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/ NEW CHOREOGRAPHY

Between the Stage and the Obscene: On the Critical Potential of the Naked Body

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The article describes the subversive potential of nudity and pornography in such plays as *This Is a Musical* by Karol Tymiński and *Hundred Toasts for a Dead Artist* by Anita Wach and Bojan Jablanovec, representing critical choreography focused on dominant socio-political order of representation. It also describes the deconstruction of normative models of being in the world to establish new rules of the game in opposition to existing ones and the discovery of mutual private and public influences. The choreographies under discussion can be described as both perverse and subversive, which allows for presenting obscene relationships with emancipation. The author tries to prove that in the space of art, obscenity is often a trickster's strategy, leading to the redefinition of the existing division into what is visible and invisible in the public space.

Keywords: obscenity, dance, nudity, porn, body

Obscenity as a trickster's caper

Despite the sexualization of the capitalist public space, the image of a naked, desiring body remains a dangerous Other for systems of representation. It is visible in numerous controversies over exhibitions and performances

suspected of being obscene. Considering the reasons for the collective aversion to scenes which are overtly, one can refer to Michał Paweł Markowski's thoughts on the reception of Witold Gombrowicz's *Kronos*. He claims that the reason for rejecting Gombrowicz's notes and refusing to classify them as literature lies in their incompatibility with the bourgeois worldview, based on three fundamental oppositions (in my opinion also characteristic of the construction of the public sphere): life vs. work, truth vs. fiction and the public vs. the private. All three assume an upbringing in a repressive, rather than affirmative code (cf. Markowski 2013). I think one can give a similar explanation to controversies over critical art (including dance), which often refers to the radical aesthetics of body art and establishes new alternative orders, i.a. through abolishing the dualisms described by Markowski or deconstructing their conventionality in accordance with the slogan "private-political". It takes place, among others, in performances representing critical choreography, which aim to dismantle stereotypes concerning broadly understood otherness and destabilize the desired – heteronormative – models of being (dancing), in which the naked body actualizes the patterns of a pornographic, voyeuristic spectacle, at the same time dismantling and transforming them into emancipatory narratives. A perverse subjects speaks in a forbidden language, hyperbolizing the political aspect of the body made public by the authorities, which treat it like the Other, imposing repressions and restrictions. It is a trickster character[1], which comes from the position of a cultural outsider, and is also described as a "clownish figure of mercurial variability and unpredictability" (Sznajderman 2000, p. 26). It both negates the established laws and affirms the possibility of transgressing them creatively, thus blurring the boundary between the stage or scene and the obscene.

In *Passwords*, Jean Baudrillard sets the obscene against the scene, or stage.

In the former, he claims, “there is no play, no dialectic or separation, but a total collision of elements” (Baudrillard 2003, p. 28). The latter, on the other hand, assumes play and a distanced gaze. In this view, obscene actions, characterized by their directness and immediacy, become the opposite of seduction, described by the philosopher as establishing relations which are not instantly fulfilled. Obscenity understood in this way is not a quality of something coarse or vulgar in the common understanding of the words, but rather of the abolished difference between the stage representation and the thing represented, between the signifier and the signified.

Obscenity, which is a synonym of perversion and a quality of pornographic performance, can be explained in a broader way – as a complete transparence/visibility of things, which Baudrillard (2003) describes in his analysis of the strategies and aesthetics of information society and postmodern media. We are dealing with a paradoxical category which refers to the taboo sphere, but can also describe the public sphere and its representation, which results, among other things, from the way in which the porno-chic infiltrates mainstream visual culture (cf. McNair, 2002. The adjective “obscene” should be paraphrased (according to its etymology) as “situated beyond the scene/stage” (*ob scena*), i.e. not suitable for public display (cf. Baronciani 2016)[2], which is surprisingly parallel to Baudrillard’s idea of postmodernity as a world where the Debordian spectacle can no longer take place, because everything has already been made visible and brought to the surface.

This ambivalence present in the cultural understanding of the obscene – that which is situated beyond the scene/stage – will be discussed on the example of *This Is a Musical* by Karol Tymiński and *Hundred Toasts for a Dead Artist* by Anita Wach (choreographer, performer) and Bojan Jablanovec (creator of

the original idea and director), both of which show the critical potential of obscenity and nudity. An analysis of these performances allows to present the mutual influences of the stage/scene and the obscene, as well as the artistic strategies of transforming the obscene into a domain of resistance, where the subordinated can speak (dance), and thus negotiate with the structures of symbolic violence. I would like to show that the obscene can become a trickster's caper, balancing not on the boundary between chaos (nature) and order (culture), but that between the private and the public, or experience and its representation. It leads to a redefinition of the existing distinction between the visible and the invisible, and, what follows – a negation of the binary divisions into art and non-art, the symbolic and the semiotic.

