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# “Our World Is Ruled by Insensitivity”: The #MeToo Movement and Transformation

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**“Our World Is Ruled by Insensitivity”: The #MeToo Movement and Transformation**

The article analyzes the transformational potential of the #MeToo movement in terms of personal experience, institutional and social transformations, looking first of all at the dynamics the movement has created in theatre in Poland and around the world. The author unveils the systemic dimension of violence encoded in invisible and standardized relations of domination and subordination, inscribed in the two models which are still very common in Polish theatre: the “master and apprentice” model defining the position of a director and the “feudal” model visible in institutional relations. Looking at the Gardzienice case and the reactions of the public to the testimonies exposing violence, the author also mentions examples of institutional and systemic reactions to similar situations in British and Belgian theatre. In this way, she outlines possible directions for action in Polish theatre. She asks questions about the transformative and emancipatory potential of the #MeToo movement, emphasizing the necessity to consider an intersectional perspective, to build alliances and to practice *promiscuous care*.

Keywords: #MeToo, discrimination, intersectionality, Gardzienice, institutional critique

The #MeToo movement is often talked about as a revolution, which of

course it is not in the strict sense. It defies the old order. It is a violent rupture, an explosion that has triggered a snowball effect.

#MeToo opposes the mechanisms of subordination, hierarchy and violence, which are often so common as to be almost invisible. It exposes them but does not topple the system. It transforms. It is literally a movement – it moves, first at an affective level, evoking reciprocity and readiness to react, and soon afterwards at a social, institutional and legal level. It sets in motion subjects caught in webs of power and dependence or frozen in a mute attempt to survive the experience of objectification and violence. It transforms institutional practices, or at least has the potential to do so. I believe that it can be part of enduring social change.

At a time when Polish theatre-makers and theatre scholars have been greatly moved by the publication of testimonies of Włodzimierz Staniewski's former collaborators, who speak of the various forms of violence and abuse of power they say the founder and director of the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices has committed over the years, I would like to look at the transformative potential of the #MeToo movement. I am aware that #MeToo is an extremely complex phenomenon, which has sparked much controversy and criticism from many ideological corners. Since its inception, it has been criticized for being not inclusive enough, as it focuses on the experiences of white women, celebrities and middle class and thus exacerbates existing inequalities; for its dependence on social media which is destructive and dangerous to democracy and effectively strengthens the growing power of surveillance capitalism; for contributing to moral panic which leads to limiting sexual freedom; and for perpetuating heteronormativity. Yet the #MeToo movement, which extends beyond Western culture, impacting both globally and across diverse local dynamics, is not only transforming the

patriarchal world, it is also reshaping itself. It is expanding its scope, forging alliances, focusing on restorative justice mechanisms, teaming up with other movements that oppose patriarchal power structures. Its energy, shape and goals are up to us, up to those who have been moved.

Institutional and social transformation begins with the personal, even the intimate. It begins with movement in one person's life, with a decision that the reality given to her does not deserve to be sustained; from a recognition of the need for change and an action reaching out to others. This is how I begin my piece – by looking at the experience of transformation in Mariana Sadovska's text in order to ultimately move on to the transformation of the collective.

## The enduring subject

Before Mariana Sadovska called her experience for what it was: "many years of violence inflicted by the director and head of the Gardzienice theatre" (Sadovska, 2020), which resulted in a direct threat to her life and a suicide attempt, she clearly defined the position she would speak from and explained her intentions. Sadovska is a violence survivor and speaks about her experience not from the position of a victim but someone who has moved beyond her experience and found other paths to artistic work and other ways of making theatre.

What I find crucial in Savodska's testimony concerns the relational nature of her transformation. Describing her journey, Sadovska speaks about people who have become her allies. But relationality also has another dimension here: Mariana Sadovska's voice is, as she herself admits, induced by other voices, it is part of the ongoing conversation about abuses of power and the

price one has to pay for “the opportunity to serve high art”, which began in spring 2019 in Ukraine. This conversation is in turn part of the vast polyphony of voices unleashed by the #MeToo movement a few years ago. #MeToo is the first truly mass movement that has given voice to women and people of other genders who have experienced sexual violence, creating a huge digital platform where one can speak and listen, share stories and respond to stories. Giti Chandra and Irma Erlingsdóttir, editors of *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement*, describe #MeToo as the product of an explosion of “an archive of lived counter-memories that militate against what is deemed to matter in hegemonic historical narratives, highlighting its exclusions” (Chandra, Erlingsdóttir, 2021, p. 3). This unprecedented “affective excess”, closely tied to the rise of social media, should be seen as part of a long tradition of feminist efforts to revalue and politicize the labour of care, in this case the collective affective labour associated with “expressing anger, pain, and solidarity”, triggering collective processes of healing and transformation (Page, Arcy, p. 6).

Sadovska’s text can be read as a manifesto of the applied “nomadic ethics of transformation” explored by Rosi Braidotti in her quest for an affirmative vision of a subject capable of setting off the processes of change sweeping through a community. Such a subject would be founded, writes the philosopher, on a “self” that seeks endurance, described as both duration and transformation. The nomadic subject undertakes ethical tasks through her mode of existence, through her tenacious, positive endurance.

> The subject as a spatiotemporal compound which frames the boundaries of processes of becoming. This works by transforming negative into positive passions through the power of an act of an understanding that is no longer indexed upon a phallogocentric set

> of standards …
>
> This sort of turning of the tide of negativity is the transformative process of achieving freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings, and forces. Ethics means faithfulness to this *potential*, or the desire to become (Braidotti, 2006, p. 345–46).

This is how I see the subject of Sadovska's piece – intense (immersed in affects), open, joyful and faithful to herself, to its *potentia*, despite the pain Sadovska writes about, or perhaps because of it.

