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/ RECONSTRUCTIONS

Jakub Skrzywanek's Theatrical Reenactments

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The main purpose of the article is to examine the reconstruction method as one of the most important features of Jakub Skrzywanek's theatrical language. His own model of reconstruction of reality, placed against the background of Rebecca Schneider's theory of reenactment, appears to be a tool for social intervention. An analysis of Skrzywanek's performances that use reconstruction - *Opowieści niemoralne* (Immoral Tales), *Spartakus. Miłość w czasie zarazy* (Spartacus. Love in the Time of Plague) and *Midsummer Night's Dream* (co-directed with Justyna Sobczyk) - confirms the thesis of the political nature of reenactment and shows an evolution of the method of reconstruction as well as the various strategies for replicating reality employed by the director. The article also attempts to find common features and - to chart a certain poetics of reconstruction. This reconstruction consists of the use of archival documents in the performance, collaboration with groups of experts and specialists, exposing the corporeality of the archives, affective influence, Brecht's V-effect and framing stage action with media and text indicators. The method of reconstruction, additionally equipped with a strong exposure of meta-theatricality and the entanglement of theatre in media negotiations, finds its most perfect development in Skrzywanek's latest premiere, *Zbrodnia i kara. Z powodu zbrodni Rosjan, których nie potrafimy zrozumieć* (Crime and Punishment. Because of the Russian Crimes that We Cannot Understand).

Keywords: reenactment; theatrical reconstruction; theatre of the real; theatre for social justice; corporeality of archives

Reenactment-reconstruction

In *Performing Remains*, the fundamental work on the theory of performative repetition, Rebecca Schneider builds her definition of reenactment on existing and everyday semantics:

‘The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives us the verb form ‘re-enact:’ to ‘reproduce, recreate, or perform again’ but offers only the term ‘reenactment societies’ and briefly describes ‘an association whose members re-enact events (often battles) from a particular historical period, in replica costume and using replica weapons...’ As the OED definition makes clear, we are still most familiar with the term reenactment as applied to historical societies.’ (2020, pp. 68-69)

The linguistic case cited by Schneider shows that, in Polish terminology, the meaning closest to reenactment is *rekonstrukcja* (reconstruction). The term carries a similar semantic resonance; after all, when speaking of a ‘reconstruction group,’ every language user thinks of history enthusiasts committed to recreating past events (particularly battles, as is the case with reenactment).

The notion of reconstruction entered the Polish theatre discourse with new force through the performance works of Jakub Skrzywanek, who turned theatrical recreation of reality into one of the most important tools of social intervention. Therefore, with Schneider’s idea of reenactment in mind, I propose to look at the objectives of adopting the idea of reconstruction in theatre, its structure and constituent features, as well as the various strategies and tools that Skrzywanek chooses to use in his ‘reconstructive’

performances. The director's latest production, *Zbrodnia i kara. Z powodu zbrodni Rosjan, których nie potrafimy zrozumieć* (Crime and Punishment. Because of the Russian Crimes that We Cannot Understand) (premiere: 16 June 2023, co-produced by the Henryk Tomaszewski Wrocław Pantomime Theatre and the Polish Theatre in the Underground), is a multi-layered reconstruction, at times a reconstruction of reconstruction and a reconstruction of simulation, is where I begin to follow the strategy of theatrical replication. It is the state of play now; one cannot deny the thirty-one-year-old artist his forward innovation and refinement of this method or even its abandonment altogether. Nor do I suggest that Skrzywanek is categorically programmed to be anti-literature, but I purposely skip here his productions based on or somewhat inspired by literature (for example, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in Opole and *Kordian* in Poznań). The artist himself admits: 'Literature in itself is of little interest to me. I am more interested in the reality that surrounds me. It is here and now that excites me' ('Teatr nowej widzialności,' 2023).

Returning to Schneider's concept — from the point of view of theatrical reconstruction, the essence of reenactment rests on two fundamental factors. The first is the temporal relationship between enactment (understood as the act of 'creation') and the cited identification of repetition. 'Reenactment,' unlike other terms for replication (imitation, mimesis, appropriation and the like) is the only one that contains a clear temporal aspect, distinguishing between past and present, 'before' and 'now' (2020, p. 69). The second basis is the idea of embodiment of the archive, the past returning in performers' bodies as 'biological machines for the transmission of affect,' which dictates 'physical actions to be treated as tools of cognition' (ibid., p. 88). From Schneider's multi-faceted narrative, one can distinguish several functions of reenactment; the most obvious one, heavily accentuated

in analyses of Civil War battle reenactments and seen as an American foundational myth, I would call the 'conservative-nostalgic function.' Reconstructionists, when asked by Schneider about the purpose of their activities, often emphasised a perverse desire to travel back in time, to faithfully recreate the way things were, to 'keep the past alive' (ibid., p. 31). In such cases, reconstruction becomes a form of remembrance, a commemorative practice and a kind of ritual repetition of ancestral gestures. A different face of reenactment is revealed when it is functionalised for the working through of past traumas. Schneider, citing Freud's *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*, observes that, in psychoanalytic trauma theory, what has happened can be simultaneously ahead of us and behind us — in the past when something has been missed, forgotten or not fully seen, but also in the future when that something that was repressed can (re)appear in a (re)encounter, (re)discovery, (re)relation and/or (re)enactment and seem only now to be experienced for the first time because it is now being experienced the second time around (ibid., pp. 53-54).

The third function of reenactment refers to its subversive and critical character, to what Dorota Sajewska called 'the profanation of the archive, a kind of cognitive theory activity, subjecting media, strategies and practices of memory to reflection' (Sajewska, 2017), and Schneider herself referred to it as 'temporal drag.' Repetition becomes a form of negotiation between 'then' and 'now;' it also contains the perspective of concern for the future, and has the potential of becoming a tool for social intervention:

Is there political efficacy in temporal drag? The act of revolving, or turning, or pivoting off a linear track, may not be 'merely' nostalgic, if nostalgia implies a melancholic attachment to loss and an

assumed impossibility of return. Rather, the turn to the past as a gestic, affective journey through the past's possible alternative futures – the ghost jump if you will – bears a political purpose for a critical approach to futurity unhinged from capitalist development narratives of time and secular investments in Progress as strictly linear. (Schneider 2020, p. 359).

The function, let us call it 'interventionist,' is clearly opposed to the conservative-nostalgic function. I attribute this function to Skrzywanek's theatrical reconstructions, except for the play *Śmierć Jana Pawła II* (The Death of John Paul II), the reconstruction process of the Pope dying, which I would place closer to the second function — that of working through collective trauma (which is why I devote the least attention to this performance). Skrzywanek himself admitted that his aim was to 'check,' to confront the audience with the image of 'the pope in a diaper,' the purely physiological process of a dying body, and thus to visualise what had 'not been fully seen.' The fact that this reworking aimed at the Polish collective happened and was effective is confirmed by how the performance was received outside of Poland — at foreign theatre festivals it is often perceived as a glorification of the suffering of John Paul II ('Teatr...', 2023).

When juxtaposing Skrzywanek's reconstruction and Schneider's idea of reenactment, another important aspect needs a mention, namely the short distance in time. The director embodies the archives, but the events he reconstructs in his performances are encompassed in the communicative memory or, simply, are an element-exemplum of a more current social problem. Hence, Skrzywanek's reconstruction (which draws on the traditions of factual montage, stage reportage and documentary theatre) is closer to Hamlet's 'brief chronicles of the time and the Zeittheater.

Reconstruction falls within the framework of what Carol Martin called the 'theatre of the real' (though, in my view, the term 'the real' is more universal and somewhat avoids the problem of temporal distance echoed in Schneider's discourse in the term 'history'). In the researcher's terms, it is theatre that wants to 'get to real essence of things,' be part of a theatre of the real community, creating ways to understand personal, social, and political phenomena' (Martin, 2019). Reconstruction seems to correspond with these assumptions: the 'now' taken up is a visualisation of the phrase: It is one thing to know and another to see.¹ Socially engaged theatre has often been accused of engaging in cheap journalism and living off cheap thrills; for Skrzywanek, the method of reconstruction is a form of ethical engagement with reality:

I wish I lived in a different time, in a different world, and could do theatre about something else. But I can't... Anyone who knows me, who follows my endeavours, not only in theatre but also in activism, knows that is who I am, and I have to talk about what's most important to me at the time.

I hear voices that I use these topics because they are loud. If someone wants to think so, that's their business, but the truth is that I simply can't do anything else. (Jakub Skrzywanek: Kara i zbrodnia...,2023)

Preliminary diagnosis

To begin, let us try to see how the reconstruction method was arrived at. The first stepping stone—the directorial debut. Jakub Skrzywanek made his

debut in the Jerzy Szaniawski Theatre in Wałbrzych, a special place renowned for its openness to critical language. The production *Cynkowi Chłopcy* (The Tinker Boys), premiered on 22 January 2016 and, based on a reportage by Svetlana Aleksievich (2015 Nobel Prize winner in Literature), indeed had a certain reconstructive potential. The play was preceded each time by a several-minute-long film projection in the theatre foyer that referred to the historical context of the war in Afghanistan, and was a compilation of video footage, images and statistical data. The interviews conducted by Aleksievich are in fact recorded accounts of participants in the events; but for the literary reportage frames, being a buffer of sorts between stark testimonial and theatre, one could have simply produced a verbatim performance. Instead of reconstructive literalism, however, Skrzywanek took a completely different strategy, emphasising the parenthetical spectacle. *The Tinker Boys* was crammed into the grotesque convention of the Military Song Festival in Kołobrzeg. Gruesome tales of Afghans, a bucket of fake blood and tin coffins were intermingled with choreographic arrangements, a compere and daring renditions of military songs.

The second stepping stone was the dramatic debut. Skrzywanek's drama *Pogrom alfonsów, Warszawa 1905* (Pogrom of Pimps, Warsaw 1905), was published in the January 2019 issue of *Dialog* entitled 'Theatre and Reality.' The playscript of the 'reconstruction,' based on press reports of a lynching perpetrated against a Jewish community of pimps and prostitutes, somehow promises attachment to reality (past and present), while playing around with the theatrical form in which reality is dressed. In this case, it is the textual convention of the lesson plan that is familiar to all teachers. In an interview with Justyna Jaworska, Skrzywanek thought that an 'alienation effect' was achieved by this procedure: 'it's great language, precisely because it's so

completely out of step with the content' (*Znajdź i porównaj...*, 2019).

Reconstructive know-how

In his statements, Skrzywanek calls the method of reconstruction a way of establishing 'factual status,' a remedy for the constant narrative disputes that are so embedded in our public and media space: 'I create these reconstructions today because to me it is super interesting on a philosophical, ontological level to search for truth itself, to show it and contextualise it' ('Teatr...', 2023). The method of reconstructing reality and producing a referential illusion has its variants: a director uses various tools to achieve it, manoeuvring between realism — literalism and metaphor — a mental shortcut. Despite the variants, the method has its own poetics of the ethical process of developing a script, teamwork, staged encounter with the audience, and theatrical form.

1. Embodying the archive: the sources

According to Schneider, the process of 'embodying of archive' already begins when gathering materials: the very act of 'examining the documents in the library' engages the body — it is 'the material act of acquisition, the material acts of reading, writing, studying' (2020, p. 219). Skrzywanek's reconstruction scripts are indeed based on 'documents,' 'records,' 'evidence,' which intuitively have high credibility status. The central, reconstructive part subtitled *Bestia* (The Beast) within the play *Opowieści niemoralne* (Immoral Tales) (Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw, premiere: 25 September 2021, co-scripted with Weronika Murek), is based on documents whose ontological status is indisputable, including on a legal level, i.e. the transcript of a court hearing (State of California vs. Roman Raymond

Polanski trial, March 1977). In the case of *Spartakus. Miłość w czasach zarazy* (Spartacus. Love in the Time of Plague) (Teatr Współczesny in Szczecin, premiere: 13 May 2022), the primary archive was a reportage, whose premise is the collecting and categorising of facts, a certain search for truth, an interpretation between reality and reconstruction. In his text *Love in the Time of Plague*, published in 2020, Janusz Schwertner told the story of a transgender teenager Wiktor and the horrifying realities of the Polish child psychiatry system, the appalling conditions in institutions, everyday life in the Warsaw hospital on Żwirki i Wigury Street and the ward in Józefów near Warsaw, and the terror and indifference suffered by patients and their parents.² *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Teatr Współczesny in Szczecin, premiere: 25 February 2023, co-directed with Justyna Sobczyk), which used the reconstruction method, was inspired by a Facebook post by Anna Alboth, where she shared her thoughts on a trip to Brussels with her disabled brother Kuba. The aim was to visit a sex worker — the sexual needs of people with disabilities in Poland are a taboo subject. However, a post on a social media platform is nonetheless not an extensive archive from which any factual situation can be established. This is why Skrzywanek and Sobczyk do not actually reconstruct, but construct, the possible course of the brother's (Roman Słonina) visit to the sex worker. Thus, we are dealing with a borderland, a space between enactment and re-enactment, what I would call a 'speculative reconstruction' (more on this further down).

2. The reconstruction process: experts and specialists

In an interview published in *Dwutygodnik*, Skrzywanek described his approach to the process, which tarnishes the image of a brilliant artist, ready at any moment to 'sit down and write a story of a particular group, relying only on his imagination' ('Dramaturgia doświadczenia,' 2022). 'We

artists have to listen carefully to the reality so that we can tell you a story about it. (...) Our first expert group I currently work with are the actual people about whom I want to tell a story. I invite them to collaborate with me because I believe the stage is a space for representation' (ibid.). On the one hand, we are dealing with the theatre as a medium for expanding recognition of social issues (following the principle of 'nothing about us without us'). This is what happened in the work on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Spartacus* (legitimate co-creators of the script are people with disabilities and their families, intimacy assistants, patients of children's psychiatric hospitals and their parents, members of the Lambda Szczecin association). On the other hand, reconstructing reality must be based on precision, reliability and honesty. The specialists assisting the process were described by the director thus: 'These are the people without whom I cannot understand and develop certain moments/aspects of a play that are important to me. If I want to talk about some fragments of reality on stage, I must be very well prepared to do this' ('Dramaturgia doświadczenia,' 2022). Thirdly, there are times when yet another specialist steps in to ensure the well-being of the ensemble. While working on *Immoral Tales*, Skrzywanek and Murek invited — probably for the first time in the history of Polish theatre — intimacy assistants, Yevgenia Aleksandrova and Agnieszka Róż. The reconstruction of actual sexual violence required concern for the safety and comfort of all participants in this creative process.

3. The body, oppression, affect and trigger warning

Reconstruction is a form of embodiment of an archive; according to Schneider, in reenactment, the messy and 'disappearing live' gestures and actions of a human body are given privileged position over documenting. Affect,³ seen as the result of negotiation between the bodies of actors and

spectators, is characterised by what Schneider, citing from Sara Ahmed, referred to as 'stickiness' (2020, p. 82). One can argue that the central theme of reconstruction in Skrzywanek's performances is the physically oppressed body, which automatically programmes this viscosity. Violence against the 'biological affect transmission machine,' amplified by awareness of the person's real experience, intensely affects the spectator's body and triggers strong affective reactions.⁴ Theatre based on performative repetition seems an ideal tool for designing stickiness — Ahmed, writing about the performativity of disgust, pointed to the role of the contact zone in the stickiness of affect. This is not only based on literal contact with the skin's surface, but also on 'risky proximity' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 177) that makes the subject want to distance themselves, to move away. The risky proximity of performers' and observers' bodies inherent in the course of theatrical reconstruction is, as it were, an 'experience on one's own skin' — hence the concern for the spectator's wellbeing so as to prepare him or her for the encounter. The strategy of trigger warnings, although often viewed by critics as a feature of sensational marketing promotion, accompanies all Skrzywanek's reconstructive performances.

To support the thesis of the oppressed body as an axis of reconstruction, I will refer to *The Death of John Paul II*, which shows the dissonance between the real and the 'phantom body of the king — a human being subjected to physiology of death, who is drooling, has difficulty with basic functioning, but even the head of Church must endure it till the very the end.'⁵ The repetition of bodily oppression is also the clou in *The Beast*. The reconstruction, as part of a triptych inspired by films by Walerian Borowczyk, is underpinned by a deep reflection on how that culture presents sexual violence, disenchanting the pseudo-romanticised 'beautiful rape scenes;' a dominant male lets himself be swept away by the 'frenzy of

passion' to which the female body must submit. A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, leaving aside the theme of Alboth's post, subjectifies and valorises the non-normative body in the theatre space — actors with disabilities are not just seen, they actually take control over the show and, forming an army of Pucks, they thwart the plans of the Guardians of Morality. What is striking about the play *Spartacus* is the real-life system of physical punishment and stigmatisation — patients' bodies are subjected to a constant psychosomatic drill — from the routine morning exercises on the ward, having to put on pyjamas when told, to overcoming shame and undressing in a shower that does not even have a curtain. The second scene of bodily oppression uncovers gendered identification of body, physicality and gender. The main character, Wiktor, is transgender — reconstructing his physicality on a literal level was therefore impossible. (The problem of physical preferences of the Polish training system for actors and actresses needs to be addressed.) The role of Wiktor was given to an acclaimed actress of Teatr Współczesny, Anna Januszewska. The reconstruction, also in scenes of nudity, of the transgendered body of a young boy by the body of a mature woman thematises and reflects this incompatibility.

4. The alienation effect

The spectator, while observing actions and mechanisms on stage that are familiar to him or her from real life is empowered and motivated to evaluate and logically analyse what is separate from — or rather, complements — affect. Theatrical reconstruction becomes a tool for a refreshing conceptualisation of the intellect-affect relationship: it is not ideologically transparent, yet the idea of presenting the factual, the 'how it is,' triggers the need to refer to the most universal ethical principles, to explicitly qualify an act as good or evil. This Brechtian critical-analytical outlook is triggered

automatically in *Spartacus* — any common-sense observation of it elicits compassion for the patients. The medical staff stick to procedures and use the tools they have at their disposal—they don't allow parents to enter the ward, they tell patients to be good and eat their breakfast, they shuffle patients from unit to unit. When the father of one boy patient requests to see a doctor, he hears 'later,' which actually means 'sometime this week.' The spectators can relate to it from their own experience, know how Polish healthcare works, see 'evil but refuse to pass judgments on individuals. They see the source of evil in the dehumanised notion of 'the system;' it is the system that is to blame. The system is responsible for the shortages of specialist doctors, the overworked staff, the state of facilities — all regulated by the system and politics.

5. Media and multimedia: indicator and negation

Screens complement each of Skrzywanek's reconstruction performances, displaying photographs, video footage and, above all, lots of text. Recorded interviews with Poznań folk (representing various age groups with a full cross-section of collective and individual memories of John Paul II) making this realistic reconstruction of the Pope's last days a bit more relaxed; they enrich it with flickers of personal recollections and micro-stories that get diluted in the official, grand narratives. Just like the interviews of the mothers of the patients whose story is reconstructed in *Spartacus*, those too not only have an authenticating function, but they introduce a certain polyphony to the message, giving voice to those who stood in the background of stories that dramatically changed their lives as a family. The famous photograph of the young girl Geimer in a swimming pool (projected as a backdrop in *Immoral Tales*) taken by Polanski during the reconstructed evening and reproduced repeatedly by media, is now restored to its original

context. Once again, it becomes evidence in the case, rather than just an image from TV news and front pages of tabloids chasing Polański's trials and tribulations. In terms of the text accompanying the reconstruction — its diversity and function show that Skrzywanek does not usurp the right to create the only true version of the narrative: the reconstructions are built up with fragments of indictment acts, archival testimonies of people witnessing and participating in the events, all documenting social life. The text is a medium of negotiation: it sometimes acts as explanation and deictic to what is occurring on stage, or it gives the lie to and unmasks the illusory character of the reconstruction; the latter will be taken to extreme in *Crime and Punishment*.

6. Multiplicity in unity and strategies of reconstruction: empty places, *Yoke* and speculative practice

The reconstruction scene of Polański (played by Michal Czachor) raping Geimer (Natalia Lange) bears no hint of naturalism; the closest to realism is Czachor's initial look — a shirt, Hollywood-style trousers and a wig recreating Polanski's distinctive hairstyle. In the background, a bird's-eye view image of Jack Nicholson's villa is projected onto a screen. The stage action relies on aesthetics of void and open-endedness — Czachor first gives Lange stolid instructions to pose for photographs, then mechanically manoeuvres her body, rearranging and placing it in different positions. There are no realistic thrusting movements, the actors freeze in violence, in agreed paralysis. There is no nudity—the actors remain clothed in leotards. No screams or sexual auditory layer is heard—the scene is played in silence. I would call this strategy, based on a certain shortcut, a synecdoche, a negation of the literal, the reconstruction of a void; more frightening and inducing affective paralysis is the suggestiveness of what actually *is not*

there.

In *Spartacus*, the reconstruction (an extract from Schwertner's text and patients' experiences), proceeds realistically in terms of recreating relationships between the character-actors. This precise reenactment of actions and interpersonal relationships is placed in an imaginative, symbolic space (only the ubiquitous metal bars and the metallic clack of closing doors and gates are realistic). Daniel Rycharski's set design previously functioned as an autonomous work of art; the installation *Jarzmo* (Yoke) speaks of 'the ease of changing someone else's experience into an aesthetic object, usually viewed not by those whose lives and work it depicts' (Rycharski, 2022). The artist, committed to the 'verity of material,' used metal coops obtained from farmers from Mazovia and West Pomerania to build the walls of the children's psychiatric ward.

The floor strewn with hay and straw, pieces of furniture and medical equipment clashingly intermingle with agricultural objects like pitchforks and buckets. The barn used for commercial animal breeding, often associated with cruelty towards animals, is closely related to descriptions of patients in child psychiatric wards that we heard while working on the performance (Rycharski, 2022).

Inviting Rycharski to collaborate was a remedy for the cognitive problem Skrzywanek struggled with while working on *Spartacus*, namely of the viewer being unable to give credence to the reality, as this reality is beyond imagination. The photographs depicting the ward in Józefów (smearred walls with paint peeling off, dirty mattresses and blood-stained, unwashed bedding) are projected for a moment as a strong, flashy impulse, thus authenticating the stage-reflected reality. A realistic replica of the psychiatric ward would paradoxically be made fake, a symbolic mock-up —

hence the idea to use the eponymous yoke that exposes the aestheticisation of violence and strips human and non-human beings of their subjectivity. The strategy of reconstruction in *Spartacus* is thus a combination of realism (the human relations level) and metaphor (the creative space level).

In a stage cubicle recreating the enclosed, intimate space of a cosy room, a brother and sister (played by Barbara Lewandowska) plan a trip, pack a suitcase, pick a shirt which the man will wear when meeting the sex worker, talk about dreams and expectations. Then the meeting takes place in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and comfort, clearly defined boundaries and tender touch. I have pointed out earlier that this elaborate scene of human actions and relationships, which Skrzywanek and Sobczyk have created–recreated based on Alboth’s short post, lies somewhere between enactment and reenactment. The post here acts as this mini-archive, failing to provide a satisfactory amount of information and details of the sex worker's visit. By allowing for 'errors and omissions' (2020, p. 36), Schneider opens the gateway to speculative practices as if they were tools for emancipation of reconstruction; fiction here becomes the method⁶ and the body its tool. The potential course of past events, rationally reconstructed, is not so much possible as probable.

A reconstruction of reconstruction, or a media image in a theatrical frame

The method of reconstruction in *Crime and Punishment* consists of most of the elements already mentioned in this paper—the document-based script is the result of a collaboration with specialists. The performance consciously sets an intellectual and affective trap for spectators, who watch something

they 'cannot understand' and logically reason with, by bombarding them with the Brechtian alienation effect. It creates a story about a body subjected to violence, an annihilated body, one reduced to a theatrical and media prop; the reconstruction owes much to the actors of the Wrocław Pantomime Theatre who bring a new quality to the embodiment of an archive, building a choreography of war and death on stage. It utilises text projected in the stage space, such as snippets of materials of the Slidstvo collective that document Russian war crimes.

A certain novelty in relation to Skrzywanek's previous reconstructions is the stronger emphasis on two aspects of repetition: its mediality and its functioning within the convention of we are in a theatre. Mediality, understood as one of the basic components of human experience, is what Carol Martin calls the tool and subject of the theatre of reality:

'The primary behaviours of everyday life - that is, life as lived 'live' - have become secondary, as these behaviours are quickly mediatised. Theatre of the real uses media in many different ways: as a gauge of truth, as a demonstration of the ways in which people's lives are permeated by simulation, and as an arrow aimed at a history of ideas that includes the disinformation and misrepresentations of popular culture (including what we call 'the news')... Sophisticated and affordable technology supports the tendency to blur the distinctions between what is 'really happening,' 'made for the camera (or other media),' 'simulated,' 'reenacted,' 'treated,' and 'made consciously as art.' What we understand as the 'really real' has its own continuum that includes the unmediated, the replicated, the staged, the reconstructed, and also, sometimes, the simulated.' (Martin, 2019)

'Stronger exposure' of meta theatricality does not mean that this communicative tool was not used in previous productions. The most striking example: in *Immoral Tales* the reconstruction of rape is 'bracketed,' the theatrical illusion is shattered (like in the theatre of 'the hanger generation'),⁷ when Czachor turns into a beast in front of the audience, puts on its pastel clothes and grapples with a groomed wig *à la* Polański.

The reconstructions (which are different in each of the three parts: 'Prologue,' 'Crime,' and 'Punishment') bring about some cognitive dissonance in the viewer, forcing the question: 'What am I actually watching?' The overlapped media and theatrical order thwarts perceptions, triggering the need to search for the original source, to find and identify some kind of 'primal image.'

The only part of the play that explicitly refers to Dostoevsky's study is 'Prologue.' There is practical dimension to the reconstruction and its formula brings to mind police investigative processes — a police visit to a crime scene that may help reconstruct the possible course of events. The all-knowing narrator is Dariusz Maj, who sits to the side and answers questions from Michał Opaliński and Michał Mrozek, reporting on what went on. The prologue introduces the first level of medialisation and plays with verity of image—the investigation happens under the watchful eye of a camera sweeping the crime scene from various angles and transmitting live images to a screen onstage. The lens is often directed at the audience, who see images of their own doubles in the background. They are pushed into the dual role of passive onlookers, bystanders to the reconstruction. Their presence is registered and recorded, and the experience is transformed into a post-experience or testimony — they are now 'fully authorised' to report on 'how it was' and 'what was'. In order to reconstruct the course of the crime,

live bodies are needed, hence a quick casting that Mrozek conducts among five simulacrum actors before he proceeds with the reconstruction. Those five, clad in flesh-coloured leotards and fabric masks, resemble crash test dummies — they have no detailed features, their task is only to mark out body movements. Those more able are selected to play the leading roles — Raskolnikov, Alona Ivanovna and Lizaveta. The other two play a stand-in for a laundry line. There are props typical of an investigation (yellow numbered markers), and there is also an axe, the prop-instrument of the crime.

Mrozek, as the *spiritus movens* of the reconstruction, ensures the impersonators accurately recreate Maj's narrative and is anxious to get as accurate as possible — he counts how many axe blows should fall and, timer in hand, times precisely the two minutes that Raskolnikov spent tearing the bundle from the usurer's neck. The crime reconstruction implodes when it becomes clear that the objectified dummies have huge acting ambitions and prefer to play Stanislavski instead of just methodically to recreate. The sham actors turn into genuine pantomime actors, who argue among themselves about who can more realistically play the fall from the axe blow and accuse each other of being too psychological in the creation of the characters. The reconstruction of a horrid crime transforms into theatre and for the first time strongly thematises the presence of an artistic, even ludic frame.

Part Two, 'Crime,' contains the most evocative scenes of reconstruction based on material gathered by the Slidstvo collective. These show crimes against individuals, selected out of the magnitude of misery, named, described and documented. 'Crime' is a series of five reconstructive études, complemented by improvised acting—each with somewhat different poetics and titles displayed upstage: Murder, Detention/Torture, Mass Grave, Rape, Justice/Sacrifice of Victims. These are linked together by a degree of unrealism, a subtle sign of theatrical parenthesis — most of the actors

remain in the unifying crash test dummy costumes, and a voice modulator gives them a robotic sound. Snippets of journalistic testimonies projected upstage explain the actors' actions; through these indicators, the viewer learns that the actors pantomiming a race (with starting blocks and a gunshot signalling the start) are actually reconstructing an escape from their persecutors, and the muffled screams interspersed with Maria Callas' singing recreate torture. The mass grave of an entire family is a deliberately positioned tangle of bodies, an overhead projector additionally projects this image on the stage screen. As Agnieszka Kwietniewska and Igor Kujawski inspect the corpses, her eye is fixed on an ever heart-wrenching image and eye-catching frame of reportage — a baby shoe left behind, a little foot sticking out of the grave. The actress puts on a fur coat and, now as a foreign politician, begins her media spectacle over the grave, while complaining at having to walk in stilettos in the mud. She brings a teddy bear, laments, wipes away tears and apologises in several European languages to the victims for not intervening, relishing the most in the pathetic-sounding Spanish 'Los siento!' Finally, she wonders, 'What can be done with these bodies, so they don't go to waste?' Meanwhile, the actor Michał Opaliński performs a pacifist performance running around the grave, Olympic torch in hand, eventually reaching for a 'Stop Any War' banner. He is joined by Elloy Moreno Gallego of the Pantomima ensemble and performs 'moving' choreography to Abba's 'SOS'. The spectacle of this cynical hypocrisy reaches a crescendo as the bodies from the mass grave are being arranged in the peace sign. A clash of form and content, this self-ironic theatricalism of crime gallops on: the reconstruction of rapes, documented by the Media Initiative for Human Rights (*Medialna Inicjatywa na rzecz Praw Człowieka*) is maintained in the poetics of unreal, anti-violence mutual consent; in reality, a perpetrator never asks, 'Will it be OK for you if...' and

will not agree to swap places in an oppressive arrangement.

The 'Punishment' section is not a reconstruction *sensu stricto*, but instead a simulation. The course of proceedings of the International Criminal Court for Russian crimes in Ukraine was designed in cooperation with Professor Monika Płatek from the Department of Criminology at the Institute of Criminal Law, University of Warsaw. The court convention brings to mind historical-theatrical contexts (the convention of German documentary theatre of the 1960s) and contemporary contexts (Sasha Denisova's *The Hague*, Michał Zadara's *Sprawiedliwość* (Justice), *Odpowiedzialność* (Responsibility) and *Cisza* (Silence) and the activities of the Institute of Performative Law that he co-manages/co-runs).

The actual proceedings are not symbolic but, rather, an attempt to show the disproportion between idealistic faith in justice and enraging helplessness. The rhetorical clash between Igor Kujawski as prosecutor and Agnieszka Kwietniewska as devil's advocate takes place against the backdrop of a ticking clock and a mock bomb sitting in the judge's chair. The methodical, logical, truthful and morally correct accusations made against Russian criminals are immediately refuted by the defence; as Kwietniewska argues, 'the findings of the International Criminal Court are of no significance to the Russian Federation and What's taking place here is a grotesque spectacle.' The defence lawyer's sophistic argumentation leads to the relativisation of the crime: what is the difference between a 'special operation' and a 'stabilising mission'? Why does the international community want now to prosecute crimes against Ukraine, but in the past did not object to those committed against the Iraqi people? What is the value of — citing Didi-Huberman — 'images in spite of all,' material evidence in the form of photographs and videos available on the Internet, since the images from Abu

Ghraib did not bring on tribunal action? The prosecution insisting on punishing all guilty parties brings an even-higher-level juggling act to bear on the arguments — the evil is made banal (as in Hannah Arendt) and responsibility dispersed among thousands of soldiers who also have mothers, wives and children to support. The evidence in the form of media images does not amount to much; neither do witness accounts of reconstructionists, producers of yet another intermediary portrayal within the framework of this 'grotesque spectacle.' Called as a witness, Izabela Cześniewicz (an actress in the Wrocław Pantomime Theatre), must testify that she had to play a fatal fall from a gunshot, such was the job assigned by the director; in the process, she reveals the ins and outs of the theatrical craftsmanship of faking, gives a talk on what arrested motion is to mimes. She is asked to fabricate the evidence once more and act out the fall. Also summoned to the audition is Janka Woźnicka, who plays Olena Zelenskaya in part two, 'Crime,' speaking at the United for Justice conference in Lviv. Her aim was to move the audience; she sees her performance as a contribution to the anti-rape movement and has more energy and passion for acting than Ukraine's First Lady. The defence cynically exploits the difference between 'real' and 'reconstructed' suffering, inaccessible to the audience, and, as evidence, presents a transcript of a theatrical rehearsal in which the actors instructed by the director simulate screams and sounds of torture. The final witness is Dariusz Maj; he is supposed to repeat an improvised act he had once rehearsed while he 'fantasised' about bringing Vladimir Putin to justice. He ties the imaginary criminal to a coat stand and, with gusto, plays out a series of tortures, a macabre retaliation for all the evil. The category of sympathy is not for Putin, it is for the victims. But can it also concern the international community and the Poles (suffering because of 'petrol at eight zlotys') since it is 'not our war'? Kwietniewska has had enough of this theatrical game of

reconstruction and clearly thematises its artificiality and helplessness; all she can do is dance out her dream death scene. Kujawski, a guardian of justice repeats, like a mantra, lofty phrases about justice as a guarantor of our future, about appealing to fundamental values; he is interrupted by Michał Opaliński, who delivers a brutally honest monologue of what many people probably feel but are afraid to say openly: how the war pisses him off, and how he has to tackle it, even at work as an actor.

In terms of temporal dimension, this more than two-hour performance dramaturgy is designed to be an encounter with the audience. After 'The Crime,' there is an interval that somewhat traps the spectator—it shows how affect is a universal tool of manipulation. The viewer leaves for the interval without closure, but with a sense of disagreement with the theatricalisation of war and the appropriation of other people's suffering. The next act does not rid them of this notion of powerlessness but redirects and reprogrammes it in some way. The actor's self-talk and the clear outlining of meta-theatricality (straight out of Weiss's strategy from *Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater*⁸) in 'Prologue' and 'Punishment' remind the viewer that this is only a reconstruction and theatrical play that can comment on reality but is not the reality. Skrzywanek thoughtfully doubles the discursive orders and recreates media reconstructions. The performance is actually about images of war, about what we (witnessing it from the outside) have access to. Those viewing the images depicting the aftermath of Russian crimes do not want to be swayed by propaganda and assume that it is fake but, on the other hand, they activate a defence mechanism reminding us that these are only media messages. How are we affected by the readily available photos of Bucza on the Internet; how do we react — as Susan Sontag has put it — to the photographed 'pain of others'? Are we affected by performance of compassion for show by big politics manifesting their

support but essentially not doing much? On the opposite end, we have a moving performance-demonstration, reconstructed as a show (the commemoration ceremony for a fallen soldier, the notorious Chernoknizhnyj who committed multiple rapes during the special operation but according to the Russian narrative is a hero). Theatre is a medium caught up in this circulation of images and war on narratives, but is at least equipped with a kind of critical, ironic self-awareness that it has no real influence on reality.

Instead of a summary: reconstruction and overflowing reality

The reconstructions described above, despite their shared use of poetic license, materialise their components in different ways, balancing between mimetics and condensed and complicated theatrical symbols. Despite this, they all work under the interventionist umbrella function of reenactment, granted with metapolitical agency of sorts based on a past-present-future timeline. For Schneider, who has repeatedly emphasised the subversive potential of reenactment, this subversiveness is based precisely on the complicated temporal contingencies.