The complete (in)visibility of things

The question which images will be considered obscene and/or pornographic is always determined by the spatio-temporal context of their situation, which is evidence of the discursive character of both categories, also common in narratives on (non)art, but, while pornography is placed on the peripheries of the world of spectacle, broadly understood "art" – at least in its traditional, "high" form – occupies its center. The scene/stage and the obscene are woven together by the dream of transgression, understood as stepping beyond bodily-subjective as well as systemic boundaries.

Anomalies and deviations from the systemically defined norm require examination and subjugation – not only in the social sphere, but also in art. Perversion, understood as a symptom of an illness, appears to be a synonym of otherness, which is always dangerous in homogenous structures. However, it is worth noting that the verb "to pervert", according to its

etymology, means to “overthrow, subvert; turn aside from a right path or opinion” (Hoad, 1996, p. 348), which links it to potentially subversive practices, meant to criticize the system and expose the hidden mechanisms of control. It is no coincidence that the naked body became one of the symbols of the counterculture of the 1960s – a movement aimed at damaging the “healthy” whole and subverting the existing order through a liberation both sexual and political.

Here it would be useful to convey the idea of the pornographic gaze as a constitutive element of postmodern communication and its surplus of information, whose recipients become passive, making no attempts at deeper interpretation (cf. Baronciani, 2016). In such dramaturgy of the media spectacle the pornographic light, bringing out the details, falls not only on the forbidden, but precisely on that which the dominating discourse wants to make visible. In its shadow one can find subjects and objects which could threaten the homeostasis of collective life and its strictly controlled images. The belief in the adequacy between the world and its representations distracts from that which is concealed for some reason (cf. Baronciani, 2016) – from the traditionally understood obscene.

In their performances, Wach and Jablanovec, as well as Tymiński, combine the obscenity of the postmodern with obscenity understood as a quality of bodies and subjects excluded from the official order of representation, thus emphasizing the subversive potential of the margin. The banal transgression characteristic of the culture of surplus, is set against subversive transgressions involved in strategies of resistance. In this context, *This is a Musical* and *Hundred Toasts for a Dead Artist* are obscene performances, because, as I will show in the following part of the article, they restore visibility to the subjects and objects pushed to the margins of official

representations, whose presence in the dominant system of social and media spectacle is undesirable and inconvenient, as it does not suit the categories of “decency” established by the authorities in order to preserve distinct boundaries between the normal and the deviant or pathological.

The musicality of the body

In Tymiński’s solo choreography, the human body gains the qualities of an instrument, which serves both as a space and a subject of experience. The dancer’s nakedness seems radical, because he dismisses aestheticization and linear narrative, offering instead a manifestation of the pure materiality of existence, not tangled up in symbolic systems, and thus torn out of the power structures. The choreographer introduces his body into the space of obscene engrossment, generating extreme and violent experiences. His actions abolish the distinction into the aggressive and the affirmative; care leads to destruction and vice versa. The performance becomes an (auto)erotic show, accumulating features typical for body art performances and pornographic shows. It is the most visible in the final scenes, which involve a camp visualization of a homosexual anal intercourse between two men, Tymiński and his partner, shown on a screen in the form of an animated rainbow shadow. The performer’s body becomes problematic not only due to its vulgarity, but, first and foremost, because it is so unspectacular, which breaks the rule of theatrical illusion, and thus also the opposition between art and life, which Markowski discussed with reference to *Kronos*.

During the choreography proper, the dancer falls down, begins to shake compulsively, twists his limbs into inhuman, grotesque shapes, hits himself with the microphone and rubs it against his skin, amplifying that which is

usually unheard, and transforming into the “musical” mentioned in the title. The choreography is focused on a specific experiencing body, subjected to a sometimes brutal training which means to extract somatic sounds out of it. This particular musicality of the body is evidence of its openness – the amplified sounds broaden its boundaries; they become a common experience, linking the lonely performer with the community of the audience.