It is a subject that endures – that is, undergoes constant change and transformation while at the same time initiating them around herself, "in a community or collectivity". In this way, the relationality essential for an enduring subject is revealed and it always strongly leans towards the future. "Sustainability does assume faith in a future, and also a sense of responsibility for 'passing on' to future generations a world that is liveable and worth living in" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 351). From the perspective I am interested in here, this future-leaning form of relationality is perhaps the most important one. In Sadovska's text, it takes the form of an acknowledgement of "personal responsibility" for those who are exposed to violence which is still common and systemic in theatre, as the actress points out in her introduction. Sadovska precisely names various mechanisms of violence, which she witnessed and whose effects she felt on her body over the ten years when she was a member of the Gardzienice group, including appropriation of other people's creative ideas; manipulation and abuse of

power; humiliation and confidence bashing, often justified by arrogating the rights to judgment, control and various kinds of appropriation of the female body; isolation; acts of verbal and physical aggression; structuring group relations in such a way as to prevent any acts of solidarity with violence victims, generating situations of psychological and economic dependence. The author points out that all these mechanisms are underpinned by the institution of master and his "true art" which is supposed to require great sacrifices.

So conceived, the institution of master is one of the structures of patriarchal power, which in our culture is predominantly peopled by men but, as Sadovska stresses, there are also women masters, so violence, though gendered, can affect anyone.

## "I feel guilty but I do not regret"

It is interesting to look at this mechanism in close-up, and also from a reverse perspective. One of the most apt self-definitions of "master arrogation", provided in 2013 by Bernardo Bertolucci, offers an opportunity to do so. In response to a Dutch TV journalist's question about the controversial rape scene in *Last Tango in Paris*, which became a source of deep trauma for Maria Schneider and had a lasting impact on her later life, the director openly describes the situation: "The sequence of the butter is an idea that I had with Marlon in the morning before shooting it. It was in the script that he was going to rape her in a way. We were having with Marlon breakfast on the floor of the flat where we were shooting. And there was a baguette and there was butter. And we looked at each other and without saying anything we knew what we wanted. […] But I'd been, in a way, terrible to Maria because I didn't tell her what was going on, because I

wanted her reaction as a girl, not as an actress. I wanted her to react like she felt humiliated. If it goes on she'd shout 'No, no'. And I think that she hated me and Marlon because we didn't tell her that detail of the butter used as a lubricant. And I still feel very guilty for that." "Do you regret that you'd shot the scene like you did?" asks the journalist. "No", Bertolucci answers without hesitation, "but I feel guilty. I feel guilty but I do not regret. To make movies, sometimes, to obtain something, you have to be completely free. I didn't want Maria to act her humiliation [and] her rage. I wanted Maria to feel, not to act, the rage and the humiliation (Bertolucci, Heys, 2013).

Maria Schneider was subjected to complex violence. Unquestionably, part of it was the humiliation resulting from male collusion, from an understanding between those whom the system had given an infinitely superior advantage over a 19-year-old actress, depriving her of the position of a subject in the artistic process. Her body was deliberately objectified so that we could see her genuine, desperate defence on the screen and naked violence, not its representation, which for us is part of the aesthetic and cognitive experience of art, while the actress experienced it as an indelible marker of a moment of total objectification. "That scene wasn't in the original script […]. They only told me about it before we had to film […] even though what Marlon was doing wasn't real, I was crying real tears. I felt humiliated and to be honest, I felt a little raped, both by Marlon and by Bertolucci" (Schneider, 2007). The theme of male collusion – and what was understood without words by Brando and Bertolucci as a joint desire enacted as a truly violent anal rape scene – deserves a separate study. At this point, it is important what Bertolucci says so openly: as a human being, I feel guilty for the harm done, but as a creator I had every right to do it. To make art, you need to be "totally free". This narcissistic declaration is a false statement, of course. There are things no master would do to achieve an artistic effect for ethical

reasons, or because transgressing the firm rules of social conduct by inflicting torture or death would exclude them from the domain of art, leading to the loss of their immunity linked to their master status. The problem is that manipulation and violence against women, including violence enacted in a sexual manner, are not such reasons.

Bertolucci makes a special distinction here, separating himself as a person from himself as an artist whose actions he places outside the bounds of social responsibility. In my view, Krystian Lupa does a similar thing when, in response to Monika Kwaśniewska's piece examining the relations of subordination and dependence between the director and actors working on *Factory 2* (Kwaśniewska, 2019B), he invokes the authority of "artistic dream".

> "Artistic dream" is the greatest manipulator of all. […] A dream that emerges in the work process is something autonomous, it is not me. The ideas/images that arise in the course of work are outside of me, they emerge between me and the actors. I am as much a slave to this dream as they are (Lupa, 2019, p. 10).

This authority serves the director to create a false equality between himself and the actors, to mask the power dynamics and to blur the question of responsibility for the process. Unrestrained "artistic freedom" and the autonomous "artistic dream" are related modernist constructs in which art is a special realm, and – to put it simply – it is a higher rather than a common good. This perspective occludes the political dimension of art, which I see as fundamental, and which involves the common in art – its social embedding, its entanglement in a web of symbolic power and thus any power, in a

system of distinctions, exclusions, exploitation processes and emancipation processes rooted in what Walter Benjamin calls “apparatus of production” which is a part of a social system. The kind of theatre that does not examine its own production processes, is not interested in itself as a social tool, does not seek to understand and transform its institutional mechanisms, and, as Benjamin notes invoking Brecht, is concerned with “transmitting an apparatus of production without … transforming it” (Benjamin, 1970, p. 4) puts itself outside the realm of the politic and foregoes its transformative potential. It petrifies power relations and patriarchal violence whether it positions itself in the mainstream or promises a countercultural alternative. For a long time, we could afford not to regard this problem as primary. But today, when the world of neoliberal patriarchy is materializing as an unlivable place, we have no time and more and more of us have no desire to interact with an art that efficiently supplies the existing productive apparatus, even if its products can be described as *masterpieces*. What we need today are institutions in transformation, capable of joining in the effort of building a world in which we can survive. And if we are to survive, we must do so in a world beyond patriarchal rule. It would be a world beyond the logics of growth, ruthless competition, accumulation, exploitation and rigid hierarchy; beyond the division into the important and prestigious sphere of production and the unimportant sphere of reproductive labour which as a matter of fact ensures the continuity and endurance of institutions, communities and bodies – that is, life-sustaining labour, beyond the master logic. Is there anyone who still has any doubts about this?

