes for an untranslatable play with the word "robot" in this poem.

[3] The Congress of Women is a socio-political movement that began in 2009 with a convention of over 4,000 women from the entire country, who discussed women's contribution to the previous twenty years of Polish history. Organized every year, the meetings serve to generate postulates and proposals for regulations.

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THE ARCHIVE

The collection of materials housed in the Archive is at the core of the Institute's activity: it drives and shapes its educational, publishing, and events programmes, and helps to widen access to the work of Jerzy Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre in various languages. The collection can be accessed in the Reading Room.

PUBLISHING

Across books, journals and films in Polish and English – and co-editions in other languages – the Institute's publishing activity covers a wide range of topics in cultural and performance research as well as documenting and analyzing the work of Jerzy Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre. The Institute is the publisher of the Polish theatre journal *Didaskalia* and the online research journal *Performer*, and co-publisher of *Polish Theatre Perspectives* (peer-reviewed journal published in English). Icarus Publishing Enterprise, a collaborative initiative of the Grotowski Institute, Odin Teatret (Denmark), Theatre Arts Researching the Foundations (Malta) and Routledge (USA/United Kingdom), presents English translations of texts by artists and scholars about the practice and vision of theatre as a laboratory.

Ludwik Flaszen *Grotowski & Company*
Translated by Andrzej Wojtasik
Icarus Publishing Enterprise, 2013

Laboratory KARAWANASUN The School of Rena Mirecka

EDUCATION

The Institute's educational programme encompasses practical, research and outreach activities for both specialist audiences and the general public. It aspires to foster a vibrant intellectual and culture-shaping milieu, open to new initiatives, methodologies and subjects.
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- Alternative Theatre Academy
- BodyConstitution
- Grotowski.net
- Laboratory KARAWANASUN The School of Rena Mirecka
- Open University of Research
- Regula contra Regulam
- Studio Kalari
- Theatre Cinema

Paul Allain
Summer Semminars
Open University of Research,
September 2013

Mauser directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos as part of Masters in Residence, premiered in October 2013

ARTISTIC RESIDENCES

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SELECTED ARTISTIC PROJECTS:

- Masters in Residence (Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret, Anatoly Vassiliev, Theodoros Terzopoulos, Diamanda Galás)
- Solo Situations: a programme of short performance works
- Teatr ZAR's "Armine, Sister"
- Residencies: Teatr ZAR, Studio Matejka

Armine, Sister
Performance by Teatr ZAR, premiered in November 2013

Eugenio Barba, Odin Teatret's 50th anniversary, September 2014

EVENTS

The Institute hosts a diverse programme of events, including performances, exhibitions, concerts and festivals.
It collaborates with many Polish and international organizations, both academic and artistic.

Georges Banu and Peter Brook "Grotowski: What was, what is. And what is to be done" conference, January 2009

INSTYTUT IM. JERZEGO GROTOWSKIEGO
THE GROTOWSKI INSTITUTE

The Grotowski Institute is a city-funded cultural institution that runs artistic and research projects responding to the challenges laid down by the creative practice of Jerzy Grotowski as well as documenting and spreading knowledge about his achievements.

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