Tymiński’s body-musical seems to echo Vinko Globokar’s *Corporel* (1984), composed of sounds made by the body through clapping, scratching, hitting and pinching, and serving as a scenario of sorts for performers. Both works discuss the ontology of the body, understood as a hybrid tangle of the subjective and the instrumental (objective), as well as its communicative and meaning-making capabilities. Through examining and amplifying natural bodily vibrations, Globokar and Tymiński point out the open places (the nose, throat, mouth) which break down the concept of the body-subject as a closed whole, set against the chaotic fragmented body from before Lacan’s mirror phase. The performances also touch upon the problem of primal communication, eluding the laws of logic and syntax, and thus – according to Michel Foucault – characteristic for the mentally ill, or, more broadly speaking, subjects deprived of discourse. The music of the body can be understood in two ways: as a kind of nonverbal, somatic communication, but also, especially in Tymiński’s case, a hyperbolic, acoustic metaphor of exclusion from the normative order. Language allows the speaker to reveal themselves, but acceptable forms of self-expression are strictly defined by the system – a collection of norms and rules determining the clarity of the message. The self, in Foucault’s words, “must constitute self through obedience” (Foucault 1988, p. 45); a conscious or unconscious refusal to subject oneself to the rigor of language threatens to turn narrative into

babble, speech that is devoid of meaning, and thus pushes the absurd self into social periphery.

Tymiński solo performance is a tale about those excluded from the patriarchal order, where heteronormativity is the necessary precondition of visibility (and audibility). The author of *This Is a Musical* escapes the pressure of rigors, not only linguistic, but also aesthetic, and thus directs the process of his own exclusion from the boundaries of discourse. The substitution of verbal narrative with embodied sounds, unaccompanied by symbolic meanings, seems both a radical refusal to subject oneself to processes of normalization (and deformation), which finds its reflection in the poetics of the performance, and an attempt at embodying Bataille's eroticism, set against the culturally sanctioned practices of romanticizing love experiences, and instead assuming first and foremost cruelty and desolation (cf. Bataille 1986, p. 170).

Linguistic exclusion concerns subjects which violate the linguistic prohibitions existing in social communication, referring to the code or meanings of speech (cf. Foucault, 2006, p. 545). The meaningless sounds Tymiński extracts from his body could be seen as an equivalent of language faults made consciously as a gesture of refusal to participate in the linguistic community. It has to be pointed out, however, that he does not perform the process of rejecting the babbling Other, but rather embodies a radical and premeditated rejection of meaning, thus revealing the violence of symbolic systems and resisting the pressure to created (produce) narratives and representations, separating the self from experience and forming the condition of subjectification, understood as imposing meaning. From a normative perspective, both the (anti)aesthetics of the performance and the visualization of a homosexual intercourse at the end could be considered as

a form of blasphemy. They manifest an effort to substitute the homologous culture, whose foundations are determined by the principles of reduction and unification, with a culture of heterology, praising, as Michał Sikora writes, “everything that is scandalous, impure, tempestuous, leading to the destruction of norms which only limit, uniformize and trivialize existence” (Sikora, 2013, p. 108)

Gay porn

Tymiński’s solo performance is complemented by the controversies around it. Edyta Kozak, head of the Ciało/Umysł Festival canceled its premiere at a one day’s notice[3], because, in her opinion (as related by Paweł Soszyński in *Dwutygodnik [Biweekly]*) it proved to be “too destructive” and “lacked the presence of a subject” (Soszyński 2015). Finally, the first performance took place at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute on November 14, 2015, and it proved divisive both among the public and the critics, with the most heated debate concerning the final scene of “gay porn”[4]. Even though Tymiński is accompanied by a rainbow shadow, the situation is obvious and leads to a clear, naturalist solution.

What seems more relevant that the investigation into the actual character of this scene (pornographic or not) is an attempt to reflect on it within the context of the whole performance, in which a body-subject looking for fulfilment loses its contours and dissolves itself in a total experience or/and dreaming about it. *This Is a Musical* becomes a record of a twofold transgression. In the first part of the choreography, the dancing, shouting, singing, and – above all else – desiring subject leaves its own boundaries, sharing the experience of bodily sonority. In the second, final part, he loses himself in the Other. This meeting is particularly dramatic, because the self-

involved is nonheteronormative, and its desire for contact is tabooed and repressed by the patriarchal culture. Resigning from artistic conventionality and letting art be literal and obscene, Tymiński symbolically liberates himself from oppression by hyperbolizing the visibility of the forbidden. The principle of hypervisibility and hyperobscenity organizes the (micro)world shown in the performance, which seems to be driven both by a need for contact as a desire for delight.