## “We. All. Knew.” Institutions in action

It has recently been three years since the New York Times and the New Yorker published articles on Harvey Weinstein’s sexual misconduct and

Alyssa Milano used the hashtag MeToo. Within the first 24 hours, over twelve million posts were tagged with the hashtag. Their authors, overwhelmingly women, shared their experiences of sexual violence or responded to other people's stories (CBS News, 2017). The #MeToo explosion illuminated some of the default settings of the social system, re-energizing the feminist movement as one of humanity's liberation movements, "the movement to free democracy from patriarchy" (Gilligan, 2013, p. 176).

In my view, the fact that institutions must transform themselves to become aligned with the cause of #MeToo is one of the crucial dimensions of the transformation. We are witnessing this process right now in the UK's theatre, which has developed the strongest systemic response to #MeToo. This fascinating process, which seems to be still largely unknown in Poland, is worth examining, as this may prove extremely relevant to our current debate. The British response to #MeToo began with a decision by the Royal Court Theatre's Artistic Director, Vicky Featherstone, taken together with her colleagues: Executive Producer Lucy Davis, Associate Director Lucy Morrison and Head of Press playwright Anoushka Warden. On October 17, 2017, the Royal Court released a statement signed by Featherstone:

> […] it is time to confront the abuses of power that have been occurring in our own industry for years. […] The Royal Court exists to tell the stories that are otherwise unheard. We have therefore created an online forum where you can safely, and (if you choose), anonymously tell us your stories. Whether you consider it a big or small thing, if someone in a position of power over you has made you feel sexually compromised, or at all uncomfortable, then be brave, tell us what happened. We will take care of your story

(Featherstone, 2017).

As a result, 150 testimonies of sexual harassment and abuse of power, including eleven rapes, were collected. Ten days later, the Royal Court Theatre held a Day of Action, a day-long public event combining a number of simultaneous activities which included reading out anonymized testimonies, as well as debates, workshops and professional consultations. The announcement stated that the event was not intended as a platform for "naming and shaming" but was designed to initiate a process of systemic change. However, those who wished to report wrongdoing by specific individuals and pursue legal action were offered professional and psychological advice (Day of Action press release, Tuesday, October 17, 2017; Harvie, 2019).

The Day of Action was a well-planned strategic event of great transformative power that turned the effort of individuals intent on speaking out about violence into an institutional process involving a whole theatre community. The public debate was designed in such a way that the problem could not be hushed up, waited out or ignored. The institution's prestige and resources played a vital role here. The Royal Court used its cultural hegemonic power in the UK as a political gesture of engagement in an emancipatory process. Featherstone's diagnosis of the widespread problem of violence normalization necessitated a systemic response. "We. All. Knew" – the use of the first person plural is not accidental here. "I knew that pretty much every single woman I know had suffered sexual harassment in her life. I knew that, and I'd just accepted that. I'm hardwired to accept it. I'm a feminist, and when I talk about it, it shocks me" (Aikenhead, 2017). The director of the Royal Court had no trouble recognizing her own entanglement and privileged position because she understood, it seems, the mechanisms of

symbolic power, and her courage was inspired by her willingness to act for change.

A week later, the theatre published a set of documents informed by materials collected in the process and by the knowledge and experience shared by the Royal Court's partner organizations: "The Code of Behaviour and the Bullying, Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Attention Policy" (Royal Court, 2017). Addressing four key areas: responsibility, reporting and responding to abuse, raising awareness, and breadth, "The Code" is a set of guidelines, suggestions and recognitions rather than a collection of conclusive and rigid directives, but it is informed by theatre practice and calls things by their names. When reading the two documents, one indeed feels they have emerged from an organization that is home to people working with language. The Responsibility section of "The Code" opens with the following appeal:

> You must take responsibility for the power you have. Do not use it abusively over others more vulnerable than you. Think about what you want, why you want it, what you are doing to get it, and what impact it will have. If this is achieved, the problem is solved (Royal Court, 2017).

These words are the exact opposite of the master abrogation. Instead of the claim "I have power and I am allowed to do with you what my artistic dream dictates", the message is "I have power, therefore I must constantly recognize what I cannot do to you."

The ultimate objective of these documents is to change the cultural model that normalizes violence, keeps it invisible and irrelevant and shifts the

burden of responsibility to those who experience violence. At the core of this new social contract in the theatre industry is the emphatic notion that even the most radical of explorations must not involve the objectification of co-workers by those in positions of power, “Theatre is an art form – the work can and should be challenging, experimental, exploratory and bold. Artistic freedom of expression is essential but the creative space must be a safe space” (Royal Court, 2017). Of course, this statement does not provide a conclusive solution, it calls for continuous careful interpretations and ongoing negotiations within the team and with oneself. Importantly, however, it reverses the system’s default settings.