Can we call *back* in time? Across time? What kind of response might we elicit? When does that which has sounded – deferred as an invocation or an appeal, a plea or a prod for ‘future’ action ‘now’ – ultimately occur? What are the limits of this future? What are the limits of this now? (Schneider, 2020, p. 356)

Invoking the etymological meaning of theatre as a ‘place to look’ and using the linguistic semantics of the gaze; the repetition of a slice of reality

characterised by violence, exclusion, manipulation and ethical relativism, reenactment played out in a theatrical frame expands the field of social visibility. It changes the optics of disillusionment with the past to a perspective of concern for the future, by acting in the present. Skrzywanek's critical reconstructions, annexing reality inwardly, provoke a blurring of the boundaries between spectacle as a medium and reality and 'pour' the potential for social intervention outwardly. This is the case with *Spartacus*: after the reconstruction, a performative space is brought to life in which 'real' non-heteronormative couples, who do not belong to the order of the show, can take their marriage vows. This is what happens in the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: after every performance at the Contemporary Theatre in Szczecin, famous for its long flights of stairs and inaccessibility to disabled people, a banner is displayed saying 'Stairs of shame' or 'Sorry'. And so it goes in the finale of *Crime and Punishment*, when Michał Opaliński, as himself, openly admits that 'this war pisses him off.'

Translated by Mark Hoogslag & Tim Brombley

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Footnotes

1. Skrzywanek used this phrase expressing the essence of reconstruction method in the recording 'Nikt sam by sobie tego nie wybrał – reportaż do spektaklu 'Spartakus. Miłość w czasach zarazy' (Nobody would choose it themselves: a reportage on *Spartacus. Love in the Time of Plague*). Audio available at the website of Teatr Współczesny in Szczecin: <https://wspolczesny.szczecin.pl/spartakus-milosc-w-czasach-zarazy/> [accessed: 12.08.2023].
2. The contact between Skrzywanek, Schwertner and the patients of children's psychiatric hospitals, established while working on *Spartacus*, led to the creation of another reportage 'Pyjamas,' devoted to the bizarre and humiliating punishment system in place at the neurosis treatment centre in Garwolin. In 2022, Schwertner produced an entire volume together with Witold Bereś: 'Szramy. Jak psychosystem niszczy nasze dzieci' (Scars. How the psychosystem destroys our children).
3. Here I use a definition of affect that is broad and extremely fertile for humanities, proposed by Brian Massumi, built on Deleuze's and Guattari's considerations; Massumi emphasised the autonomy of affect — understood as a body rendered force, precognitive, extra-linguistic, unconscious and unintentional — in relation to emotion, belonging to the subjective and functional order. See Massumi, 1995.
4. On the affective reception of *Immoral Tales* and *the Death of John Paul II*: Tabak, 2022; Chaberski et al., 2022.
5. The role of a dead and dying body, only touched upon here, definitely deserves a separate study on necro-performance, or a comparative analysis with, for example, passion plays and dogmatics of depiction of suffering in the Catholic Church.
6. I refer the reader to two interesting books exploring the operation of speculative and counterfactual practices in art, science and social discourse: 'Performanse pamięci w literaturach i sztukach,' 2020, 'Fikcje jako metoda,' 2018.
7. See Kościelniak, 2009.
8. Mateusz Borowski, while analysing strategies for constructing truth in documentary theatre, referred to texts of Rolf Hochhuth, Heinar Kiphardt and Peter Weiss, as well as Weiss's theoretical statements from *Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater*. 'Weiss stressed the importance of emphasising a theatrical frame, an aesthetic parenthesis of the stage, so that the artistic form that organises factual material is not a mystery to the

audience, for only in this way will the persuasive power of documents contained in it be preserved. There should be no doubt that what they are watching is not reality itself on stage, but only its replica consciously constructed for the specific purpose,' Borowski, 2007, p. 216.

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/ RECONSTRUCTIONS

‘Ladies Are Looking for Problems’

An Attempt to Reconstruct Marcelina Grabowska’s Drama ‘Children Do Not Want to Live’ and Its Staging and Reception within the Framework of Creating a Feminist Archive

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The paper is an attempt to reconstruct the content of the drama *Dzieci nie chcą żyć* (Children Don’t Want to Live) by Marcelina Grabowska as well as its staging and reception. Using the methodology from the field of philosophy of history (Benjamin), theory of performance (Rebecca Schneider) and anthropology of memory (Michel-Rolph Trouillot), the authoress analyses the collected archival material. She thus problematizes the notion of a silent archive and an archival gap. The archives concerning probably the first and only staging of Grabowska’s play (May 1938) and the sociopolitical reality turn out to be the subject of reflection upon the materiality of history and recurrence of time. The crisis of psychological support for children and adolescents of the 1930s comes into dialogue with the (re)current appearance of this issue that happened during the pandemic. The paper contributes to the feminist archive production as a consciously political and architectural gesture that supports non-hegemonic narratives of the history of Polish theatre.

Keywords: feminist archive; interwar period; historical materialism; silent archives; Polish drama

As flowers turn toward the sun, what has been strives to turn – by

dint of a secret heliotropism – toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history.

Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History'

1.

The mysteriousness of tropism in the past that Walter Benjamin wrote about in *On the Concept of History* (1996) lies, inter alia, in the unpredictability of the discursive movements of that which is gone. The moment of the emergence of elements of the past in the field of the present appears as a phenomenon of unclear source, operating within a dispersive temporality. The formation of disappearance goes hand in hand with the formation of residues (Schneider, 2011, p. 102), which turn to the 'sun of history' at various moments, resistant to projections. It is in setting history in motion, according to Benjamin, that the task of historical materialism lies (1996, pp. 389-396). That which is gone makes itself known within a framework of constant updates. I understand Benjamin's historical materialism as a stance that is, firstly, critical of the concepts of continuity and totality and, secondly, that also focuses on the figure of the female and male historian, the individual, corporeal entities embedded in the present, but constantly looking backwards. In light of Benjamin's thought, learning about the world through the writing of history is an attempt to collect traces and remains without the hope of achieving a coherent picture. Connected to this view of the present as a material reality constantly updating itself through the movements of the past is Rebecca Schneider's proposed view of time as a syncopated composition in which the production of narrative is identical to the production of blank spaces, leaps and circulations. In the final section of

this essay, I will also demonstrate that Benjamin's conception of historical materialism is also in dialogue with the approach to archives presented by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. In his view, the silent omissions in the process of writing history are active and causal factors rather than simply transparent places between the fragments that make up the archives. Therefore, I see the methodological framework of this essay as a triad combining philosophy of history, performance theory and anthropology of memory.

The headlines from the daily press published in Poland in the 1930s sound as if they could fit into the current media coverage of the crisis of psychological support for children and adolescents. An analysis of the press from the 1930s shows that the problem became most acute in the last years of the decade in question. Already in 1935, concerns were raised about a wave of suicides among school-age children.¹ In 1938, the frequency of news items on this subject seemed to suggest that the crisis was entering its most acute phase. Articles and notes on the subject carried alarming, sometimes clearly emotionally charged headlines, such as 'things are not going well for children in Poland,'² 'society should take care of young people,'³ 'childcare is not sufficient, crime is on the rise, juvenile suicides are increasing,'⁴ 'things are bad for our children.'⁵ An important, if not crucial, background to the press coverage is the economic crisis, also known as the Great Depression, which lasted in Poland from 1929 until at least the mid-1930s and drastically worsened the living situation of children and young people (Jamrożek, 2012).

The statistics confirm the relevance of the press releases quoted above. In 1935, more than twenty-six thousand juveniles were sentenced, i.e. three thousand more than in the previous year (2012), and there were twenty-one cases of suicide by children between the ages of ten and fourteen.⁶ A year later, there were already twenty-eight such cases.⁷ Press reports of suicides

by adolescents between the ages of fifteen and nineteen also show a dramatic increase in cases in this age group, up to a dozen times that of children aged 10-14, adding up to over two hundred and fifty attempts resulting in death.⁸ This situation led to the convening of the first Polish National Child Congress in 1938, initiated by the Association of Participants in the Struggle for Polish Schools under the patronage of President Ignacy Mościcki.⁹ The congress was conceived as the first of a series of regular national meetings during which parents and educators, as well as doctors, clerics, paediatricians, columnists, and social activists, would work together on a project to improve the situation of children and young people in Poland.¹⁰ Participants in the Congress conducted deliberations within the framework of five thematic committees (devoted to the relations between children and adults, child health, the youngest ones' leisure time, relationships in the family and the condition of schools).¹¹ However, the proposals developed during this several-day-long meeting did not live to see full implementation (Jamrożek, 2012), and the radical disruption of the efforts to improve the fate of children in the Second Republic turned out to be, of course, the outbreak of the Second World War less than a year away.

The recursiveness of time as a movement of that which is past towards that which produces history nowadays is revealed, *inter alia*, in the effects, appeals and rhetoric relating to public affairs. Benjamin's thought provides encouragement to look at the re-emerging discourse of crisis, in this case, the crisis of psychological support for children and young people, not as a return, but as an update of that which is past. This changes the perception of history; it is not simply a 'pile of ruins' – according to Benjamin, this pile grows skyward, and the traces accumulate, and the past, revealing itself in the present, 'explodes the continuum of history' (2006, p. 262). The coronavirus pandemic crisis, which began in March 2020 and officially

ended in July 2023, generated public discussion about psychological and psychiatric support for children and adolescents in Poland. Forced home isolation, radical reduction of contact with peers and other components of the global epidemic crisis were among the reasons for the increase in suicidal behaviour among children and adolescents in Poland (Ruszel et. al., 2022).¹² In 1938, an intervention from the field of art and a reaction to the crisis affecting children and young people was an essay with the blunt title *Dzieci nie chcą żyć* (Children Do Not Want to Live) by Marcelina Grabowska, later directed on stage by Ziemowit Karpiński.

The purpose of this article is to reconstruct the content of Marcelina Grabowska's drama *Children Do Not Want to Live*, the circumstances of its staging and reception and, as a consequence, to produce another component of the archive that fits into feminist research on theatre. Following Ewa Majewska, I treat the latter objective as a fulfilment of the 'methodological and political task of joining in the construction of herstory' (2018, p. 35) and a form of mounting weak resistance to the hegemonic orders of making and preserving history in the name of uncovering 'the fissures that can burst the archive' (p. 46). I treat the practice of building an archive precisely as a gesture of an architectural nature - as a conscious and active participation in the creation of new structures of knowledge. A review of the state of research offers the conclusion that Marcelina Grabowska's drama *Children Do Not Want to Live* has not been the subject of a wider scholarly discussion before. In specialist publications, the title has only been mentioned in the context of feminist interwar dramaturgy and engaged theatre along the lines of the German *Zeittheater* trend (Adamiecka-Sitek, 2021; Hernik Spalińska, 2006). I see the attempt to reconstruct the drama and its staging, and its critical reception precisely as a practice of uncovering archival gaps.

2.

On 22 May 1938, as part of the Theatre Workshop of the State Institute of Theatre Art (PIST) in Warsaw, the premiere of the drama *Children Do Not Want to Live* by Marcelina Grabowska took place, directed by Ziemowit Karpiński with stage design by Waław Ujejski. The stage production presented at the Nowy Theatre, the studio stage of the National Theatre, was at the same time the graduation work of Karpiński, a student of the Department of Directing Art of the PIST, and a show inaugurating the activity of the newly established association Młody Teatr (Youth Theatre) under the direction of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (additionally, this was the show with which Waław Ujejski, who prepared the scenery for the play, crowned his studies at the Department of Directing Art of the PIST). Established on 4th January 1938, the Youth Theatre was meant to provide support for young playwrights and dramatists and save their works from 'mouldering away in theatre administrative offices' (Podhorska-Okołów, 1938) by recommending the most interesting ones for staging (primarily on Warsaw stages). The constitution of the association can be seen as a kind of critical intervention in the interwar theatre production system within which it was extremely difficult to gain visibility as a young playwright or author. The plays submitted to the Youth Theatre were evaluated by a reading committee,¹³ which then prepared a recommendation bulletin to be sent to theatre managers. One of the works that gained approval was the drama *Children Do Not Want to Live* by Grabowska,¹⁴ a prose writer, reviewer, playwright and columnist. Established in 1936, the Theatre Workshop was an endeavour that allowed those graduating from the directing course at the PIST to create and present their first performances, primarily those in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree. In total, the Theatre Workshop

formula resulted in twenty-four productions. They were usually presented on Sundays at noon on the studio stage of the National Theatre. In the case of *Children Do Not Want to Live*, the play was not submitted to the PIST as part of a recommendation bulletin, but was recommended to Ziemowit Karpiński, who approached the Youth Theatre in the first months of its operation while preparing his graduation work and asked them to recommend a play by a young Polish author, and Grabowska's piece particularly drew his attention (Winklowska, 1998, p. 179). An analysis of the archives allows the conclusion that the May 1938 production was the only staging of *Children Do Not Want to Live* in the history of Polish theatre; it was also the first and last case of direct collaboration between the Youth Theatre and the PIST Theatre Workshop (Wilski, 1971) and the only contemporary Polish drama produced within the framework of the Workshop (1971).

3.

The text of the play, unlike that of *Sprawiedliwość* (Justice)¹⁵ by the same author, which was staged four years earlier, has not survived to this day. However, its content can be reconstructed quite accurately with recourse to critical texts published in the press. The most useful source, i.e. the one that provides the fullest summary of the plot of Grabowska's drama, turns out to be the Catholic monthly *Pro Christo: wiarą i czynem!* (Pro Christo: with Faith and Deed!)¹⁶ And its article with the polemical title *Children Do Want to Live* (1938) by Tadeusz Dworak.¹⁷ This paper cites the summary contained in Dworak's article, being aware of where it was published and of the selective nature of the narrative, the polemical value of which is a separate issue. At this stage of research, it is impossible to directly access the text of the drama; hence, the reconstruction of its content and key themes is the result of collecting and arranging uncertain, distortion-prone traces. At the same

time, the awareness of the source does not allow one to present a synopsis of *Children Do Not Want to Live* without a clear indication of the source and a mention of the author's political views; the fact that the article was published in Pro Christo supports a clearly defined agenda after all.

From Dworak's article, we learn that *Children Do Not Want to Live* is a work called 'melodramatic' by the author, based on a three-part structure. The first part, entitled *Konflikty* (Conflicts), is set in a school context. The protagonist is the teenage girl Marysia Kilianówna, who opposes the oppressive and coercive system of education that stifles individuality. According to her, one of the problems is that pupils are assigned numbers at school like impersonal parts of an institutional machine. She also draws attention to the issue of patronage; a pupil whose father sits on the board of the parent committee is granted reduced school fees. In the final scene of the first part of the play, the figure of Włodkówna appears, a gifted school graduate who is denied a position at the school by the management who offers it to another person who does not show similar abilities, but who enjoys patronage. Kilianówna's anger prompts her to leave the school. The second part of the drama is (most likely¹⁸) entitled *Szukanie w ciemnościach* (Searching in the Dark) and presents the family background of the rebellious schoolgirl. During a conversation between her mother and her form teacher Wierzbicka, the teacher suggests that Kilianówna is overexposed to the 'bitter truth about life' (1938). The point is that Marysia's mother works as a clerk and is a victim of exploitation; she also constantly fears being sacked and loss of income. As Dworak writes, Wierzbicka warns her mother that 'a child prematurely initiated into the mechanism of social wrongs may fall under this burden' (1938). At her mother's request, Marysia returns to school, where she befriends a pupil identified as 'number 3,' also identifying herself as a victim of the oppressive school system. Together, they play

truant. The third and final part of the drama, entitled *Ślepy tor* (Blind Track),¹⁹ reveals the behind-the-scenes work of female teachers; those working at the school are overwhelmed by their responsibilities and embittered by their low salaries. The condition of female teachers then affects the mental state of children and young people, resulting, inter alia, in a higher suicide rate among this age group.²⁰ In the meantime, Marysia and 'number 3' sink into anxiety and bitterness; the last straw is a press release found by Marysia about Włodkówna being arrested for communist activities. The girls decide to take their own lives by running onto the railway embankment straight under the wheels of a train.

4.

In an article from the series 'Nad czym pracują scenopisarze polscy?' (What Are the Polish Scriptwriters Working On?) published in the magazine *Teatr*, Grabowska admits that it was press reports of youth suicides that prompted her to place the school and family realities within the framework of the drama (Grabowska, 1937). The author also writes that *Children Do Not Want to Live* is her first stage play while *Justice* is her second (although it was staged four years before *Children...*). It is, therefore, easy to conclude that *Children Do Not Want to Live* had been lying in a drawer for several years, waiting for its chance (in this context, the Youth Theatre fulfilled its task flawlessly, giving visibility to a previously unnoticed piece of work). Another conclusion may relate to Grabowska's motivation for launching the dramatic part of her writing activity; turning to this form was a reaction to press reports on the social situation. Thus, she must have considered the theatre as an appropriate place to take up a subject combining moral, political-social and economic issues as it can be assumed that she wrote her work with a view to a stage production). At the same time, Grabowska points out that her

plays 'are not social in nature,' but are conceived as 'an artistic illustration of one of the many realities of life [sic] picked up and fixed in art' (1937). Emphasising the artistic character of her dramatic work may suggest that Grabowska considered situating her dramas in the domain of social critique as depreciating or weakening the position of the work in the sphere of art. However, the reviews of the staging of *Children Do Not Want to Live* cited later in this article will show that both female and male critics perceived this drama precisely as interventionist and politically engaged content, and rated its artistic qualities low, pointing rather to Grabowska taking advantage of the dramatic medium in order to manifest her convictions concerning the social and economic reality.

5.

The synopsis of *Children Do Not Want to Live*, published in *Pro Christo*, makes it possible to identify Grabowska as an author involved in the political, social and economic spheres even without knowing her earlier achievements. What is important, however, is that the aforementioned drama *Justice*,²¹ most clearly included in her creative biography, tells the story of a woman punished with imprisonment for infanticide who has an abortion under pressure after being impregnated by the son of the prison warden. This play can be called a stage reportage (Poskuta-Włodek, 2015), which is in line with the perception of theatre performance as a method of political representation and a laboratory for social transformation, and theatre not as a medium of artistic expression, but a kind of discursive agora and sense-making mechanism (Krakowska, 2016, p. 9).²² In her work *O zmianę polityki teatralnej* (For a Change of Theatre Policy, 1935), published three years before the staging of *Children Do Not Want to Live*, Grabowska expounds her vision of theatre as a medium of artistic expression, but also as

an institution embedded in a material reality. In her opinion, the economy of the theatre's functioning deserves no less attention than the creative issues, and for her, the two main problems of contemporary theatre are low attendance and poor artistic quality. She sees the reasons for the first of these problems in the detachment of the theatre from issues close to the audience's everyday life ('Poor attendance proves the lack of contact between the work of the theatre and life,' 1935). Grabowska consciously makes use of economic terminology pointing to the 'unproductivity of the work input'²³ as a result of the 'split between production and consumption.'²⁴ She thus argues that the material well-being of theatre depends on the ability to attract audiences by offering a theatre that is close to their issues, problems and experiences of everyday life. In other words, in order to operate, theatre must be an engaged theatre:

The Polish stage got out of touch with the Polish audience. It has lost the only possible attraction that cinema would not take away from it, i.e. the connectedness with the Polish reality. ... Offering serious things is not enough. To make them interesting, they must also be topical; they must be a mirror of our lives.²⁵

The perception of theatre as discourse and performance as a method of communicating public issues and a gesture of joining the discussion about them (a gesture coming more from the field of rhetoric than art) (Krakowska, 2016, p. 8) puts the researcher in the position of having to set a drama or its staging in a broader socio-political context and subjecting a dramatic or theatrical work to a synchronic analysis. To define Grabowska as an engaged artist, it is necessary to look for an answer to the question of what specifically the object of her engagement was - which contemporary

structures aroused the anger and disagreement that sublimated into her dramatic activity.

6.

The discursive nature of theatre as part of the public sphere is revealed forcefully, *inter alia*, in moments of censorship intervention. Following the acceptance of the text by the PIST authorities and Karpiński's consultations with the author about creating an abridged version, the decision of the Government Commissariat to prohibit the staging of the play reached the institution. In defence of the play and the stage production, Boy-Żeleński himself, one of the conceivers of the project, spoke out publicly in the pages of the *Kurier Poranny* daily. In the note, 'Not too zealously?' (1938), Boy-Żeleński presented arguments relating to the content of the play, stating, among other things, that 'the oversensitivity, the dark tone is the only thing (from the point of view of censorship!) that this play could be blamed for' while also pointing to the special circumstances of this production which, like other productions of the Theatre Workshop, was a one-off show for a small group of theatre professionals, enthusiasts and loved ones. In his opinion, such a situation was indicative of the potentially small 'impact' of the work based on *Children Do Not Want to Live*, and therefore, Boy viewed the measures taken by the censor's office as too severe.²⁶ Less than a week later, Boy returned to the subject in the *Kurier Poranny*, this time bringing good news for the producers of the play. In the small note 'Repeal of the Ban by Censorship,' the author reports that the Government Commissariat has reversed its decision, and Karpiński can get down to work.

7.

Six press reviews of *Children Do Not Want to Live* were published (of which I was able to access five), in addition to the two notes by Boy-Żeleński quoted earlier in the *Kurier Poranny*, two mentions in articles by Karol Irzykowski included in the fourth volume of his *Pisma teatralne* (Theatre Writings, 1995), and a mention in Bohdan Korzeniewski's essay on two productions based on the plays of André Birabeau. Grabowska's drama and its staging were also mentioned in Irzykowski's lecture as part of the Holiday Courses in Wisła in the summer of 1938 (1939).

Considering the nature of this production, directed by a future graduate, being an adaptation of the first piece of writing by the author, who at the time was primarily a reviewer and a columnist with just one novel and one staging of her drama to her credit, and above all, the fact that the production was only presented once (and to a small audience) outside the repertory system, the number of reviews of Karpiński's play and press and literary mentions of it may seem surprising. There are probably at least two reasons why *Children Do Not Want to Live* received such a reception despite its strongly 'professional' nature; firstly, the shows at the Theatre Workshop had their regular, close audience, and these were predominantly people professionally involved in theatre; and secondly, as Boy aptly pointed out in his article 'Repeal of the Ban by Censorship,' the attempt by the authorities to stop the show meant that the venture attracted increased press attention.

The author of Boy-Żeleński's biography Barbara Winklowska states in her book that the show *Children Do Not Want to Live* 'enjoyed great success according to reports in the press' (1998, p. 179). In coming to this conclusion, Winklowska must have relied solely on the statements of the

protagonist of her book because the performance was severely criticized, even though it received relatively numerous reviews; of the five reviewers, none assessed the performance unequivocally positively. The literary mentions also testify to the authors' negative attitude towards the performance. In each case, the object of criticism is primarily the text itself. It is its discursive, engaged nature that poses a problem for the reviewers because, in their opinion, the blatant social criticism is not accompanied by literary and artistic qualities in this case.

Stefania Podhorska-Okolów, the only woman among those whose reviews are available in the archives, wondered in the pages of the *Bluszcz* weekly why it was Grabowska's play that the Youth Theatre recommended for staging as part of the Theatre Workshop. In her opinion, it might have been 'the reformist streak Boy himself that was at play here, after the well-worn theme of "conscious motherhood," sniffing out a new social sensation, i.e. the suicides of schoolchildren' (1938). The author's nasty remark is thus, at the same time, an accusation of Boy's opportunistic approach to social themes and of his privileging of discursive qualities over literary qualities. According to Podhorska-Okolów, social and institutional criticism within a theatrical performance has a *raison d'être* only where theatre 'does not cease to be theatre, and a high theatre at that' (1938), and all social diagnoses should be exchanged for 'the jingling coins of drama' (1938). The reviewer's reflection on the motivations of Marysia Kilianówna and her friend for the decision to commit suicide, presented in the drama, is significant in the context of her stance on the relationship between society and the individual. According to Podhorska-Okolów, the decision is motivated 'meagrely' omitting the whole 'rich field of erotic awakening,' crucial to adolescence, in which Grabowska could have sought the reasons why the heroines decided to take such a radical step. The existential, social, institutional and political reasons were

thus, in the reviewer's understanding, too weak to drive the schoolgirls to suicide. The review thus confronts two positions: Grabowska's belief in the social and systemic embedding of mental crises and Podhorska-Okolów's view of individual, emotional experiences as the source of mental breakdowns. This is another point in the process of making the archive of *Children Do Not Want to Live*, where the past, within a syncopated temporality - where, as Schneider writes, different 'times touch' (2011, p. 35) - is reflected as a remnant in the current reflection on therapeutic discourse and the causes of mental disorders and illness, situated in the realities of neoliberal capitalism. Within this same reflection, critics of capitalism recognize and analyse the systemic nature of mental crises while at the same time treating individual-centred therapeutic discourse as a tool to sustain the harmful system by obscuring the true sources of mental problems (Fischer, 2009). The confrontation between Grabowska's and Podhorska-Okolów's positions is reminiscent of contemporary tensions between the atomistic and the collective visions of society.

A similar opinion on Karpiński's performance and Grabowska's play was expressed by Zdzisław Broncel in the 'Chronicle of Poland and the World,' arguing aggressively, in the context of Boy's intervention with the censorship authority, that 'there was nothing to fight for' (1938). He calls the drama 'a misunderstanding in terms of both the content and the form', seeing it as schematic, trite and literarily weak. In contrast to Grabowska's declared demands of bringing theatre closer to the audience's everyday life, Broncel claims that her play is not reflected in reality. In all the reviews and articles that mention Karpiński's performance, basically, the same opinions expressed in different words are repeated. For Roman Kołoniecki, the reviewer of the *Pion* weekly, the performance by the Theatre Workshop was also a disappointment. Above all, Kołoniecki states that 'discussing the so-

called social ills alone does not give artistic credit' (1938). The author dissects Grabowska's drama without mincing words; he calls it, among other things, a 'weak journalistic feature' with 'wretched and ineptly edited dramatic staffage' for which he sees a place in a newspaper rather than on stage (1938). Gentler language was used by Jan Parandowski, who, in the pages of *Gazeta Polska* daily, describes Grabowska's drama as admittedly touching on socially significant topics, but doing so in a naïve and one-sided manner (1938). The author also claims that the attitudes of the schoolgirls portrayed are unrealistic as 'a normal child finds immense resilience in the innate optimism that comes from the function of a healthy and fresh organism.' At the same time, Parandowski appreciates Karpiński's staging itself (which he describes as 'careful and full of restraint'); the simplicity of Ujejski's set design and the skills of the young acting ensemble.

In a lecture entitled 'On contemporary dramaturgy in Poland,' delivered in the summer of 1938 as part of the Holiday Courses of the Art Institute in Wisła and published a year later in the *Ateneum* magazine, Karol Irzykowski put forward the thesis that Grabowska's drama, alongside the works of Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska and Leon Kruczkowski, is an example of Polish dramaturgy being infected by the 'Soviet doctrine' which he defined as follows:

The Soviet doctrine has made our drama shallow for two reasons:

1) by demanding a flamboyant, open tendency, a so-called bright face, it destroys shades, subtleties and obscurities; it destroys that old thesis that the sense, the idea of a drama, is to be derived by itself indirectly from its premises, is to be suggested, not shouted out; 2) by negating the importance of the individual, and exaggerating the importance of the collective, it deprives drama of

its main terrain, i.e. the relations and situations between individuals (1939).

This was, incidentally, another example of Irzykowski's criticism of Grabowska's creative stance; in 1937, he commented on the premiere of *Justice* at the Słowacki Theatre in Krakow, writing: 'I always get an ungodly burst of inner laughter when I see that this or that author "raises a social issue." I immediately imagine this raising visually, something like plucking pickets from a fence' (1965, p. 103). Irzykowski often expressed his opinion about Grabowska's play staged by Karpiński in an ironic tone, emphatically proving his condescending attitude towards the author and her work. He also stated, inter alia, that *Children Do Not Want to Live* is a 'cold and programmatic' drama in which the author 'gives vent to her anti-teacher resentment' and which belongs to 'accusatory literature' (1965, p. 684). In his opinion, the author illustrated certain theses about social reality in her drama, presenting a clearly defined worldview with which she could 'only preach to the converted' (1939). A similarly ironic though overtly chauvinistic opinion on *Children Do Not Want to Live* was expressed in Bohdan Korzeniewski's essay. The author referred to Grabowska's drama as part of a review of two adaptations of André Birabeau's plays (1966) in the context of the methods of dramatically depicting the problems of young people. Korzeniewski compared the method adopted by Grabowska and other female authors to a 'hysterical scream:'

With this scream, the ladies most eagerly looking here for 'problems' covered their lack of dramatic power and often lack of a firm stance on the wrongs and misfortunes of the youth. (An example of this is Marcelina Grabowska's pathetic *Children Do Not*

Want to Live at the Theatre Workshop).

Significantly, both Irzykowski and Korzeniewski address their criticism of engaged drama almost exclusively to women. The latter, incidentally, supports the image of a woman as a hysteric who exaggerates, amplifies things and looks for problems, while at the same time being unable to control her language (which is one of the things that the allegation of unskilful construction of drama refers to). Women may well have been an easy target here since, as noted by the researchers, investigative and engaged dramas were only created by female authors in the interwar period with a few exceptions (Michalczyk, 2021), shaping the soc-feminist current of drama (Hernik Spalińska, 2006). Soc-feminism (or socialist-feminism) is a term used for the first time in the field of theatre studies by Jagoda Hernik Spalińska and refers to the artistic output which, in her opinion, was a response, constructed by Polish female playwrights, to the *Zeittheater*, the 'theatre of social concern' (2006) and at the same time the most progressive manifestation of theatrical expression of the interwar period.

Tadeusz Dworak, the author of the aforementioned article 'Children Do Want to Live' published in *Pro Christo*, similarly to the other reviews quoted above, does not refer to the theatrical shape of the play, but to the text itself, which provides him with a motive to engage in a polemic against the author's 'sharp criticism of social relations' (1938). This criticism, according to Dworak, grows out of views characteristic of 'Marxist socialism' and bears the hallmarks of 'philo-communism.' Further on in the article, we are confronted with an attempt to assess the degree of similarity between the world described by Grabowska and the extra-textual reality. The author admits that 'the poverty of the so-called professional intelligentsia' and the exploitation of workers by employers²⁷ is a fact; she also notes the reality of

the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s and describes the phenomenon of patronage as 'the gangrene of our lives.' Significantly, he also quotes Walenty Majdański, a precursor of the protection of conceived life in Poland and a staunch opponent of abortion, a promoter of the large family model, and author of such essays as *Polska kwitnąca dziećmi* (Poland Blooming with Children) (Majdański, 1947, p. 10):

For in order that the ordinary man, not the hero, may always live a Christian life, he must also always be economically independent, at least to the extent that he can give himself a minimum of food and clothing. The condition increases when one is family-oriented and intensifies with the birth of each child.

Dworak uses this quotation to support his position, within which he considers livelihood issues to be crucial insofar as they serve as the basis for the formation of Christian morality and the preservation of the large family model. He, therefore, agrees with Grabowska's view concerning the importance of the material dimension of existence, but for him, the satisfaction of subsistence needs is not an end in itself, but is the basis for the elevation of life according to the tenets of Christianity and with a sense of patriotic duty. He criticizes Grabowska's portrayal of the characters on the grounds that they 'show absolutely no national instinct, do not think at all about the homeland, do not intend to play any civic role and, most bizarrely, have no religious feelings whatsoever.' The allegation against the author regarding the fact that she presents a one-sided, materially determined perspective could, therefore, be modified and reversed, and its edge could be pointed towards Dworak himself, who demands, from a firmly based Catholic-nationalist position, the inclusion of what he considers to be

the most salient features in the portrayals of the heroines of *Children Do Not Want to Live* as he fails to imagine that national instinct and religious feelings might not be part of the teenage girls' identity, or at least not the primary ones. According to the author, the fact that adolescents are deprived of ideals is the direct cause of their deteriorating psychological condition resulting from a sense of meaninglessness in life. He places the responsibility for the crisis above all not on those who shape the socio-economic system and are responsible for the shape of institutions, but on those who 'do not want to or do not know how to bind the pupil to God' and 'are unable to develop the strength of character in the boy and girl and prepare them to serve their homeland with their work.'

The reviews and mentions cited above have several things in common. Firstly, they are unanimous in their negative attitude towards Grabowska's play and their criticism of placing discursive and critical social values above the artistic and literary ones. Secondly, they are essentially devoted solely to the content, structure and meaning of the drama, not to the staging directed by Karpiński. In the context of the way in which the play *Children Do Not Want to Live* came to life on stage, we can extract some scanty information from the critical texts; the visuals were characterised by an almost ascetic simplicity (Parandowski, 1938), part of the scenery was a model of a railway embankment giving an illusion of perspective (Kołoniecki, 1938) and curtains (Podhorska-Okołów, 1938). Based on these reviews, we can also reconstruct the cast of the performance (or at least a large part of it).²⁸ Although the authors criticise social engagement as a dominant feature of Grabowska's drama and, more broadly, the treatment of theatre as a medium of public discourse and a place of intervention, their reviews almost completely ignore issues of staging, visuals, musical setting (if there was any), lighting or (apart from Parandowski) acting. These are reviews that

could be written without seeing the production, having contented oneself with just reading the play.

8.

There is currently no direct access to Grabowska's drama. In the context of a Benjaminian understanding of historical materialism, the lack of a source in the form of a manuscript of the drama (or possibly an adaptation thereof) does not prevent work with the archive or undermine the process of making a new repository. Instead, it opens one up to experiencing history in the process of exploration, in the small states of research euphoria when a clue turns out to lead to an important trace. In this sense, reconstruction is an effective task that strengthens the researcher's relationship with the object of research. The process of the feminist archivist's searching for the fissures that can burst the archive is a process that bears the characteristics of a curator's work: a situated selection of content that forms a new piece of the map, a further part of the atlas. (I use a geographical metaphor precisely because of the issue of location and entanglement; every utterance – archival, curatorial or theoretical – always comes from a place and is shaped by what can be seen from that place). Such a distribution of the sensible (in the sense of Jacques Rancière), which reveals phenomena and persons relegated to the margins of the hegemonic order of theatre history, has a strongly ethical dimension as it gives visibility and rank (Majewska, 2018), restores proportion, and adds value to that which is seemingly peripheral, insignificant and faint.

Initially, the methodological framework of this article was to be different. While conducting preliminary recognition of the object of research, I realized

that I was dealing primarily with a gap in the archives, and that the silence of the archive would be my dominant theoretical point of reference. I understand the concept of an archive gap not only as the absence of the text of Grabowska's drama, but also the absence of a wider study of this case, of the text itself, the stage production and the critical reception. What changed over the course of my research was not only the extent of the archival material that I managed to collect, but also my own perception of the 'archival silence' or absence in terms of gaining knowledge about the past. The more the archive of the play *Children Do Not Want to Live*, its staging and reception expanded, the more clearly I shifted from the theoretical elaboration of absence towards methods of historical analysis and discourse analysis. At the same time, I began to understand the concept of archival silence in the way proposed by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, a key text for postcolonial studies relating to the practices of silencing narratives about the Haitian Revolution. The author states that every historical narrative carries a set of silences that enter into the process of making historical knowledge at four key stages: the making of sources, the making of archives, the making of narratives and, finally, the making of history (Trouillot, 1995, p. 33). In the light of such thinking, it is, therefore, impossible to conclude that some archives are silent and others are not. Undoubtedly, however, 'not all silences are the same' (1995), and their analysis and deconstruction require different approaches, perceptions and tools. I cite Trouillot's ideas not with a view to creating an analogy between the Haitian Revolution and Polish interwar theatre, but as part of a methodology that reveals the interpenetration of ideas and their non-obvious alliances. This methodology, which is inspired by Benjamin's thought, is directed towards using existing concepts in new contexts to track traces. In doing so, I benefit from a methodological proposal developed

through the analysis of a different phenomenon, but one that opens up new insights into the context of archives and the power relations revealed within making them. Thus, thanks to the reading of Trouillot, for me, the archival silence has become a figure in the shape of an intrusive agent who will always find a way to become part of the process of gaining knowledge about the past. I treat the gap in the archive and in the historical narrative not as a silent element in the structure of knowledge, but as a significant and causal element, indispensable in the context of historical materialism. A disappearance or a gap leaves a traceable residue; each archival remnant coexists with its own silent reflection.