The performer demonstrates his obscene pleasure and otherness, inseparably intertwined. In order to understand this dependence, it is crucial to emphasize the difference between the normative pleasure and delight, already belonging to the prohibited territory. Lacanian psychoanalysis presupposes an antinomic, but at the same time strongly unified, relationship between these two categories. Delight (*jouissance*) is defined as a perverse transgression of the principles of the more neutral pleasure (*plaisir*). Its experience involves a particular dramaturgy – a tension resulting, on the one hand, from its intensity, and on the other – from the risk. It is no coincidence orgasm is sometimes called "a little death" (*la petite mort*), i.e. a brief loss or weakening of consciousness. According to Bataille, the loving subject discovers in the Other its extension, but also loses its energy in them.

Jouissance leads to transgression, and thus damages the integrity of the subject, which, if it functions within a normative order and makes its experience visible, risks social exclusion. By staging the pursuit of desire, Tymiński breaks taboos and rules of communal life. The regained right to delight is linked to the right to transgress, conditioning the transformation of a homogenous system into an open space which affirms otherness. The rainbow shadow-lover becomes a synecdoche of a Utopian universe of

suspended difference, and the pornographic clip itself completes the narrative of a queer body as a place defined equally by delight and rebellion as well as trauma, expressed in autoaggressive motion, actually changing the dancing body (the artist dances close enough to the audience to let them notice the bruises and scratches on his skin).

The choreographer consciously provokes charges of obscenity leveled against his dance, using strategies typical of pornographic spectacle, casting an “extremely strong light at the bodies and details of the intercourse” (Baronciani, 2016), whose purpose is not the creation of a narrative, but the act of revealing itself (Baronciani, 2016), transformed by Tymiński into a critical gesture. In this solo act, exposure seems to be the precondition of starting an alternative narrative, created against established principles and leading to an emphasis on the political aspect of the body and the subjectification of the Other. It turns out that in the field of art, pornography understood as “casting an intense light on that which should not be seen” can become an emancipatory strategy through which the nonnormative subject obtains power over the discourse which excludes them, thus transforming the invisibility imposed on them into hypervisibility.

Here one can refer to the notion of the pornographic gaze and its dramaturgy according to Baronciani. Even though Tymiński does not explicitly refer to these observations, and his choreography is not a direct critique of information society, the theory of illuminating and obfuscating information seems flexible enough to apply also to mechanisms of producing (in)visibility and (non)normativity typical for patriarchal cultures. In this case, a pornographic, and thus fetishizing gaze would be directed towards normative (or normalized) bodies which are overrepresented in the public sphere, and would omit those which do not fit the broadly understood canon.

In *This Is a Musical* Tymiński reverses the direction of the sharp light described by Baronciani, and here illuminating the margin does not involve objectification, but a subjectification identified with making visible. In this way, perversion reveals its second meaning - perverseness. The Other intercepts strategies of (not)speaking about him something/someone obscene and transforms them into an element of its own identity project.

Trickster – a perverse prankster

The bitter, scathing sense of humor present in the performance, and further strengthened by the poetics of the obscene and scandalizing buffoonery, make it possible to view Tymiński as a dancing trickster, coming from the world of cursed carnival players, taken from folk imagination and representing the social periphery. The clown, once banished from the space of the visible due to the bodily nature of his profession, as well as his physical otherness and grotesqueness (cf. Sznajderman 2000, p. 13-17); a trickster character – ambivalent, and a perfect, or, one could say, total embodiment of otherness. Twisting his joints and ironically manifesting his non-heteronormativity , Tymiński seems to be a dancing, perverse prankster, and the whole performance becomes a subversive choreography, whose dramaturgy is based on the imperative of transgression and hyperbolized, camp obscenity.

In *This Is a Musical*, the stage is a space of subversive sacrilege, the kingdom of Dionysus. Eliade describes the trickster as a figure who is, on the one hand, related to gods because of their primality and special powers, and on the other close to humans in regard to gluttony, excessive sex drive and amorality (1984, p. 156-8). Tymiński, whose “special power”, visible in the amazing intensification of the stage experience, is the ability to blur the

boundaries between the stage/scene and the obscene, the representable and non-representable, disturbs oppressive binarisms, which condition the violent exclusivity of the normative space of the visible. Basing his choreography on desire, he not only abolishes and deconstructs the taboo, but also utilizes the stereotype of a “promiscuous gay man” (Mrozek, 2017), which is repeated and subversively rewritten in the performance. Here, the foreground is formed by things which are normally concealed and repressed. This makes visible the subversive potential of the poetics of the obscene, which can become a tool for redefining the public sphere. The ostentatiously obscene performer includes that, which is prohibited in terms of public morals, into the theatrical space, which, by assumption, represents official (i.e. not pornographic) art/culture, thus abolishing the boundary between the private and the public, and materializing the subconscious.