## Justice, the prestige of academia and the figure of network violence

The testimonies that came to light as a result of the Royal Court’s initiative swept three major UK theatre figures from their posts: Max Stafford-Clark, who, ironically, was the previous Artistic Director of the Royal Court and later founded the famous Out of Joint Theatre, the Director of Dublin’s Gate Theatre Michael Colgan, and the Artistic Director of the Old Vic Kevin Spacey, accused of sexual misconduct towards men. None of them have been brought to justice. The reasons for this are complex: some of the acts described in the testimonies are past the statute of limitations while others are not prosecuted *ex officio*, which leaves them in the grey area of scattered violence and misuse of power – to start a case a civil action needs to be filed.

As Chandra and Erlingsdóttir point out, it is clear that questions of responsibility, including criminal responsibility, and of broader justice are at the centre of the #MeToo controversy (Chandra, Erlingsdóttir 2021). We

know this all too well after the “paper feminists” case in Poland (Grabowska, Rawłuszko, 2021). What I mean here are the sometimes irreversible effects of public stigmatization, unverifiable testimonies, the blurred line between personal and power relations, the media’s appetite for sensation, its focus on viewer ratings and readership figures rather than on reliable reporting or in-depth debate, and, of course, the mechanisms of cancel culture, which is on the rise thanks to social media (Kuczyńska 2020).

It would be much easier to just rely on the justice system. However, #MeToo is about the inefficiency of this system, about the fact that the legislation and practices of a democracy that according to Carole Pateman can still be called a “republic of brothers” (Pateman, 2014) do not give women, and many other groups, what they promise. For the vast majority of those who have experienced violence in professional relationships, taking legal action is too difficult for social or psychological reasons, financially inaccessible, or simply too risky due to low chances of successful prosecution and, frequently, very negative professional repercussions. This is evidenced by judicial statistics: discrimination cases represent less than one percent of labour law suits in Poland, while sexual harassment cases account for a tiny fraction of all cases. Proving sexual harassment in court is extremely difficult (often, there are no direct witnesses and doubts are resolved in favour of the suspect) and the vast majority of such cases do not have a favourable outcome for the claimant (Bartusiak, 2017; Wilk, 2018; money.pl, 2020). Contrary to what is generally felt, the number of workplace mobbing and sexual harassment cases in Polish courts is falling year by year. These striking statistics must be supplemented by an awareness of how the Polish justice system deals with serious sexual offences and violence against women (see Staśko, Wieczorkiewicz, 2020). After examining the legal and social aspects of the situation of women in Poland in the context of #MeToo,

Magdalena Grabowska and Marta Rawłuszko reached a clear conclusion: “the existing solutions are insufficient, ineffective and effectively serve the interests of the perpetrators” (Grabowska, Rawłuszko, 2021, p. 295). The justice system will not solve the cultural problem exposed by #MeToo, nor will it bring justice to most of those who have suffered violence. Therefore, nothing will absolve us of the responsibility for the reality of gendered violence, which has finally been revealed to us in all its graphic details; we must find ways to tackle this challenge.

“Since the case has been referred to the prosecutor’s office, some findings will finally emerge. […] If there has been a transgression, punishment will be the right outcome.” (Kornaś, 2020). “It is obvious that all acts of violence and harm, if proven, should be judged and punished” (Kolankiewicz, 2020). “Any transgressions of bodily integrity, especially in business relations, any breaches of the law should be reported by those concerned to relevant authorities, judged by the institutions established for this purpose, and the consequences for acts proven and judged should be strictly enforced against every person regardless of their status and position” (“Poland: Statement on Gardzienice by Representatives of the Academic Community”, 2020). I believe that the recurring formulations in the responses of Gardzienice researchers reveal their lack of readiness to face the situation and a refusal to think over both the wider cultural problem and their own entanglement. Therefore, in addition to what has already been said about the current legal solutions and the justice system, it is necessary to state clearly what the authors of the “Statement” seem to suppress in their consciousness: the criminal acts allegedly committed by Włodzimierz Staniewski, which have been described in the published testimonies and which could have resulted in charges – that is, psychological abuse, insults, infringements of bodily integrity, workplace mobbing, sexual harassment, deprivation of liberty and

violation of the Labour Code, are all beyond the statute of limitations, so no criminal action can be taken against him[1]. The justice system will not absolve us of our responsibility for our present and past attitudes in relation to what we have already learned.

#MeToo demands that we initiate a deep process of socio-cultural transformation and of thinking about justice that goes beyond incarceration facilities and combines the systemic and the individual. In this context, the authors of the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement* invoke the term "transitional justice" (Chandra, Erlingsdóttir 2021, p. 10), which refers to political, cultural and legal transformations. The essential components of transitional justice include the acceptance of responsibility by the perpetrators, stepped-up efforts of institutions responsible for investigating and exposing the forms and scale of violence and for developing legislative changes and procedural solutions and, most importantly, a collective redress effort, which occurs through recognizing the voices of the victims as important, initiating communal processes of strengthening and healing, and launching actions that offer hope for real change.

This informs the question of the responsibility of researchers, especially those closely following the work of a theatre, which is raised by three of the women who have described their experiences: Mariana Sadovska, Elżbieta Podleśna and Joanna Wichowska. An important point worth highlighting is that categories and approaches emanate from academia and that it is academia where decisions are taken as to what is visible and what and how disappears from view. Nothing shows this more clearly than "The Statement on Gardzienice by Representatives of the Academic Community".

> Witold Mrozek's article published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on October 7, "Workplace Mobbing and Sexual Harassment in Gardzienice", as well as Agata Adamiecka-Sitek's and Paweł Soszyński's comments that appeared the same day in Dwutygodnik.com sparked many responses and comments on industry websites and in social media. Other than serious allegations against Włodzimierz Staniewski, they also include a claim that "all" members of the academic world and universities, particularly "important professors" are complicit in these crimes and abuses. Some of these comments name and shame, others merely refer to the academic community as a silent witness to the abuses, which in the media space by no means presupposes the presumption of innocence or the need to prove guilt.