In writing this article, my aim was to attempt to reconstruct the content of Grabowska's drama *Children Do Not Want to Live*, as well as its staging and reception. In the context of this attempt, the understanding of archival silences proposed by Trouillot as differentiated and multi-sourced is linked to the category of the feminist archive. The nature of non-identical archival silences, inherent in the making of historical knowledge, is also indicative of the unequal nature of the control (1995, p. 53) that subjects of history possess over the whole of the several-stage activity culminating in the creation of history as an institutional representation of the past. In the case of the subject of this research, this control would be undermined to a similar extent by the institutional background (a one-off show within a school 'incubator' for future graduates) as well as the gendered context. Indeed, there appears the question of why the interwar social-feminist current, of which Grabowska's work is a part, is a side issue in mainstream theatre historiography, and why the figure of Leon Schiller is mainly associated with the Polish interpretation of the *Zeittheater*. The concept of the feminist archive contains a redefinition of what is important in writing history, a redefinition that shifts the research focus towards what has hitherto

functioned on the periphery of the historical and theatrical discourse due to its unsupportive (or even threatening) position towards the hegemonic, masterful order of spectacularity. (I am referring, inter alia, to the fact that, in the context of, e.g. the question of the representation of abortion in Polish interwar theatre, one usually cites Leon Schiller's 1930 production of Friedrich Wolf's *Cyankali*, and less frequently the later productions of *Justice* from the 1930s). Trouillot also uses the concept of two kinds of historicity: the first would refer to the materiality of the socio-historical process (as a set of facts and tangible documents), and the second to the way in which history locates itself in narratives on the ground prepared by this materiality (1995, p. 13). I regard the research work done in writing this article as a movement that precedes the heliotropism of that which is past. It is a movement that claims the past and allows a new materiality of the socio-historical process to emerge. This, in turn, becomes the substructure of the stage on which a new component of theatre history can emerge.

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Footnotes

1. *Robotnik: organ Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej*, 1935, no. 156.
2. *Dzień Dobry*, 1938, no. 211.
3. *Mały Dziennik*, 1938, no. 219.
4. *Głos Poranny*, 1938, no. 214.
5. *Dobry Wieczór! i Kurjer Czerwony: ilustrowane pismo codzienne*, 1938, no. 214.
6. *Nowy Dziennik*, 1936, no. 216.
7. *Dzień Dobry*, 1938, no. 211.
8. *Nowy Dziennik*, op. cit.
9. The congress took place from 2 to 4 October in Warsaw. It should be emphasized that this was not the first congress of its kind in the history of Polish pedagogy; the interwar period was a time of intensive development of pedagogical thought, with congresses being organized as early as the 1920s.
10. *Pierwszy Ogólnopolski Kongres Dziecka: Warszawa 2, 3, 4 października 1938 roku: cel i charakter Kongresu, program i rozkład prac*, Warszawa 1938, p. 4.
11. Ibid.
12. 'Between the beginning of January and the end of December last year (2021), 1,496 children and teenagers aged 7-18 attempted suicide according to data provided by the Police Headquarters. This is over 650 more attempts than for the whole of 2020. Compared with 2020, we see a 77% increase in suicidal behaviour among young people,' (Ruszel et. al., 2022, p. 357-365).
13. It consisted of: Tadeusz Breza (secretary of the association), Jerzy Hulewicz, Jan Lorentowicz, Zofia Nałkowska, Arnold Szyfman, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński; *Kamena. Miesięcznik literacki*, 1938, no. 5 (45), p. 102 (back cover).
14. Marcelina Grabowska - born on 24th December 1912 in Lviv, MA in history and PhD in Polish philology (she graduated in both fields of study from the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Lviv). She debuted as a prose writer in 1934 with the novel *Żółty dom* (A Yellow House), and in the same year, her drama *Sprawiedliwość* (Justice) appeared on the stage for the first time (premiered on 15th September 1934 at the Pohulanka Theatre in Vilnius). During the Nazi occupation, she took part in conspiratorial activities; she was, among other things, the secretary of the Union of Polish Syndicalists and collaborated in the creation of underground magazines. She was a participant in the Warsaw Uprising, during which she was wounded. After the war, she continued her journalistic and literary activities. She joined the Polish Workers' Party (from 1948, Polish United Workers' Party, PZPR). She died on 13 May 1986 in Warsaw.
15. The drama was published in the volume *Rodzaju żeńskiego. Antologia Dramatów*, ed. A. Chałupnik and A. Łuksza, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Teatralnego, Warszawa 2018.
16. At the time, the monthly was published by the Congregation of Marian Fathers, and the editor-in-chief was Fr Jerzy Pawski, a supporter of the Catholic totalitarian system (totalitarianism based on the Catholic religion).
17. As a Catholic author and supporter of 'modern nationalism,' Tadeusz Dworak published, inter alia, in the weekly *Mysł Narodowa*, in the daily *Dziennik Wileński* and in the series *Biblioteczka Akcji Katolickiej*. Dworak wrote about 'modern nationalism' in an article published in May 1937 in *Dziennik Wileński* on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the death of Bolesław Prus, in which he focused primarily on anti-Semitic themes in the writer's work, using them to propound his own nationalist views.

18. Most likely because Dworak does not define it precisely. Unlike the previous part, for the next part, he does not use the phrase 'bears the title' or a capital letter, which may suggest that it is a kind of synthetic definition ('Part II begins: *searching in the dark,*' op. cit.).
19. As with part two, Dworak does not make it clear that the lowercase phrase 'blind track' is the actual title of the drama's third component, but this can be assumed with a high degree of probability.
20. Dworak constructs the narrative in such a way as to suggest that the comments on the mental condition of children and young people and the suicide statistics appear in the opening conversation of the third part of the drama (rather than being interpretive remarks by the author).
21. The premiere of *Justice* took place in 1934 at the Vilnius Pohulanka Theatre. The play was directed by Mieczysław Szpakiewicz. The drama was also known under the title *Woman No. 14* (premiered in 1937 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Krakow).
22. The understanding of theatre as discourse has been complemented by Grzegorz Niziołek (2021). The author proposes a correction to the definition of theatre as discourse, adding after Michel Foucault that it (discourse) can also be 'a threat to performance, a way of establishing power over it' and noting the existence of extra-discursive reality. Niziołek, in the context of the said performance by Jan Peszek in the 1981 staging of Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantic* directed by Mikołaj Grabowski, focuses on the affective dimension of the theatrical event, 'shattering the coherence of the performance,' (Niziołek, 2021, p. 58).
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. At the same time, Boy, for a reason that is not entirely clear, stated that Grabowska's work 'would not stand a chance in the regular repertoire,' so working on it at the workshop was the only chance for the text to see the light at all.
27. In pro-labour circles it is correctly point out that employees are in fact 'labour-givers' while employers are 'labour-takers' - they obtain the labour of others and live off it.
28. The performance featured: Irena Borowska, Stanisława Kawińska, Jerzy Michał Kordowski, Lucyna Kownacka, Jadwiga Kuryluk, Wanda Leśmian, Zofia Małynicz, Janina Pollakówna, Stanisława Stępień, Irena Tomaszewska, Zofia Wierzejska, Helena Zahorska and Maria Zarebińska.

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/ DANCE AS MEMORY MACHINE

Contemporary African Dance as a Decolonizing Practice

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This article takes a closer look at the processes of reappropriation of the aesthetic field within which the phenomenon known as 'contemporary African dance' was shaped in the second half of the 20th century, mainly for the use of Western audiences. Using the context of the generally outlined political and economic conditions of production, and based on examples of performances that illuminate the basic concepts of postcolonial theories (e.g. H.K. Bhabha, E.W. Said and R. Bharucha), the text outlines the main historical and aesthetic lines of the formation of the term 'contemporary African dance' and its possible designations, evoking the artistic attitudes and formal procedures employed by artists of different generations in the process of reclaiming and transforming the aesthetic field that this term defines.

Keywords: Africa; choreography; practices of decolonization; postcolonialism; contemporary African dance

Is this Art? Is this Dance? Is this contemporary African Dance? How will I know if this is art? Do you call Art one's attempt to resist the cycle of destruction by planting seeds of beauty/seeds of dreams in a hopeless context? What then when this resistance is written in

one's body? The body as the last shield for freedom.

Faustin Linyekula, 2008 (quoted in: Sörgel, 2011, p. 90)

In this article, I analyze the processes of reappropriation of the aesthetic field¹ as part of which, in the successive waves of interest in African culture, a phenomenon dubbed 'contemporary African dance' was formed in the second half of the 20th century, primarily for the use of audiences in the so-called West. In this case, the term 'reappropriation' refers not so much to the reclamation of an appropriated cultural object (dance), but to the process of restoring the agency, self-determination and self-definition of African dance artists.²

This text has been written from the perspective of a white person originating from a country with no comparable colonial experience,³ and therefore it is evident that, in order to bring forward non-Eurocentric optics, the material compiled is based primarily on the statements and activities of African artists. Given the wealth of research material, I will focus on presenting the historical and cultural processes affecting the formation of the concept and identity of contemporary African dance, while also discussing selected examples of performances by artists hailing mainly from West Africa and South Africa.

The broad term 'contemporary African dance' has its grounds for application, even though it encompasses phenomena that are extremely diverse in both cultural and aesthetic terms. These grounds are established, first of all, by the fact that the term has been used (notwithstanding doubts and discussions) by artists themselves, who thus continue - with a sense of distance caused by the awareness of its utopian assumptions - the Pan-African idea of the 1950s and 1960s. Contemporary African dance functions

as a brand, a label used both by artists working in Africa and by those moving between their respective countries of origin and residence.⁴ This very notion has also accompanied surveys (triennials, biennials) of contemporary dance held since the 1990s, bringing together the dance community from around the continent.

Accoucheurs and ideologues

The inception of this term is related to an externally imposed perspective, as 'African dance' was first defined by and for Western audiences.⁵ It should be noted that the very framing of music, dance and drama as separate is Eurocentric and follows from a relatively recent division of genres. In the cultural practice of the African continent, these domains are rarely isolated from one another, despite the fact that performers specialize in, for example, percussion instruments, dance or singing (Kringelbach, 2014).

Based on field research conducted in Bamako (Mali), among others, anthropologist Altaïr Despres identifies the following critical factors linked to the general processes of globalization that led to the emergence of contemporary forms of African dance: the formation of a network of international institutions tightly connected to Europe; the formation of a new perspective on art among African artists; the emergence of 'aesthetic' opportunities and interests (related, but not limited to, travels to Europe and cultural funding); and the formation of new subjective identities of the dancer/performer and choreographer, situated between 'here' and 'there' (Despres, 2016, p. 3). The groundwork for the formation of modern-day post-colonial African art, including dance, was largely shaped by the actions of French cultural agencies and UNESCO in the 1960s, when the dismantling of colonial structures was underway. These activities were supposed to

reinstate subjectivity in 'traditional' cultures, but in reality they reasserted the cultural influence of the West. Congolese scholar Henri Kalama refers to the Western organizations and administrators proclaiming such traditionalist approaches and ways of producing 'authentic' African art as 'accoucheurs.' They then gave way to 'ideologues,' i.e. European-educated artists and patrons, including state rulers (e.g. Léopold Sedar Senghor in Senegal or the extreme case of Mobutu Sese Seko's *authenticité* policy implemented in Zaire at the time). The 'ideologues' started out precisely in the 1950s and 1960s, which coincided with the time when African countries were searching for a new, post-colonial identity, which was to both transcend the pre-colonial 'tradition' and the colonial, imported modernity (Kalama, 2018). In the realm of dance, this translated into a marked popularity of the so-called 'great African ballets,' national ensembles that showcased traditional dance and music in elaborate stage forms and served as an important tool in forging cultural identities.

The most famous among those companies was the Guinean Ballet, founded by Keita Fodeba in Paris in 1947, and subsequently transformed into a national institution under the patronage of President Sékou Touré (Fodeba, 1957). Beginning in the 1970s, these ensembles declined in popularity and importance, and succumbed to folklorization. At the same time, new urban dance forms began to emerge, accompanying the hybrid musical currents that had been evolving since the 1960s.⁶

Pan-Africanism of the pioneers

Since the early 1960s, the countries of the African continent, including Arab countries, have also been incorporated more fully into UNESCO's agenda, expanding the initially adopted scope of the 'Orient' category.⁷ Between

1957 and 1966, UNESCO implemented a large-scale interdisciplinary initiative known as the 'Projet majeur pour l'appréciation mutuelle des valeurs culturelles de l'Orient et de l'Occident' (Plan for Mutual Recognition of the Cultural Values of the East and West). It sought to improve mutual understanding of the cultures of the countries of the 'Orient' (understood mainly as Asian countries) and 'the West' (understood as Western Europe and the US). However, with its focus on the past and tradition, it ignored the contemporary, living forms of post-colonial countries' cultures and their evolution in the field of contemporary art. The activities, reportages and films developed as part of this venture were only executed in Western languages and from an ethnocentric perspective (Maurel, 2005). The plan thus became an almost textbook exemplification of the notion of 'Orientalism' as defined by Edward W. Said, according to whom the Orient was cast as a mysterious and distant undifferentiated entity, inaccessible and confined by tradition and the past, in contrast to the modern, rational West.⁸

This also led to the first pan-African festival of black art (Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres) in Dakar in 1966, which aimed to bring together both 'traditional' artists and the African diaspora: American jazz artists, representatives of Creole art, writers, painters, etc. Pan-African events of this kind also took hold as dance platforms, thus - according to Western rules of production, promotion and understanding of modernity - laying down the original aesthetic framework of the term 'contemporary African dance.'⁹ Starting in 1974, UNESCO shifted the paradigm somewhat and began to promote contemporary art of post-colonial countries through the FIPC fund¹⁰ (Bax, 2018). It was with the support of this very fund and Senegalese President Leopold Sédar Senghor that the continent's first contemporary dance school, École de Sable in Dakar - a branch of Maurice Béjart's Mudra

School in Brussels – was established in 1977.¹¹ Its director and icon of contemporary dance in Africa, the European-educated Germaine Acogny proposed the term *New African Dance* (French: *nouvelle danse africaine*) as early as the mid-1970s, using it to describe her own proposal for an aesthetic synthesis of several African traditional dance forms with contemporary principles of choreographic composition. Acogny's goal was to create and develop a unique technique for contemporary African dance that would promote African aesthetics as part of the new global world, while also respecting the hallmarks of each country (Acogny, 1980). A similar stance was later adopted by Alphonse Tiérou, including in his well-known manifesto *Si sa danse bouge, l'Afrique bougera*¹² (If Her Dance Budge, Africa will Budge) (Tiérou, 2001). A foremost scholar of African dance, whose research combined ethnography and contemporary aesthetics, Tiérou was an advocate of pan-African festivals and an ideologue of 'transnational dance politics,' which stipulated that contemporary dance was an 'imagined community' that extended above and beyond (neo)colonial discourse.

Lorsque la danse paraît le masque tombe, dit un proverbe africain (When dance appears, the mask falls off, goes an African proverb), notes Tiérou in a book that represents the first comprehensive attempt to characterize the main traditional dance genres on the continent, in which he also outlines an ambitious policy for the emerging contemporary African dance, one that is, however, founded on its ties to tradition (Tiérou, 1989).

Both Acogny's formal gesture and Tiérou's declarative one can be considered the first attempt to reappropriate the notion of 'African contemporary dance,' i.e., to restore agency to its creators. One should cite here the example of South Africa, where, due to apartheid, the development of black art was particularly impeded, and yet, paradoxically, it was the

contemporary currents, combined with traditional elements and in opposition to the classical ballet imported with white culture, that were recognized here in the 1970s as a space for the social emancipation of the black body. Thus, this first moment of decolonization manifests itself here through the seizure of what – according to Rustom Bharucha’s interpretation of colonialism – was originally appropriated, decontextualized and recognized as a representation of the ‘other’ culture, often involving the complicity of the colonized subjects: the ‘accoucheurs’ and, to some extent, also the ‘ideologues’ (Bharucha, 1990, pp. 1-2).

The pitfalls of interculturalism

Another colonial pitfall, the ‘dead end’ of interculturalism (ibid., p. 2), awaited European choreographers travelling to Africa in the 1990s in search of inspiration, including Mathilde Monnier, whose 1993 performance *Pour Antigone* (For Antigone), transposed the Greek myth onto the bodies of black dancers; Benjamin Lamarche and Claude Brumachon in Nigeria, Alain Platel in Burkina Faso, Susanne Linke in Senegal and Jean-François Duroure in South Africa. Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s saw growing support for the advancement of choreography and enhanced intercontinental exchanges, including internships or co-productions (Despres 2016, p. 56); however, African cultures were still seen primarily as a wellspring of artistic raw material, and not necessarily an end in itself. A telling illustration is *Le Coq est mort*, a 1999 performance choreographed by Linke (The Rooster is Dead – also the title of a French children’s song), which met with extreme reactions, including accusations of cultural cannibalism and even racism, especially among American audiences, who picked up on this aspect much more vocally than their European counterparts. Based on the excellent

technical skills and original movement qualities of the eight dancers of the Senegalese company Jant-bi, the performance reflected the rather stereotypical thinking of Europeans about African dance (primitivisms, strong rhythmization, sexualized male bodies, traditional symbols, etc.). On the other hand, one should note that all of the aforementioned projects furthered the international careers of the participating dancers and de facto expanded the contemporary African dance scene beyond the continent's borders.

Perceptions of African dance among Western audiences changed to a greater extent at the time through contemporary works by African choreographers, mainly created for Western audiences, including Guyanese-born Bernardo Montet, who, after his stay in Chad, developed two important pieces focused on Africa, i.e., the 1997 *Issé-Timossé* (The Embodiment of What Is to Come), followed by *O. More* (2002); another project of this kind was *The Rite of Spring* by Algerian-French choreographer Hedy Maalem, featuring dancers from Senegal, Benin, Nigeria, Mozambique, Togo and Martinique (2004),¹³ which achieved international success. Highlighted by minimalist costumes, the diverse morphology of bodies (punctuated by the corporeality of the soloists, i.e., a pair of twins) is in its own right a commentary on the stereotypical perception of the continent and the black body. In the first part of the performance, dancing takes place in a white, austere cubicle, and evokes an Africa that is traditional, spiritual, sensual, but also full of tensions. In contrast, the second part features a documentary filmed in Lagos, which moves from depictions of paradisiacal nature to images of a brutal, 'civilized,' post-colonial Dark Continent: poverty, dirt and the body mechanized in line with the rhythm of machines. As a starting point, Maalem highlights the need to work through the trauma of colonialism, drawing on a critique of the Western myth of the victim, with Africa cast as one in the

show.

Thanks to these works, at the turn of the 21st century African dance on European stages no longer appeared as a mere social practice or tradition, but a full-fledged art form, co-created by Africans.

Mimicry and feedback loop

In the 21st century, the next generation (which can already be considered the third generation), often working outside their country of origin, feels trapped neither in a racial 'straitjacket' nor in their African roots. This generation is actively engaged in global artistic circuits, in a different, more ephemeral way than the pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s, but with new aspirations to transform Africa as a social space, among others through global workshop networks, participation in international choreographic projects, and engagement in interdisciplinary practices. The successors to the continent's urbanization and globalization processes proclaim themselves citizens of the world and insist on their universality. 'I am an African, I am an artist, but I am not an African artist,' states Congolese artist Faustin Linyekula. (Mensah, 2021, p. 3). 'Contemporary African dance,' 'modern dance' and *danse d'auteur* (auteur dance) all reflect the same artistic challenge: to express a new stance towards modernity, in all its complexity and with all of its contradictions (ibid.). This challenge also entails the imperative to transcend the general external image of the continent's art, according to which said art operates under three basic paradigms, not so much aesthetical but political-historical ones: that of primitive (traditional) art, that of colonial (modernist, modern) art and that of postcolonial-contemporary art (Kalama, 2018). What contemporary dance artists propose does not fit directly into any of these variants, but rather

constitutes a fluid (transgressive) commentary thereon. Colonial hegemony can be subverted from within its own framework, as illustrated by Homi K. Bhabha's critical concept of colonial mimicry (2010, pp. 79-89). Mimicry can accord one an emancipatory path whereby the appropriation of Western contemporary dance forms by African choreographers should not be seen as a form of neo-colonialism, but rather as decolonization.

This is perfectly illustrated by the work of the aforementioned Linyekula, such as his reckoning with the implicit racism of Ballets Suédois Ballets Suédois (the Swedish Ballet) and Fernand Léger in *La création du monde*,¹⁴ whose reconstructed 2012 version Linyekula annotated with critical commentary. In *Dinozord: The Dialogue* series III (2006), Linyekula explores the possibility of reckoning with Congo's traumatic past following the periods of colonization, dictatorship and the recent civil war, when a sense of nation no longer exists, supplanted by a keen awareness of a state of ruin (Sörgel, 2011, pp. 83-91). Prefacing the performance is an installation consisting of photographs and documentary films, as well as interviews from Kisangani, Linyekula's home village, with the dancer moving among the audience, dressed in black jeans and a white shirt and wearing white makeup (which can be read as a reverse practice of black face, as well as an allusion to the African mask). The choreographer takes the fourteen movements of Mozart's *Requiem* as the starting point for the performance, dramaturgically framing the structure of the work as successive 'stations of suffering,' illustrated by abstract images from Congolese history. Thus, for Faustin Linyekula and his dancers, contemporary African dance becomes an imaginary home at a juncture in Congolese history when all systems of representation and community belonging have failed (Sörgel, 2011, pp. 83-91). Similarly, in *More, More, More... Future* (2009), a *ndombolo* rock opera, Linyekula dissects the social and cultural history of his native Congo.

The piece includes quotes from the poetry of political prisoner Antoine Vumilia Muhindo, accompanied by a hybrid, trance-like *ndombolo* musical form performed by Congolese guitarist Flamme Kapay's band (see Sörgel, 2020, pp. 70-81). Thus, the choreographer uses a Western aesthetic framework to transpose local content, while challenging the simplistic division into traditional and contemporary paradigms. A still more radical formal intervention can be found in *Si c'est un nègre/autoprotrait* (2004), Linyekula's autobiographical solo developed for a white dancer. It is still extremely rare, after all, for a black choreographer to produce a piece intended for a white performer; it is usually the other way around (which, by the way, illustrates the imbalance of power in the space of symbolic distribution of power). Linyekula thus undermines another pillar in the notion of 'African dance' as one based on the black body, which stereotypically invites associations with such physical qualities as speed, agility, rhythmicity, eroticism.

A similar approach manifests itself in Boyzi Cekwana's *Ja'nee* (2003), a performance-installation performed in Zulu and Xhosa languages, which confronts South Africa's problems: AIDS, rape, child abuse and poverty in black communities. However, the confrontation of indigenous culture with the capitalist and urbanist culture of the West is not a simple dichotomy, but a tool to expose at least the patriarchal, oppressive nature of 'tradition' and male domination in African societies. Cekwan's *Influx Controls: I Want to Be* (2009), on the other hand, uses the device of double black face: in painting his face black, the black dancer becomes a caricature of mimesis, intercepting a racist practice and embodying its absurdity. This time, the criticism is also partly directed inward: it targets the apartheid policies of South Africa, where the choreographer was born (*Influx Controls* invokes the

name of a governmental programme that sought to restrict the movement of black citizens within certain neighborhoods).

In a similar vein, the *J'accuse*¹⁵ (2008) solo by Senegalese dancer Pape Ibrahim Ndiaye (Kaolack), which deals with his personal experience of violent racially-motivated detention in a North African country, is also a vehicle for criticism turned inward, one that borrows from the 'white' aesthetic.¹⁶

The adoption of iconic ballet classics or contemporary choreographic repertoire, such as the aforementioned Maalem's *The Rite of Spring*, presents a particularly interesting example of feedback loop.¹⁷ Here the Eurocentric myth becomes a tool for critical commentary on the post-colonial situation of present-day Africa, in a gesture that simultaneously undermines or criticizes the universal potential of said myth. *The Rite of Spring* was also invoked by Dada Masilo, a young generation choreographer from South Africa and graduate of the Brussels-based P.A.R.T.S.

Nevertheless, Masilo's *The Sacrifice* (2022) seems to have failed to fully exploit the critical potential of reappropriation, as it draws primarily on the title and general structure of the myth (here, the mother sacrificing her daughter's life), dispensing with Stravinsky's music in favour of a contemporary composition by African artists, which she supplements with a choreography based on traditional *tswana* dance. Consequently, Masilo created an aesthetically refined work with classical dramaturgy and a powerful lyrical charge, but with little dispute with the myth of *The Rite of Spring*.

Conversely, more iconic and loaded with greater critical potential are Masilo's reinterpretations of the classics: *Romeo and Juliet* (2008), *Carmen* (2009), *Swan Lake* (2010) and *Giselle* (2017), featuring black dancers. Each

of these performances is based on the original libretto; however, in *Swan Lake*, for example, Siegfried is gay, Odile is male, the roles of the swans are danced by both women and men, the artists speak, Tchaikovsky's music is cropped and combined with pieces by other composers (including Steve Reich and Arvo Pärt). The choreographer (who dances the role of Odetta) adeptly blends various techniques of Africa's traditional and popular dances, such as twerking, with the classics, a seemingly daunting task, as the principles of moving one's body in these techniques are extremely different. She clads black, physically diverse bodies in tutus, knocking the sole legitimate choreographies off their pedestals, and while she does so without toppling the monuments, she nonetheless strips white culture of its dominance in ballet, if only for a while.

The *D'abord moi* generation

Masilo's case demonstrates that, *en route* to full emancipation, the youngest generation is still threatened by the neo-colonial dichotomy of tradition and modernity, which no longer arises only from the external gaze, but also from the introspection of the dance community. In fact, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a renewed turn to tradition took place, which was a form of reaction of the young generation, raised in times of economic crises, to the uncertainty of the future (Kringelbach, 2014). When a contemporary artist stays too attached to traditional forms, they are often accused of not being innovative, whereas if they turn away from these forms, leaving them too far behind, they may be charged with the practice of 'uprooting' (Kringelbach, 2014). The presupposition that all African dance is founded on so-called traditional dance forms simultaneously implies that, in order to establish themselves as contemporary artists, African artists must transcend this traditional movement vernacular. The aesthetics of

contemporary African dance should therefore be based on an understanding and knowledge of lineage and archives, while at the same time, as Tiérou postulated, the dancer/performer can transcend tradition by engaging with its formal and qualitative aspects (Sörgel, 2020, p. 33); it is not the purpose, function or content that become the subject, but rather, e.g., rhythms and formal structures. This paradoxical alternative that has emerged in the consciousness of artists and resonated in their works since the first pan-African meetings of contemporary dancers, still largely determines the character of African contemporary dance today.

As Bhabha remarks, quoting Jean-François Lyotard,

Tradition is that which concerns time, not content. Whereas what the West wants from autonomy, invention, novelty, self-determination, is the opposite - to forget time and to preserve, and accumulate contents. To turn them into what we call history and to think that it progresses because it accumulates. On the contrary, in the case of popular traditions ... nothing gets accumulated, that is the narratives must be repeated all the time because they are forgotten all the time. But what does not get forgotten is the temporal beat that does not stop sending the narratives to oblivion (Bhabha, 1994, p. 57).

African dance artists seem to perfectly implement the postulate of tradition-as-time rather than tradition-as-content, which - while remaining an important element of contemporary creation - updates itself under new contexts and meanings, hybrids and fusing genres, no longer just for an external Western audience, but also as part of a process of self-

determination undertaken by professional African artists. For example, in traditional practice, particular dance and music styles are often restricted to specific social groups, while the performance of a particular dance may be an indication of social status. In some communities, such as in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali, this is accompanied by a widespread social stigmatization of stage performance (Sieveking, 2004; Desperes, 2016), especially when it comes to women: conventional performance patterns in locally established cultures are gendered, with many songs and dances reserved exclusively for one sex. Even if they are appropriated by the opposite sex (in accordance with a presupposed, dichotomous view), their function remains gendered (Sieveking, 2004). Contemporary dance deliberately deconstructs this semantic framework, transforming elements of local representations into 'raw material' that can be re-composed and repurposed as a fabric transcending the boundary of a particular social and cultural sphere.

A case in point is the work of Fatou Cissé, a Senegalese choreographer of the younger generation who, in her first group performance commissioned by the Avignon Festival, *Le Bal du Cercle* (2015), took inspiration from the popular urban practice of *tanbeer* (Wolof: nocturnal dance), reserved for women. It is a type of celebratory event where women dress up and dance. However, it is also associated with a form of competition between neighbours or family members, who, moving in a circle, as if in a performative fashion show, prove their superiority in terms of attractiveness, sexual power and individuality. According to Nadine Sieveking, however, what the five dancers – two from Burkina Faso and three from Senegal – perform here is neither tradition, nor nation, nor specific ethnicity; instead, they stage their individual identities as professional women artists, (re)producing the difference between amateurs and professionals. Indeed, women in Senegal or Burkina Faso who choose dance as their vocation to

this day have to grapple with the resistance such a decision usually entails in their social environment. In an environment in which 'we have no individualism,' as Fatou Cissé noted, the professional practice of contemporary dance provides an opportunity to assert oneself: *C'est d'abord moi!* (Me First!) (Sieveking, 2017).

Local, global, professional

Many choreographers have argued that, in the African context, the generic label 'contemporary dance' indicates nothing more than a designation of practices as 'modern-day,' relating to current social, political and cultural life. This takes away from the use of the term 'contemporary dance' as a genre criterion (Sieveking, 2004; Desperes, 2016). Nevertheless, a new wave of choreographic talent in the early 21st century across the African continent has established aesthetic norms and artistic principles that largely conform to the conventions identified as the realm of 'high culture.' Therefore, contemporary dance is often criticized by local audiences as a culturally alienating genre, copying the art of whites and appealing exclusively to educated audiences in the West or to a small group of expatriates and African urban intellectuals who have adopted Western customs (Sieveking, 2004). Even those who have never attended a contemporary dance performance associate it with an *affaire de blancs* ('a white thing'). Casual audiences often find it too intellectual, abstract, difficult to access or simply meaningless, and even if they admit that contemporary dance is thought-provoking, its message is often deemed difficult to understand (Sieveking, 2004).

Both audiences and artists entering the space of contemporary dance are

hindered by the disconnect in the close rhythmic relationship of music and dance in the new genres; differences in the use of instrumental language; and the relaxed relationship between the kinetic and textual.

Gradually, however, a more familiar audience has developed, one that is particularly appreciative of the way African performers use dance to articulate changing realities and while also emphasizing the value of local culture and tradition or, conversely, deconstructing its violent, patriarchal patterns (e.g. Cekwana, Cissé). The success of local artists and the opportunities for international cooperation have also prompted a noticeable change in attitudes over the past few years. The youngest artists, often coming out of the practice of traditional dance or urban forms, emphasize dance as a tool to build dialogue and bring nationalities together, and to create networks for artistic collaboration and cultural exchange (Sieveking, 2004), which brings us back to the pioneering Pan-African visions of Acogny and Tiérou.

Contemporary choreography as a conscious appropriation, deconstruction or reconstruction of traditional performance genres, and abolishing linear narratives and established symbolism, further emphasizes the proficiency of individual creative subjects and their ability to create and transform symbolic space. However, even as artists demand recognition of their individuality and refuse to unify under the outdated banner of *négritude*,¹⁸ or 'African dance' aesthetics, they employ the latter category as a marketing mechanism.

Ann Cooper-Albright highlights still other interrelated, derivative barriers facing contemporary dance from Africa, as it enters an international market that is predominantly white and 'Western.' The first such barrier is the struggle for secure employment, while the second is related to the

widespread lack of acceptance for the fact that contemporary African dance theater is not necessarily culturally defined and codified (Sörgel, 2020). The conditions for artistic development in the continent's respective countries reflect the intertwined socio-historical contexts within which the practice of contemporary dance as an art and profession emerged in Africa.

These contexts involve institutions for the training and dissemination of the arts, such as schools, companies, competitions or festivals, and are partly shaped by a legacy of national and international cultural policies, and partly by private initiatives. Their particularities and diverse impact on artistic trajectories contradict the reductionist perspective on contemporary dance in Africa as an extension of the (mainly) French choreographic field (Sieveking, 2017). The importance accorded to the process of professional training in dance has a particular stake here. It is also tied to the influences of Western cultural agendas and practices attendant to the construction of post-colonial national identities, as discussed above. In some cases, such as Burkina Faso, modernity and the development of the arts sector was a premise of the revolutionary regime guided by an active 'cultural reconstruction' (Thomas Sankara's rule in the 1980s), which sought to modernize the local cultural practice, perceived as backward. After the regime's violent collapse, Burkina Faso's new government - in keeping with most countries in the region - withdrew from its commitment to cultural policies and left the development of the arts sector mainly to individual actors who actively participate in international and transcultural collaborations.

This relative freedom - which is in fact spurious as it is limited by lack of funding - is accompanied by the still growing involvement of international development agencies in the promotion and professional development of

contemporary dance in Africa. On the one hand, this underscores the ways in which globalized artistic standards and mainstream development discourses exert influence in the field of dance, but on the other, it demonstrates the increasing inclusion of this relatively new artistic movement in the struggle for greater visibility and control of its own position at the international level. In recent years, the European Union has become an important sponsor of cultural cooperation programmes in the West African region, yet contemporary dance is still dominated by French agencies, which continue to invest in the professionalization of the field. This type of contribution by European agencies and cultural institutions remains ambiguous. Although their influence is precious given the endemic lack of other production structures, it undoubtedly translates into the adoption of patterns of dance production and presentation and the hierarchization of the community according to established Western templates. At the same time, it fails to translate into easy access to the international scene for even the most acclaimed African artists.

This dynamic can be illustrated by the example of the Centre de Développement Chorégraphique (CDC) La Termitière in Ouagadougou. Officially inaugurated in 2006, the CDC was founded by the directors of the acclaimed ensemble Salia n'i Seydou (itself also created with significant support from French structures). The Centre has become the most influential institution to promote contemporary dance in Burkina Faso, also serving as a focal point in the network of the 'new choreographic movement' in West Africa.

The centre conducts residency projects, provides space, technical facilities and organizational infrastructure to artists, enables workshops and lends its professional stage to live performances. La Termitière offers an

institutionalized framework for the transmission of knowledge, often featuring educators from abroad, and contributes to the formation of a cosmopolitan 'choreographic culture.' It is a public institution - a unique phenomenon on the continent - established with government support, while its funding is provided by international sponsors, mainly the French embassy; it also maintains enduring relations with the National Dance Centre of France. Such strong connotations with France have sparked criticism from the community, which considers La Termitière to be just another French choreographic centre, admittedly located in Ouagadougou, but nevertheless embedded in the French cultural establishment (Sieveking, 2004).

The pieces and activities that are part of the aesthetic field of 'contemporary African dance' thus implement Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural objects as dual entities whose reception cannot be separated from the conditions of their production. '(T)he social conditions of the production (or the invention) and of the reproduction (or the inculcation) of dispositions and classificatory schemas which are activated in artistic perception - the social conditions of that kind of historical transcendental which is the condition of the aesthetic experience' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 288) are not provided *à priori* here, but instead are an element of the reception process.

In light of the above examples, the processes of reappropriation of the notion of 'contemporary African dance' thus involve practices with a decolonizing potential in the sense that they employ the tools and methods of dominant colonizer cultures in order to gradually intercept specific aesthetic fields.

These practices include Tiérou's declarative ideologies and actions, which

today we would label as managerial; Acogny's hybrid technique of contemporary African dance; the mechanisms of mimicry and feedback loop as a dramaturgical backbone of performances; or the revision of the role and function of tradition in contemporary choreographies, as well as the uncompromising artistic stance of artists rejecting aesthetic and generic presuppositions and the use of Western aesthetics and institutional models for critiques addressed 'inward,' i.e. the deconstruction of oppressive cultural and political patterns in African countries, whether or not related to (de)colonization processes.