A shaman at an obscene forefathers’ eve

The duality present in the figure of the clown is the point of departure for the (auto)satirical performance *Hundred Toasts for a Dead Artist* by Anita Wach and Bojan Jablanovec. The minimalist, ironic choreography unfolds in the space of a spectacular installation, devised as a banquet, which should actually be considered an anniversary wake. The performance, while preserving its formula, is versatile and open. In its Polish version, created for the *Kantor Now!*project, the audience toasts Tadeusz Kantor, in the Slovenian one the remembered and celebrated figure is the Romantic poet Franc Prešeren , the Italian version deals with Dante Alighieri and the American one with George Washington[5].

As the party hostess, the performer welcomes the audience in a skimpy, provocative costume whose main element – a black mesh shirt – alludes to

subculture aesthetics, but can also be associated with the stereotypical image of a street prostitute. Her face is covered with clown makeup, which refers to Kantor's Market Stall and becomes a visual confirmation of the role played by Wach, an embodiment of the trickster as a joker, negating the established order.

By combining the elements characteristic of the popular images of the clown and prostitute, the choreographer and the director refer to the common ancestry of these figures as individuals who belonged "to the group excluded from *familia christi*" the longest (Sznajderman 2000, p. 15), and thus were "typically trickster-like" (Sznajderman 2000, s. 23) – always aliens and outsiders. The clown and the prostitute are also linked by common symbolism, determined by that which has to be concealed in a normative (and rational) system, i.e. the bodily taboo, encompassing both abjectness and passion. Moreover, the prostitute, just like the clown, is a figure that is "typically trickster-like, marginal, 'excluded'" (Sznajderman 2000, p. 23), always an alien and outsider, and so mediating between life and death, both human and animal. Using the attributes of both these figures, Wach speaks and dances from the margin, which in *Hundred Toasts…* becomes also a space linked to independent choreographers, with no ties to any institution. This creates a hybrid of multilevel exclusions, manifesting its own otherness and incompatibility with the normative system. The performer's body seems to become a visual allegory of Kantor's lowest rank and a variation on the theme of one of the most ambiguous, wandering characters of the Theatre of Death – the Cleaning-Woman.

In the figure of the prostitute-death from Cricot 2 Theatre, carnival is mingled with mourning. Wach builds her character from these apparent contraries, becoming the mistress of an ironic ceremony, during which the

viewers celebrate the death of the artist-producer and the birth of the artist-consumer. The dancer, toasting Tadeusz Kantor, functions as a shaman at an obscene forefather's eve ceremony, where contact with the dead is not a mystical ritual, but turns out to be carnivalesque – subversive and anarchic – tomfoolery. The performer's actions echo the medieval Feast of Fools, explained by Jacques Heers as "a revenge of the subordinated, a reversal of hierarchy and unceremonious aping of sacred gestures" (Heers, 1995, p. 75). The obscene dancer builds a synecdoche of the carnivalesque reality described by Bakhtin, but here the subversion takes place predominantly within the space of art, which Wach reclaims for herself, and, in a broader perspective – for new dance artists. Even though carnival is by definition a collective action, the enhanced grotesqueness and forwardness of the performer's gestures, made more coherent by the clown makeup, points towards a transfer of the carnivalesque strategies of "aping" into the space of critical choreography and uncovering the political aspects of the carnivalesque in individual experience.

The stage can be seen as a visual allegory of the society of the supermarket and the surplus associated with it. The dance floor is filled with symmetrically arranged trays with cakes and wine mugs, and the dancer strolls among them, like Kantor did when directing his "room of imagination" from the middle of the stage. In the Theatre of Death the Cleaning-Woman was the great absent figure in the background (cf. Skrzypczak, 2013), while the demiurge director was always visible. In *Hundred Toasts…* this is reversed – the dirty "tart" finally got her moment of glory, promised in *I Shall Never Return* (Kantor 2005, p. 110). Borrowed from Kantor's universe and put in a new context, the figure of the prostitute in Wach's performance is on the one hand a symbol of carnivalesque rebellion, and on the other – as a product of a male demiurge, she takes control of it. Perversion as a

structure organizing the dramaturgy of the performance seems a necessary precondition for the emancipation of the female subject, which gives herself agency in the process of an obscene desecration of cultural symbols. However, the artist mockingly deconstructs the model of patriarchal culture, demanding the worship of fathers-patrons, and not the work of Kantor himself. Referring to one of the basic functions of the carnival, a temporary reversal of the social order, the choreographer establishes a new order in which the private sphere manifests its political aspects, and the taboo traditionally linked to the feminine – the bodily lower stratum – (re)gains visibility. Symbolically dethroning the male demiurge, Wach causes the birth of a female subject endowed with agency and realizing the notion of female writing, or rather choreographing, which is, however, viewed from an (auto)ironic point of view.