The "Statement" asserts that the "claim" of academia's shared responsibility was made by outsiders – that is, critics and commentators. There is no mention whatsoever of the three women's voices, as if these crucial words had not been uttered! Does it mean that if the commentators had not raised the question of the responsibility of academia, the women's testimonies would have been met with absolute silence by the researchers? The former collaborators of Gardzienice pointed out that the scholars who followed the work of the theatre legitimized the violence they experienced; that the researchers' "mute" and "silent" presence was an essential part of the normalization of the behaviours and of the work model that directly hurt their dignity and mental and physical health (Sadovska, 2020; Podleśna, 2020). How much longer will women's voices and experiences continue to be overlooked and invalidated?

Joanna Wichowska described the relationship between the founder of the

Gardzienice Theatre Centre and the researchers who follow the Centre's work in terms of a system of circulating prestige and power:

> More than that, it was an exchange. Researchers and critics basked in Staniewski's light, while he liked surrounding himself with influential people.
>
> Staniewski welcomed them in the toxic family circle of the Gardzienice theatre. And family is beyond criticism. As is so often the case, it was ultimately about power. And the director was not the only one intoxicated by it. This intoxication was shared by visitors who felt admitted to the narrow circle of initiates, they knew more than the rest of humanity, they were allowed to be exegetes. They received the great power to create meanings, to choose what to talk about and what to leave unsaid. Such power can get to someone's head and prevent him/her from seeing the dark side of the (Wichowska, Siegień, 2020).

The system described above involves the mutual reinforcement of its participants' positions in the artistic and academic world; a reciprocity that translates into visibility and prestige, and everything that goes with them. This is where we enter an opaque area, one that is difficult to grasp and define, which always arises at the interface of concomitant and interrelated fields in which real and symbolic power circulate. The system of reciprocal relations is a natural result of the collaboration between researchers and artists, a vital and often extremely creative element of the academic and artistic world. It is hard to fault this system in principle. In fact, these two fields are hard to imagine without such relations.

It is undeniable, however, that this arrangement benefits both sides, so it should be subject to constant scrutiny and there should be a readiness to enter into a genuine debate, to open up space for other voices and perspectives.

Did the reflection on Gardzienice meet these criteria? This is open to doubt. Anna Kapusta, the author of a yet unpublished book about Gardzienice, in which she examines – as she puts it – the "social empiricism" of this phenomenon – that is, both the relations within the group and those built between the Centre for Theatre Research and the local community and, finally, the relations between Gardzienice and academia, which affected the discourse around Staniewski's work, proves the opposite: "This discourse forms a closed self-legitimizing system as the publications reproduce the mutually reinforcing and homogenizing view of Polish experts on Gardzienice. Gardzienice is thus 'written' with the autopoiesis of a story, with a system that is autotelic and empirically non-referential" (Kapusta, unpublished).

The author argues that the absence of the social concrete and the fact of keeping the research within the limits of an autotelic system whose principal notions came from Staniewski himself, resulted in a complete disregard for ethical questions about the model of theatre practiced by Staniewski. Kapusta points out that the "effect of silence" was linked with and indeed conditioned "the figure of network violence in the academic discourse on Gardzienice", which she sees as "an institutional, academic situation of ethical silence which is a factor contributing to the state of chronic absence of questions about the ethical functioning of Gardzienice". The author claims that the two phenomena she had identified had a profound effect on the status of her research, because her empirical material, which included

interviews with Staniewski's co-workers and associates, required her to ask these questions. In her dissertation, the author also examines the institutional resistance she ran up against when she tried to conduct her research in a university setting. This approach, including an empirical study of Gardzienice, an analysis of its accompanying academic discourse and of institutional resistance to research questions and perspectives coming from outside an authorized circle, may prove particularly valuable for understanding the questions of ethics in theatre research.

I cite Anna Kapusta's text – with the author's knowledge and consent – not in order to try to arrive at any conclusions – her text can be discussed and verified only after it is published, thus becoming part of the official academic discourse on Gardzienice, but to show that a conversation about the co-responsibility of researchers and academia's internal institutional mechanisms, triggered by the case of Gardzienice, but understood far more broadly, is yet to come.

## The subject of a revolution

When it embraces institutions and initiates transformative processes in the domain of art, the movement unleashed by #MeToo tends to face similar accusations and ways of neutralizing it. The authors of a zine published by Engagement Arts analyze the most frequently invoked arguments, which, in addition to posing a threat to artistic freedom, invoke conservative moralism and reactionary gender and sexual binarism, which are supposed to lead to "apocalyptic scenarios in which all the labour of the sexual revolution began in the 1970s will be wasted by re-entering the puritan era" (Engagement Art ZIN, 2019). A similar position is espoused by Dorota Sajewska, who sees heterosexually-focused #MeToo as a threat to non-normative gender and