Translated by Józef Jaskulski

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Footnotes

1. I refer here to the field of cultural production as understood by Pierre Bourdieu (1995, pp. 214-277).
2. For more on the term 'appropriation,' see among others Kupis, 2019.
3. As Jan Sowa argues in *The Phantom Body of the King*, Poland's history is also marked by the colonial experience associated with, among other things, the domination of the Russian, Prussian, Habsburg and Soviet empires (Sowa, 2011).
4. The main focus of the text will be on the relations between Europe and Africa, and on artists and creators associated with these areas, hence the notion of 'black dance' - which refers primarily to the black community in the US, and has somewhat different origins and connotations - will not be addressed here, nor will traditional dance or artists working exclusively in Europe.
5. Quoted in A. Tiérou: *D'ailleurs l'expression « danse africaine » n'a pas été créée par des Africains. Elle est née en Occident* (Besides, the term 'African dance' was not created by Africans. It originated in the West), Chalu; Thérésine, 2013, p. 6.
6. For more on these contemporary urban forms of African dance, see e.g., Szymajda, 2022.
7. Within the frame of this project, the notions of 'Orient' and 'West' posed ongoing categorization problems for UNESCO (and revealing a distinctly Western-centric perspective on this division), not least because of Japan, which demanded to be included among the Western states, and countries and regions situated between these intuitive zones (such as the then USSR, Turkey), let alone the completely overlooked areas such as Central and Eastern Europe, South America or Australia. See Maurel, 2005.
8. See Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism today,' [in:] *Orientalism*, 1979.
9. For more on the network of international dance festivals in Africa, see Szymajda, 2022, and Frétard, Sanou, 2008.
10. Fonds internationaux pour la promotion de la culture (International Fund for the Promotion of Culture).
11. In 1980, the fund also financed a rehearsal space for the Rwandan ballet company Amasimbi N'Amakombe, which had ambitions to combine traditional and modern forms. However, numerous projects were found to have failed, mainly for organizational reasons.
12. In the context of neo-colonial perspectives, one can recall a review of the 2006 Poznań presentation of this performance. The audience received the artists rather coolly, among others on account of their 'non-ballet' technique and 'technical deficiencies'; the reviewer postulated that the dancers may have been better off sticking with 'their original movement and music,' see Obrębowska-Piasecka, 2003.
13. *La création du monde* (The Creation of the World) was a 1923 production by the Swedish Ballet, with costumes and stage design by Fernand Léger and choreography by Jean Börlin; it drew on African myths about the origin of the world, not without avoiding simplifications and stereotypes tied more to the imagined than actual culture of the continent.
14. The performance's title may be read as an allusion to Emile Zola's eponymous open letter in the notorious case of Alfred Dreyfus, a French officer of Jewish descent, falsely

accused of espionage.

15. Radical formal interventions based on intercepting the aesthetic frameworks, genres and discourses of white dance, especially classical ballet, are also employed by Robyn Orlin, a pioneer of contemporary African dance. A white choreographer originally from South Africa, Orlin works with black performers and now mainly resides in Europe. In a similar vein, Steven Cohen, another white artist originating from South Africa and currently working in France, undertakes a critique of apartheid, but also the problems of the queer minority in South Africa, see Szymajda, 2013.

16. I propose here a more general treatment of the notion of 'feedback loop' than is the case with Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) theory of performativity; I thus put it in a context that goes beyond the individual situation of performance reception as an abstract and general term for feedback within a given system, i.e. a situation in which a system receives feedback on its performance.

17. The term *négritude* (blackness) proclaimed by the poet Aimé Césaire as an identity marker of the new black culture, mainly in relation to literature, became a symbol of African authors' take on the distorted Eurocentric image of said culture (Fanon, 1952). Césaire, Fanon or Achille Mbembe see blackness not only as a skin color, but 'as a kind of human condition (*la condition nègre*), in which one must recognize the legacy of colonial history and slavery, one that is marked by extreme poverty, cultural marginalization and radical social inequality [...] the transnationalization of the black condition is a "constitutive moment of modernity" ..., with the black slave as one of its most disturbing figures ... In Eurocentric colonial discourse, blackness has been defined as an area of the periphery, identified with the inferior, the backward, the marginal' (Sajewska, 2020, p. 143).

18. On this occasion, I rehash a conclusion emerging from the feedback provided by artists and producers who took part in the discussions held during the Triennial and Biennial of African contemporary dance in Burkina Faso (2016) and Morocco (2021), respectively.

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/ DANCE AS MEMORY MACHINE

Tango as Memory Machine

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The article looks at the history of Argentine tango in Poland using the tools of *song studies* and *memory studies*. The author makes reference to Marvin Carlson's concept and treats tango as a memory machine; in her opinion, pre-war Polish tango allows to tell an important fragment of the history of Poland and Central Europe. Focusing on selected songs, she shows how their history (and the fates of their creators) is entangled in various cultural, social and political contexts. The author constructs the narrative by choosing one tango, *Plegaria* by the Argentinian musician Eduardo Bianco, which was chosen for his debut at the Qui Pro Quo theatre by the Dana Choir. According to a legend, this tango was to be the 'tango of death' from the Janowska concentration camp, the inspiration for Paul Celan's *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue). Other Polish songs of the time are also recalled (e.g. the tango *Wanda*, alluding to the activities of the Zwi Migdal organisation, the foxtrot *Gdy Petersburski razem z Goldem gra* (When Petersburski and Gold Play Together), or the Polish version of *La Cumparsita* with lyrics by Andrzej Włast) and their composers (Jerzy Petersburski, the brothers Artur and Henryk Gold, Henryk Wars and Dawid Bajgelman), lyricists (Andrzej Włast and Emanuel Schlechter) and performers (Mieczysław Fogg, Adam Aston and Wiera Gran). Many tango artists in Poland had Jewish roots and perished during the war, which means that the genre itself became entangled here in the history of the Holocaust.

Keywords: Argentine Tango in Poland; tango of death; entertainment theatre; song studies; memory machine

1.

A memory machine? This is how Marvin Carlson has made us think of the theatre. His 2001 book, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Carlson, 2003),¹ addresses the relationship between theatre and memory. For Carlson, the essence of the theatrical experience is the oscillation between the 'here and now' of the theatre and the 'there and then' of the represented world, but also the multiple 'there and then' of the spectator's past theatrical experiences. His/her perception activates the memory of all previously seen productions of Shakespeare and Ibsen, all of the actress's/actor's previous roles, which haunt the stage and the audience's imagination like ghosts. The American scholar believes this to be the reason why there are so many ghosts, apparitions and spectral figures in theatre. *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *Ghosts* thematize and recycle the essence of theatre art. Hence the title of his book: *The Haunted Stage*. This mechanism of recognition is also a source of the spectator's pleasure, and many directors deliberately utilize this effect, constructing their theatrical idiom from quotations and self-quotation (the case of Jerzy Grzegorzewski).

Songs, as demonstrated by practitioners of song studies, a relatively new branch of the humanities which explores popular music,² affect us in a similar way (Tański, 2021; Kuligowski, Tański, 2021). For example, our enjoyment of a *cover* (another version of a hit song) consists in recognizing a new rendition of the original or one of its previous incarnations. Incidentally, the more radically different the new version is, the greater the fun for the listener (Skrzypek, 2021).

Marek Jeziński proposes an understanding of popular music (an important

part of 20th-century audiosphere) as Pierre Nora's site of memory.

Music, a form of cultural memory, should be understood as a sonic space reflecting the current landscape of society – musical styles, methods of music production, and the works and performers popular at a given time are important indicators of wider trends and cultural changes in society (Jeziński, 2017, p. 15).

Popular music as a site of memory combines the most personal (think how often our memories are encoded by their soundtrack) with the public. Music reaches us through multiple channels operated by various public institutions (concert halls and dance floors, radio and television, the recording industry and, in the past, sheet music publications, now superseded by the Internet with YouTube, Spotify and other music portals), as much shaped by the period's fashion and ambience as that fashion and ambience and the audience's preferences are shaped by them. Engaged in a dynamic dialogue that John Fiske describes as the constant negotiations and guerrilla struggle between 'domination and subordination' (2010, p. 19), between power and forms of public resistance, between military strategy (of the culture industry in this case) and audiences' guerrilla tactics. According to Pierre Nora, a site of memory can be 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora, 1996, p. XVII). Consequently, it can also be a song.

2.

So how would I like to think in this paper about song and its special genre that is the Polish variety of tango? Would it be a 'site' or a 'machine'? 'Site' seems to connote a more static vision, 'machine' refers to the dynamics of collective memory and its performative character and thus appears to a more appropriate category for my subject. I am interested in the dynamic and circular character of the migration of rhythms, melodies and dance steps from Europe overseas and back - from Argentina to Europe and Poland, and all the contexts acquired by tango during those travels, all the cultural residue that it carries. Tango as a memory machine establishes new relationships and generates new meanings which I am going to trace. (And since theatre is my starting point, I will regularly return to theatre).

Many songs thematize their function as a medium of memory, whether we define them as sites or machines. Recall, for example, *Już nie zapomnisz mnie* (You Will Not Forget Me) with music by Henryk Wars and lyrics by Ludwik Starski from the 1938 film *Zapomniana melodia* (Forgotten Melody):

Because you won't forget me
When you remember my song
The melody has magic powers
And charm, and might

And even if you forget me
The wistful sound of this tune
Will make you miss me for sure
Every day and night.³

I was going to refer here to one of Osvaldo Pugliese's most beautiful and recognizable tangos, *Recuerdo*,⁴ with lyrics by Eduardo Moreno, which must be the title that first comes to the mind of every *aficionado* when asked about tango and memory. When I looked for its lyrics at todotango.com, a list of twenty-eight tango pieces containing the word 'recuerdo' in the title was displayed, and it is by no means a complete inventory⁵. I don't know all of them, but the list is very promising. (Recuerdo can be translated as 'I remember,' 'memory,' 'reminiscence' and 'souvenir;' all of these meanings revolve around memory and remembering.) Judging by the titles alone, their authors write and sing about the aromas and colours of memories (*Perfumes del recuerdo, Flor de recuerdo*), recall old loves, girlfriends (*Un recuerdo de amor, Muchachita del recuerdo*) and places (*Recuerdo de Bahia, Cafecito del recuerdo*), and pay homage to the past *maestros* (*Memorial/Recuerdo de tangos, Recuerdo para Villoldo*). Perhaps, then, it is pointless to refer to that particular text, since Argentine tango as a genre is, in a sense, about memory and remembering? About nostalgia for a lost homeland that you've never really had? (Thomson, 2005)

I also have the impression that Carlson's haunting effect must have accompanied the participants in the tango life of Buenos Aires during the most hectic years in the history of the genre: the most popular tangos were recorded by the majority of popular orchestras so for *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) they exist simultaneously in many versions. The most famous tango, the closure of every *milonga* (a tango dance party), *La Cumparsita* by Gerardo Matos Rodríguez from 1916, has allegedly been recorded 2700 times! Today YouTube puts those thousands of versions at our fingertips so we can easily trace the history of recordings and its meanderings.⁶ This availability changes the way we experience music, but it can also give a false

image of the scope of musical influence in the past: to travel, music used to need the body and memory of a living person or a material carrier, such as a record or a score. Nevertheless, *La Cumparsita* must have been familiar to every *porteño* in many instrumental or vocal versions (with words by the composer or as *Si supieras* with lyrics by Pascual Contursi and Enrique Pedro Maroni). Thus when he or she heard one version, he or she also heard many others. Of the leading orchestras of the Golden Age, Juan D'Arienzo's band recorded *La Cumparsita* five times, Osvaldo Pugliese's twice (including *Si supieras* with Jorge Maciel), Anibal Troilo's also twice and Carlos Di Sarli's three times.⁷ (And these are just four bands out of countless others that performed in clubs, cabarets and broadcasting studios, played music for dancing and recorded albums.)

I am going to focus on prewar Polish tango because I believe that its history can be used to tell an important part of the history of Central Europe. By concentrating on selected songs, I want to show how their history is entangled in a variety of cultural, social and political contexts. That, when it is viewed as a memory machine, tango tells a fascinating story that no one in Poland has recorded yet.⁸

3.

The tango as a genre of music and dance emerges at the end of the 19th century in the La Plata delta, in the poor suburbs of Buenos Aires and Montevideo (Brunelli, 2014). It derives from different musical and dance traditions brought to South America by immigrants from all over the world, including habanera, flamenco, candombe, polka and even opera). Initially danced in the docks and brothels, it is brought by the Argentine gilded youth

to Europe, conquers Paris and other European capitals to return to the salons of Argentine elites and be recognized as an important element of the nation's identity. The Golden Age of Argentine tango lasts approximately from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. This is the period with the highest number of dancers, the result being that the largest number of orchestras are active and the musical form of the tango matures and flourishes as radio, the growing music industry and the ever-improving recording technology make the music available where orchestras do not perform.

In Poland, tango is performed publicly for the first time by Lucyna Messal and Józef Redo at the Nowości Theatre in Victor Jacobi's operetta *The Marriage Market* in 1913, but only a year later, the eponymous 'apostle of the tango' from the one-act play by Adolf Nowaczyński announces: 'Tango is now not just amusement... Tango is a sport! It's a mania! A *folie*! An epidemic! It's what the mass frenzies in the Middle Ages were. ...Tango is power... it's a new rhythm! A new thrill...' (Nowaczyński, 1914, p. 100), and the production includes live performances of the 1905 *El Choclo* by Ángel Villoldo and the 1913 *Amapa / Le vrai tango brésilien* by Juca Storoni.⁹

Nowaczyński's text is interesting in many ways: it diagnoses 'tangomania,' names and describes contemporary dance figures, offers an opportunity to hear one of the most famous tangos¹⁰ in a theatre and stages a solid lesson in musicality, even though it comes in ironic inverted commas.

Moreover, by invoking the mythicized criminal origins of tango, Nowaczyński seems to point to an important issue in the history of relations between our region of Europe and that part of South America:

And it came straight from those brothels ... from squalid bodegas....

Ugh... (*spits to the side*) It shames me to say this... Malaga! gitana!
I say... the dagger ... blood! Those gauchos!... Those Argentine
pimps were the first to dance it... scum of the world... lowlifes...
white slaves... agents from Galicia... oh... (Nowaczyński, 1914, p.
101)

‘Lowlifes,’ ‘white slaves’ and ‘agents from Galicia’ seem to be a direct reference to the operations of Zwi Migdal, the Jewish mafia that supplied women from Central Europe to brothels in Argentina and Brazil (Jakubczak, 2020). It was a large-scale business (as most sex workers in the region came from our part of Europe, they were commonly referred to as ‘las Polacas’; from the perspective of Buenos Aires, the geographic, ethnic and religious differences in the women’s identities became irrelevant). Zwi Migdal was officially registered in 1906 as the Warsaw Mutual Aid Society Varsovia, ‘an organization of Jewish procurers, emigration agents and pimps posing as a self-help group for emigrants from Poland’ (Styczyńska). (The group was broken up in 1930, due primarily to the testimony of Raquel Liberman, a Jewish woman from Berdichev.)

This story can be told through various songs of the era, as Donna J. Guy, author of *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires* (Guy, 1991) does, using the poetry of tango lyrics as an important source of information about the social changes of the first decades of the 20th century in Argentina and their consequences. One of the texts chosen by her is Horacio Pettorossi’s tango *Esclavas blancas* (White Slaves).¹¹

Below is an English translation by Paul Bottomer:

Little tortured souls, poor white slaves
Tango and milonga,
Infertile women, automatons of vice
Soulless and loveless.
I do not know why, tonight, your pupils reflect
The sorrow that is killing you,
And in every laugh, I know, poor milonga

Your heart is sobbing.¹²

Another victim of Zwi Migdal seems to be the protagonist of Andrzej Włast's tango *Wanda*, with music by Jerzy Petersburski and Kazimierz Englard, from the 1928 revue *To trzeba zobaczyć* at the Morskie Oko Theatre:¹³

W szynkach Argentyny każdy zna ją
Bawi gości śpiewem, tańcem i grą
Kto zapłaci, temu odda swój czar
Ciała i ust żar

Z Polski ją sprzedano tu na życie psie
Każdy nią pomiata, każdy śmieje się
Tylko jeden gitarzysta
Szepce do niej: święta, czysta

Wando
Kocham cię nad życie
Jedź ze mną w świat

Wando

W tej spelunce podłej
Zwiędziesz, jak kwiat

Nie płacz, podaj usta malowane
Wierz mi, jam ci bliski, jam twój brat.

(*Wanda. Nowe tango argentyńskie*, 1928)

The song's author, Andrzej Włast, perhaps the most prolific lyricist of the interwar period, is also an important figure in the history of Polish tango. He managed major revues for which tangos were written and adapted, penning tens or even hundreds of them, including the lyrics to the Polish version of *La Cumparsita*.¹⁴

But the echoes of women trafficking can also be found in Antoni Marczyński's 1930 novel *Szlakiem hańby* (Marczyński, 1930) and its 1938 film adaptation *Kobiety nad przepaścią* directed by Michał Waszyński with music by Henryk Wars.¹⁵

The Golden Age of Polish tango began in the second half of the 1930s and lasted until the outbreak of the war. Tomasz Lerski, a historian of the Polish phonographic industry, claims that as many as 2,200 tango compositions were recorded in interwar Poland by Syrena Record alone (Lerski, 2004, p. 164). The recordings include Polish versions of Argentine and European tangos and original tangos composed by Polish musicians. The songs were written mostly for the stage, and later also for film. Those greatest hits, recorded by the brightest stars of Polish entertainment, were created for Qui Pro Quo and Morskie Oko revue theatres, but an interesting tango niche was the Jewish variety theatre with Dawid Bajgelman, who composed *Grzech*,¹⁶

Wiera Gran's famous song, and was recently remembered on the Bester Quarter's excellent record *Bajgelman, Get to Tango*.¹⁷ As in Argentina, tango developed in a triangle between the stage and film, the recording industry and the dance floor. Certain analogies can be drawn: Argentina's most popular band of the Golden Age was Juan D'Arienzo's orchestra, residing at the Chantecler club at 440 Paraná Street.¹⁸ The club's proprietor and soul was Ángel Sánchez Carreño, known as El Principe Cubano. The Polish Chantecler would have been Adria, located at 10 Moniuszki Street, whose legendary boss, Franiszek Moszkowicz, could be dubbed Warsaw's Principe Cubano. The counterpart to Juan D'Arienzo's band must have been Jerzy Petersburski's and Artur Gold's orchestra, which had its best period before the opening of Adria in 1931; founded in 1925, the orchestra ended its activities at the turn of 1929, but occasionally reformed: for example, it performed at Adria during the carnival of 1935. The band also had a signature tune: the foxtrot *Gdy Petersburski razem z Goldem gra* (When Petersburski and Gold Play), with music by Artur Gold and lyrics by Andrzej Włast, from the 1926 *Qui Pro Quo* revue.¹⁹

When the war broke out, Jerzy Petersburski moved to the Soviet Union, joined the theatre of the II Corps and reached Palestine via Tehran and Jordan with Anders' Army. In Iraq, he formed a trio with his cousins, Henryk Gold (Artur's brother) and Fred Melodysta; in Cairo, he hosted radio broadcasts for soldiers; in Tel Aviv, he performed at the Ohel Theatre. After the war he found himself in Buenos Aires. He collaborated with the El Mundo radio station, ran a theatre with Kazimierz Krukowski, composed and made recordings. (The portal bibliotekapiosenki.pl claims that he worked with Astor Piazzolla, but so far I haven't been able to confirm that.)²⁰ According to various sources, Petersburski returned to Poland in 1968 or 1969, which, given the anti-Semitic campaign under way in Poland at the

time, seems a surprising decision. As for Artur Gold, after the outbreak of the war, he found himself in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he managed an orchestra. He was then deported to Treblinka and formed an orchestra in the camp. He was murdered in 1943, in the last days of the camp's existence.²¹

4.

I will now put my research method to the test by examining one tango to see where it takes me. I will look at Eduardo Bianco's *Plegaria* from 1927. The Polish part of its history is associated with the first performance of Chór Dana in the revue *Gabinet figur wo(j)skowych* at the Qui Pro Quo theatre in 1929.²²

Władysław Daniłowski recalls that he had brought from Paris the 'beautiful Spanish tango *Plegaria*.'

I asked them to write Polish lyrics. 'No,' was the collective reply. [The debuting choir's audition for director Boczkowski was also attended by Qui Pro Quo lyricists Marian Hemar and Julian Tuwim – author's note.] The Spanish words [sounded] not only beautiful but also authentic and stylish. Polish lyrics could ruin the effect. (quoted after Mościcki, 2008, p. 143).

The new group was a huge success and went on to play an important role in the history of Polish tango: tangos would be a staple of its repertory for years.²³ The career of the first Polish revelers is associated with the rise of Mieczysław Fogg, one of the most important voices in the history of Polish tango.

But the first performance of Coro Argentino V. Dano (the group debuted under that name) is important for a number of reasons.

Mieczysław Fogg remembered it as follows:

The day of the premiere came. They dressed us in silk trousers and ruffled shirts, painted sideburns on our faces, adorned our heads with shiny sombreros and... the curtain was lifted... Our choir was given a Spanish name (to intrigue and lure Warsaw's snobbish audience): Coro Argentino V. Dano.

We sang, in Spanish of course, the two lovely Argentine songs [Daniłowski, and after him, Tomasz Mościcki, author of a monograph on Qui Pro Quo, mention three - author's note] against a backdrop depicting the Bay of Rio de Janeiro. (Could it be that geography was not a strong suit of the excellent decorator Józef Galewski?) (Fogg, 2009, p. 33).

A photograph of Chór Dana from the National Digital Archive collection shows the singers in white ruffled shirts, but instead of sombreros, their heads are covered by black, probably silk bandannas, tied low on the nape of the neck in the Spanish fashion.²⁴ Their eyes highlighted with kohl, the band's members hold banjos (Fogg mentioned that he had to 'give up buying new trousers and shoes' to procure the instrument) and an accordion in their hands. The costumed singers are accompanied by Daniłowski in a tuxedo and bow tie. The contrast between the singers and the conductor further emphasizes the effect of colonial fantasy that the creators of Qui Pro Quo intended to evoke by means of Coro Argentino's performance.

This effect was a combination of the novel formula of the performance, the previously unknown tango, the songs' Spanish words, the ensemble's foreign-sounding name and, finally, the exotic setting. The choice of Rio de Janeiro as scenery may seem odd from today's perspective but is justified in the context of the interwar period: the Argentine scholar Florencia Garramuño discusses the early 20th-century dispute between Brazil and Argentina over the ownership of the tango (Garramuño, 2011). In Nowaczyński's *Apostle of the Tango*, Oswald's students demand that he dance tango 'Brazilian style' (that is, with fervour), and Tadeusz Artur Müller composed *Tango brazylijskie* (Brazilian Tango) with lyrics by Leopold Brodziński for the operetta *Szczęśliwej podróży!* at 8.30, a small musical theatre active in Warsaw in 1932-1934.²⁵

In short, the first performance of Coro Argentino created a fantasy about the generalized South, where details (Spain? Argentina? Brazil?) were not so important. In this respect, Qui Pro Quo theatre drew extensively from fantasies which were widespread at the time, evoked by tango in popular culture across the world. Instrumental in the creation of these fantasies was the film *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921, dir. Rex Ingram), with the famous tango of Rudolph Valentino and Beatrice Dominguez.²⁶ Valentino's performance in the *gaucho* costume, characteristic loose-fitting trousers, high boots and a black hat, popularized the figure of *tanguero* as a wild, passionate Argentine cowboy. This image was also referenced by Eduardo Bianco, composer of *Plegaria* and leader of Orquesta Tipica Bianco - Bachicha (Argentine orchestra who was very popular in prewar Europe and often performed wearing *gaucho* outfits).

According to Manuel Adet, an Argentine journalist who recounts its unobvious story, Eduardo Bianco's *Plegaria* is 'poor and conventional;' the

song uses obsolete literary devices as well as an anachronistic musical form; in Argentina, tango reached its maturity during that period (known as the Guardia Nueva), in terms of both music – thanks to the likes of Julio de Caro and Osvaldo Fresedo – and lyrics, thanks to such poets as Homero Manzi and Enrique Santos Discépolo (Adet, 2013). But *Plegaria*'s lyrical, sublime – not to say pathetic – tone must have found broad appeal in Europe, given the number of recorded versions.²⁷ The text laments over the bitter pain of existence and speaks of the comfort offered by prayer. In the second verse, 'the beautiful penitent' dies and her 'repentant soul' passes away 'without complaint.' (Altar bells mentioned in the lyrics can be heard in a number of recordings.)

Chór Dana's recording for Syrena Record sounds very much like the Odeon version of the Orchestra Bianco – Bachicha from 1927²⁸ (a vocal version that is probably closest in time to the choir's). A similar arrangement and the same mournful key; the verses are sung by the soloist, joined by the choir in the refrain in both recordings. Bianco's version features the guitar, characteristic of the early Argentine *tango-canción*, and the bandoneon; in the Polish version, the accompaniment is dominated by the accordion (unless it is a bandoneon, but it was a rare instrument in prewar Poland); there is also a violin solo. (What cannot be heard is the banjo, for which Fogg had saved up by not buying new shoes, so perhaps there was no banjo in the studio version.) In Bianco's, the altar bells sound more like church bells. But the two versions are strikingly similar, particularly given the contrast between most Polish tangos of the era and the Argentine recordings. Bianco's orchestra has a decidedly European sound.

This could be the beginning of a new story. One that is not about exotic aesthetics and colonial fantasies, but about politics and war.

Eduardo Bianco, an Argentine violinist born in Rosario, came to Europe in 1924, where he became an artistic and social success. Bianco seems to have enjoyed the company of the high and mighty of this world: he played for Alfonso XIII, king of Spain (to whom *Plegaria* is dedicated), Mussolini and Joseph Stalin. He was friends with Eduardo Labougle, Argentina's ambassador to Berlin and fascist sympathizer; historical rumour has it that members of the Argentine diaspora in the 1930s warned each other against Bianco, who was regarded as a Gestapo agent (Adet, 2013).

Shortly before the war, Bianco's orchestra attended an *asado* (i.e. Argentine barbecue) given by ambassador Labougle for the Führer and his entourage. The musicians played tango and served the guests. I have come across two versions of the story: in one, Bianco played *Plegaria* and Hitler liked the song so much that he asked for it to be replayed (Adet, 2013); the other claims that there is no proof of that (*El tango de la muerte*, 2010). It is known, however, that the Nazis saw tango as a wholesome alternative to the 'degenerate,' 'black' jazz.²⁹

Plegaria would eventually make its way into the repertoire of concentration camp orchestras during the war. It was recorded as *Das Todestango*, with German lyrics, by Aleksander Kulisiewicz,³⁰ a Polish political prisoner at Sachsenhausen, where he had memorized a vast archive of camp poems and songs in many languages, passed on to him by fellow inmates from all over Europe. He expanded this archive for many years and made the works available to the public, recording albums and giving concerts.

He dictated his memoirs to Konrad Strzelewicz:

Or in Lviv, on Janowska Street, at the so-called Janowska camp. ...

There was an SS man there, SS-Unterscharführer Rokita, a café musician from Katowice. And there was a violin artist, Schatz, a Jew, who played marvellously. Now, this Schatz and other Jews wrote various compositions for Rokita, waltzes and tangos, he signed them and conducted concerts on Saturdays and Sundays to which the SS men's wives and children came. They drank beer and wine and had a good time ... Rokita conducted the orchestra, *The Tango of Death* was played, and Mrs. Gebauer, an SS man's wife, shot prisoners from a few steps away, just for pleasure...

The melody for *The Tango of Death* was composed before the war by the Spanish Jew Ricardo Bianco; it was taken from the tango *Plegaria*. And there in Lviv, as the prisoners were shot, the words of the song rang out:

Can you hear the violin's plaintive weeping
Its sounds fill the air, as if soaked in blood...
Have no fear, don't be afraid of anything,
Although the violin plays the tango of death...

(Strzelewicz, 1984, p. 39)

There is no doubt that Kulisiewicz means Eduardo Bianco's *Plegaria*. The composer may have turned in his mind into a Jew by the association with the tradition of Sephardic music, which might serve as an interesting point.

One of many possible ones.

Tango blogs quote the suggestion of John Felstiner, biographer of Paul Celan, that the performances of *Plegaria* at the Janowska camp may have

inspired *Todesfuge* (Deathfugue), Celan's best-known poem and probably the most important poem about the Holocaust.³¹ In 1947 the Bucharest magazine *Contemporanul* published a Romanian translation under the title *Tangoul Mortii*. The American scholar argues that the poet draws on his personal experience of the practice of using music in Nazi camps: 'Celan's early title *Todestango* (Death Tango) gave his poem the ring of reliable evidence: that this person knew whereof he spoke, that he was surely there and must have written the poem there' (Felstiner, 1995, p. 30).

We drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air where we won't lie too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair
Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he
whistles
his hounds to stay close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the
ground
he commands us play up for the dance (Celan, 2001, p. 31).

The Dutch scholar Willem de Haan devoted an entire book, tellingly subtitled 'the Creation of a Holocaust Legend,' to the story of the 'tango of death' (de Haan, 2023). Relying on many accounts and comparing Kulisiewicz's memories from *Zapis* with his immense collection at the Holocaust Museum, he asks the question whose tango was actually played by the Janowska camp orchestra. One of the hypothetical authors of the lyrics to the Janowska

'tango of death' mentioned by de Haan is Emmanuel Schlechter,³² another important name in the history of prewar Polish song. As for the music, the scholar puts forward three theories. The first version assumes that the tango was composed by an anonymous Jewish musician who was murdered in the camp along with all the other members of the orchestra. The second follows the legend of *Plegaria*, but de Haan rejects it as rumour based on Educardo Bianco's fascist sympathies. In the third version, which he finds the most plausible, the tango played during executions in the Janowska camp was Jerzy Petersburski's popular song (and the best-known Polish tango!) *To ostatnia niedziela*. Thus we would come full circle, returning to Adria and the orchestra of Petersburski and Gold (who, as we remember, formed the camp orchestra at Treblinka).

Another striking coincidence would give a different twist to this story. In May 1936 Eduardo Bianco's orchestra recorded ten pieces, mostly tangos, including eight featuring the singers Manuel Bianco and Carlos Moreno for Syrena Record in Warsaw (Lerski, 2004). Some dozen Hebrew versions of popular Polish tangos were recorded by the same label for the Palestinian market in 1936-1939. The Hebrew lyrics were written by Izrael Mordechaj Biderman and Jehuda Warszawiak, and most of the songs were performed by Adam Aston, one of Poland's most beautiful singing voices, who recorded them under the pseudonym Ben Lewi.³³

Tomasz Jankowski i Katarzyna Zimek, authors of an excellent study of the collection, note that these tangos testify to the dilemmas of the era's generation of Jews who were involved in the Zionist movement. Previously used only in religious music, the Hebrew becomes 'the language of popular music which accompanied evening dancing and flirtatious advances of lovers.' The very choice of the language 'was an ideological declaration.'

According to scholars, the choice of the genre was not without significance either:

Shaping new mentality and building foundations of the dream homeland coincided with the very emergence of tango in the everyday experience of this generation. In these circumstances, two seemingly opposing phenomena merged in one: a ballroom dance and the Zionist message. However, there was also a sentimental note to the revolutionary Hebrew tangos, for when faced with the hardships of life in Palestine, the emigrants from Poland were able to think back towards their old homeland and lifestyle. Even in distant Tel Aviv, Ben Lewi sung with Adam Aston's voice - a voice of the dance-filled Warsaw of the 1930s (Jankowski, Zimek, 2019, p. 139-140).

5.

Eduardo Bianco returned to Argentina in 1943. The style of his orchestra (which, for the two decades of its European career, preserved the sound of the Guardia Nueva period) prevented him from finding a place in the Buenos Aires tango scene of the 1940s, where the orchestras of Anibal Troilo and Osvaldo Pugliese had elevated the tango form to a completely different level. Before leaving Europe in 1942, he recorded *La Cumparsita* in Amsterdam; many years later, Maurice Béjart, unaware of Bianco's fascist sympathies, would use this version of the song in one of his performances (*El tango de la muerte*, 2010). Around that time, Andrzej Włast, the author of the Polish lyrics to *La Cumparsita*, died in the Warsaw Ghetto.

It is not known how and when he died. There are several mutually exclusive versions. Apparently Ola Obarska tried to get him out of the ghetto. Another story, mentioned by Loda Halama, claims that there was a chance to ransom Włast. According to a version that seems closer to the truth, he was rounded up for transport during the Great Action in 1942. He lived through the 'loading' at the Umschlagplatz and arrived at his 'destination.' Still another version takes him beyond the wall, where, on the Aryan side, he found shelter in the apartment of a showgirl, his former love. When he decided to leave his hiding place for a while, someone recognized him. Not as director Włast, but as Baumritter, a Jew. He didn't get a chance to drink chicory coffee in the nearby cafe. His escape from denunciation was cut short by a shot from a Mauser (Wolański, 2019, pp. 8-9).

But before he died in unclear circumstances, he had written what may be his most beautiful song, *Warszawo ma* (My Warsaw).³⁴

What follows from this juxtaposition of coincidences and the intersecting lives of a number of people - in Buenos Aires, Berlin, Warsaw, Lviv and Treblinka? From these tangled wanderings of melodies, rhythms, images and bodies of which I try to speak, drawing from seemingly random sources: remembered anecdotes, blog entries and descriptions of YouTube videos? The material is given some coherence and meaning by tango, which seems to work well as a memory machine. Tango allows a story to be composed from these scraps of information, rumour and conjecture. I have no doubt that it could not be put together without YouTube, which allows us to traverse thousands of kilometres and many decades and to discover or establish links between distant events at a single click, but also without the entire tango

blogosphere or such sources as todotango.com and staremelodie.pl, the collective efforts of enthusiasts. These sources – non-linear, hypertextual, branching out in many directions – certainly influence the nature of my text and can sometimes lead me astray, but they also offer unexpected insights, generating meaning and setting imagination in motion.

This is also a very personal story. I tell it as a theatre scholar, interested in the missing pieces (and blind spots) in the narrative of theatre history (and awaiting the as-yet-unwritten history of Polish popular theatre). As a Varsovian, living about three hundred metres from the ghetto's boundaries and some two hundred metres from Janusz Korczak's Dom Sierot. And as a dancer of Argentine tango whose first tango school is located at 2A Wolność Street, twenty minutes on foot from the Jewish Cemetery, half an hour from the Umschlagplatz, five minutes from the Court Building on Leszno Street, ten minutes from the Femina Theatre and another fifteen from where the Sztuka café used to be – important centres of cultural life in the ghetto, where tango must have been played on many occasions.

Translated by Robert Gałązka

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Footnotes

1. While Carlson's book has not been translated into Polish yet, it is occasionally referenced by Polish scholars (Szczawińska, 2015; Golonka, 2022).
2. Paweł Tański's manifesto opening the monographic issue of *Czas Kultury* on song studies emphasizes the fact that 'songs have become a legitimate element of university research.' 'It is time,' he writes, 'to stop regarding songs as illegitimate child of music and literature in academic disciplines and to recognize them as a paradigmatic art form in modern culture and to critically reevaluate all the songs we live by' (Tański, 2021, p. 1).
3. Lyrics quoted after the portal [staremelodie.pl](https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/13/Juz_nie_zapomnisz_mnie): https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/13/Juz_nie_zapomnisz_mnie [accessed: 11.02.2023].
4. This is a link to a 1966 recording with Jorge Maciel: https://youtu.be/ftCkxRb_qug [accessed: 15.04.2023]. This tango was first recorded in 1924 by Eduardo Bianco's orchestra, to which I will return in the second part of the text.
5. See: <https://www.todotango.com/english/search/?kwd=Recuerdo> [accessed: 15.04.2023].
6. As exemplified by these renditions: *La Cumparsita* in the cartoon *Tom and Jerry*, <https://youtu.be/CNBawXfwnoU> [accessed: 22.02.2023], the dance scene in *Some Like It Hot*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn_7PpyxqZM [accessed: 26.02.2023], a mambo by Xavier Cugat, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v61hKEKMjQQ> [accessed: 26.02.2023], and a tango-vals by the Solo Tango Orquesta, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_yNQF7pKQ8 [accessed: 26.02.2023].
7. Here is a bravura performance by Juan D'Arienzo's orchestra in a television studio: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHOgQQ_D3EY [accessed: 01.03.2023], and a 1943 performance by Anibal Troilo's orchestra, arranged by Astor Piazzolla: <https://youtu.be/mqnT9UqkMSs> [accessed: 01.03.2023].
8. There is one Polish book about Argentine tango (Stala, 2017), but no comprehensive history of Polish tango. A lot of interesting material can be found on YouTube channels run by collectors of prewar records. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/@jurek46pink> [accessed: 23.02.2023]. Another interesting source is the blog *Poezja tanga argentyńskiego*: <https://www.facebook.com/poezjatanga> [accessed: 23.02.2023].