A pornographic spectacle

Elements of body art are crucial for the poetics of the performance; the artist covers her bare breasts with plastic cups and sits naked on a chair so as to expose the most intimate orifices of her body (which she then drenches in wine), in order to blur the boundary between the private and stage self, reality and its representation. The strangeness of the transformations undergone by Wach’s body allows to make it visible again: the transgression lies in the fact that the pornographic formula is both repeated and grotesquely distorted, which allows to go beyond it and intercept it for emancipatory purposes. The trickster performer, ostentatiously showing her intimacy and embodying the hybrid mixture of the clown and prostitute (whose bodies can be understood either as prisons or spaces of resistance) surrenders herself to objectifying gazes. Through taking the role of the hostess, creating an atmosphere of familiarity, and an ironic play with the

tradition of pornographic spectacle, colonized by the patriarchy, she is able to liberate herself from this oppressive dependence.

I think the scene in which the nude dancer exposes the most intimate areas of her body can be a reference to Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement*. In her 1990 performance, the famous post-porn-modernist, sitting on a chair dressed up as a coarse pin-up girl, she invited the audience to come on stage and examine her cervix with the help of an endoscope and a light. One of the participants of the performance, quoted by Philip Carr-Gomm, said that the artist "had gone beyond nakedness to a supernakedness that transcends sexuality" (Carr-Gomm, 2012, p. 251). Starting from a situation typical of a pornographic spectacle, where the mode of existence of the female body is determined by the pornographer's fantasy, Sprinkle, through the gesture of a radical opening of the vagina and its secret, deconstructed the dialectics of hiding and revealing, crucial for porn dramaturgy, and thus transformed her seemingly erotic show into a performance which could be said to realize the assumptions of anatomic theatre. Crucially, the performer's body was not objectified, because the strangeness and campiness of the situation, with a visibly amused Sprinkle in its center, excluded the possibility of a medical neutralization and de-subjectification. In order to look between the performer's legs and see "there are no teeth there", one had to stand in line, and thus become subjected to observation. The act of voyeurism became public, and the body, causing both discomfort and curiosity, dominated over the audience; it regained power over the gazes directed at it.

In her book *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum*, Terri Kapsalis sets Springle and her cervix display against the way in which the organs of Saartije Baartman, known as "Hottentot Venus"

were exposed. The European colonial discourse transformed her into a body-spectacle, a process that found its bizarre conclusion in the posthumous exposition of her skeleton, genitals and brain at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Kapsalis points out that even though the displays of both bodies redefine the space of representation through revealing that which would traditionally be concealed, the ways in which they function within the politics of visibility belong to two different orders: subordination and emancipation. Kapsalis identifies the act of creating a performance, and thus taking on the role of a demiurge, with power – both in the context of making someone or something visible, and redistributing the right to watch.

Visibility can be a sign of oppression or liberation, or both (cf. Kapsalis 1997, p. 7). Baartman's exhibited body tells the herstory of its appropriation, and Sprinkle's exposed cervix becomes the visual confirmation of emancipation. In *Hundred Toasts…* Anita Wach seems to connect both these topics. . The performer sitting face to the audience so that her labia would be visible, on the one hand repeats the formula of a female erotic nude, characterized by its frontality and a particular sexualization, referring to the sexuality (and fantasies) of men as spectators and owners of the image (cf. Berger, 1990, p. 55), and on the other – exposing that which remained concealed in traditional representations of nude women. She takes control over the cultural taboo, and with it – over the gaze. The dancer's agency – just like that of the author of *Public Cervix Announcement* – is expressed already in the process of creating the performance, i.e. giving birth to an alternative world, which is additionally emphasized in *Hundred Toasts…* by the role of shaman/hostess, played by the choreographer on the stage. Both Sprinkle's performance and Wach and Jablanovec's choreography confirm John Berger's thesis, crucial for understanding visual culture in its traditional and postmodern form, assuming that power relations regulate ways of looking.