sexual emancipation. “Should the experience of non-binary sexual relations, of polyamorous relationships, of freedom to choose one’s gender and of exploring non-reproductive erotic pleasure be sacrificed on the altar of such an outmoded concept of sexuality?” asks Sajewska rhetorically, thus setting up an opposition between, on the one hand, the desire to stop sexual violence against women and change symbolic power relations in this space and, on the other, a transgressive queer revolution that makes it possible to “formulate utopias of the impossible” (Sajewska, 2020). I profoundly disagree with this approach, both with its understanding of the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and with the political strategies of resistance and dismantling the capitalist-patriarchal hegemony. Simply put, the rise of capitalism was connected not only, as Sajewska reminds us citing Foucault, with the subjugation of sex, but also with the severing of bonds between women, the blocking of mechanisms of female support and knowledge transmission, the subordination of women’s sexual and reproductive freedom to accumulation processes, as demonstrated by Silvia Federici (Federici, 2009), let alone colonial and class exploitation and the exploitation of the Earth. Today, we cannot open the revolutionary horizon in just one direction, unless we mean a utopian revolution understood not as pointing to systemic alternatives which our imagination is yet to grasp but as permanent unfulfillment. In this role, however, the revolution is reduced to being a safety valve on the periphery of the system. In my view, real transformative work must involve building an intersectional front, which in no way means unification and removal of tensions but the maintenance of dynamic alliances, exchanges and cooperation in a process of transforming the world together. #MeToo energy should be included in this constellation of emancipatory movements, which is already happening in different corners of the world (cf. the analyses of China, Japan, African countries, South America,

India and Arab countries in Fileborn, Loney-Howes, 2019, and in Chandra, Erlingsdóttir, 2021). This polymorphous movement requires continuous critical debate, the opening up of further avenues such as including the perspective of people with disabilities among whom the experience of sexual violence is the most widespread of all social groups and perhaps the most deeply taboo (cf. Haraldsdóttir, 2021), and taking into account the inevitable racialization of gendered violence. It can also, as Jack Halberstam argues, become an impulse for a "profound reorganization of the understanding of sexuality and desire", because no one can doubt anymore that "something is rotten in the heterosexual state" (Halberstam, 2021, pp. 182–83). We can co-shape the energy of #MeToo and set its directions, as best evidenced by the movement's dynamics to date, which Sajewska, however, does not address.

In Sajewska's view, the #MeToo movement is not worth engaging with not only because it re-normalizes the discourse of sexuality but also for other, equally valid reasons. Firstly, it exacerbates class and racial inequalities by redirecting attention from the marginalized communities of black women to white elites. Secondly, it is a product of social media which is a "dark tool of consumption and capitalism" and is not a space of a proper (radical) revolution, as such revolutions should not happen in the media but "in the streets" (Sajewska, 2020). I understand, of course, that the author cannot examine all the vast contexts she sets in motion in her essay. The arguments cited above, however, serve to posit the thesis that #MeToo is in fact a threat to the emancipation process – both in the social sphere and in the domain of art and reflection on art – which is why I find it difficult to agree with their simplifications. I will discuss them briefly.

When Alyssa Milano first used the phrase MeToo, she claims she was not aware that ten years earlier Tarana Burke had founded a movement of the

same name to support black women from marginalized communities who had experienced sexual violence. Even if we take her at her word, Milano's lack of awareness is telling. Another indisputable fact is that #MeToo initially focused media attention largely on high-profile names, fuelling spectacular downfalls and feeding off the energy of the scandals. This, however, was not the only process that was unfolding. Milano was quick to admit her ignorance and made sure that Burke's authorship and, more importantly, the work of the organization Burke had set up, gained widespread visibility. Their subsequent collaboration brought "the idea of collective and connective collaboration to the centre of the movement". (Chandra, Erlingsdóttir, 2021, p. 2). "What the viral campaign did is it creates hope. It creates inspiration. People need hope and inspiration desperately. But hope and inspiration are only sustained by work", said Burke in October 2017, failing to foresee how sustainable and transformative the #MeToo movement would prove to be (Ohlheiser, 2017). The process set in motion by Milano brought high visibility to the Me Too organization and helped develop Burke's idea of work dedicated to supporting violence survivors and community healing processes, making it a key line of action in local communities and globally. In the longer term, it has also impacted transformations of the complex intersectional realities of black women's experiencing violence, revealing violence, preventing it and seeking justice. What's more, Me Too has influenced and continues to influence #MeToo.

Rebecca Leung and Robert Williams examine the complex dynamic of the overlap of sexism and racism in their article "#MeToo and Intersectionality". The authors point out, for example, how the far lower visibility of the black women victimized by Bill Cosby enabled his lawyers to portray their client as a victim of racial vilification and to call the trial a "lynching". At one point, Cosby's defenders even compared him to Emmett Till, the black teenager

murdered in 1955 for allegedly accosting a white woman (Leung, Williams, 2019, p. 357). The unequal distribution of visibility is not the only problem. In the context of sexual violence, black women also have to face the consequences of deep-rooted racial inequalities. On the one hand, due to the constantly active set of stereotypes making up the construct of the promiscuous “black slut” who is virtually impossible to harm (Tille, Simon, 2007, as quoted in Leung, Williams, 2019, p. 359), their right to defend their own dignity and bodily integrity is undermined, while on the other hand their willingness to speak up about violence inflicted by members of their own community is hindered by the lingering mechanisms of solidarity against white oppression which stop them from exposing “their own people”. Given how deeply racist the practices of the US law enforcement and justice apparatus are, this resistance is entirely understandable.

Looking at R&B music star Robert Kelly’s long history of allegations of sexual violence against black girls and women, the authors point to a seismic shift in public and law enforcement attitudes that they link to the impact of #MeToo. In a 2008 trial, Kelly was acquitted of all charges despite the existence of incriminating video evidence and a great number of testimonies. The jury found the black girls and women who testified against him to be not credible. At the core of Netflix’s 2019 documentary series *Surviving R. Kelly* are testimonies of dozens of women who suffered abuse from Kelly and who tell their stories directly to camera. This focus on the voices of black women who have experienced violence and who had formerly been seen as lacking credibility is, in the authors’ view, the effect of #MeToo, while the case, which has been highly visible in the mainstream media, can significantly impact social practices. The case has also helped to spread awareness of the intersectional queer experience of black women who face the double bind of gender and racial discrimination. Kelly’s trial has resumed. Due to the

magnitude of the charges (rape of minors), the star remains in custody awaiting the court's verdict.