9. See <https://louisianadigitalibrary.org/islandora/object/lsm-jaz%3A14787> [accessed: 12.02.2023]. Nowaczyński may have come across this publication or a similar one. *Amapa* also appeared in 1914 on a Victor record:
<https://www.discogs.com/release/10288464-J-Storoni-Arthur-N-Green-Victor-Military-Band-A-mapa-Sans-Souci> [accessed: 12.02.2023].
10. *El Choclo* is one of the classic tangos of the Guardia Vieja (Old Guard), which almost every tango orchestra had to have in its repertoire. Here is a performance by Tita Merello in the 1949 film *La historia del Tango*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3PKtEjNtP4> [accessed: 05.03.2023].
11. This is a link to the oldest recording I've found, of a 1928 performance in Paris by the Bianco-Bachicha orchestra with Teresa Asprella, one of the first Argentine vocalists who recorded in Europe: <https://youtu.be/zLRyhKMX-VU> [accessed: 24.02.2023]. The song's author, Horacio Pettorossi, was for several years a guitarist in Eduardo Bianco's orchestra, to which I will return.
12. Lyrics quoted after todotango.com,
<https://www.todotango.com/musica/tema/1212/Esclavas-blancas/> [accessed: 24.02.2023].
13. Here is a performance by Tadeusz Faliszewski, with slightly altered lyrics:
<https://youtu.be/RnT8jFSalY8> [accessed: 13.02.2023].
14. Here is a version recorded for Odeon with Tadeusz Faliszewski in 1937:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xMGT32qdWA> [accessed: 28.02.2023].
15. Incidentally, the film's interesting dance scenes seem to problematize the male gaze: we look at the exploits of students of the Lola Ventana Choreographic Institute through the eyes of a pimp who selects the prettier girls to send them abroad on forged passports, which makes it difficult not to think of the female body and female sexuality as a commodity. The viewer is also confronted with the popular association of dancer with sex worker.
16. <https://youtu.be/5GD67mJ4inI> [accessed: 13.02.2023].
17. Cf. <https://youtu.be/QNX-IHFoKMQ> [accessed: 11.02.2023].
18. For the closing of the club in 1958, Enrique Cadícamo wrote the beautiful tango *Adiós Chantecler*, which tells its story. The song was performed, naturally, by Juan D'Arienzo's orchestra with Jorge Valdez: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwQopcJB-ZE> [accessed: 25.02.2023].
19. Here is a bravura performance by Hanka Bielicka: <https://youtu.be/w7Qc4qMYO5w> [accessed: 25.02.2023].
20. See: https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Petersburski_Jerzy [accessed: 03.03.2023].
21. See: https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Gold_Artur [accessed: 03.03.2023]. For information about Gold's camp orchestra, see Arad, 2021.
22. Here is a recording made for Syrena Record shortly after the premiere:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx0UKXh-VGo> [accessed: 25.02.2023].
23. The list of the choir's recordings on the portal staremelodie.pl has over 170 tangos! They include Argentine (*Callecita de mi Barrio*, *Pobre milonga*), European (*Tango nocturno* and *Capri*) and the original Polish tangos by Daniłowski (*Siempre querida*, *Pamiętaj*), Petersburski (*To ostatnia niedziela*, *Tango milonga*) and Fanny Gordon (*Buddha*). See: <https://staremelodie.pl/chory/2/Ch%C3%B3r%20Dana> [accessed: 23.02.2023].
24. See: https://elcalaixetdelaiaia.es/2015/03/el-panuelo-mocador-de-cabeza-en-el_5/ [accessed: 23.02.2023].
25. Here is a beautiful performance by Adam Aston:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjWRa2P4dNQ> [accessed: 23.02.2023]. Incidentally, the

composer emigrated to Brazil and settled in São Paulo after the war, which gives a perverse point to the story. See: https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Muller_Artur_Tadeusz [accessed: 23.02.2023].

26. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4ELzf0u7Q8&t=176s> [accessed: 01.03.2023].

27. Various recordings can be found here: <https://tango.info/T8002606841> [accessed: 27.02.2023]; this is only a link to a list of different editions of the recordings by the Bianco - Bachicha orchestra:

https://www.discogs.com/search/?q=Plegaria++Bianco-Bachicha&type=all&type=all&format_exact=Shellac [accessed: 27.02.2023].

28. Here is a 1927 recording by the Bianco - Bachicha orchestra with Juan Raggi (or, if the portal tango.info is to be believed, with César Alberú):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViH6NdbLqoc> [accessed: 27.02.2023].

29. If *Plegaria* was played at that *asado*, it may have sounded similar to the following recording that is closest in time, by the Bianco - Bachicha orchestra with Mario Visconti from 1939: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGfcYb9R-mA&t=1s> [accessed: 28.02.2023].

30. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzPNzEvTypA> [accessed: 21.02.2023].

31. See: <http://humilitan.blogspot.com/2014/05/so-thats-why-poema-is-hard-to-fit-into.html> [accessed: 09.03.2023].

32. See: https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Schlechter_Emanuel [accessed: 09.03.2023].

33. Interestingly, Adam Aston, real name Adolf Loewinsohn, had Jewish roots like many artists pursuing tango in prewar Poland. I examine the identity of Polish tango in *Żydowskie tango i kwestia tożsamości* (Chałupnik, 2022).

34. Zofia Mrozowska's performance from *Zakazane piosenki* can be found here: <https://youtu.be/2uXc3S8AlnY> [accessed: 09.03.2023].

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/ HACKING PATRIARCHY

Anorexics as Homo Necroperformers. Affective Agents

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The article is a proposal to look at anorexics as performers and an interpretation of the spectacle they make of their own bodies in the context of *homo* necroperformance in which the subversive and affective causality of the liminal subject (half-living being) and emaciated bodies becomes important. The article places the problems of the representation of a certain kind of disorder in the field of cultural experience. The article is an excerpt from a master's thesis written under the supervision of Professor Katarzyna Fazan.

Keywords: affect; anorexia; autoethnography; dehumanisation; *homo* necroperformance; necroviolence

At the foundation of the perspective on anorexics as affective agents as *homo* necroperformers lies the concept of necroperformance proposed by Dorota Sajewska, for whom it was initially a tool for exploring the 'performative power of [human and material] remains' within the context of Polish cultural memory.¹ In her further studies, Sajewska emphasizes various aspects of necroperformative reflection. However, in my view, the crucial point is the connection between the researcher's theory and the 'concept of

historical agency that cannot be reduced to human action' (Sajewska, 2022, p. 147). This involves the updating of history through dead and residual matter subjected to multiple mediations. It is about performing history through remains, or to put it more strongly, 'the action of the corpse,' which is not necessarily a human subject, but above all a (non-)material residue that can serve as a medium for the absent/dead human body. However, my interest does not lie in the historical context, the body-archive that animates the past in the present, but rather in that which, while not carrying what has passed, generates tangible changes in the situation 'here and now'.

Respecting Sajewska's original project, in this work I aim to reorient the researcher's perspective and redirect the vector towards the future and the affective agency of a body in crisis. For the purposes of my research, I do not adapt the theory of necroperformance in its known form, as I do not rely on the fundamental assumptions of this theory. Instead, I draw inspiration from Sajewska's insights on necroperformance as a phenomenon with an active influence of 'that which is dead on that which is alive' (Sajewska, 2016, p. 39).

My use of the term 'necroperformance' arises from the perception of the semi-dead status of anorexic individuals and their performative actions. I adopt the definition of performativity understood as the agency of a given phenomenon or object, matter, or attributed power to actively shape its environment (Wojnowski, 2017, p. 176), while 'performance,' in this context, refers to the spectacle of bodies which cause real changes in the viewer. The anorexic subject is conceived as 'Nekros;' more precisely termed *homo necros*: a semi-living being in a liminal position between life and death. I understand necroperformance as a phenomenon that fits within the interpretive realm of both dead body studies and performative studies. The broad conceptual horizon of the terms *necros* and 'performance' can be both

inspiring and troublesome. The plethora of semantic configurations means that the combination of these terms and the use of the category of 'necroperformance' (with a slightly different meaning than that given by Sajewska) require clarification of the interpretive field in which I intend to operate. Therefore, for the clarity of the starting point of this research, it is necessary to untangle these concepts.

In my considerations, I take into account the model of affective agency, which alters the consciousness and disposition, with the body being the primary source of change and influence. My aim is to examine the affective effects of anorexics on both the individual and on society, thereby uncovering the political, emotional and performative nature of the necrotic body. Additionally, I wish to highlight the challenges faced by individuals suffering from anorexia and to generate societal interest in the topic of eating disorders. In this article, I rely on statements from participants in talk shows, documentaries, video blogs, reports, interviews and personal experiences. I also draw from public reactions to the advertizing campaign of Isabelle Caro; I utilize the online activities of Eugenia Cooney and interpret a scene from the popular TV series *Skins*.

Preliminary remarks

I will begin my contemplation on the status of anorexic individuals as *homo* necroperformers with a few clarifications. Firstly, I exclude men and non-binary individuals from my observations. This does not imply a disregard for the presence of anorexia among the non-female portion of society, but examining this issue in those groups would require separate research; my focus is on women and girls, who most frequently suffer from this illness. According to poststructuralist feminist researchers,² it is precisely the

female gender and patriarchal culture that are the primary factors causing anorexia. Secondly, I consider anorexic individuals in advanced stages of the disease, with bodies in a state of cachexia, while being aware that this illness also affects individuals whose body mass index falls within the normal range. Thirdly, a portion of my observations and conclusions stems from direct experiences of the affective actions of anorexic bodies. In 2021, I spent several days at a Specialized Therapy Centre, where I had close contact with six individuals suffering from anorexia at various stages of the disease. I observed the treatment methods and behaviours, and I conducted conversations with the anorexics and with the medical and caregiving team. I have a sense that embodied knowledge and a form of auto-ethnography³ are significant in affective research. When writing about affective agency, it is difficult to escape one's own emotions, which are increasingly considered a research method (see Chaberski et al., 2022). Hence, my experiences appear pertinent, too; yet I am aware they might be insufficient; therefore, I confront all my findings with theories and scientific works. Finally, I deliberately omit considerations regarding the causes of the disease, as I am interested in the performative actions of anorexics rather than the aetiology of anorexia.

I have divided the article into two parts; in the first part, I address the issue of the status of anorexic individuals, which I interpret as *homo necros*. I believe that only in this way can I explain why I refer to anorexic individuals as 'semi-living beings.' Only then can I take a step further towards establishing the concept of *homo* necro-performance; it is in the second part that I examine the affective and subversive *homo* necro-agency of anorexic individuals.

1. The ontology of liminal beings

Homo necros

I borrowed the term *homo necros* from Ewa Domańska, who, drawing from Giorgio Agamben's insights (2008), uses this concept in her analysis of the phenomenon of the Muslim camp inmate as an example of biopolitical action and a post-human/non-human form of *homo* existence. *Homo necros* is a being situated on the threshold between life and death, neither entirely alive nor entirely dead. The researcher's study of the Muslim figure serves as an analogy for my considerations regarding anorexic individuals – *homo necroperformers*. The common elements connecting both subjects are: a starvation disease, an unprecedented state of bodily destruction, dehumanization, a significant stage of mortality, the difficulty of leaving the state of *homo necros*, the affective reception of a necrotic body, the effects of biopolitics/necroviolence, of balancing on the verge of life and death. It is also necessary to point out the difference in the reasons for the emergence of the subject of *homo necros* and the conditions of its existence. Of course, the life of a concentration camp prisoner was different from the life of anorexic women in the 21st century. Therefore, below, I analyze two points characterizing *homo necros* that may be controversial in the context of the status of anorexic women.

Dehumanization

Negative dehumanization⁴ involves stripping a person of dignity, debasing them, depersonalizing them, and reducing them to the category of sub-humans. However, even the slightest gesture perceived as treating an individual in an objectifying manner constitutes an act of dehumanization. In

the case of anorexic individuals, this process occurs on two levels: through self-destructive actions leading to instinctual, behavioural (often labelled 'inhuman') conduct, and through the frequently violent treatment of anorexic individuals by the caregiving and medical environment.⁵

One of the common points of feminist research on anorexia is the conviction that medical and psychiatric discourse treats anorexics in an inhuman and objective manner. This is manifested in, among other things, the way they are commonly hospitalized that consists in total control over patients, depriving them of decision-making and taking away subjectivity in the treatment process. With eating disorders, total control over eating, movement and body is used. The degree of supervision is most often associated with tightly-controlled meals, in extreme cases with an obligatory feeding tube - the interference in the patient's body may take place under duress; if she resists, she can be tied to the bed. It is worth listening to at least a few voices of participants in disciplinary therapy to understand the scale of their problems related to the experience of oppression and humiliation.

They told me to eat, threatened that if I didn't eat within half an hour, I'd be tubed. Which means I'll have food fed by a feeding tube. They scared all those who resisted with this. It did happen, but only as a last resort. The nurse yelled at me when I ate too slowly or dropped crumbs because they were wasted calories. I kept hearing: 'Stop yammering and eat.' (Pawłowska, 2022, p. 56)

Language as the main therapeutic tool and a medium of information and communication is sometimes used for commands, prohibitions and threats.

On the other hand, control over movement includes the banning of exercise, but also of any bodily activity, e.g. the manner of sitting at meals (it is forbidden to sit cross-legged),⁶ standing time, number and length of showers and walks.

Once a doctor called me because the nurses reported that I was walking around talking to patients, another time that I was talking to them standing up. The task of nurses is to control the consumption of calories by patients with anorexia. (ibid., p. 54)

In extreme malnutrition, the so-called bed regime consists in limiting the patient's movements to a minimum. In turn, their clothing should be layered and warm. In some centres, there is also video monitoring in the patients' rooms, so anorexics are deprived of privacy. In various institutions (public and non-public), girls are weighed and measured daily or several times a week; then their bodies are put on display and accompanied by a norm-based judgment full of comments.

Lena mentions weighing as the most embarrassing thing about her hospital stay. It took place twice a week, in the morning, in just underpants. (...) It happened that bustling nurses opened the door wide, the almost naked girls could be seen by other patients. - When the nurses forgot about weighing in the morning, they called me even a moment before breakfast, (...) they simply told me to undress and stand on the scale. It was terribly humiliating, because there were many nurses. (ibid., p. 55)

Many anorexia sufferers' stories⁷ relate hurtful comments made by medical

staff while observing their bodies: 'When I was weighed, when I stood naked on the scale, [the nurses] looked me up and down and said, God, the way you look. [...] One nurse blasphemed me once, another said that I should not be here at all, that I was taking the place of those in need' (Famulska, 2021). In addition to the standard weighing, various places on the body of anorexics are touched to verify new wounds or disease symptoms. My observations and interviews with patients show that such examinations were never preceded by a request for consent to touch.

The analysis of cultural, historical and gender contexts of the occurrence of anorexia has been made by, among others, Helen Malson. The researcher combines feminist academic discourse with interviews with people suffering from the disease. On body inspection practices, Malson concludes that 'it is indeed a disciplinary technique that characterizes medical, psychiatric and psychological practices as a whole in terms of their procedures of observation, measurement and categorization and normalization (...)' (Malson, 1998, p. 173).⁸ She also argues that, in the case of anorexia, the disciplining process can equally be self-control through measurement, but I believe also through excessive exercise, inducing vomiting, using laxatives, obsessively counting calories, limiting or giving up food, and having cold showers and baths. Numerous discipline practices lead the body to a state of cachexia and the already mentioned autodehumanization of anorexics. In a situation of extreme hunger, the biological survival instinct is triggered; the starved organism demands food, so it begins to govern human behaviour, which becomes non-human. In many narratives of the sick and their relatives, one can hear about irrational, pathological actions, deprived of dignity. Among anorexics and bulimics, drastic experiments with tubes, or tearing out of the flexible drain are common, which often leads to haemorrhaging. 'I immediately realized that I had easy access to my

stomach. When I tensed my muscles, I could squeeze food out or pull it out with a syringe.’⁹ Other self-humiliating behaviours include taking food out of garbage cans, eating other people’s leftovers or spoiled food, extorting money, stealing food, regurgitating meals to different places and objects.¹⁰ These are just some of the instinctive actions of anorexics leading to autodehumanization.

Another practice that is part of the process of dehumanization is incapacitation. According to Article 23 of the ‘Mental Health Protection Act,’ a mentally ill person may be deprived of the right to self-determination (See Tylec et al., 2013, p. 537). Deprived of the ability to make choices or influence one’s own life, deprived of faith in one’s own activity inevitably leads to the de-subjectification of the individual and the deprivation of their autonomy. Therefore, it is worth considering whether depriving people with anorexia of rationality and subjecting them to incapacitation is an ethical action taken for the good of these people. It should be added that, according to feminist research, an anorexic woman is not an insane being who has a distorted view of reality, but is someone ‘who has too closely adopted cultural standards of appearance and applies them too precisely, not someone who has a wrong perception of their body’ (Derra, 2010, p. 40). It seems that the sick quite sensibly (and at the same time to an extreme extent) interpreted the social requirement of being thin to perfectly meet cultural expectations.

The last aspect causing dehumanization is depersonalization, which is one of the symptoms of anorexia and consists in disturbing the experience of corporeality. In the stories of ill women, there are many conclusions about the separateness of the body from the self, about its strangeness. Splitting the body and mind, the feeling of disintegration is accompanied by a

separation from one's past self, by losing the memory of one's self from before the onset of the disease. The loss of knowledge about one's own appearance, interests, features and relationships leads to a sense of alienation from oneself. Finally, in extreme cases, these people lose their identity or define it only as anorexic: 'I am the anorexia, this is my identity'¹¹ (Malson, 1998, p. 147).

Biopolitics or already *homo* necroviolence?

The concept of necroviolence gained scholarly elaboration in 2015 thanks to the anthropologist Jason De Leon, who defines this phenomenon as 'violence carried out through special treatment of corpses, perceived by the perpetrator and/or the victim ... as derogatory, sacrilegious or inhumane' (Orzeszek, Rosiek, 2022, p. 1). Following the researcher's diagnosis, I would like to consider whether political actions on 'skeletons,' 'the living dead,' such as anorexics, are only biopolitics or also *homo* necroviolence. However, I would not mean violence perpetrated on a dead body, but actions on a half-dead subject that lead to the death of people suffering from anorexia. These oppressive practices do not work directly on the body but are located in the exclusion and limitation of accessibility. It should be emphasized that, other than depression, anorexia is characterized by the highest mortality rate among all mental illnesses, not only due to somatic complications and suicide decisions,¹² I believe, but also due to the specific health and education policy of the state. Therefore, the fundamental problem lies in systemic solutions, or rather their absence.

The number of psychiatric hospitals with units for individuals with eating disorders is so limited that they usually end up on general wards lacking in specialized care such as psycho-dietetics. The waiting time for admission is

at least a year, and the units and clinics set specific admission criteria for patients.¹³ An example of this common practice can be seen in the conditions outlined by the Clinic for Neuroses and Eating Disorders at the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology in Warsaw. Before an individual with an illness is added to the waiting list, they must undergo a qualifying interview to determine, among other things, their motivation for getting better. In the case of eating disorders, patients planning to be admitted to a 24-hour ward must have a BMI above 14.5 (similar conditions are set by general psychiatric hospital units). Individuals with anorexia may also attempt to gain admission to gastroenterological or endocrinological wards, though these do not provide psychotherapy. Another option is treatment at a few very costly private clinics. Additionally, there is the possibility of individual psychotherapy, funded by the National Health Fund, but this entails a minimum one-year waiting period, while similarly, the private route of treatment also exceeds the budgets of many citizens. In Poland, there is a lack of learned societies devoted to eating disorders, in contrast to Western European countries. Education in this area is treated marginally, resulting in minimal societal awareness and a scarcity of specialists.

This brief outline of the situation of people suffering from anorexia shows their entanglement in the violent actions of biopower (see Foucault, 1998). The entire repertoire of failures, systemic condemnation to life in disease, despite the existence of measures to counteract psychopathologies, is a form of biopolitics. This is also related to decisions on drug reimbursement, access to tests or treatment. The fact that psychiatry is the most neglected medical sector, that knowledge about anorexia is negligible, that no statistics are kept or data collected¹⁴ is the result of specific political arrangements.

These are practices that not only control the body and life, but also condemn to death subjects who are useless to society; these people very often do not work or drop out of school due to their health, and therefore are not economically productive. I think it is also worth considering the gender role of women; according to Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu or Michel Foucault, depending on our biological sex, our bodies are given specific meanings and specific requirements are imposed on them, which emerge in response to social expectations addressed to both women and men. Not without significance is the fact that anorexia affects mainly women, so perhaps that is why it is underestimated and considered a whim. In many countries, including Poland, women are still perceived in terms of their role in reproduction.¹⁵ This is evident in the actions of the government: simply look at the tightening of the anti-abortion law in 2021 or the state's pro-family policy encouraging an increase in the number of offspring. One of the symptoms of anorexia is the loss of menstruation and the difficulty in restoring normal hormonal balance, which results in infertility. When a woman's body is in a state of destruction, it is difficult to talk about the implementation of procreative proposals, so the anorexic does not fulfil the imposed role of a parent/mother. That is why the lack of specialists and public centres supporting treatment seems so meaningful if we think of anorexics as reproductively 'useless' individuals. At this point, I would like to emphasize that I am not putting forward the thesis that the government's actions are aimed at the deliberate liquidation of people suffering from anorexia, because those actions are unable to increase demographics. I just want to signal that one should look at the motivations behind the state's health policy, which results in the elimination of sick, weak and economically non-productive individuals.

Causes, goals, means and scale are key issues when discussing the

difference between biopolitics and necropolitics or, more broadly, necroviolence. Achille Mbembe, radicalising Foucault's concept of biopolitics, introduced the notion of necropolitics, which he defined as the 'contemporary form of subordination of life to the power of death.' It represents a form of governance that takes death as its main objective and targets civilians (see Mbembe, 2018). Radicalism would entail more specific methods and greater impact compared to biopolitics, which, despite its hypocritical premise of controlling life and building a healthy, productive society, results in death as a kind of unintended side effect. According to Foucault, what characterises biopolitics is primarily the affirmation of the body-population, which involves ensuring that no dangers emerge within it (Foucault, 1998). Would individuals with anorexia be such a danger? I believe so, considering the significant increase in cases in recent years¹⁶ and the activities of the pro-ana community. This environment, mostly found online, supports and encourages destructive weight loss; sharing photos, thoughts, methods of (not) eating, and exercise routines, as well as offering critical and affirming comments about one's own body. It is a movement that promotes anorexia as a lifestyle rather than an illness. Pro-ana is growing each year, gaining more and more followers.

I believe that the stakes in attempting to discuss biopolitics or necropolitics would involve not only ruthlessness and radicalism but also intentional action. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether the countless failures and systemic methods concerning individuals with anorexia constitute a form of biopolitics or even *homo* necroviolence. However, in my opinion, it is worth introducing discussions about the status of anorexic individuals as subjects of *homonecros*.

2. From the body, through the body and on the body

Homo necroperformance

I refer to an encounter with an anorexic individual as a *homo necroperformance* not only due to the spectacle of the body of *homo necros*, which we observe with a mixture of curiosity, disgust, shame and shock, much like the bodies of performers in body art.¹⁷ What I consider fundamental to the *homo necroperformance* is the embodied action at the intersection of life and death, with its cognitive and political potential and of an affective nature. I would like to discuss two fields of action by anorexic individuals, while noting that they are not separate performances but rather illuminate the *homo necroperformance* from different angles. The first context pertains to the practices that anorexic individuals carry out on their own bodies, while the second context relates to how an anorexic individual affectively influences the observer through her body, eliciting somatic reactions.

Homo necroperformance subversion

The self-destructive practices by which anorexics push their bodies can be interpreted as acts of resistance,¹⁸ subject to 'daily trials and repetitions in the public and private spheres' (Taylor, 2014, p. 22). As mentioned earlier, an anorexic individual is someone who has 'internalized cultural appearance standards and applies them meticulously,' to an extreme degree. This recognition, according to Susie Orbach, does not necessarily position anorexic individuals as victims of a patriarchal world. As demonstrated by Susie Orbach, the behaviours of anorexic individuals are not characterized

by submission but by opposition and action. According to the psychoanalyst, anorexia is a form of protest, manifesting not through withdrawal but through continuous engagement in shaping one's own embodiment reflectively (Giddens, 2001, p. 147).

Strictly counting the calories of each product, exhausting regular exercise, eating one meal or product slowly, cutting food into small pieces, setting specific times of the day and times for meals, recording the progress of weight loss, regularly weighing and measuring. All this ritualization of activities performed for the benefit of the body always has its own rhythm, place and time; it is discursive and repetitive; it is brutal, exhausting, but also obsessive behaviour. All these practices may be associated with resistance to socially and politically imposed cultural scenarios that objectify women and impose specific care and educational roles on them (see Rojek, Opoczyńska, 2014, p. 301). The anorexic could express opposition to traditionally understood femininity, social roles, but also to gender divisions into two sexes. 'For example, a skinny anorexic body can be experienced as sexually attractive or as childish and sick. Or as androgynous and boyish at the same time' (Józefik, 2014, p. 116). The disappearance of menstruation and female body proportions means a 'regression' of the woman's body to the period before puberty, or a halting of the process of reaching puberty, which shows that the anorexic is not only in the liminal phase between life and death, but is accompanied by a gender-identity suspension of the continuity of being. From a biological point of view, an anorexic is not a woman (she lacks female tertiary sexual characteristics), but she is not a man either, thus breaking with the binary understanding of gender identities.

Katarzyna Szopa, referring to, for example, the views of Orbach and Malson,

raises the issue of various interpretations of the actions of anorexic women (see Szopa, 2014). Writing about 'mismatched' bodies,¹⁹ the author draws attention to their subversive potential. Therefore, one can ask whether rebellion against one's own body can also be a gesture of resistance against the rules imposed by the patriarchal system. Medical sociologist Maria Adamczyk ponders a similar issue, considering whether anorexia is a manifestation of opposition to the binding canons of beauty, the requirements of sexual attractiveness, constructs of femininity and girlhood, imposed gender and social roles, or perhaps it is about extreme conformity to these requirements, orders and restrictions. Submissive, disciplined or subversive bodies?

One example of a bodily practice that can be seen as a subversive performance is training in public; the anorexic undertakes exhausting exercise not only at home, but also at the gym or in the park. Training an emaciated body grabs the attention of the audience of a given place, shifting its meaning. The gym is a place where the goal is to take care of one's health, but it can also be seen as a place of oppression, where bodies are shaped to meet the aesthetic standards of modern culture. An anorexic exercising at the gym not only creates a spectacle of her own corporeality but dismantles the patriarchal system from within. She sabotages its operation, 'damaging' the machine that is supposed to produce athletic and shapely bodies. The very appearance of a physiognomy that is not normative for this space is a gesture of rebellion, which through intensive training is forged into a *homo* necroperformance of subversion. Another such place where anorexic practices of the body become a public, subversive performance is school. A scene from an episode of *Skins*²⁰ shows anorexic teen Cassie talking to her friend Sid. In the school cafeteria over lunch, the boy asks the girl how she manages to hide her illness: 'Come on, Cass, you

never eat anything. Your parents must have noticed something,' he says. The teenager decides to divulge her 'method,' takes away Sid's plate with his meal and begins to cut the food vigorously, talking constantly. As she lifts the fork to her lips, she distracts the boy by asking him questions, sharing her food, engaging in conversation. Cassie eats nothing and her plate lies filled with mixed-up food. The boy is impressed by the methods of masking, but after a while, as if speaking to himself, he says: 'This is fucked up,' and he probably does not mean the strategy that the girl has showed him. What seems surprising is the answer of the ever-nice and charming Cassie, who says with an ironic smile: 'You know what? It's like it's nobody's fucking business.' The girl's reaction seems to me to be extremely significant, as it is a strong expression of opposition not so much to the boy's evaluative comment as to patriarchy. Cassie resists the appropriation of her body; as she says, it is only her business. It is also worth noting the whole performance that the girl performs in the canteen in front of one spectator; I think it is easy to imagine similar camouflaging practices being performed in front of many people. Does the fact that we cannot see the reactions of others in the cafeteria mean that there could not have been any? And if so, what kind? Did those present not notice Cassie's behaviour? After all, from the very beginning, a surprised Sid says that her parents must have noticed that Cassie has a problem. It turns out that having a very low body weight and not eating is as suggestive and performative as people suffering from obesity eating in public. Not eating is not a lack of action, as it might seem, but a causative practice, which, combined with a frail and emaciated body, never goes unnoticed, almost becoming a spectacle.

Social media are also becoming an important public space for *homo* necro-performance, with blogs, videos and photographs of anorexic women

appearing on Internet portals. These places engage not only supporters of the pro-anamovement, but a wide range of Internet users who manifest their disagreement with the presence of thin bodies in public spaces and convey affective feelings. These media performances are special because they show the inseparability of the *homo* necro-performance of subversion with the affective *homo* necro-performance. Affective reactions followed, for example, the *No-anorexia* campaign, in which Isabelle Caro, an anorexia sufferer, took part. Photographs of the naked model appeared on billboards and in magazines the day before Milan Fashion Week in 2007. Reactions to the photo showing a drastically thin body were so strong that the campaign was almost immediately banned by the Italian advertising authority ('Italy Bans,' 2007). Despite this, Caro became famous; she appeared in the public media many times and blogged regularly, which provoked extreme, emotional comments. Even Oliviero Toscani himself, who photographed Caro for the campaign, stated after her death: 'She wanted to be a star, she craved fame, she even died for this idea! Idiot. I regret that today everyone knows her name thanks to this picture. ... I should have put a mask on her head, a bag over her head' (Oliviero Toscani, 2015).

The way disgust emerges in the context of affective coupling and how challenging it is to interact with an anorexic body are perfectly evident in the reactions to Eugenia Cooney's activities. In social media, the twenty-eight-year-old American publishes videos whose content is located in the sphere of the emo subculture. Cooney mainly presents gothic stylizations, shows recently purchased clothes, creates makeup tutorials, talks about her private life in video blogs, but rarely mentions her illness. As of 2011, she has attracted over two million subscribers and a wide audience. The influencer evokes extreme emotions: on the one hand, she has become an icon and inspiration for the pro-ana community, which affirms her slimness

and encourages, supports and motivates her to maintain her low weight; on the other, there are reactions filled with concern for her health, and then, in addition, voices are heard calling for the influencer's account to be blocked²¹ or encouraging her to give up her social media activities. All these suggestions and proposals register the affective reactions to the anorexic physicality:

Everytime i see her i feel physically sick. I get so nauseous it feels like im looking at a dead body. the way her skin just wrapsaround the bone. and how the skin on her armit streches, fuck, it just makes me wanna puke [sic].²²

In the whole range of resonating difficult intensities, not only a feeling of disgust emerges, but also a strange kind of discomfort mixed with shock, astonishment constrained by helplessness, fear and incomprehension intertwined with shock. We can speak of emotions that originate from a bodily reaction - nausea, headache, chills. If looking at Cooney hurts, breaks your heart,²³ it means that it is extremely difficult to pass by a ravaged body unaffected. It is a way of feeling that cannot be put into exact wording, yet it hurts and hurts, and at the same time repels and disgusts.

A few more, similar examples of media spectacles showing, on the one hand, resistance to the standards of beauty and, on the other, the affective agitation of a wide Internet audience could be listed. Yet, if the media-mediated images of anorexic bodies already evoke a whole range of 'ugly' feelings in the recipients, then imagine the explosion of emotions when faced with an anorexic in real life.

Affective *homo necro*performance

The most important causative forces regulating the intensity of the perception of the physicality of *homo necros* are actual proximity to and length of time spent around the devastated body. I consider these two categories important because it brings home the details of the devastated physicality as an intense emotional experience. The reaction that is produced during a meeting with a devastated anorexic body is very individual; therefore, recognizing such personal experience as a valuable source of knowledge allows these feelings to gain wider attention. What is felt, combined with theory, can give a fuller picture of the story of anorexics as *homo necro*performers. In this context, I consider my personal, close encounters with anorexics of a few years ago to be affective *homo necro*performance. The performative character would consist in the agency of the bodies of anorexic women. This is realized through agitation, and I am interested in that word in its noun and verb form because, first, it is an affective agitation that has left psycho-corporeal traces in me and fostered an embodied knowledge of the disease. Secondly, in the context of cultural research, I can agitate for the subject of anorexia to gain wider prominence. Yes, I am doing this by writing this text, but it would not have been possible without meeting these anorexic bodies.

The sight of limbs devoid of muscle tissue, bones surrounded by a thin layer of skin is shocking. The head seems disproportionately large compared to the frail body, as are the clothes that hang loosely from the shoulders. Whenever I met an anorexic in public, I never saw an uncovered body, not even in the heat of summer. The reason for this lies in anorexia's effect of causing hypothermia and the constant perception of being cold, and thus the need to cover up, even in warm conditions. However, it was only during the

first, close and prolonged meeting that I felt disorientation and shock. I remember holding my breath for a long time, as if afraid that the slightest puff of air might blow over their frail body at any moment. With each subsequent contact, my throat tightened, probably in response to the fear of death, of which anorexics were the image. Then I realized that it is not without reason that in media publications and in colloquial speech they are described as the 'living dead,' as 'walking death' or 'skeletons.'

These connotations not only refer to *homo necros* but are inevitably associated with a reaction of disgust to anorexic bodies. From the uneven handwriting in my notebook, I read memories that tell of the shivers on the skin and the nausea caused by the sight of worn faces, yellowed teeth and the feeling of a specific, sour body smell. Julia Kristeva (2007), writing about the causes and reasons for the emergence of this disgust, similarly to Sara Ahmed (see 2014), points to the fear of crossing physical limits, of the outside entering the inside. Disgust comes when the almost-anatomical is brutally shown to us; something we usually do not see, but now the disappearing fat and muscle layers reveal what has been hidden until now – bones that look as if they are about to break through the skin, but also the lines of blood vessels wandering over the body and face. Blue veins are as visible as the changes to the skin that leave it a sallow, grey complexion: acne, abscesses, psoriasis – the decomposition leaves traces in the form of dead skin and nail chips. There are wounds in the corners of the mouth, and the lips are covered with blisters full of sticky liquid which seals them; the notion of the corpse is evident. Widely spaced teeth and dull eyes are the dominant components on the small faces of these young girls. Hair, brittle and thin, revealing pale strands of the scalp, attracts attention and repels at the same time. Hair loss is compensated by lanugo, so the back, neck, forearms and face of the girls are covered with a fluffy nap. The softness of

the hair in combination with the dry, porous and rough structure of the skin is a peculiar property of the anorexic body. It was odd enough that when I touched the forearm of one of the girls, the familiar, experientially stored expectation fell short, as if all reference values were exhausted, expired. These numerous, peculiar bodily anomalies meant that when I was among anorexics, I experienced complicity in the process of self-annihilation by these necromonsters.

Anorexia is often combined with bulimic behaviour, the effects of which are also visible on the body. The frequent proximity of the incisors to the back of the fingers, resulting from provoking the gag reflex, leaves abrasions and calluses (Russell's sign). In contrast, the increased contact of the bones of the spine with the ground during intense exercise rubs the skin, creating bloody wounds. I saw such a back once, by chance, when the door of the medical office was ajar during the morning weigh-in. The image was so paralyzing that I could not look away. I had the feeling of a specific fascination with a view usually hidden from my eyes.