Both works involve a disruption of the patriarchal mechanisms described by Berger, as they abolish the opposition between the man as the gazing subject and the woman as the object of the gaze. By making absurd the situation in which a woman transforms herself into a spectacle, Wach and Sprinkle annihilate the symbolic presence of the male observer who defines the ways of their being in the visual world. This shift also characterizes the current of new pornography for which Sprinkle serves as a matron – the woman, who used to be merely a sexual object, transforms into a person in charge of the situation.

The stage situation in which a nude woman becomes an element of a feast can be understood as an ironic reference to the classic repertoire of erotic scenes and/or as an allegory of mechanisms of appropriating the female body by patriarchal discourse and the archetype of the female victim, but I think at the same time Wach puts her narrative in the context of the sexualization and pornographization of contemporary culture as such. Overtly caricatural images in *Hundred Toasts…* are both a critique of the systemically subordinated female subject and an ironic commentary on surplus, typical of the society of late capitalism, which makes the body its condition and hostage at the same time, as well as practices of overproducing goods and signs lacking reference. The grotesqueness of the performer's actions is linked to the transgressive character of contemporary culture, characterized by excess and thus, according to Adorno, monstrous by definition (cf. Adorno, 1999) as it overflows the boundaries of our perception. In *Hundred Toasts…* the borderline experience is shown as a clash with a surplus that is impossible to utilize, which is shown in the scenes where the performer steps on elegant desserts, a gesture which can also be read as a symbolic act of resistance against practices of subordinating life to objects of consumption.

The democratization of desire

In *Hundred Toasts…*, the subject of the absurd surplus typical of postmodernity is combined with a narrative about the surprising, paradoxical link between the pornographization of postmodern reality and emancipation, as described by Brian McNair in *Striptease Culture* (2002). Even though the British thinker seems not to notice that what he describes as emancipatory processes happening because of erotic capital, could also be seen as a multiplication of inequalities, consisting in another commodification of women, the notion of the "democratization of desire", lying at the center of his thought, reflects the character of capitalist society, totalizing the bodily experience, which is visible in the ubiquitous porno-chic, i.e. images referring to porn aesthetics, which have dominated the mainstream, and, at least by assumption, nonpornographic system of representation.

McNair describes sex as the most publicized cultural commodity, determining the pornographization of the public space, which consists in, on the other hand, the liberalization of access to hard pornography and a diversification of its repertoire, now encompassing not only heteronormative male viewers, and on the other – the penetration of porno-chic into the official reality of the media and the market. Here, the erotic capital, in regard to which women are not only objects, but above all subjects and clients, strengthens their position in society and liberates them from male dominance (cf. Hakim, 2011). It also gives them the opportunity to negotiate existing discourses. Today, the emancipation of women is connected to the pluralist model of consumerist culture, where pleasure becomes democratized, as it acknowledges the diversity of the needs of its participants. Traditional – patriarchal – capitalism diversifies itself through

giving consumerist agency (and freedom) to all subjects (cf. McNair 2002, pp. 11-12). As official culture becomes sexualized, the intimate sphere, i.e. aspects traditionally attributed not only to private (or home) spaces, but also to women, infiltrates the public sphere and redefines its *status quo*, which is why McNair writes about the subversive power of pornography, idealistically assuming a connection between the heterogeneity of pornographic representations (mostly films) and the growing social tolerance of broadly understood otherness. Although McNair clears both postmodern pornography and late capitalism of the charges of objectification of female bodies, his idea of the subversive potential of the presence of pornographic representation in the public space appears to be correct.

It is clearly visible in the case of *Hundred Toasts…*, where the democratization of desire is presented as both helping emancipation and only seemingly liberating. Wach embodies the woman-consumer, who manifests her sexuality openly and shamelessly, but at the same time reminds of the irremovable possibility of appropriation and commodification. However, it seems that the performer creates a subject endowed with agency, whose power over the consumed and deconstructed world is by all means real. Here, emancipation does not consist in the blurring of the boundaries between the intimate and the public or giving the consuming woman the right to desire, but by intercepting the pornographic narrative and deconstructing it in a grotesque way. If the pornographic has been incorporated into official culture, the trickster performer distorts the image of this fusion, restoring the obscene as something that does not fit the normative system and, as an undesirable element, can again destroy patriarchal social and political structures.