"#MeToo has finally returned to black girls", wrote activists Salamishah and Scheherazade Tillet. "After all, #MeToo was founded by a black woman, Tarana Burke, to help African-American girls […]. Now we have to make sure that it does not leave" (Tillet, Tillet, 2019, as quoted in Leung, Williams, 2019, p. 367).

With its sensitivity to the transformative potential of #MeToo, this approach seems not only more apt than the stagnant notion of an appropriated movement but also more effective as a political strategy, which has been adopted by Burke herself. The Me Too organization became strongly involved in the 2020 presidential election campaign in the US, capitalizing on the recognition gained from #MeToo. Focused around the #MeTooVoter campaign and then around #SurvivorsVote, the "multi-racial and multi-issue coalition" came up with a programme of demands and solutions designed to instigate profound change in the federal policy focused on people affected by violence. One of the mottos of #SurvivorsVote is "We are not victims of sexual violence, we are survivors[3]. Our voices will be heard, our stories will not be ignored, and our votes will be counted" (survivorsagenda.org/survivors-vote/).

Not averse to social media, Me Too uses it effectively in its political struggle. I myself largely share Dorota Sajewska's deeply critical opinion of the role of social media in contemporary politics and cultural processes, but living in the country of #BlackProtest and the Women Strike, which began with women posting photos of themselves in black, I find it difficult to accept the view that it is at most "an effective platform for informing (each other)" (Sajewska, 2020) and does not really contribute to building political

resistance that happens “in the streets”. This dualistic separation of media space and physical space has long since fallen out of step with our experience immersed in what has been described as the code/space continuum where digitized spatiality and temporality are produced (Kitchin, Dodge, 2011). What’s more, social media is not just a communicator. Its power resides in the ability to produce a narrative consolidating resistance, also in the form of hashtags, which in turn enables a shift from collective efforts, requiring much organization and an elaborate structure, to joint efforts made independently in any number of local centres, or even individual efforts which come together, notice one another and are harmonized through social media platforms and their tools (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013).

As Elżbieta Korolczuk and others demonstrate (Korolczuk, 2016; 2017), this is how the Black Protest was constructed – for the first time in Poland, resistance had extended beyond the big cities to more than four hundred towns, big and small. In her analysis which also encompasses the recent Women Strike protests, Anna Nacher emphasizes the narrative role and the communicative power of the hashtag, which comes from fusing the human and machine communication modes. Hashtags enable sorted data to be combined into clusters, achieving a high level of transversality in grouping together messages and increasing their circulation online (Nacher, 2020). This is how the #MeToo explosion happened, and that’s what today’s activist movements (including right-wing initiatives) are drawing on.

This revolution is taking place in the streets, in the media, in institutions and in private homes. And it will have to continue in all of these spaces if any change is to happen. Pooling the energy of different movements, it launches what Paul B. Preciado has called a transfeminist and decolonialist uprising

(*soulèvement*). Here is an example of a discourse that does not waste its transformative potential, is not squeamish about mass phenomena and mainstream icons, and does not hesitate to integrate the power of their voices with voices that are not heard in the halls of global capitalism:

> One day, without any warning to the gurus of the Left, to the patriarchs or the bosses, raped young girls began outing their rapists, throwing open the closet of sexual assault and harassment […]. There were archbishops and dads, teachers and CEOs, doctors and trainers, movie directors and photographers. At the same time, people subject to gender and race violence rose up everywhere: trans, lesbian, intersex, and antiracist movements; movements defending the rights of people with diverse cognitive and functional abilities, racialized workers in insecure jobs, sex workers of all genders, adopted children stripped of their names and pasts, and more. In the midst of that whirlwind of insurrections, the César Awards (the French Oscars) […] became the televised transfeminist and decolonialist storming of the Bastille. In the lead, actress Aïssa Maïga denounced the institutional racism of cinema. When they gave the best director award to an absent Roman Polanski (the rapist is never there; the rapist has no body), another actress, Adèle Haenel, got up, turned her back on the patriarchs of cinema, and left […]. Two days later, Virginie Despentes, aka subcomandanta King Kong, joined Maïga, Haenel, et al. and, condemning French president Emmanuel Macron's neoliberal reforms as complicit with the politics of oppression, both sexual and racial, declared a general strike among subjugated minorities: "From now on, we get up and we walk out" (Preciado, 2020A).

Amidst the authoritarian regime's assault on women's rights in Poland, the message has been "Get the fuck out!" I strongly believe that the anger of the Women Strike is reinforced by the energy of #MeToo, and vice versa. In fact, the offensive against women we are experiencing is also an offensive against all others who refuse to submit to white, heterosexual, patriarchal domination. This is the foundation of the neo-patriarchal global alliance, which is best illustrated by the Geneva Consensus Declaration of October 22, 2020 (the day of Julia Przyłębska's Constitutional Court ruling), signed by the governments of 35 countries, a rather exotic coalition of the USA, Saudi Arabia, Poland, Iraq, Brazil and Hungary, among others. The aim of the Declaration is not only to outlaw abortion but also to enshrine in law the binary gender distinction and to monopolize the heterosexual family, which is to regain its former status of the only social unit entitled to enact parental relations (Adamczyk, 2020). The refusal to recognize the female body as a legitimate political subject is thus combined with the legal naturalization of the binary of gender and heterosexuality and with the denial of the right for intersexual and non-binary bodies to exist. "Gender ideology" and "LGBT ideology" are a single construct portrayed as the main threat to civilization as Preciado points out, noting that the neo-patriarchal agenda also includes climate denialism and neo-racist politics, whose effects we are seeing in the shameful refugee camps at the external borders of the European Union, in the fences and barbed wire separating the better world from the worse one (Preciado, 2020 B). This combination leads me to repeat the words of the authors and contributors of *The Care Manifesto*, "Our world is one in which carelessness reigns." (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 2).