The faces evoked a similar amalgam of disgust, amazement and fascination: the high cheekbones, sharp jawline, sunken cheeks and huge, bulging eyes. The deathly pale colours of the face often took on a yellow-orange hue (carotenoderma) that also spread to other areas of the body. The skin tones of the hands, feet, nose and ears; except for the yellows, they turned bluish, as the result, I believe, of disturbances to blood circulation and thermoregulation. Low body temperature and hypothermia are a syndrome of death. Anaemia caused by iron deficiency results in poor blood clotting and bruises, accompanying diseases and disorders such as scabies, diarrhoea, osteoporosis, hypothermia and depression manifested through self-mutilation. I vividly remember shivering at the sight of fresh scars from

deep wounds on one of the girls' forearms and neck. I later found out they were the result of a suicide attempt. The devastated and scarred body is not only a harbinger of death, but also a carrier of a liminal state of limbo. It is the sight of a veritable disintegration – a corpse – that is the highest kind of abject for Kristeva.

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. ... No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. ... If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a boarded that has encroached upon everything. ... The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. (1982, p. 3).

The degraded perception of anorexic women is not just about the sight of a devastated body; it is not merely a spectacle of destruction and ruin. The point is what this decay evokes. The dying body of anorexic women appears disgusting because it is a manifestation of death – repulsed and repulsive at the same time. *Homo necros* is death that ravages life, interfering with what is alive in our world (ibid., p. 3). The 'walking death' weakens the boundaries

of the integrity and identity of the subject who comes into contact with it. This half-dead matter disturbs the delicate fabrics of life, it wants to transcend life while preserving it. 'What is disgusting is what disturbs identity, system, order. That which does not respect boundaries, places, rules. A certain in-between, ambiguous, mixed' (ibid., p. 3). The 'Living Corpse' is a subject that, extending beyond life, does not yet enter the space of death, and thus becomes an abject border. It breaks the rules of existence - not only its own, but also of those people close to me. Because how should one deal with one's own functioning and sustaining one's life processes when death is personified? When there is no sign of vitality, when contact is broken because mental acuity has disappeared, because pulse and speech have slowed down?

All the visible features of an anorexic body, physically ill, make these people appear as liminal subjectivities. The sight of an anorexic body and interacting with it are quite simply violent sensations. This term was introduced by Agnieszka Dauksza, who writes about the violent effect of art and affective literature, which 'activates the viewer through a strong, sometimes shocking impact' (2017, p. 338). In this case, this suggestive activation, this violent agitation, with feelings stretched over time, sees meanings and associations emerging and materializing as a result of the considerations presented here. I would like both the substantive and emotional value of this text to influence the reader, thus contributing to the broadening of social awareness.

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Footnotes

1. The concept was introduced and defined for the first time by Dorota Sajewska in 2015, through the article 'Nekroperformans,' 2015. Subsequently, Sajewska introduced the term into English-speaking circulation in the essay 'Postmortal Life of Savages: Witkiewicz and Malinowski Disinterred,' 2016. The concept reached full maturity in the book *Necroperformance: Cultural Reconstruction of the Theatre of the Great War*, 2016 (English edition 2019). Also, see Sajewska, 'Archaeology of Abortion Trauma,' 2017; Sajewska, 'Nekroperformans. Teoria jako resztki,' 2018; Sajewska, 'Niewolnictwo poza grób. Od nekropolityki do nekroperformansu,' 2022. It is also worth noting texts that utilize Sajewska's concept, e.g. Boruszkowska, 'Necroperformance of the Avant-Garde or Theorizing Death in Paul Mann's *Critical Project*,' 2021.
2. In-depth sociocultural analyses and extensive research on anorexia have been conducted by Susan Bordo, Julie Hepworth, Susie Orbach, Helen Malson and Elspeth Probyn, among others.
3. Autoethnography is a developed and quite extensive research method (but also an artefact), which performs various functions depending on the choice of the subject of research and the research process and the narrative practices selected. However, the core of the diverse perspectives is the 'fusion between autobiography and ethnography'; the merging of the personal with the cultural and social through the introspective approach of the researcher. In my case, I use analytical and evocative autoethnography. See Kacperczyk, 2014; Szwabowski, 2019.
4. Domańska distinguishes between negative and positive dehumanization; the latter would involve incorporating decomposed remains into the ecosystem and recognizing their biological potential in creating an '*oecumene* of various life forms' and a multi-species

community.

5. The complexity of the relationship between patients and employees of hospital institutions was discussed by, for example, Agnieszka Dauksza. See Dauksza, 2021.

6. This type of disciplinary practices can be witnessed in YouTube videos. See, e.g. Julia Sanczenko, ANOREXIA-my story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UtBDndhuPE> [accessed: 7.02.2023].

7. See, e.g. Zagórski, 2022.

8. Malson adds: 'And the widespread attention that many girls and women (both those diagnosed as anorexic and others) give to the details of their food and body weight can similarly be understood in terms of a normalizing gaze, as critical self-examination, as a process that disciplines through self-surveillance, measurement and comparison with a norm or, rather, with a fictive norm, an 'ideal'.

9. *Thin*, directed by Lauren Greenfield (2006), available on HBO Max.

10. See e.g. *Rozmowy w toku*,

<https://player.pl/programy-online/rozmowy-w-toku-odcinki,63/odcinek-2311,S07E2311,28963>, [accessed:7.02.2023].

11. And the physician there refused to listen to all my bantering on about food or anything like that [...] And it was as if he said well you know: yeah OK I don't want to hear about your anorexia. I want to hear about you. And I started thinking: But I am the anorexia./H: mm/This is my identity ... it had actually become my identity /H: mm (.) yeah/ and I think that's that's a problem with it. /H: mm/ I think it becomes (.) can become an all-consuming identity.

12. It is worth noting that, since 2016, suicidology studies have been conducted at the Faculty of 'Artes Liberales' of the University of Warsaw, indicating an increase in suicides in Poland in recent years. See e.g. *Nikt nie chce umierać. Autodestrukcja w perspektywie kulturowej*, 2022.

13. The guidelines that must be met by the patient on the day of admission to the clinic can be found on the website of the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology (Neurosis, Personality and Eating Disorders Clinic).

<https://ipin.edu.pl/o-instytucie/dzialalnosc-lecznicza/psychiatria/> [accessed: 7.02.2023].

14. From the website of the Ministry of Health and the National Health Fund: 'In Poland, no extensive epidemiological research on this subject has been conducted, but it is estimated that anorexia may affect 0.8-1.8% of girls under the age of 18,'

<https://pacjent.gov.pl/zapobiegaj/anoreksja-i-bulimia> [accessed: 31.12.2022].

15. Lucy Irigaray, among others, wrote about the 'reproductive use value' of women in the context of economic exploitation and violence within the oppressive capitalist-patriarchal system in 2003.

16. Over the past fifty years (see J. Treasure et al., 2020), the number of cases of anorexia and bulimia has significantly increased. According to research published in 2019 (see M. Galmiche et al., 2019, p. 1402-1413), while eating disorders affected 3.5% of the global population between 2000 and 2006, between 2007 and 2012 this number rose to 4.9%, and between 2013 and 2018 the prevalence of these disorders reached 7.8% of the global population. Narodowe Stowarzyszenie Anoreksji i Zaburzeń Towarzyszących (the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders) reports that this issue currently affects at least 9% of the world's population. Statistical data can also be found on the association's website. See <https://anad.org/eating-disorders-statistics/>.

17. Bogna Olszewska discussed anorexic individuals as body-art performers in her article

- 'The Spectacle of Corporeality. Can Anorexia be Called Body Art?' in 2009. Meanwhile, the referenced Maria Adamczyk associates the spectacle of anorexia with a contemporary variation of the 'freak show.' The phenomenon of displaying emaciated bodies and the fascination with practices of extreme food restriction require separate analysis, especially when considering the scale of phenomena like the 'fasting girls' in the 16th to 19th centuries or the phenomenon of starving circus performers (Józefik, 2014, p. 79).
18. As Diana Taylor notes, the term 'performance' can be a kind of methodological lens that allows us to analyze various types of phenomena as performances, including, for example, acts of resistance. See Taylor, 2014.
19. One of Szopa's theses on bulimia seems to be especially important. The author points out that it is the subject of anorexia that is of greater interest to researchers, while bulimia is marginalized even in feminist studies. This realization seems to reveal a burning, massive problem not only of anorexia or bulimia, but also of various other types of eating disorders - hitherto overlooked or poorly recognized in academic discussions.
20. The scene I am writing about can be viewed on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8yIqhHPr70&t=258s> [accessed: 7.02.2023].
21. In 2016, an online petition was created that garnered over 18,000 signatures and was intended to temporarily block Cooney's activities.
22.
https://www.reddit.com/r/EUGENIACOONEY/comments/tq5a6u/i_know_its_bad_to_say_but_i_genuinely_find/ [accessed: 28.12.2022].
23. Also it hurts to look at her, not so much because of her appearance but because I kind of imagine how she might feel about herself and others. It is so damn sad it breaks my heart.
https://www.reddit.com/r/EUGENIACOONEY/comments/tq5a6u/i_know_its_bad_to_say_but_i_genuinely_find/ [accessed: 28.12.2022].

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/ HACKING PATRIARCHY

Hacking Patriarchy: Post-Cyberfeminism in the Work of Florentina Holzinger

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The aim of the article is to analyse two performances by the Austrian choreographer Florentina Holzinger - *TANZ* and *Ophelia's Got Talent* based on post-cyberfeminist manifestos and Paul B. Preciado's book *Testo Junkie*. The artist and the researchers deal with the relationship between body and technology. Through technology they deconstruct body, sexual identity and gender. The author of the article attempts to name the research and artistic strategies used by the aforementioned authors.

Keywords: Florentina Holzinger; post-cyberfeminism; body; technology; manifesto

A biometallic embodiment can thus be reconceived as a literally 'grounded' embodiment. Deleuze and Guattari's free-floating, liquid 'Body without Organs' becomes significantly less plastic with the addition of metal appendages... In increasing the body's physical strength, metal simultaneously increases its strength of gravitational pull downward, toward the earth. (Dixon, 2007)

There are two kinds of posthumanism. The first one, practiced mainly within the academia, focuses on speculative narratives – creating visions of the future and modern societies on the basis of elements formerly considered ‘weak,’ such as care, collectiveness, polyphony and empathy. Careful observation of how technology grows into the earth’s tissue, the creation of posthuman assemblages, emergent nanocultures (cf. Haraway, 2003) and feminist technocultures (cf. Domańska, 2014). The second, closer to transhumanist practices and dominating in performance arts, revolves around the body – stripping it naked, fashioning it into a virtual object, cloning and simulating it, transforming it into a being that is more than human through implants and other improvements or impediments. The work of the Austrian choreographer Florentina Holzinger fits the second category. I am writing about a form of domination in cultural circles; the academic discourses do not necessarily avoid the hybrid body, and performative arts do make use of critical posthumanist thought. The two currents intertwine, both in academic texts and on the stage.

The Palme d’Or award for Julia Ducournau’s *Titane* will definitely be regarded as a watershed moment for posthumanist feminism.¹ The film tells the story of a woman who gets into a cyborg pregnancy as a result of sexual intercourse with a car. As she is a serial killer wanted by the authorities, she goes into hiding by adopting the identity of a man lost many years ago. The act of hiding, also on the level of physiology, by means of binding the abdomen and breasts with bandage, allows for a precise enumeration of questions linked to the discipline and regime of the female body. *Titane*, as well as Holzinger’s performance, are a consequence of a yet unnamed cyberfeminist turn in performative arts and popular culture, with keywords such as ugly emancipation, subjectification through objectification, women-motorbikes/cars/helicopters (women appropriating typically ‘male’ attributes

and toys), unaestheticized women.

In Ducournau's and Holzinger's work bodies are abjectal. During the cyborg birth in *Titane*, the protagonist secretes not blood, but car oil, and in one of Holzinger's stage works, the performer vomits a substance strangely similar to faeces (nobody removes the secretions until the end of the performance, so they become an integral element of the stage landscape). Bodies evoke disgust and their technological deformation causes a strong feeling of discomfort in the theatre and film audiences. I will examine two performances originating from Holzinger (the artist does not identify as a director), *TANZ* from 2020 and the most recent one, *Ophelia's Got Talent* from September 2022, using the (post)cyberfeminist creed: *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Isolation*, the manifesto of the international labour group Laboria Cuboniks and the book *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* by the American curator Legacy Russell. I also feel an affinity to the concept of technobodies (derived from *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, which is not a manifesto, but its political and emancipatory force prevents me from thinking about it in other categories) created by the Spanish philosopher Paul. B. Preciado, responsible for the theory of the pharmacopornographic regime, a particular section of biocapitalism. The above publications will allow me to grasp the complex relationship between the body, gender and technology in the 21st century. Using a manifesto as a methodological tool can seem experimental, but my choice was based on the necessity of finding something as radical as the visions of Holzinger, Ducournau and other queer artists aiming to hack the patriarchy by constructing hybrid cyborg identities.

The factions I have chosen: xeno-, glitch- and technocyberfeminism, are some of the many subgenres of the movement; one may also distinguish

cyberfeminism 2.0, black cyberfeminism, Arab cyberfeminism, afrofuturism, hackfeministas or transhackfeminism. I consider the theories devised by Laboria Cuboniks, Legacy Russell and Paul B. Preciado as the most suitable for an analysis of Holzinger's dance performances and her strategies of hacking the body and gender. However, before I start the discussion of the performances themselves, I will present a short history of cyberfeminism which will answer the question why the present representatives of the movement separate themselves so strongly from its founders.

The clitoris as a time machine, or the cyberfeminism of the nineties

Cyberfeminism is preoccupied with the relationship between the body and the machine, using new technologies in its fight against social exclusion and discrimination. Cyberfeminists believe that technologies had been shaping our bodies and identities long before the appearance of systems modifying the workings of the human body (both bypasses or hearing aids and devices mutating cognitive processes). However, there is a significant difference between the ideas of the pioneers and the shape of the movement today. In the nineties, the cyberfeminists glorified the female body, particularly its intimate parts. The Australian collective VNS Matrix wrote in *The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century*: 'we are the future cunt / We are the modern cunt / positive anti reason / unbounded unleashed unforgiving / we see art with our cunt we create art with our cunt /... the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix.' Old Boys Network (OBN), a group established in Berlin, is another example of cyberfeminism growing out of second wave feminism.² Despite its short, merely four-year-long existence, they have been able to organize the First Cyberfeminist Internationale in

Kassel in 1997. In their understanding, cyberfeminism is a system for hacking the gender code ('embodied' in the binary metric) into which our 'databodies,' faces and interfaces are inscribed. They aimed at dealing not only with the 'zeroes' and 'ones,' but also the openings between the digits. They focused on the computer culture and its impact on corporeality. In *100 Antitheses* they built the definition through negation - cyberfeminism is not: 'ideology,' 'error 101,' 'a non-smoking area,' 'an empty space,' 'a trauma,' 'a fragrance,' 'a picnic,' 'science fiction,' 'horror' or 'about boring toys for boring boys.' Interestingly - in the context of my later reflections on Holzinger - it is not abject either. Helen Hester (a member of Laboria Cuboniks) notes that this kind of antilabelling was desirable and inclusive in its time. Finally, the Woman stopped being the main bond keeping the movement together - practically everything, from membership to status, depended on individual preference, which perfectly suited the more and more popular neoliberal narrative of the liberated individualist consumer. Even though the disidentification can still seem attractive, the scholar proposes the model of 'n hypotheses' - speculations on what cyberfeminism could be now: 'Xenofeminism seeks to be a mutable architecture that, like open source software, remains available for perpetual modification and enhancement following the navigational impulse of militant ethical reasoning' (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015). This infinite number of descriptions reminds that every political project aiming at emancipation should constantly revise its obligations.

'One is not born, but rather becomes, a body' -

the faces of postcyberfeminism

Postcyberfeminists call themselves the abolitionists of gender. Bodies that can be technologically expanded and modified are not – playing with the title of Judith Butler’s book – troubled by gender. By means of technology, such bodies skillfully move between the categories of male and female, constantly hacking gender. Such bodies are not only human. They integrate with technologies in many different ways, not always through direct intervention into skin tissue. It is more about a certain (virtual, technological) dismemberment, a constant subversion of the permanence of the body and sexual identity. For Preciado it will be the hormones (the writer conducts endocrinological experiments on his body and proposes using testosterone as a contraceptive, which – as he notes – could help women remain in heterosexual market for longer).³ Xenofeminists advocate appropriating and intercepting platforms earlier used to marginalize minority groups and deepen social inequalities: ‘There are incessantly proliferating tools to be annexed, and although no one can claim their comprehensive accessibility, digital tools have never been more widely available or more sensitive to appropriation than they are today’ (Laboria Cuboniks, 2015). Russell recommends fighting against the still active narrative about the Internet as an alternative reality, an ‘esoteric’ sphere which allows one to escape from real problems. On the contrary – accepting both dimensions, the virtual and the non-virtual (the scholar refers to the opposite of the virtual by means of the slang abbreviation AFK – *away from keyboard*; interestingly, she identifies the virtual with the act of writing, maybe even creating knowledge and subjectivity) could help dematerialize the body, which could thus stop being treated as a socio-cultural and political tool: ‘Feminist writer and activist Simone de Beauvoir is famous for positing “One is not born, but

rather becomes, a woman.” The glitch posits: One is not born, but rather becomes, a body’ (Russell, 2020).

The techno, glitch and xeno visions have as many common points as they have differences. The above-mentioned scholars are interested in the entanglement between the body and technology, but their descriptions of this relationship vary, as each of them understands it differently and sees different potentials for revolution and risks of catastrophe. What I see as significant in all three projects are their praise of error (visible in the strategies of hacking or introducing errors in quoting gender norms), noticing the strength in alienation (conceiving it as a force for resistance) and glorification of abjectivization,⁴ which serves to free the body of conventions, systems, binary narratives (I also see these features in Holzinger’s work). For the present article I have prepared a glossary table, a toolbox of sorts that can be referred to in the course of reading.

	Laboria Cuboniks	Legacy Russell	Paul B. Preciado
Error	Xenofeminists claim that no machinery is so permanent that it could not be examined by means of science and manipulated by means of technology. Everything can be tinkered with and hacked, disassembled and constructed anew.	Subversion through digital remixing. Dismantling gender by means of virtual tools. Strategies of nonperformance and refusal. ‘As glitch feminists, we inject our positive irregularities into these systems as errata, activating new architecture through these malfunctions, seeking out and celebrating the slipperiness of gender...’.	Getting hormones from the black market. Work on an archive: appropriation, moving that which had long been hidden into the light. A suggestion to make one’s own body and sexuality a living archive.

Alienation	Xenofeminists treat the strategy of alienation in an emergent way - as an 'impetus to generate new worlds'	A political project: ghosting the body. Virtual extension of the body (the concept of cosmic bodies). Creating valid virtual identities - avatars.	Alienation of heterosexuality: changing the language, moving it to the margins, seeing the category as 'one body aesthetic among many others, a retro reproductive style'.
Abject - abjectalization	XF is a refuge for persons who, at any point in their past, have been called 'unnatural' in relation to applicable norms. Xenofeminists enumerate trans and queer persons, persons with disabilities, those discriminated due to pregnancy or duties linked to child care.	The scholar notes that Black bodies are expected to take up less space. They are to be visible, but not heard. They are systematically removed, edited, ignored. If the Internet were to become a queer utopia, it would be able to hold all the bodies, those excluded because of race, class, gender and orientation.	It is Preciado's trans-body itself that becomes an abject, being an endocrinological experiment, not identifying as female or male, sweating due to the surplus of testosterone. Preciado calls his work 'body-essays' due to the symbiotic mixture of discourse with autobiographic inserts, often related to his sexual experiences.

TANZ

After *Recovery* and *Apollon*, *TANZ* serves as the closure of a performative trilogy devoted to the regime of the body. It is a plotless event in which the creators filter the male and pornographic gazes through a critical apparatus. They participate in an unsettlingly sexual ballet lesson conducted by an 80-year-old former dancer (Beatrice Cordua), the first person in the history of dance to perform in *The Rite of Spring* without any clothes. The teacher moves them through the subsequent positions, and the transition to the next exercise is signalled by taking off another article of clothing, until complete nudity. The performance is a pastiche of romantic ballet, emphasizing the artificiality of this kind of spectacle. It is lampooned as an object of pure perversion, serving to fulfil male pleasure. The identity of the ballerina is

situated between the penis and the fetish:

She looks *like* but isn't a penis. Her legs, her whole body become pumped up and hard yet always remain supple... She never twists or contracts. Her sudden changes of direction and shifts of weight, always erect, resemble the penis's happy mind of its own, its inexplicable interest in negligible incidents. Yet, clearly, she is not a penis; she is a woman whose leg movements symbolize those of a penis. (Foster, 1996)

The performers are women more or less linked with various dance theatres from all over Europe, but their bodies differ from the canon. Female bodies that are muscular, covered with tattoos, short or subjected to mastectomy, interrogate the essence of beauty, aestheticism and discipline - all elements of the ballet stage. In my interpretation, these bodies, not only different, but also fused with technological tissue, are technobodies created in the course of the performance:

The body is not passive living matter but a techno-organic interface, a technoliving system segmented and territorialized by different (textual, data-processing, biochemical) political technologies (Preciado, 2013)

Nude bodies naturally merge with metal, not in the sense of a prosthesis or implant, but in a harmonious coexistence. Two motorbikes are suspended above the stage. Initially covered with white sheets, they are revealed as the performance progresses. The dancers levitate in the air, clad in leather and metal, going on a symbolic journey towards technological emancipation in a

postcyberfeminist spirit. Almost all of Holzinger's performances feature vehicles - cars, motorcycles and even a helicopter in the most recent production. The technology built into the stage world reminds of the more and more popular slogan 'technology is the new nature' or, in a milder version, of the blurring of boundaries between the organic and inorganic, culture and nature.

The performers construct subjectivities based on progressive sexual politics. They blur the boundaries between the male and the female, teaching the viewers to experience the undressed body (which, despite the pornographic frame, is not erotic in nature). The actresses objectify themselves, tolerating the sexual, and sometimes even misogynistic remarks from Cordua, who constantly emphasizes the loftiness of the moment and her own affectiveness, particularly her physiological excitement. Initially she only remarks on the position of the body and the proper mechanics of motion, but in time she starts to exploit her position of power, verbally molesting the performers, patting their buttocks and performing 'pussy inspections.' This is an example of a subversive strategy, because on the one hand the male gaze is embodied by an eighty-year-old woman, long removed by society from the reproductive and social circulation (Preciado calls it the heterosexual market.)⁵ On the other hand, the performance is built in a strongly abjectal tone - the stage is filled with fluids, secretions, vomit, blood and urine. The beautiful, lofty, romantic image that should be conveyed by a ballet performance is constantly hacked by mismatched elements that can be performative, such as a 'witch' masturbating with a vacuum cleaner telescopic tube, or parts of the stage design: a bong lying on the sidelines, a huge red gaming chair, as well as the motorcycles hanging from the scaffolding.

Reflection on beauty is accompanied by experiments on the body. The fusion with metal happens literally, through intervention into skin tissue – one of the dancers is hanging by her skin, like Stelarc several decades ago, and another one by her hair. These ‘levitations’ happen simultaneously, and are significantly accompanied by the song *Crazy Frog*. Despite the irony and the spectacle, the experience is painful for the viewers. I feared for the condition of the performers, feeling complicit in what was happening on the stage.

Midway through the performance, there is a sudden interruption in the form of microparticipation. Holzinger enters the stage, holding a black bucket. She commends the courage and stubbornness of Polish citizens in their fight for reproductive rights against an ultra-conservative government, tells about the structure of Romantic ballet and ways in which it is deconstructed in the performance (in her performances, Holzinger often plays the role of a mother/guide showing the ins and outs of the world of the dance), asks for donations for the activist action she started, consisting in planting trees in Austria. In a way, the artist performs ecological blackmail – the performance will not continue until somebody gives a symbolic coin. A man from the first row starts a dialogue with Holzinger, drops twenty euros into the bucket and the dancers return to the technoperformance as if nothing happened.⁶

Ophelia's Got Talent

The title refers to the international TV talent show which has more than sixty local versions (in Poland it has been aired on the TVN channel since 2008). A three-member jury judges performances of people in several age categories, preceded by short conversations with the announcers, meant to build an affective reaction towards the participants in the audience. In the Berlin

performance there is a single announcer who arrives at the Volksbühne in a helicopter - two screens at the sides of the stage show the female Captain Hook (Annina Machaz) in the cockpit. Wearing only a linen shirt, she 'parachutes' and lands in front of the theatre building. A moment later, an exclusive black car arrives with the jurors, who are of course naked. The talent show starts with Sophie Duncan, a performer at the prestigious Cirque du Soleil. Her performance is interrupted for being 'too beautiful' - like in *TANZ*, beauty is marginalized as an outdated, inauthentic aesthetic. The next performer showing her unique abilities is the professional sword swallower Fibi Eyewalker. She swallows blades of different length and size, finally putting an endoscope in her mouth and performing a gastroscopy on herself. Initially, the diagnostic image shows her mouth and esophagus - a blue fluid she drank a moment before is trickling down its walls. Then the image becomes distorted and hacked, and her digestive tract is populated with floating blue cartoon fish. The sword swallower's performance is repulsive, but also fascinating due to its weirdness and atypicality. This is how William Miller wrote about the ambivalence of repulsion-abjection in *Anatomy of Disgust*:

And even as the disgusting repels, it rarely does so without also capturing our attention. It imposes itself upon us. We find it hard not to sneak a second look or, less voluntarily, we find our eyes doing 'double-takes' at the very things that disgust us. (1998)

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Sara Ahmed compares the object created as a result of disgust with a liminal object or a sexual fetish (2005). It is not only the emaciated, flexible body of a ballerina that can become the object of perversion, but also something apparently repulsive.

The performance revolves around motifs and archetypes linked to rivers, seas and oceans - everything that can be linked to water. It features a sailor's dance, a hydraulic striptease performed by a person of short stature (which also is a subversive-hacking strategy), the drowning of Ophelia, Leda's herstory, diving, a storm, a fountain, sirens, harpies, trout, sharks and many other elements of this kind. Before the performance, the interested viewers could get dictionaries printed on pink paper, meant to help in navigating through the thicket of meanings. Even though the verbal sphere is much more elaborate in comparison to *TANZ*, and it uses almost poetic German and English, I think the performance can be easily understood without knowledge of these languages, due to its humorous use of symbols. And, above all, because water serves to liberate the bodies from regimes and conventions, though in a slightly different way than in Holzinger's other performances. *Ophelia* is closer to hydrofeminism (cf. Neimanis, 2012) than cyberfemism, but also here the body is directly fused with metal, during the erotic, acrobatic dance on and with the helicopter. This scene reminded me of the famous article by the American culture critic Vivian Sobchak, *Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to Get Out of this Century Alive*, in which she shared her personal experience of becoming a cyborg body by getting a prosthesis as a result of an operation removing a cancer growth and amputating her leg. She writes about the ambivalence accompanying her technological transformation, but also emphasizes the eroticism of her 'new' identity:

I have also become a 'lean, mean machine.' The truth of the matter is that I feel more, not less attractive than I used to. Hard body (however partial) that I am, I feel more erotically distracting and distracted than I have in years (1995).

The choreography of bodies, diverse in terms of both color and perspective, made me think about the functioning of the female body in the patriarchal public sphere and how it is limited in comparison to the male body. The performers' bodies can be viewed (or rather peeped at, due to the nudity) in every possible variation, position and arrangement. Holzinger attempts to remove the taboo surrounding actions considered to be unaesthetic, undesirable, vulgar - all abject activities linked to bodily secretions. It goes from motions derived from dance and acrobatics to the everyday choreography of every human being. Because of that, every performance can be seen as an extreme, empirical anatomy lesson. The body becomes an object of research, exploration performed by the viewers, a stage exhibit - for a moment it objectifies itself, in order to become liberated from gender identification.

The stage design consists of three containers filled with water, each of a different size and depth. A huge fish tank standing on a pedestal occupies the back of the stage, a shallow sports pool with lanes stands in the middle, and a construction similar in shape and size to a phone booth is placed in the right corner. In the distance, there are musical instruments - two harps and a cello. Initially this landscape is ordered, strikingly clean and sterile. As the performance progresses, it turns into a dirty, chaotic, almost apocalyptic image. The transparent water turns red with artificial blood, plastic bottles fall from the ceiling, referring to the incoming climate catastrophe, and the stage is littered with microphones, clothes and accessories. In this frightening, but also spectacular mess, children will perform the dance of the last generation living on Earth.

Viewers who have seen *TANZ* at the New Theatre in Warsaw during the New Europe Festival in the autumn of 2021 could be surprised or even shocked

hearing about Holzinger's work with children. The vision of children running among naked performers smeared with artificial blood seems impossible to realize in contemporary Polish institutional theatre. The children were included because the performance is mostly participative (it should also be added that the girls did not take part in the extreme scenes, featuring real blood, or in sexual sequences).

Ophelia features more queer bodies than *TANZ*. The performers include a person of short stature, a person with trisomy 21, non-white persons, as well as pierced and tattooed persons (the presence of such bodies on traditional dance stages is sometimes still controversial). Non-normative bodies appear on the same terms as those conforming to the canon. Furthermore, giving the stage to the youngest performers is a strong political gesture. On the one hand, it objectifies them, but on the other it shows that what we give to the generations following us is a world full of terror, woven out of plastic and violence towards the human and non-human.

In the performance, participation works on many levels, not only in the representation of minorities I described above, but also in the direct call for participation addressed to the audience. It happens twice – the first person's task is to jump into the pool in their underwear (Captain Hook tries to 'bribe' the audience, offering a backstage selfie with the team), and the second will leave the performance with an anchor tattooed on their belly. Furthermore, the frame of television entertainment identifies the viewers as television audiences, who treat such bitter, deadly scenarios as their bread and butter. In *Ophelia*, the performers risk not only their health, but also their lives. The last performance of the talent show, which I intentionally omitted at the beginning, is the Harry Houdini's famous trick, an attempt to free oneself from chains under water. It is repeated by Netti Nüganen, an Estonian

actress and performer, who regularly collaborates with Holzinger. The last element she has to get rid of is a metal collar. When this proves too difficult and she makes gestures indicating suffocation, the performer accompanying her drops the camera and Holzinger jumps into the water, coming to the rescue. Even though the following scene and the whole performance suggest that the drowning has been faked, the silence caused by the scene (resulting from the conviction that somebody is actually dying as we watch) emphasizes the gravity of the situation.

Some techno-hope - a conclusion

Who, apart from Milo Rau, writes theatre manifestos in the 21st century? It would seem that the manifesto is a dead form. Between two subsequent ends of the world, we tend towards two extremes - narratives that are catastrophic or utopian. Somewhere on the way to a new way of posthumanist writing about the world (or rather with the world) he lost the sense of agency and revolution. The present generation of postcyberfeminists shows that this genre also deserves constant updates. The manifesto can adapt to the technoreality we function in without too much difficulty, as long as it is speculative in nature. X never equals x , but is a possibility of x . Not a negation, but a variable, fluid and related to the human and non-human, particularly the technological non-human.

The work of artists such as Holzinger or Julia Ducournau, mentioned at the beginning of the article (to show the broader phenomenon of the transfer of postcyberfeminist ideas to the performative arts, and sometimes even to mainstream culture) gives hope for a shift in the relationship with technology. The research and artistic strategies described here: alienation, abjectification and hacking, are capable of deconstructing the body and

gender, and subverting binarism, still inviolable in some circles. The nude body of the performer in Holzinger's performances is both a tool for deconstruction and a subject in itself. Initially the Austrian choreographer performed in costumes, and the decision to undress completely was a consequence of her development and the creation of a consistent artistic idea. How did she benefit from the nudity? I have not found any specific information in the interviews, critical texts and reviews; as a dance researcher I can only speculate about the benefits and dangers of undressing (at this stage of research I see no examples of the latter). Firstly, the naked body, even though it is never culturally 'clean', because, as Preciado wrote, it is a 'system territorialized by different political technologies', can become such for the duration of the performance. A body that can be written on; one that eludes all gender identification, because it is one of the many elements of the stage. A body-object, a stage exhibit, can be hacked, abjectified and alienated much more freely than a real body. Such an objectified body loses its gender and can easily form hybrid non-human identities; it transforms and adapts like a chameleon. Secondly, on the political and participatory level it familiarizes with the non-normative body, which is erased in culture, or, to use language more in tune with the digital domain, 'edited' (as Russell wrote about Black bodies) or represented as different, worse or uglier. In *TANZ* and *Ophelia's Got Talent* is not distinguished in any way, because all bodies - queer or not - are abjectified. Why is it then that I decided to read Florentina Holzinger's work through the focus of postcyberfeminism, and not disgust or abjection? I consider postcyberfeminism as a theory included in the critical philosophical project of posthumanism. Renewed reflection on the boundaries of humanity and the human, the functioning of humans in the ecosystem and their dependence on other organisms - human and non-human, including machines and technological apparatus - seems to me

particularly important in the context of climate change. A shift in perception and a growing sensitivity to all that does not fit the category of humanity should not be just another trend in performative arts and a transient methodology, but a paradigm shift in thinking, creativity and production of knowledge. Binarism is a thing of the past. As Preciado writes, following Donna Haraway: ‘...the twenty-first-century body is a technoliving system, the result of an irreversible implosion of modern binaries (female/male, animal/human, nature/culture)’ (2013, p. 44).

Translated by Paweł Schreiber

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Footnotes

1. After the publication of Donna Haraway’s ‘A Cyborg Manifesto,’ feminism extended to non-human subjects.
2. Initially, feminism promoted binarism and focused on the alledged superiority of bodies

identifying as male over female ones. However, it also excluded persons who did not fit the male–female opposition: queer, transsexual and intersexual persons. Not to mention the domination of White feminism. Legacy Russell writes: ‘Gender is predominantly a racial construct.’

3. Feminist researcher Adrienne Rich defines it as ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’

4. The term ‘object’ was popularized by the philosopher Julia Kristeva. She uses it to refer to all beings barred from the right to be subjects/objects. An object evokes disgust, it repulses and irritates, and does not fit the heteronorm. This category can include fantastical creatures – vampires, as well as queer persons or breast-feeding mothers; all beings that are culturally illegible.

5. ‘To calculate the true age of a woman in the heterocapitalist economy, it’s necessary to add fifteen years to make her equal to her male equivalent; then two years can be subtracted for each beauty advantage (breast size, thinness, length and thickness of the hair, etc.), and two years must be added for each social handicap (divorce, number of children – each counting two years more – unemployment, etc.)’ (Preciado, 2013).

6. The expression ‘technoperformance’ was first used by Jon McKenzie in his introduction to *Perform or Else... From Discipline to Performance*, describing the American Cold War machine, part of the extensive military-industrial complex. Although the origin of the term is military, technological performances have extended to the performative arts as well.

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/ MASCULINITIES: MAPPING THE FIELD

Reconfigurations of Masculinity in Recent Polish Theatre

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Based on selected performance pieces (including *Autobiografia na wszelki wypadek* [Autobiography Just in Case] by Michał Buszewicz, *Woyzeck* by Grzegorz Jaremko, *Chcieliśmy porozmawiać o męskości, ale zostaliśmy przyjaciółmi* [We Wanted to Talk about Masculinity, but We Became Friends] by the Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki, *Bromance* by Michał Przybyła and Dominik Więcek, *Halka* by Anna Smolar and *Ojcowie* [Fathers] by Błażej Biegasiewicz), the author analyzes transformations in the ways of representing masculinities in recent Polish theatre. In her opinion, it has been possible for the past few years to notice both a marked increase in interest in thematizing male emotionality, fragility, caring, tenderness or intimacy in Polish theatre and a radicalization of angry patriarchal masculinity, especially among those who reject the perspectives of institutional criticism or the #metoo movement. In this article, however, the author focuses solely on outlining the historical conditions that constituted patriarchal masculinity with all its qualities and on analyzing feminist-formed masculinities in Polish theatre using methodologies developed by feminist theorists (bell hooks and Karla Elliott) and by researchers associated with the field of critical studies of men and masculinities (Michael Kimmel, Raewyn Connell, Jason Wilson, Erik Anderson and Paco Abril).