The pornographic body in *Hundred Toasts…* is at the same time a feminist

body, and the obscene becomes synonymous with an alternative, liberating narrative. Wach and Jablanovec highlight the subversive potential of the art of sexual transgression. The consumer artist, who both experiences the obscene (and forbidden) pleasure of surplus and transforms her body intro a quasi-erotic spectacle, transforms eating/consuming into an action which is not only an expression of a pursuit of ludic intoxication, but above all – a form of liberating the female body from an oppressive structure, positioning it as dependent on the male gaze. Wach and Jablanovec restore visibility to the feminine, which in traditional systems of representation functions as the material and bodily lower stratum. In their performance, the female subject, endowed with agency, appears to be carnivalesque by definition, as it negates divine and human laws, and so dethrones the male demiurge who established them. In the carnival, one became perfectly free (Bakhtin 1984, p. 8), in *Hundred Toasts…* the woman becomes perfectly emancipated.

Staging the obscene

Even though the poetics of *This Is a Musical* and *Hundred Toasts…* focus on obscene transgression and blurred boundaries between the real (life) and the represented (fiction), and both works refer to the mainstream aesthetics of porno-chic as the dominant visual feature of the public space, characterized by the "complete visibility of things", in the case of these performances one cannot speak of immediacy, understood as indifference and a lack of reflection. In Tymiński's choreography, the dancing subject actively seeks fulfilment, and the final, quasi-pornographic scene in which he assumes the posture of a passive lover, seems to be another stage of this search. In Wach's and Jablanovec's performance, the gestures referring to the pornographic repertoire have an added layer of ironic distance, which allows the performer to both project and break the fetishizing gaze. The

visual radicality of these performances forces the audience to abandon the comfort of not seeing that which the homogenous system wants to conceal, and their obscene literality turns out to be a form of broadening the boundaries of art with images which only seemingly negate practices typical of Baudrillardian seduction. Here, obscenity is not a negation of the stage or scene, but rather signifies an attempt to destroy the established state of things, and, which follows – to transform the invisible into the hypervisible, and the obscene into the stage. Perversity, both in *This Is a Musical* and *Hundred Toasts…*, turns out to be a tool serving the deconstruction of subversive mechanisms of removing the non-homogenous elements from the common space. In both performances the carnival is not a time of suspension of rules, which has been established by patriarchal authorities. It seems to be an unalienable quality of the margin (obscene) as an alternative reality which, on the one hand, does not admit of the pornographic light, organizing the dramaturgy of normative social and political orders and their practices of illuminating and obscuring information, and, on the other, restores the subversive potential of perversion, made banal by capitalist porno chic.

The narratives of the performers, deliberately situating themselves in the perverse and countercultural positions of trickster subjects, lack clearly establish boundaries between life and art, being and creation, desire and telling about it. Thus, they become a negation of the rules organizing the order of the androcentrically designed public sphere and make safe voyeurism more difficult. In this context, the obscene, understood as a quality of space revealing the displaced, reveal its twofold subversiveness: it is an emancipatory technique and a danger to the identity of the onlookers, who have to face the phobias and prejudices produced by normative society.

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Footnotes

1. In this article I do not focus on the ambiguity of the trickster and its social and cultural functions. I understand it as an ambivalent character which functions against an established order to disturb its integrity (cf. Struzik, 2014, p. 241).
2. Such a definition of obscenity is parallel to the definition of pornography by Jonathan Elmer (quoted by Lech M. Nijakowski), who refers to it as “a term of public discourse, serving to mark representations of sexuality and the body as unsuitable to function in the public sphere” (Nijakowski 2010, p. 46). It is worth noting that the epithet “obscene” is not reserved exclusively to everything connected with representations of sex; it refers to all phenomena which, for some reason, are excluded from the official representational order.
3. In an official statement, Kozak explained her decision referring to the performance as not ready to show to the audiences, at the same time saying that “canceling the performance is not an attempt at interpreting it”, www.cialoumysl.pl/pl/aktualnosci/informacja- [DOA: 6 Feb 2019].
4. This division is visible in the polemic between two reviewers from *Gazeta Wyborcza* – Marta Odziomek and Witold Mrozek (cf. Odziomek, 2017, Mrozek, 2017).
5. Depending on the place, it is not only the addressees of the toasts that change, but also the more or less subtle allusions to their work. In the version devoted to Kantor, the famous director appears, for example, in fragments of documentary videos projected on the screen, and elements of his writings, especially those about metaphysics in art, become an important reference for the stage actions of Wach – performing an artist-consumer. Moreover, the Polish version of the performance is tailored to local contexts – in Cracow it included comments on the Cricoteka building, absent in the performance in Białystok. Thus, I think it is justified to read *Hundred Toasts* with reference to Kantor’s work, which is embedded in the dramaturgy of the performance in a more than purely instrumental way.

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