# Revolutions of care

Before Mariana Sadovska relates her Gardzienice experiences, she starts with remarks written, as she puts it, “at a remove”. She begins with the labour of care which is at the core of the transformation we need. Sadovska asks how to balance motherhood and work in the theatre where reproductive labour – not only and not primarily in the sense of biological reproduction but in the sense of the labour of sustaining human and non-human life – is separated from real production recognized as culturally significant. In the theatre, even more emphatically than in most other areas of society, the false idea of an independent, self-sufficient subject that is not subject to care and provides no care is instituted, the primacy of competition over interdependence is sustained, and labour is subordinated to the relentless principle of productivity that abhors the rhythm of care-related and regenerative activities.

When I read Sadovska’s words[2], I think of *Hymns*, a graduation production directed by Anna Smolar at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw. One of her student actors had a daughter a few months earlier, and her baby performed in the show. The work process was subordinated to a different rhythm to accommodate the needs of the baby; care labour, in which all company members took part to varying degrees, and production labour were brought together in a single process. It turned out that it was possible to accept the unpredictability stemming from the psychophysical condition of someone who is fully engaged in the process but cannot submit to the principle of efficiency and productivity.

The institution had to draft new contracts to account for new work circumstances and to accept the risk that the process may take longer and

that some shows may have to be cancelled because baby Stefania would be unable to perform. The piece explored the experiences and fears of someone who has entered a radical caring relationship such as taking care of a baby. It also invoked the experience of childhood and the special condition of a child subject. The presence on stage of a baby who strongly attracts attention but is outside the conscious mode of acting and the theatrical "make-believe", opened the show to a performative dimension marked by unpredictability, modifying the communication set-up. The presence of a baby throughout the work process and during the show transformed what Benjamin called "the apparatus of production". Not in a dramatic or radical way, but deeply and consistently. The performance piece can be viewed as a transformative model for social relations in which care labour – the reproductive labour of sustaining life – understood in its broadest sense, not reduced to parental relations, becomes part of production labour.

I've been observing scattered but steadily built transformative practices in Polish theatre that provide a basis for intuiting the possibility of a systemic alternative. The idea proposed by Agnieszka Jakimiak comes to mind which sees a theatre production as a micro-institution whose creators decide to transform and democratize power relations within theatre (Jakimiak, 2014, p. 23), sometimes turning this principle into a long-term artistic strategy. Many directors, especially of the younger and middle generation, work along these lines. Apart from Jakimiak and Smolar, the list includes Weronika Szczawińska, Katarzyna Kalwat, Małgorzata Wdowik, Justyna Sobczyk, Agnieszka Błońska and Magdalena Szpecht. The same principle underlies the relational and speculative choreographic practices of Agata Siniarska and Anna Nowak. There is no point in providing an exhaustive list here. What matters is that there is a rising trend in Polish theatre that combines the political with production processes in the belief, as I have written elsewhere,

“that labour methods cannot be separated from artistic processes, and that each work of art also tells of how it was created” (Adamiecka-Sitek, forthcoming). This trend is also shared by other institutions and practices of varying scope, such as Teatr 21, Teraz Poliż and the Performing Arts Institute (its mission statement, “On Biodiversity in Theatre”, was written jointly with Komuna Warszawa), curatorial programmes of Agata Siwiak and Pracownia Kuratorska, activities of the Strefa WolnoSłowa (Free Speech Zone), institutional processes such as Teatr Powszechny’s Agreement (*Porozumienie*) or Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Theatre Art in Warsaw anti-discrimination efforts and efforts to democratize the training model in drama education[3].

I consider the practice of care the most important vector of transformation. If we need radical gestures, we need gestures of radical care that have actually guided the Me Too movement from its inception and co-created the meaning of #MeToo. Ideally, we need “promiscuous care”, which the Care Manifesto collective traces back to the practices of gay communities at the height of the AIDS epidemic; promiscuous care going beyond the traditional relations of care attributed to family relationships, any close relationships in private, intimate spaces, or to professionalized care institutions. This care is spreading outwards, forming transversal connections and demanding new institutions. “It should […] inform every scale of social life: not just our families but our communities, markets, states, and our transnational relationships with human and non-human life as well.” (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 72). But promiscuous care with a gay genealogy also shows that counter-normative sexual excess and caring relations need not be reduced to conventionally understood opposites and are not polar to each other. Rather, they should jointly chart the horizon of transformation. While I enthusiastically concur with the notion that “there is no revolution without

sex", as the title of Karol Radziszewski's and Maurycy Gomulicki's exhibition asserts, I also believe that there is no future without care. Literally.

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## Footnotes

1. Indeed, on June 25, 2021, the prosecutor's office discontinued its investigation as the statute of limitations had expired for most of the charges, and the acts did not fulfill the characteristics of criminal offenses.
2. *Hymns*, directed and with dramaturgy by Anna Smolar; libretto and dramaturgy by Natalia Fiedorczuk; music by Maciej Cieślak; stage, costume and lighting design by Mateusz Atman; Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Theatre Art, premiered on March 6, 2020.
3. I was directly involved in the two initiatives mentioned at the end of the list, and although I realize that they are just the beginning of transformation processes, and their effects are far from certain, I do believe they are an important step in the transformation of Polish theatre. (See Adamiecka-Sitek, Koszulińska, Miłoszewska, Szczucińska, Szczawińska, Wdowik, 2019; Adamiecka-Sitek, Keil, Stokfiszewski, 2019).

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