Keywords: masculinities in Polish theatre; feminism; representation; toxic masculinity; patriarchy; care politics

1.

In recent years I have noticed two interconnected trajectories in Polish theatre. On the one hand, theatre-makers increasingly turn to male tenderness and intimacy, dialogue with phantasmagorical representations of hegemonic masculinity¹ (including stereotypical models of fatherhood) and problematize forms of male intimacy, erotic and non-erotic, and new types of emotional communities. They are more inclined to break down representations of toxic masculinity, defined by Michael Kimmel as a set of harmful, both for men and for society as a whole, cultural norms that legitimize and perpetuate negative behaviours involving dominance, aggression, violence and sexuality (1995). At the same time, we are witnessing a violent (and often public) radicalization of mad patriarchal masculinity,² particularly among those in denial of institutional criticism and of the #MeToo movement, and among some directors who struggle to accept the fact that they are no longer given *carte blanche* to use sexual harassment and psycho-physical violence as legitimate work methods in an artistic process presumed to produce masterpieces.

I mention the interplay between the two paths, because my position is not unlike that of Raewyn Connell, who has convincingly demonstrated that masculinities are not (and cannot be) essentialized or teased out of the contexts in which they are constructed, but they remain splintered, tangled and interdependent. Different types of masculinity produce, transform and define one another under the influence of an array of geopolitical, cultural, social, symbolic and economic factors and as a result of interaction or confrontation with other models of masculinity (2005).

I regard the radicalization of mad patriarchal masculinity in Polish theatre as

not unlike what Michael Kimmel refers to as aggrieved entitlement – that is, a set of mechanisms via which angry white men, consciously or unconsciously, nurture a sense of hurt stemming from having been stripped of their former economic status, power, privilege, attention and symbolic position, all of which have now been passed to women, non-binary individuals, queer persons, migrants, refugees and racial or ethnic minorities, as well as to men who do not conform to the standard of hegemonic masculinity (2013, p. 32). Driven by ‘aggrieved entitlement,’ these guardians of patriarchy and the *status quo* are characterized by anger, violence, resentment, refusal to adapt to new social norms and by affective and radical opposition to anti-discrimination policies.³

Examples from the Polish context are not particularly difficult to come by. One is Andrzej Chyra’s reply, widely reported in the media, to the question posed by a Campus Poland participant who asked him whether young artists should be taught social responsibility in schools. Not only did the actor answer the question in the negative, but he rose from his seat and exclaimed angrily,

Are you guys nuts? Are you now going to do a nationwide campaign [against] ‘violence in the theatre’? Excuse me but what’s the point? Who do you want to rip into with nationwide campaigns. This is totally sick,’ ‘do you want to teach artists how they should behave?’⁴

I mention this, because I want to outline certain trends and illustrate my observations, even if I do not intend to focus on examining the manifestations of mad patriarchal masculinity in contemporary theatre but to sketch the historical processes of constructing masculinity, which, as it

were, have institutionalized patriarchal ways of thinking about men and masculinities, the consequences of which we still live with today, and to investigate the most recent ways of representing masculinity in Polish theatre, which I believe are predominantly feminist.⁵ In this article I consider the notion of masculinity as a term bringing together a particular set of cultural and social practices, so when I refer to men, I mean all individuals who identify as male. My essay is not meant to offer an exhaustive treatment of this vast subject. Rather, it is intended as an introduction to further research and as a mapping out of potential directions for investigation.

2.

In her now classic treatise, *Masculinities*, Raewyn Connell locates masculinities in a centuries-long process in which modern gender orders have crystalized, arguing that they have been primarily shaped by factors such as the rise of global empires and of the global capitalist economy, the ascendance of Western Europe and then North America, and the asymmetrical confrontation of various gender models in colonized territories (p. 185). In her view, the configuration of the social practices collectively referred to as masculinity have been particularly affected by four factors. The first factor is a cultural shift that can be traced back to the Renaissance transformation of medieval Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation and the decline of the monastic system, which led to a new understanding of sexuality, with heterosexuality becoming the most respected form of it, and to the emergence of a new approach to the individual which underscored his or her unmediated relationship with God, promoting individualism and the notion of an autonomous self (p. 186). These shifts in turn influenced later thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, who defined rationality and science in opposition to nature and emotions, hence passion, emotionality and

instability came to be identified with phantasmagorical femininity, while reason and force became equated with phantasmagorical masculinity; masculinity later became associated with Western civilization, which enabled the emergence of a cultural link between the legitimization of patriarchy and the legitimization of the highly gendered enterprise of imperialism (p. 187). The second contributing factor was the formation of overseas empires, first by Portugal and Spain, then by the Netherlands, France and England, and later by Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as the creation of land empires by Russia and the United States. The empires were almost entirely governed by men. Discussing the war of conquest, specifically the French conquest of Algeria, in the second volume of *A History of Virility*, Christelle Taraud refers explicitly to the gender dimension of colonial imperialism. She relates that colonizers would frequently enact their male power by debasing and mutilating the bodies of the colonized. The debasement of the conquered indigenous people involved not only bestialization but also feminization. One example is the Algerians who were made to perform acts of allegiance to the European colonizers in which, like in a traditional marriage, the colonized were positioned as the woman (defeated, weak and passive) and the Europeans as the man (conquering, strong and powerful) (2020, p. 295). Thirdly, urban centres developed as hubs of commercial capitalism, the consequences of which were most evident in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, when calculative rationality began to permeate urban culture in the aftermath of the first industrial revolution and the accumulation of wealth from trade, slavery and colonies,

The entrepreneurial culture and workplaces of commercial capitalism institutionalized a form of masculinity, creating and legitimating new forms of gendered work and power in the

counting-house, the warehouse and the exchange (Connell, p. 188).

In addition to the cultural changes occurring in the cities, the shaping of masculinity in the North Atlantic area during this period was also influenced by the landed gentry, who were closely integrated with the state and strongly engaged in capitalist economic relations. Members of the landed gentry entered local administration and the military where they became army and navy officers as well as rank-and-file soldiers (p. 190). The landed gentry's masculinity tended to be defined by their brutal relationship with the agricultural labour force and its power over home-bound women, reinforcing the institutionalization of aggression- and brutality-based masculinity in the economy and the state. Connell argues, however, that with the spread of industrial economy and the development of bureaucratic states, the economic and political power of the landed gentry declined. In later periods, in metropolitan countries, the gentry were gradually displaced by businessmen and bureaucrats, which was accompanied by the transformation of peasant populations into an urban working class, and new forms of masculinity organized around the ability to earn money and support a home/family emerged as industrial production developed (p. 196). Fourthly, European civil wars led to the perpetuation of patriarchal and hierarchical gender order by highly centralized Western states (p. 189).

Connell refers to the orders of masculinity constructed in Western Europe and North American and in the territories remaining under their influence, but Tomasz Tomasik, who has sought to transpose Connell's ideas to a Polish context,⁶ points out that although the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had no overseas colonies, 'the Polish kings, magnates and nobility were no strangers to imperial aspirations' (2016, p. 11).

Following Karla Elliott, I assume, that the margin (periphery, semi-periphery) and the centre always remain in close relationship with each other, affecting and interpenetrating each other (2020). Therefore, although the shifts described above have occurred to a different extent in Poland, the patterns in which patriarchal masculinities constituted themselves in western areas have influenced the forming of local cultural and social models and representations of masculinity.

3.

Between ten and fifteen years ago, it was actors' portrayals of their characters, such as those of Andrzej Chyra and Jacek Poniedziałek in Krzysztof Warlikowski's productions (*Hamlet*, *Bacchae* and *Cleansed*) or Piotr Skiba's work in the plays directed by Krystian Lupa (particularly *The Sleepwalkers*⁷ and *Factory 2*), that seemed to set the horizons of alternative representations of masculinity in Polish theatre. At the time, the introduction of male characters whose sexual identity was not fully defined represented a shift from the transparent order of heterosexual masculinity in the theatre and the public sphere, which, as Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes in *Male Domination*, requires no additional commentary or problematization because it is automatically classified as natural, fitting and self-evident (1998).

I assume that the mere presence of queer characters on stage is no longer enough to constitute transgression. What is needed is a display of male emotionality, weakness, fragility and incompatibility with the gender essentialist regimes constructed by patriarchy, and a search for new, more inclusive, relational and open models, and representations of masculinity.⁸ I would also link these shifts, in part, to theatre-makers resorting more to autobiographical strategies including confession and candid - yet oscillating

between fiction and non-fiction – tales of personal experiences, failures and traumas, among other tactics.

The feminist model of masculinity, as presented by bell hooks in her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, is underpinned by the assumption that

feminist masculinity presupposes that it is enough for males to be to have value, that they do not have to ‘do,’ to ‘perform,’ to be affirmed and loved. Rather than defining strength as ‘power over,’ feminist masculinity defines strength as one’s capacity to be responsible for self and others. This strength is a trait males and females need to possess (2004, p. 104).

This form of masculinity is oriented towards relationship-building, it emphasizes men’s interdependence and emotional sensitivity, and sets itself against patriarchal masculinity marked by frigidity, cynicism, alienation and, not infrequently, the use of psychological or physical violence against others or oneself.

bell hooks discusses at length emotionality and the way patriarchy produces emotionally mutilated men who believe that ‘they are more manly if they don’t feel’ or when they are angry: ‘Real men get mad. And their mad-ness, no matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural – a positive expression of patriarchal masculinity’ (p. 20). Exhibiting other emotions is bound up with strongly internalized shame and exposure to potential attack from ‘real men,’ and therefore – to gender-related, symbolic, economic or other harm. hooks argues that:

The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves (p. 65).

and that

Patriarchy rewards men for being out of touch with their feelings. Whether engaged in acts of violence against women and children or weaker men, or in the socially sanctioned violence of war, men are better able to fulfill the demands of patriarchy if they do not feel (pp. 68-69).

4.

The ideas outlined above provide me with a framework to examine Michał Buszewicz's production *Autobiography Just in Case* (*Autobiografia na wszelki wypadek*, 2020). The dead protagonist of the piece, Michał Buszewicz, is portrayed in accounts of three men (played by Tomasz Cymerman, Daniel Dobosz and Konrad Wosik) hired to clean up his flat. *Autobiography* pivots on the relationship between capitalistic success – which is or may be one of the markers of patriarchal masculinity – and failure in the pursuit of such success, as well as on the process of slow and gradual disarming of male emotionality. Michał couldn't bring himself to cry when his beloved grandmother and his mother died. He spent most of his adult life waiting for recognition and external validation of his work before he eventually received it in the form of a lifetime achievement award. In his relationships with women, there always came a point when other man, seen by Michał as better

than himself, brought his relationships to an end. No one had ever taught Michał how to set boundaries and deal with his own emotions,

my emotions do not matter in any way. No guy is being accustomed to the fact he has emotions, much less that his emotions matter at all, except for the feeling of being pissed off, which is not my thing. What's left for me then?⁹

Autobiography Just in Case is a story of male loneliness, embarrassment, defeats, anxieties, traumas and a journey to discover and name one's own emotional states. The same themes, but in a slightly different manner, are explored in Grzegorz Jarek's and Marcin Cecko's *Woyzeck* (2019). The piece revolves around the confrontation of a number of essentially patriarchal models of masculinity represented by the friends of the protagonist (Mateusz Górski) with whom he plays in a garage band. Tamburmajor (Paweł Smagała) is not ashamed of his body, prefers older women and has a domineering personality. Captain (Jan Dravnel) wants to become the CEO of a corporation, because, in his opinion, helping people is about telling them what to do. Doctor (Rafał Maćkowiak) is more focused on anatomy and cool analysis than on interpersonal relations. *Woyzeck's* dramatic predicament is underpinned by his double confusion evident in his attempts to define his masculinity and in his boundary-less relationship with his overprotective mother (Maria Maj), who feeds him green-pea hummus. Jarek and Cecko have almost completely rewritten Büchner's text, shifting its focus onto the process of constructing male identities, particularly in adolescence, which occurs, as it were, against the models of masculinity prevalent in one's immediate social surroundings. In their reading, *Woyzeck* is about how much destruction is ultimately caused by

men's suppression and denial of their own weakness, incapacities or emotional identities - which are strongly affirmed in patriarchal society - and about the fact that they lack tools and education to counter that suppression.

5.

bell hooks contends that the internalized concept of patriarchal masculinity forces men to cultivate ideals of loneliness and prevents them from building emotional bonds with other men. This pattern is reversed in feminist masculinity which underscores the importance of fostering emotional bonds between men for the healthy functioning of men in society (2022, p. 139). One example corroborating and illustrating these diagnoses is the work of Boys Performative Group (Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki), who search for non-toxic forms of emotional brotherhood based on support rather than competition.

Boys Performative Group's *We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity but We Became Friends* (Chcieliśmy porozmawiać o męskości, a zostaliśmy przyjaciółmi, 2021) begins with a prologue in which a man stands on one leg and bends his body in all directions in an attempt to keep his balance. His mouth is sealed with a tape bearing the words 'I've had enough,' while a series of confessions can be heard from off stage: 'All my life I have been ready, I couldn't make a mistake,' 'All my life I've done what was expected of me,' 'I've been expected to work and take care of the children. I did both,' 'I've been expected to get everything done and I got everything done,' 'I've been expected never to fail, never to fuck up. I've never failed, I've never fucked up.'

As the show progresses, men get closer to each other physically and mentally, echoing the format of men's circles. Tom speaks of how he identified as a non-binary person for many years before undergoing therapy and discovering that he had feared masculinity, because he saw it as evil and aggressive. Kamil, too, feared men and it had not been until he joined men's circles that he had managed to integrate his two identities, that of a man and that of a non-heteronormative person. Wojtek claims that he would like to break out from the rigid boundaries that divide the feminine and the masculine and to focus on everyone's individual experiences, while Paul points out that men lack social spaces where they can express their emotions.

We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity but We Became Friends is also a collection of stories from different stages of men's lives, which probe disciplining rituals in military schools, confrontation (or lack thereof) with an absent father, toxic fatherhood (and attempts to overcome it while taking care of one's children), male crying, sexual failure, unexpected erections, premature ejaculations and relationships with mothers. Most of these stories are accompanied by choreography in which stiff, trained, disciplined male bodies interact with one another, intertwining, touching, stroking or hugging, revealing a close connection between emotional identity and corporeality, as well as the relational nature of masculinity that requires mutual mindfulness.

Male friendship is also prominent in Michał Przybyła's and Dominik Więcek's *Bromance* (2019). As the play begins, helmeted performers wrestle on a mattress while the rules of a good relationship are announced from off stage: 'don't ridicule a friend in company,' 'hug your friend if the situation calls for it,' 'when you're with a friend, don't pretend to be someone you're not,'

‘enjoy your friend’s success, even when it means your failure,’ ‘be a partner, not a rival, give your friend a helping hand.’

Time and again, the dancers bare their fears and insecurities, including dissatisfaction with their bodies, the shame they feel in the company of men who feel comfortable naked, a sense that their bodies are at odds with the traditional canons of beauty. The masculinities they represent are contrasted with the recurring figure of the patriarchal parent. ‘He made all decisions for us and would not tolerate disagreement,’ says Przybyła, who for most of his adult life was afraid to talk to his dad about being gay. At one point, he even asks an audience member to read out a letter he once wrote to his father,

I remember you as a reproach against me, against the world and fate. I find it hard to bring back good memories as they are obscured by the moments when you were upset with me. I can’t tell if I love you, if you’re dear to me, who you are to me, you didn’t prepare me for life, for what awaited me. I had to become a man on my own.

Both *Bromance* and *We Wanted to Talk About Masculinity but We Became Friends* reveal the need to seek new, more inclusive forms or communities of intimacy between men which would connect rather than hierarchize cisgender, non-binary, heterosexual, homosexual/queer individuals with one another. In opposition to orthodox masculinities marked by homophobia, compulsive heterosexism, sexism and stoicism, Erik Anderson proposes the term *inclusive masculinities*, or masculinities characterized, among other things, by social fluidity (behaving in ways that would be considered

feminine or homosexual in the orthodox model; seeking to solve problems through dialogue rather than fighting; choosing not to build up respect through violence) or greater intimacy between men, both erotic or non-erotic: hugging, stroking, kissing. Anderson does not single out one model or pattern but discusses a set of processes, a number of forms of masculinity subsumed under the umbrella term of inclusive masculinities which either coexist with orthodox masculinities or destabilize them in some way (2009).

6.

The figure of the parent appears in almost every play referred to in this essay, but the concept of fatherhood is most clearly problematized in Błażej Biegasiewicz's *Fathers* and in the second part of Anna Smolar's and Natalia Fiedorczuk's *Halka*. *Fathers* addresses the recurring figure of a disciplining father whose respect can only be earned with good results, discipline and correct performance of tasks. As a counterpoint to these memories, four actors (Maciek Karczewski, Filip Lipiecki, Marcin Piotrowiak and Mateusz Grodecki) seek to establish a different relationship between father and son – one they would like to build in the future if they become fathers. Worried by the 2016 data which says that Polish fathers spend an average of forty minutes a day with their offspring, they pledge to spend with their children as much time as possible. The actors' commitment to changing the prevailing model of fatherhood is particularly in evidence when they test one another on infants, asking questions about how long a baby feeds only on mother's milk, how it is affected by sugar, when its lower jaw and tongue develop, how long it can drink its mother's milk, how to introduce new foods, expand a baby's diet, control its allergic reactions, change it (step by step) and, most important, how to build an emotional bond with your baby.

Karla Elliott holds that values derived from the domain of care, such as interdependence or relationality, may help neutralize male dominance and positively affect men's development by giving them a sense of being loved and respected without having to compete with other men (2016, p. 252). In Elliott's proposed notion of caring masculinities, derived principally from feminist theories of care, men's competences are not only associated with presiding over a family and providing financial security but also with the ability to care, whereas respect is linked to love rather than the production of patriarchal authority.

Niall Hanlon, who is also cited by Elliott, posits a number of reasons why care-related functions have been underrepresented in traditional models of masculinity. Firstly, care was automatically equated with women, and the position of male carer was seen as subordinate. Secondly, the exercise of care means revealing a feminized part of masculine identity. Thirdly, care implies a full or partial relinquishment of power associated with patriarchal masculinity, which inspires fear and resentment in defenders of the status quo (2012).

Halka, in contrast, juxtaposes two models of fatherhood (and two models of masculinity), which are represented by Jontek (Łukasz Stawarczyk) and Janusz (Radosław Krzyżowski). In the Smolar and Fiedorczuk version of the *Halka* story, Halina (Aleksandra Nowosadko) does not die of a broken heart but runs away leaving her newborn in the care of Jontek, who is not its biological father. Janusz claims that his duty to pay Halina alimony, which he sometimes defaults on, grants him the right to call himself the baby's father and to decide its future: 'Why do you want alimony from me if you want to mould the kid to your will? Do you want to have a Jontek kid, for fuck's sake? It's not a Jontek kid. It's a Janusz kid,' he exclaims during an argument with

Jontek.

Janusz represents a model of fatherhood closely associated with masculinity identified with the ability to financially provide for one's family, while Jontek, in my view, pursues the caring model described by Elliott. In his text 'Men and Caring Masculinities,' Paco Abril, in reference to the Australian researcher's diagnoses, notes that

the fostering of *caring masculinities must focus on* questioning systems of domination - patriarchy and capitalism - and cut across every sphere of life: the family, education, the world of work, politics, the media and relations between humans and non-humans (2021).

A thorough social reorganization that would definitively challenge patriarchal entitlement which is harmful for many social groups should be based on care and willingness to work together for change (2021).

7.

As Jason Wilson rightly points out in his book *Cry Like a Man* (2019), the toxic representation of men is often reinforced by slogans in the public space, such as 'real men don't cry' or 'be a man, stop whining,' which encourage men to suppress their emotions in order to impress other men and present their masculinity as devoid of softness, fatigue, confusion, insecurity and depression. Therefore, drawing upon low theory, I will regard men talking on stage about their weaknesses, failures and feelings as a gesture of cultural resistance. Addressing the relationship between feminism and failure, Jack Halberstam argues that

where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures (2011, p. 4).

I would like to expand Halberstam's theses to include men who do not conform to hegemonic male standards and I consider the onstage acts of revealing incongruity with patriarchal gender regimes, by people of all genders, in terms of pleasure and contestation, as disruption of and intervention into the oppressive system of conventional constructs and gender norms, which may simply bring relief.

I regard the trends I outline above as the first step towards a broader reorganization of thinking about the impact of patriarchy on men and towards seeking and developing other, non-toxic forms of gender expression, not only on theatre stages but also in arts institutions.

The block 'Masculinity' continues the theme discussed in issue 171 of *Didaskalia. Theatre Journal* in response to the call for papers 'Masculinities: Mapping the Field' proposed by Wiktoria Tabak. (Introduction to the block: <https://didaskalia.pl/pl/artykul/meskosci-w-teatrze-mapowanie-pola>)

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Footnotes

1. Here and further on, I follow Raewyn Connell's definition of 'hegemonic masculinity' (2005), which she understands as 'the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees the domination of men and the subordination of women.' Connell argues that the most conspicuous bearers of hegemonic masculinity are not always people primarily associated with power. Other such figures include actors and film characters. She asserts that hegemony can only be established where there is a correspondence between the cultural ideal and institutional and collective power. The effective invocation of authority, even more so than direct violence, is the hallmark of hegemony (even if violence often provides the basis or support for authority). Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy, meaning that the changing conditions of patriarchy can at any time influence the dominance of a particular type of masculinity, and new groups can challenge an old order and construct their own hegemony. Hegemony is a historically mobile relationship, its mutability being a key element of Connell's proposed perception of masculinity.

2. I consider masculinity in isolation from the male body, regarding it as a cultural practice,

so when I write about 'mad patriarchal masculinity,' I also refer to women. As bell hooks notes, 'As women have gained the right to be patriarchal men in drag, women are engaging in acts of violence similar to those of their male counterparts. This serves to remind us that the will to use violence is really not linked to biology but to a set of expectations about the nature of power in a dominator culture' (2004, p. 55).

3. In his book, Kimmel refers to an American context, but in my opinion the framework he proposes is an interesting and inspiring conceptualization that can be applied in a Polish context too.

4. I have transcribed Chyra's words from a recording available on YouTube. See 'Andrzej Chyra WKURZYŁ się na scenie! Wstał i zaczął krzyczeć do dziewczyny z widowni,' 31 August 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Tze2aGT_vc [accessed: 17 November 2022].

5. In early scholarly reflection on masculinity, four strategies of defining this concept predominated: essentialist (the core of masculinity is defined by a selected characteristic), positivist (there is a well-established typology of genders, based on which conservative scales of masculinity and femininity are created without taking into account the gender spectrum), normative (which produces a set of social norms attributed to men and used to identify them) and semiotic (defining masculinity through a system of symbolic difference, in which masculinity and femininity are opposed to each other, with masculinity defined as non-femininity) (Connell, 2005).

6. Tomasik points out that a comprehensive history of Polish masculinity is still to be written and must be informed by extensive research (2016).

7. Stanisław Godlewski offers an interesting examination of this piece from a queer perspective in 'Dewocjonalia z Jednorożcem. Krystian Lupa i queer' (Devotional Items with the Unicorn: Krystian Lupa and Queer) (2019).

8. Male protagonists in Monika Strzępka's and Paweł Demirski's productions are also partly weak, which the creators frame as the characters' non-conformity with the generally accepted Western or neoliberal model of masculinity, but it seems they do not offer a broader problematization of the emotional sphere.

9. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the piece are from the script provided to me by the creators (this also applies to the productions I examine further on).

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/ MASCULINITIES: MAPPING THE FIELD

The Male Dancer and His Role in Theatrical Performances of the 16th-18th centuries

Anna Reglińska-Jemioł | University of Gdańsk

The beginning of the 19th century brought the absolute domination by women of the ballet stage (although they had to face the challenge of mastering the language of dance created by men and originally intended for them on the professional stage). The process of feminisation, also in this 'symbolic' aspect to which theatre dance had been subjected since the 19th century, directed the research of dance theorists towards the so-called "problem of the male dancer" (Burt, 2007). However, the complexities of the code of masculinity can be traced through all stages of the development of choreographic forms, i.e. from the dance intermedia of the Renaissance to the autonomous, in terms of content, *action ballets* of the Enlightenment (referring, inter alia, to the images of androgynous figures of the burlesque ballets of the time of Louis XIII, or the phenomenon of *cross-casting* of court ballets of the Sun King era).

Keywords: ballet; masculinity; theatre of past eras; cultural patterns; the body

As far as Duport¹ himself is concerned, my admiration is a long-standing affair, to which I have remained faithful. The audience could barely contain its desire to applaud: the King set the example. I heard His Majesty's voice from my box, and the excitement reached the point of fury, which lasted

three quarters of an hour. Duport has all the lightness we saw in Paris in his interpretation of *Figaro*. You never feel the effort, little by little his dance comes alive, and he fills you with the excitement and intoxication of the passion he wants to express. It is the highest degree of expression of which this art is capable. Vestris and Taglioni, like all common dancers, cannot hide the effort; secondly, their dance has no *progression*. And so, they do not even reach *sensuality*, the first goal of the art... *Admiration*, after sensual delight, is almost the entire domain of this oh-so-hermetic art. The eyes, enchanted by the brilliance of the decorations and the novelty of the *groups*, should encourage the soul to pay close and tender attention to the passions that the dancers' steps will paint (Stendhal, 2007, pp. 62-63).²

Outline of issues

The history of ballet performances can be viewed from the perspective of the interrelationship of body movement and dramatic narrative or the aesthetic and cultural patterns that shape it. One direction of research into the place of the dancer, or more broadly – the male body in movement in past performances – becomes the establishment of an intra-structural relationship between the ‘institutional’ conditions of the spaces in which such performances took place and the social expectations of their presentation. Due to the nature of the research, such a study takes on an interdisciplinary character and takes into account the textual and cultural nature of the documents analyzed. The cultural image of the body determined the power of the rules imposed on the dance form, not only the constraints, the obligations of following specific patterns, but also the challenges. And the process of reworking traditional movement codes implied a continual development of choreography. Anya Peterson Royce notes:

Just as we have recognized ritual and social drama for the condensed presentations they are, so we must recognize movement and dance as forms at once the most and the least resistant to distortion and misappropriation. They provide subtle and multivocalic entryways to cultural examinations both in the actual embodied performance and also in the memory of it (2014, p. 25).

How is the notion of masculinity constructed in choreographies of theatrical performances up to the 18th century? In studies that analyze the forms of choreography's presence on stage, attention is paid to how its structure enforced a specific spectatorial frame that changed and evolved over the eras - the content message, the set design, the stage space, the costume. The aesthetics of a given dance form have been influenced by numerous determinants over the centuries: cultural perceptions of the body, dress codes, gender stereotypes, dominant musical trends, etc. Thus, it seems necessary to consider it in the broader (historical) context of cultural knowledge. The close connection between the creative idea and the manner and place of the performance of a dance character is emblematic of the artistic strategies of the court culture of past eras, inscribing these works in a specific sphere of social communication and thus making choreography a cultural spectacle. Mark Franko draws attention to this aspect by zooming in on the spectacular staging form of the 1581 court show *Le Balet comique de la Royne* (2015, pp. 32-50). For at the time, the body in motion³ was a vehicle for culturally designed content - not just a record of the character's experiences and their dance expression.

The process of developing a definitive model for professional ballet performance was accompanied from the outset by a clear gender division of functions. Men were masters of court ceremonies and were responsible for

organizing theatrical performances, they were choreographers, educators, critics and theorists of dance,⁴ proclaiming an authoritatively binding aesthetic doctrine (in a sense guaranteeing the availability of this form only to a group of men, of noble birth at that). The female body had, on the one hand, to struggle with mastering a technique created by and initially intended for men, and on the other, to find itself in the image associations imposed by the dominant cultural pattern of patriarchy. Female dancers were first and foremost 'shown', and the form of this presentation was simply linked to the contemplation of beauty (Reglińska-Jemioł, 2016, pp. 76-77)⁵.

Court spectacles between the 16th and 17th centuries. Dancer in the world of gestures and theatrical signs

In dance performances until the 17th century, which belonged to the structure of the patriarchal order, the male creative vision was realized. The male 'heroic' body in choreography had to be identified with power, strength, sublimity, which translated into a heavily codified gestural language (see Agnel, 2004; Dziechcińska, 1996). Language, of course, has evolved over the centuries - from a code of behaviour realizing the ethos of chivalry, then the refinement, chic and exquisiteness of the courtier, to a kind of hybrid form merging these two figurations, realized in the vision of the *danse noble* style (Turocy, 2013, pp. 202-203). Here, 'dance emploi' was combined with the performer's tall stature, slender figure, perfect body proportions, majestic movements, masculine grace of expressive gestures and elegance.⁶ As Maria Ossowska notes:

Although the only acceptable profession for a courtier is to be that of a knight, in essence Castiglione's model is a demilitarised one. Tournaments, horsemanship, crushing lances, hurling spears and playing ball will suffice. Nor will the peaceful courtier look for opportunities to duel... It is particularly recommended for a courtier to have charm and a certain nonchalance, which masks his craftsmanship and makes one assume that everything comes easily to him... Obviously, he will not dance at some folk festivals, nor will he perform acrobatics in dancing, which befit only professionals (1986, p. 101).

Court ballet dance of the 16th and 17th centuries used the theatricalized, choreographically tamed body for the purposes of monarchical propaganda. As Voltaire pointed out: 'Louis XIV excelled in grave dances, which were agreeable to the majesty of his figure, and did not injure that of his rank' (*Historia męskości*, 2019, p. 230). The monarch's body, initiating a ball or masque with his movement or closing the court spectacle in a *grand ballet*, was always 'the first mover' (ibid., p. 334). Masculinity in the theatrical spectacles of the past was manifested not only in a confident, practised processional step, but also in the wielding of the sword and horseback riding. Between the 16th and 17th centuries, court spectacles took the form of an elaborate show that mixed 'knightly games with church dramas, processions with intermezzos, the Old Testament with mythology, dance with music and song' (Liński, 1930, p. 16). Participants in these performances, known as carousels,⁷ often played the roles of King Arthur's knights, crusaders and Argonauts. Themes from knightly epics and epic poems by Tasso or Ariosto were taken up (for example, the Florentine equestrian ballet of 1637, based on the themes of Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated*, the theme of

which was a sham battle depicting the imprisonment and subsequent liberation of the participants in the First Crusade).⁸

The settings for these spectacular shows were the town squares, the gardens of the courts and the vast fields outside the city walls. Carousels and equestrian ballets played an important role in the formation of the ceremonial culture characteristic of the Baroque period; their power of visual transmission raised the status of the events they accompanied, in which the male body had a sort of persuasive function. Like *ballet de cour* type performances, they created a courtly iconosphere, common to the whole of Europe, whose message was readable by the elite circles of the continent (Limon, 2001, p. 394). Carousels taking place in urban spaces were addressed to a wide and diverse audience and could thus be read on different levels. The spectators gathered in the streets were dazzled by the enormity and richness of the staging, as well as the equestrian artistry of the participants in the tournament, while the reading of the allegorical messages and figures of the spectacle remained within the interests and perceptive capabilities of the court elites. The initial phase of the spectacle, the processional entry - a kind of parade (usually of representatives of the largest families), was a reference to triumphal royal entries. A recurring element of the performances was the presence of occasional architecture (gates, triumphal arches, rocks, fountains, palaces, defensive fortresses, which formed the centre of the sham battles) (Hübner-Wojciechowska, 1987, pp. 285-286). Over time, the image of the fighting male body in theatrical performances of this type began to serve panegyric purposes or the apotheosis of heroism.

Horse ballets most often depicted battles between the elements (an example is the Viennese production from 1667 - *Sieg-Streit deß Luft und Wassers*,

Freuden-Fest zu Pferd),⁹ disputes of virtues and vices, or the four seasons. Usually, these performances were to some extent topical, as they were linked to celebrations in honour of important visitors to the city, anniversaries, religious festivals, wedding ceremonies or coronation ceremonies. A common feature of performances involving horse parades was competition, taking the form of dramatic staging or a choreographic narrative in which the dancers-riders outlined a geometric pattern of formations. *Traité des tournois, joustes, carrousels et autres spectacles publics* (1669) by Claude-François Ménéstrier defines the concept of the carousel as a competition with carts, machines, recitatives and horse dances, which the French Jesuit relates to both equestrian ballet and sham combat, without indicating the differences in the understanding of the ballet form *à cheval* and the *à pied* type. Ménéstrier likens the geometric drawing of the choreography of the dances on horseback and on foot, a harmonious image of the entire performance with the central figure of the ruler, to a higher, cosmic world order (1669, pp. 170-180; see Reglińska-Jemioł, 2010, pp. 264-269).

In equestrian ballets and carousels, the traces of chivalric culture were translated into a system of performance signs in which the ideals, attitudes and patterns associated with this cultural formation were reinterpreted through the male body in motion. In the 17th century, as attitudes to the idea of combat changed from an indispensable skill to simply a kind of art, the ability to ride a horse and wield a sword rose to become an effective stage tool for dynastic propaganda. A common element of court ballets of the Renaissance and especially of the Baroque era was the representation of controlled movement, reflecting the unity of the social order. One might add that the presentation of the body on stage was accompanied by allegorical imagery (the French edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* [Paris, 1636] on the

title page highlighted the usefulness of this title for ballet makers and dramatic texts).

An interesting clue in the search for a refiguration of masculinity, a cultural legacy of gender indeterminacy/indefiniteness on the ballet stage, is the phenomenon of *cross-casting*, realized in 17th-century ballet burlesque masquerades; in this parodistic type of performance, androgynous figures were relied upon to circumvent censorship (see Prest, 2006; Klimczyk, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 223-245). These forms were present in the repertoire of the Parisian Jesuit stage of the Baroque period. On the stage of the College of Louis-le-Grand, despite the existing standardized orders and prohibitions governing the theatre of the Societatis Iesu throughout Europe, the presence of danced female roles is noted in almost all years. As Judith Rock notes, 'there were the Jesuit educational rules from Rome, the French interpretation of them - and their Parisian interpretation!' (1996, p. 12). At the time, the choreographed movement of male pupils was the response of such establishments to the systemic need to master the kinetic language of the elites. On stage, this form of choreography (harmonious but also quite schematic) additionally became a tool for creating a specific image for the ruler. With their sumptuous staging (which also included choreography), the court productions were able to arouse appreciation among the subjects, which was in keeping with the propaganda message about the ruler.

Noverre's era

A crucial turning point came with the publication of Jean-Georges Noverre's *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (1760), mentioned below in footnote 4, in which the choreographer set out his project for the reform of ballet, postulating above all the development of a ballet with action (*ballet*

d'action), the narrative of which was to become a subject of deeper reflection and emotional involvement for the audience.¹⁰ Ballet should stand on a par with dramatic theatre, but the overriding means of expression was the dance – rather than words.¹¹ And so, in the Age of Enlightenment, ballet choreography, a pillar of a sublime and highly codified dance form that paid homage to cultural conventions, begins to focus on the emotional message, seeking precisely in it an effective means of artistic commentary.

The credibility of the emotional content was guaranteed by the vivid facial expressions (the theatre dancers' rejection of masks), the simplicity of the choreography, the expressive gestures, the costumes in harmony with the well-thought-out set design, the appropriately selected music, the harmonious collaboration of the show's creators, the sensitivity of the performers, but also the appropriate choice of the libretto's theme.

When the dancers, animated by feeling, will transform themselves into a thousand different forms with the varied features of the passions; when, Proteus-like, their features and glances will trace all the movements of their soul; when their arms will leave the narrow path that the school has prescribed for them, and when, traversing with as much grace as truth a more considerable space, they will express by correct positions the successive movements of the passions; when they finally combine wit and genius with their art, they will stand out. Stories will then become useless; everything will speak, every movement will dictate a sentence; every attitude will paint a situation; every gesture will reveal a thought; every glance will announce a new feeling; everything will be captivating because everything will be true, and the imitation will be drawn from nature (Noverre, 1959, p. 63).

It is emphasized that in Noverre's aesthetic thought, the emotional message and expressiveness of the theatrical gesture were paramount. The dancer's performance prowess receded into the background (Szyfman, 1954, p. 75). The Enlightenment's (in the spirit of the age – scientific) curiosity about the body, the evolving conception of the body and, at the same time, gender, paralleled the transformation of the art of ballet, based on ballet's assimilation of the capacity for narrative (Foster, 1996, p. 12). Thus, the male body in dance begins to express emotions, supported by the reformed art of mimicry, which allows for a broader spectrum of expression on stage and provides an opportunity to depict the theme of the libretto, competing successfully in this area with drama and this form's natural predisposition to verbal communication (Strzelecki, 2010, pp. 90-93). As the stage art of dance developed, alongside the *danse noble* style a *danse caractère* also developed, reflecting, among other things, the specific national character of dance.¹² As Irena Turska adds, it was the Enlightenment theorists who solidified the division of dancers into several types corresponding to the range of choreographic arrangements performed. The repertoire programme of the classical dancer included so-called noble roles, pathos-filled creations of heroes, gods and protagonists. The semi-classical (semi-choreographic) dancer had a slightly larger range of roles in which he could also display his acting talent. The character dancer (also called the 'grotesque' dancer) performed choreographies of a comic nature, and the folk dances already mentioned (2009, p. 146).¹³

When looking, for example, at librettos projecting movement, one can notice that the male body on the ballet stage began to be treated on an equal footing with the female body, aiming at a general 'rationalization of the ballet' (*Psyche and Amor*, 1762; *Medea and Jason*, 1763; *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1772; *Diana and Endymion*, 1770; *Acis and Galatea*, 1773; *Judgement of*

Paris, 1793). When analyzing the transfiguration of the image of the male body on the ballet stage, Iwona Pasińska emphasizes that over the centuries there has been a gradual loss of the traditional 'masculine' image in favour of finding in it a feminine identity. The dancer, from being a stage monopolist (using a dance formula promoted in the Renaissance, shaped in the Baroque era and fully categorized in the 18th century), became a mere instrument carrying the female body (2008, pp. 323-324).

Towards a new aesthetic - Romantic ballet

French Romantic ballet, breaking its ties with the traditions of courtly culture, after two centuries of the supremacy of the male body in choreographic depiction, almost completely eliminated it from the performance space. In the structure of a ballet work, the male dancer (as a result of the progressive stage glorification of the female dancer and her privileged position in the choreographic concept) began to play a primarily auxiliary role. And what had previously characterized the male performance form - jumping skills, the changing dynamics of the arrangement, strength, flexibility and resilience - began to determine the quality of female dance as well. The male body was removed from the foreground so that its heaviness would not dampen the impression of the ethereality, transience and lightness of the dance expression. With the use of the form *sur les pointes*, the eternal desire to soar upwards, the illusion of flight in stage movement became attainable for the female body. The Romantic era programmatically initiated this indivisible domination of the female ballet stage, which lasted in Europe until the arrival of Vaslav Nijinsky. The role of the dancer on the ballet stage in the early 19th century was limited to that of a partner, or possibly a display of dancing prowess. This 'non-masculinity' of the ballet spectacle, understood as the secondary nature of male dance creations, is

reflected in – if only – a cursory review of the themes of ballet librettos of the period, the dramaturgy of which, followed by the choreography, promote the movement of the female body (to point out just some of the representative titles: *La Sylphide* (1832), *La Révolte au Sérail* (1833), *La Gipsy* (1839), *Giselle, ou les Willis* (1841), *La Péri* (1843), *Ondine, ou La naïade* (1843), *Le Esmeralda* (1844), *Le pas de Quatre* (1845), *Catarina ou la Fille du Bandit* (1846), *La Fille du Pharaon* (1862), *Coppélia ou la Fille aux yeux d'émail* (1870) (see Reglińska-Jemioł, 2019, pp. 299-302). The scholarly discourse emphasizes that the cult of the female body in movement and the minimization of the space for male dance expression to the dancer's frame of exposition were among the key cultural trends of romantic ballet performance (Rey, 1958, pp. 184-189; Wysocka, 1970, pp. 118-129; Homans, 2010, pp. 135-175).¹⁴ As Arnold L. Haskell points out:

Man was no longer the hero... With the decline of the great dancers of the period, the popularity of ballet rapidly waned... Two hundred years after the founding the Academy, ballet in the country of its birth was artistically bankrupt. The art that been raised by a powerful dynasty of kings, nourished by the genius of a Boucher, Boquet, Lully, Molière, dignified by the interest of a Voltaire, that had produced men of the mental attainments of a Noverre, had become merely a prelude to flirtation, the dancers grisettes and expert gold-diggers. (1951, pp. 28-30).

The growing distance towards stage dancers, has led to the exclusion of men from the *corps de ballet*. According to Agnieszka Narewska, the French Chamber of Deputies even took the initial initiative to exclude male dancers from ballet productions altogether, proposing in their stead the presence of

'versatile conductors who would be given a pair of tights and three or four francs per evening, so they would support the female dancers' (2016, p. 163). The lack of a male element on stage was compensated for by female dancers *en travesti* in toreador and hussar costumes (*Paquita*, 1846), dancing the parts of ship's boys and sailors (*Betty*, 1846), female rebels or common *bandits* (London 1846 production - ballet *Catarina ou la Fille du bandit*, choreographed by Jules Perrot). Furthermore, audiences admired women's bodies forming a battle array or building palisades, adopting male 'hard, rough' patterns of behaviour. By performing such choreography, the ballet dancers entertained the audience with a cultural masquerade of gender without stripping men of their traditional cultural costume of power or leadership. This is because performances of this type deliberately avoided retouching femininity (Reglińska-Jemioł, 2019, pp. 299-300).

As Jean-Marie Pradier notes, 'theatre and dance, when they become feminine, lift a thick layer of dust accumulated over the centuries, hiding silent questions, attitudes and imaginaries' (2012, p. 16). It is in this 'layer of stage dust' of the performance culture of past eras that we can seek an answer to the question of the complexity of male creations (at all stages of the development of the art of dance - from single choreographic insertions, through the *ballet à entrée* type of spectacle, to ballets with action fully independent in terms of content).

The scholarly perspective of viewing the art of ballet (more broadly: dance forms in theatrical and paratheatrical¹⁵ productions) as an intermedial cultural spectacle makes it possible to trace the process of change in male choreography over the centuries. The dynamics of this phenomenon should be linked not only to the way in which the male body in motion is displayed on stage, but also to the evolution of the content transmission of dramatic

roles intended for male dancers (in the 18th century, the key concepts that became the primary carriers of meaning transmission included: emotion, emotionality, passion, naturalness). Certain turning points can be identified in this process - the appearance of professional dancers on the theatre stage for the first time (the ballet *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, 1681), the influence of eminent choreographers recognizing the need to give dramatic clarity to the art of dance (Gasparo Angiolini, Franz Hilverding, John Weaver), the publication of Noverre's *Letters on Dancing and Ballets* (1760), and, finally, the work of the leading dancers of the period who became symbols of the turn towards reformed ballet (Jean Dauberval, Maximilien Gardel, Gaetano and Auguste Vestris). Through cultural transformation, ballet has finally gained the status of a full-scale theatrical form (cutting itself off from the tradition of the court entertainment spectacle); and the contribution to this transformation by choreographers, ballet masters, dance educators and theorists, and finally the dancers themselves, cannot be overestimated.

Translated by Adriana Wacewicz-Chorosz

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Footnotes

1. Louis-Antoine Duport (1781-1853) was an excellent French dancer (forerunner of the Romantic era in ballet), whose performances are mentioned in the letters of, among others, Noverre (Wysocka, 1970, pp. 104-105).
2. There is considerable research potential in personal documents (diaries, memoirs of theatre experts, amateurs of the art of dance, letters, autobiographies of prominent dancers and choreographers), which – in the perspective of the study of this topic – can direct our reflection on the function of choreography and the language of dance as self-narrative testimonies of the era. In all quotations, the spelling and punctuation of the originals have been preserved, and the highlighting of the text is by the author of the article.
3. It should be added that – in the early stages of the development of the art of ballet – it was essentially a male body. By the time the ballet *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (1681), featuring professional female dancers, was staged at the Paris Opera House, female roles were also played by men.
4. Among the more important historical and theoretical works on the art of dance up to the 18th century, the following should be mentioned: Claude François Ménéstrier's study *Des ballets ancien et modernes selon les règles du théâtre* (1682); Gottfried Taubert's treatise *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* (1717); the works of John Weaver, the English choreographer and 'the father of English pantomime' (among others, *Anatomical and Mechanical Lectures Upon Dancing*, 1721); *Histoire générale de la danse, sacrée et profane* (1724) by Jacques Bonnet, and *La danse ancienne et moderne, ou traité historique de la danse* (1754) by Louis de Cahusac; and, Noverre's groundbreaking *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (1760). It should be added that the narrative around the reformist theoretical thought about dance initiated during the Enlightenment continued in the writings of Carl Blasis (1797-1878): *Traité élémentaire théorique et pratique de l'Art de la danse* (1820) and *Code of Terpsichore* (1830). In the introduction to his treatise, the Italian pedagogue clearly emphasized that 'the plan and conduct of the ballet's action should be similar, as in comedy and tragedy' (Pudełek, 1986, p. 49).
5. Klimczyk draws attention to the form of the English mask, which, through the active participation of women in the creation of its form, became 'a field of articulation of female kinetic sensitivity' (2015, pp. 81-82).

6. Carlo Blasis, who is primarily credited with systematizing the principles of classical dance technique, as well as formulating clear ways to teach them, also clearly exposed the importance of the physical qualities of the dancer's physique in his works on dance theory (Wysocka, 1970, pp. 113-115). As he points out, 'to him [the dancer of the *serio* roles] belong beautiful *developpés*, *grands temps* and all the noblest steps of dance. He should attract the viewer's attention with the elegance of his figure and the correctness of his poses, attitudes and arabesques' (Pudełek, 1984, p. 57).

7. Carousel (from the French *carrousel*) - one of the most popular types of court entertainment, referring in its form to the tradition of knightly games. In the structure of this public spectacle, the final staging shape of which was formed in the 17th century, in addition to competitions, sham fights, ceremonial processions, one can also find choreographic elements (for example, a type of dance figures performed by riders on horses). As Joanna Hübner-Wojciechowska points out, 'Carousel was one of the many Baroque "theatres" aimed at dazzling and enchanting the viewer. It did this by referring to painting, sculpture, architecture, as well as movement and words, thus becoming the most syncretic work of art of the Baroque period' (1987, p. 294).

8. Bernadetta Craveri notes: 'At the same time, the young ruler suggested through Ariosto - the Italian author whom the French aristocracy most read and liked - the supposed continuity of feudal traditions and customs of absolute monarchy, turning to his advantage the warlike moods and pastoral fantasies manifested by the nobility outside the court and against the court... And yet, in the tournament, temporarily setting aside the royal insignia and appearing as Roger, the prototype of the brave warrior, Louis XIV was paying homage to the chivalric ideal, which was also his ideal' (2009, p. 317).

9. The performance involved about a thousand actors and two hundred musicians. The tournament began with a parade of decorated platforms surrounded by infantry and horsemen. The highlight was a procession of ancestral spirits led by the emperor himself. An allegorical figure of Glory summoned the ruler, twelve ghost figures and thirty-six riders performed a horse ballet. The choreographic design itself is brought to us by a series of thirteen surviving sketches (*Parte delle figure del balletto*) of the arrangements by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer. Owing to these illustrations, we are familiar with the patterns of figures performed by groups of eight, six or four riders (the emperor was always in the middle), as well as the specific steps and jumps of the horses (Watanabe-O'Kelly, 1992, pp. 94-105).

10. Thus, fitting in with the growing criticism of operatic art at the dawn of the 18th century, of which, let us recall, ballet was an integral part. Jean-Jacques Rousseau pointed out the lack of narrative continuity in the texts of the librettos: 'Most of these ballets (operas) consist of as many separate themes as they have acts, and the themes are linked by some metaphysical relationship that the viewer would never have guessed if the author had not been willing to enlighten him in the prologue. Some of them are thoroughly allegorical, such as the carnival or the craze, and the hardest to endure' (Rousseau, 1962, pp. 151-152). Similar criticism can be found in the writings of Francesco Algarotti (*Essai sur l'opéra*, 1755), Gasparo Angiolini (*Dissertation sur les ballets pantomimes des anciens, pour servir de programme de "Sémiramis"*, 1765), Louis de Cahusac (*La danse ancienne et moderne, ou Traité historique de la danse*, 1754) (Foster, 1988, pp. 164-165).

11. The dramaturgical motivation of dance sequences is already clearly present in Molière's comedy-ballet, where ballet took the form of pantomimic dance, illustrating the stage action (e.g., *Les Fâcheux* [The Bores], *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The*

Imaginary Invalid).

12. This form of the developmental line of the art of dance was undoubtedly influenced by the aesthetics of the Rococo; the emerging desire for graceful sensations, often dictated by a rather sublime sense of taste, or simply the search for a new aesthetic form and artistic satisfaction. An example of spectacles very different from the pathos-driven realizations of court ballets of the Baroque era was certainly Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera-ballets. One of the most sophisticated examples of the realization of naive exoticism, in which the dancer's movement simply provided the audience with pleasant emotions encapsulated in images from distant travels, is Rameau's work *Les Indes galantes* (in its final version of 1736).

13. Considerable attention was paid to discussing these individual categories by Carlo Blasis. In the eighth chapter of his *Elementary Treatise upon the Theory and Practice of the Art of Dancing* (1820), he focused not only on the external prerequisites that dancers should have, but also on the tasks that the performance of particular roles entailed. Thus, he considered the serio style to be 'the touchstone of the dancer's art,' 'the most difficult variety of dance, requiring a great deal of work and never fully appreciated unless one counts connoisseurs and people endowed with good taste.' In the context of considering the place and role of the dancer in theatrical performances up to the 18th century, the choreographer's observations on 'the decline of artistic serio dance' at the dawn of Romanticism seem valuable. According to Blasis, 'the explanation for this phenomenon should be sought in the confusion of styles and the tainted taste of a certain part of the audience,' as well as in the fact that 'the predecessors were masters of this style, but left few successors' (Pudełek, 1984, p. 54).

14. A general reflection on, among other things, the presence of the problem of cultural gender in the art of dance is developed in the works: *Dance, Gender and Culture*, 1993; Burt, 2007 (further references here); *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, 1995; Aschengreen, 1974; Bassetti, 2013.

15. The concept of the *intermedium* is classified by Konrad Chmielecki, writing about the research object of intermedia aesthetics. Here, in addition to 'visual poetry, intermedia photography, film, computer animation, theatre' - he mentions ballet (as a type of stage performance that explicitly exposes the close relationship between words, music and dance) (2008, pp. 14, 35, 93).

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/ EXERCISES IN ACCESS INTIMACY

Social Dances for Seniors: Choreographies Susceptible to Fragility

Alicja Müller | Jagiellonian University, Kraków

The article discusses selected strategies of theatrical collaboration with male and female seniors with no stage experience where the aim is not only to encourage health-promoting behaviours in a group with difficult access to culture, but also to produce events of high artistic value that might be included in the professional theatrical circulation. The author describes two productions - Barbara Bujakowska's *The Voice of Seniors* and Daria Kubisiak's *Przyjaciółka* (Friend) in which senior people are empowered and share in the creative process together with professional artists. The article also draws attention to the dangers associated with tokenistic, i.e. apparent, inclusion and emotional exploitation of other bodies, and points to possible alternatives to the narratives that infantilize older people. Referring to Judith Butler's reflections on frail bodies, the author analyzes theatrical practices of care and concern. The article argues that stage emanations of the frailty of old bodies disenchant the stereotype of old age as a time of radically limited possibilities.

Keywords: frailty; old age; Barbara Bujakowska; Daria Kubisiak; inclusive choreography

Other possibilities

In one of his essays, François Chirpaz writes about somatic non-transparency that becomes an attribute of other (non-typical and

conspicuous) bodies (1998). Crucial to somatic non-transparency is the mode of experiencing the world and being in it rather than the mere visual difference. A body becomes non-transparent when it starts offering resistance during everyday activities, forces us to exert greater effort, or makes it impossible for us to take our next steps. For Chirpaz, non-transparency is synonymous with disability and illness, as well as with fatigue and pain, that is, in general, with conditions in which the situation of the body cannot be ignored and when the physical persistently reminds us of its autonomy, manifesting non-conformity, unruliness and insusceptibility to the activist efforts of the will. Chirpaz argues that illness does not only affect the body but it touches and changes our entire lives, 'a sick person is not just someone with a weakened heart but someone operating in a world that itself is too weak and contracted' (p. X). The French philosopher does not distinguish between chronic pain and motor disability, which does not need to involve pain. He argues that any deviation from the psychophysical norm becomes the source of radical limitations. Consequently, the body's otherness cannot be framed in affirmative terms. Old age is a variant of non-transparency, therefore, for Chirpaz, aging must be considered a process of anti-vital emancipation of the body, which gradually both inhabits and thwarts ever more spaces of the subject's activity. In other words, the body's potentialities become negatively actualized.

In this article I look at theatre practices that reach beyond the discourses that are limited to regarding old age as a period of dramatic reduction in the spectrum of choices and opportunities. However, I am not interested in stories of superheroic seniors or people experiencing a 'second youth.' Instead, I examine theatre works in which senior-age performers explore what from the perspective of the capitalist cult of young and fit bodies would be referred to as spaces of non-normative agency. I do not want to compile a

catalogue of all possible theatrical and/or choreographic formats of working with seniors or to offer a sociological and community-oriented analysis of such work. Rather, I discuss two productions, Barbara Bujakowska's *The Voice of Seniors*¹ and Daria Kubisiak's *Friend*² (*Przyjaciółka*),³ which treat seniors as partners and subjects and do not stage old age as a source of emotion or existential impasse. *The Voice of Seniors* is a theatre collage of personal and collective stories in which fragments of intimate and, most of all, carnal-affective archives are intermixed with snippets of cultural memory (Bujakowska draws upon texts of well-known women writers). *Friend*, by contrast, focuses on the phenomenon of the iconic magazine *Przyjaciółka* ([Female] Friend), established in 1948, and in some sense reactivates its reading community.

One of the things the two pieces have in common is the involvement of seniors (most of whom have no previous stage experience and are not members of groups based in community centres)⁴ and professionalism understood as skills and technical aspects, including music and scenery.⁵ Key differences include the subject matter – Bujakowska foregrounds the experience of old age, while Kubisiak zooms in on the phenomenon of *Przyjaciółka* magazine and on what I have termed 'susceptibility to fragility.' By 'susceptibility' I do not mean negatively valued states such as submission or passivity. I define it in affirmative terms as a vulnerability or weakness which, when manifested, can be part of resistance (which, in the case of the works under discussion, refers to resistance against the ideology of the norm embodied in representations of strong, fit and efficient bodies).

In *The Voice of Seniors*, the performers are on the stage alone (except for the musician, who is not involved in the action), and any potential mistakes seem to be part of the idea of the show. In *Friend*, the seniors are (non-

invasively) accompanied onstage by the composer Weronika Krówka. In *The Voice of Seniors* fragility is an attribute, while in *Friend* it is a controlled potentiality. Potential failure is of course integral to theatre – bodies are not infallible and memory plays tricks at any age, but it seems that in Bujakowska's and Kubisiak's productions, precarity becomes an aesthetic-political category.

I regard *The Voice of Seniors* and *Friend* as alternative propositions to participatory initiatives that are solely dedicated to promoting health and activating groups with limited access to the arts, and as such exist outside of the professional theatre circuit. I refer to them alternately as 'productions/pieces' or as 'choreographies.' While movement is not the dominant medium in neither *The Voice of Seniors* nor *Friend*, both are genre hybrids in which dance is the essential element propelling the dramatic development and activating relationships.⁶ The choreographies echo back to the era of disc jockeys and old-school social dances, which linger on on the margins of mainstream culture, particularly, but not exclusively, in spa resorts, although they are now less popular than clubbing.

Bujakowska and Kubisiak revive the crude aesthetic of 20th-century social dances, treating the dancefloor as a meeting space. The democratic idea of 'going dancing,' often associated with social dances, frees the performers from the need to pretend to aspire to virtuosity, opening up to uncoded physical expression, to the potential of rhythm-driven yet non-unified being together. In both pieces, the seniors wear elegant, even extravagant outfits. The multi-colour dresses and suits remind me of Pina Bausch's ceremonial processions. The two choreographies might be seen as echoing the practice of the founder of Tanztheater Wuppertal. In 2000, Bausch revived one of her early pieces, *Kontakthof* (1978),⁷ the poignant tragicomic tale of a violent

world of interpersonal relationships, pulsating to the beat of sentimental 1950s songs. The revived version had a cast of 26 seniors with no previous theatre experience, who engaged in 12 months of intense work before the opening night.

Bausch did not choose material considered suitable for her performers' age and capabilities, and her piece was not about old bodies refusing to give up. Rather, she worked with ready-made material or, to be exact, with a physical score. Interestingly, she later staged the same choreography with a group of teenagers. Without changing the physical structures, she explored the spaces of youth and old age as spheres of potentiality choreographed by bodies dancing themselves (*sobątańczące ciała*). The seniors' gestures, in a way, extended the initial sequences to include embodied stories of their long lives, while the teenagers' movements were like explosions of curiosity, renewed initiations into adulthood in various configurations. The experiences of the old bodies were not so much the central theme of *Kontakthof* but the factor transforming the choreographic narrative focused on meeting places, taking it in an unexpected direction. The outcome was a production in which the seniors were dancers rather than 'old folk' performing on stage. The subjective treatment of female performers in Kubisiak's and Bujakowska's shows also manifests in a departure from the infantilizing fantasy of old age that sees it as a life stage when the space of creative possibilities becomes limited rather than one allowing for physical experimentation. The two productions offer an alternative to participatory initiatives that emphasize the non-professionalism of their participants and thus position themselves outside the realm of 'serious' art and to works that resort to tokenistic, spurious inclusion, which objectifies their participants.

Choreographies of fragility

In writing about fragility as an aesthetic-political category, I am inspired by the philosophy of Judith Butler or, more specifically, by two of their publications: *Frames of War* (2009) and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). The contexts of the philosopher's considerations are, of course, different from the contexts informing this article: *Frames of War* explores media representations of armed conflict; *Notes*, by contrast, discusses protesting bodies that publicly express collective protest. This notwithstanding, the notion of fragility as that which is shared by both human and non-human subjects has an ontological foundation or, in other words, it describes the mode of inhabiting a shared world.⁸ I invoke it in a necessarily simplified form without the background built by Butler before proceeding to examine how it applies in theatrical situations. In my approach, fragility is seen as not only a property of every being and body but as a trait of choreographic-theatrical alliances with the Others of the neoliberal norm, established to democratize the 'right to appear.' Butler writes of the right to appear in the context of public gatherings – bodies manifest themselves through voice, movement or just through their material presence, thus changing social choreographies, breaching the established divisions between the visible and invisible. The philosopher focuses on bodies she refers to as 'precarious,' that is, ones that, to a greater extent than others, 'suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (2009, p. 25). The precariousness of these bodies is palpable, overt and, in a way, compounded by their lack of protection. By showing it in public in situations of protest, the bodies demand its redistribution. In other words, they demand the right to live a good life no more susceptible to injury than other

lives. Thus, precariousness becomes not so much a collective identity as an ephemeral alliance of hyper-precarious bodies, the objective of which is to undermine the hegemonic structures of majority privilege. The idea is to generate new rules of interpersonal, or even interspecies, cohabitation, the cornerstone of which - alongside mutual concern - will be, at least, the equalization of our chances of dignified survival.

Butler addresses issues related to fundamental human needs, in particular those concerning existential and financial security. Precarious bodies are queer, non-normative, disabled, black, immigrant, and so on. The philosopher does not address old age, but they emphasize that patriarchy confines seniors, as well as children, women and slaves, to private spaces and denies them the right to public and politically-related appearance. As Łukasz Wójcicki contends, 'patriarchal culture driven by capitalism is doing its best to erase old age. It would be ideal to convince everyone that there is no such thing as old age' (2021).⁹ Wójcicki goes on to enumerate the practices of infantilizing and belittling and of commodifying senior citizens, the purpose of the latter, in addition to reinforcing capital, is to erase difference - older persons are welcome as long as they choose to take part in the performance of beauty mimicry, making themselves look like young people by hiding the signs of approaching death. Seniors are expected to mask their fragility, because its manifestations threaten the capitalist-ablist vision of the world and infect the 'healthy' fabric of the society of success and beautiful, strong and fit bodies.

Testimonies of the impermanence or non-self-sufficiency of human life and its susceptibility to decay, disintegration and the shrinking space of possibilities radically deconstruct neoliberal illusions associated with the rational logos and the slogan 'you can be anything you want.' The

dramaturgy of old age is unpredictable since old bodies are uncontrollable: they get ill, slow down, swell up, lose weight, bulge, cave in. In this regard, they resemble the bodies of children who are yet to internalize discipline and the hegemonic regimes of visibility. This does not mean, of course, that old bodies are completely unruly, or that old age is a time of mental incapacity. I understand unpredictability as an inevitable process of somatic and physiological changes that occur naturally, regardless of a person's health or financial resources. We all gradually succumb to fragility.

By recognizing and accepting the fragility of our bodies and identities, we notice our social nature and interdependence. Creating spaces where bodies can manifest their inherent fragility and precariousness is an ethical act. It also offers a chance to develop an alternative to the capitalist logic of self-sufficiency that promotes resourcefulness, efficiency, entrepreneurial spirit, productivity and competition while invalidating the significance and subjectivity of those who do not conform to that norm. In Kubisiak's and Bujakowska's pieces, seniors take the stage as artists whose fragility is a property rather than a synecdoche. I want to emphasize this, because old age is easily objectified, such as by considering it an embodied metaphor for weakness and helplessness, Butlerian precariousness or vulnerability to disappearance.

In *The Voice of Seniors*, fragility is revealed, among other things, in the performers' lines and stage presence, but it does not become a substitute for identity. In *Friend*, by contrast, it is present in the choreographic sequences, the pace of which is set by Krówka, who also makes sure they do not formally disintegrate. Her supportive role is not a form of depriving the performers of agency or autonomy but an expression of solidarity, concern and support, which should not be confused with pity or paternalism. I also

want to emphasize that neither Kubisiak's nor Bujakowska's piece is about the fragility of bodies. In both choreographies, precarious bodies *appear* and perform. What is at stake is not a mere pro-health involvement of senior citizens or a subversive destabilization of normative aesthetics (and politics) achieved by including bodies representing the visual periphery into the space of the visible. The idea is to develop a theatre event format that will offer seniors the opportunity for creative interaction without having to mount the barricades of critical art, perform inspiring tenacity or agree to embarrassing artistic outcomes for the sake of mere participation.

They made them believe

The Voice of Seniors unfolds in two spaces - live and virtual. In the first scene, seniors in flamboyant rainbow-coloured costumes repeatedly move across the stage. Each crossing is initiated by a different person. The other performers walk together, but their walking is not synchronized: styles and pace vary. The walking is collective, because everyone does it, but it is also differentiating, as it opens fissures in a seemingly homologous structure. This is reminiscent of Steve Paxton's 1967 *Satisfyin' Lover*, in which dozens of performers traverse the stage from right to left. The walking affirms a heterogeneous community that shares the same experience and choreographic score, celebrating the individuality of the bodies coexisting within it. For Paxton, a member of Judson Dance Theatre and the postmodern dance community, the use of everyday movement was not only a formal experiment but, above all, it expressed a protest against the esoteric-dramatic and hermetic forms of modern dance, elitist classical dance and against artistic and social hierarchies.

By opening her production with a walking scene, Bujakowska reveals its organizing principles. As is already apparent in the score of the opening scene, *The Voice of Seniors* does not universalize the experience of old age but splits it into a number of parallel scenarios that sometimes converge. At the same time, the walking bodies reveal their own potentials: each has different capabilities and is the source of different movement. In the section of the play that follow, the diversity of physical potentialities does not 'ruin' the choreography, but it makes it less restrictive. The dancing bodies are not hierarchized according to ability or virtuosity, and the open choreographic structures give them expressive freedom. In effect, the choreographer does not expose them to ridicule or subdue them by choosing easy, formulaic forms. In addition to the simple movement sequences that involve changes of direction and rhythmic arm raising, *The Voice of Seniors* includes expressive, lyrical and strongly individualized choreographic sequences in which performers embody longings and joys, or enact everyday rituals in quasi-comical ways.

The walking sequences in the first scene are interspersed with static introductions of performers. When each performer stops, their video portrait is projected on the screen behind them. The faces in the short videos look at the camera, smiling or remaining neutral. Some seem shy, others defiant. The private and the public begin to converge, the boundary between them remains jittery until the finale. The videos also show the seniors fielding questions about their likes and dislikes, pleasures and longings. The subject of death frequently comes up in their brief answers. The performers talk about loved ones they have lost and about missed opportunities. They also speak a great deal about the good things. The brevity of their answers renders the tone lighter - horrible things do not come across as personal tragedies but as part of the natural order of things. Bujakowska does not

exploit personal stories, nor does she try to elicit compassion. The fact that the seniors remain silent on stage also seems significant, as this and the restrained form of the piece generate distance.

In both the title and format of her work, Bujakowska references the popular TV show *The Voice Senior*, a version of the international format *The Voice*, in which senior citizens (60+) perform well-loved songs vying for the appreciation of the jury of voice coaches and for audience votes. The message of the show is that it is never too late to make one's stage debut and that music invalidates the cultural stereotypes about retirement. At the same time, *The Voice Senior*, like every show of its kind, raises a number of ethical questions related, among other things, to its tendency to intercut vocal performances with quasi-reports offering glances of participants' private lives, often highlighting sad, challenging or traumatic moments. As a result, votes are cast not only in recognition of talent but also for stories.¹⁰ In Bujakowska's piece, vocal performances are interspersed with video portrayals, following the pattern of the TV show, but significant modifications have been made to disallow the exploitation of other peoples' experiences. The choreographer does not replicate the formula of the objectification of suffering designed to strengthen a show affectively – she rejects the emotional *freak show* scenario and proposes a different kind of intimacy. By injecting wit and distance, Bujakowska does not deprive *The Voice of Seniors* of qualities such as honesty and authenticity, and she triggers mechanisms that I believe are intended to prevent responses based on pity. Her piece is neither a tale of the cathartic power of dance, nor an ageist melodrama in which seniors, exposed, and open to ridicule, are merely used to elicit emotions. What seems to prevent the objectification of other bodies is the use of humour.

Unlike in *The Voice Senior*, Bujakowska's production does not follow the dramatic script of a competition, even though one of its scenes includes rivalry. The performers alternate as conductors deciding the tempo and steps. Many of them make triumphant or provocative gestures, which may bring to mind popular dance battles. The director has the performers fulfil choreographic and acting tasks, collective and individual, and the overall tone of *The Voice of Seniors* is tragicomic. It becomes bombastic and sentimental at times, but this is defused with absurdist, grotesque scenes and black humour. The choral recitations of John Lennon's lyrics for the song 'They Made Us Believe' and of excerpts from George Perec's book *The Man Who Sleeps* are juxtaposed with playful lip syncing and a string of deaths enacted to the strains of Edith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien.' On the one hand, we hear poems such as Wisława Szymborska's 'Teenage Girl' and Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's 'How Many Roads Travelled Together' as well as quotes from Katarzyna Nosowska's book *Return from Bambuko*, on the other, we witness a shot to the head from a banana gun, accompanied by a monkey's guffaw morphing into the first chords of Czesław Niemen's classic song 'This is a Strange World.' The lyrics of the Myslovitz song 'The Length of the Sound of Loneliness' recited by one of the performers is followed by an admonition that can be loosely translated as 'calm your tits, dance with us old fuckwits.'

This patchwork composition combines the bitter with the ironic, the funny and even the silly. The lines fuse together into a song that is as mournful as it is rebellious. The choir of senior performers lambast neoliberal universalism and expose the illusion of individual autonomy. They remind us that we exist in and through relationships. The performers free themselves from the homogeneous regimes of retired persons' being in the world to explore spaces of strangeness and queerness. They do what is often

considered unbecoming for seniors. The grotesque serves not only to alleviate bitterness but mostly to deconstruct and queer stereotypical representations of old age. When one of the performers forgets their lines, their fragility affects the structure of the performance, amplifying the effect of the real. Nobody feeds the forgotten lines to the confused body, but it is not left alone as others carry the scene to its conclusion. In Bujakowska's piece, old age is not heroized, idealized or infantilized, but it becomes the source of potentiality and both good and bad (or challenging) experiences. The old bodies have agency and really influence the shape of the show.

The senior bodies experiment, pretend, explore their creative potential. Karol Miękina, who taught improvisation classes in the process of creating the piece, writes,

My main role was to open the seniors to creativity, to generating art rather than reproducing it. First of all, I wanted to show the participants that they themselves were the greatest value in creating dance, because their own bodies were their instrument, their material.¹¹

At this point it is worth mentioning Simone de Beauvoir's essay 'The Coming of Age' (2011), in which she notes that as we age our somatic reality changes not only in the physical but also in the existential sphere. The palette of our possibilities shrinks, which is not necessarily due to limited mobility but also results from becoming other and the concurrent experience of social marginalization. Miękina's strategy can thus be described as a remedy for this shrinking. Improvisation broadens the horizons of the body and imagination, allowing one to move beyond the socio-cultural scripts of old

age.

Dance, which is a generator of contact and a conduit of intimacy and empathy, fulfils the same function in *The Voice of Seniors*. As Pamela Bosak writes,

Movement, getting around the stage and disposition within the space become an operational choreographic strategy in which simplicity and expressiveness play a central role, particularly in the context of happiness, which seniors seek, and intimacy, which they want and need. A silent disco with other people or slow dancing creates an atmosphere of warmth, tenderness, mutual support and fun (2022).

Bujakowska's practice, which I term 'sensitive choreographing,' enables forming empathetic alliances not only between the particularly vulnerable bodies of the seniors but also between them and the audience. The source of the empathy, however, is not the concern about the predicament of others and a difference-erasing identification with it but the interaction space pervaded with intimacy and tenderness on the one hand and with distance on the other. As Anna Łebkowska argues,

Empathy cannot be reduced to the pursuit of complete identification, because it involves a perpetual tension between otherness and the pursuit of intimacy. In other words, the relationships in question tend to be based on the paradox of empathizing and standing aside, of deliberately suppressing one's expression while at the same time refraining from excessively

interfering with another person's autonomy (2008, p. 33).

The Voice of Seniors, due to its grotesque-comic elements, presents exactly that sort of paradoxical blend of simultaneous strangeness and intimacy and, therefore, a deliberate exercise in choreographing empathy.¹²

The club of *Przyjaciółka* lovers

Eighteen women and one man perform onstage in Daria Kubisiak's theatre event. The story they enact is not based on their personal experiences but on letters to the editor and advice published in *Przyjaciółka* ([Female] Friend), a magazine that was extremely popular in communist Poland.¹³ The structure of *Friend* corresponds to the diverse thematic range of the magazine, which, as we learn from the play's description, published 'legal, matrimonial, psychological and life-practice advice.' The set seems a nostalgic fantasy about a bygone era, organized by nostalgic imagination rather than by historical memory. The cluttered editor's desk with an old-style typewriter looks like a museum piece but it is just an ordinary table dressed up with communist-style trimmings. The darkened space is tainted red by warm light or it vibrates in the lights of a mirrored disco ball, while Anna Jantar's songs transport us to the world of a 1970s musical. The archival copies of *Przyjaciółka* the performers clutch in their hands serve as media through which the past is made present.

Kubisiak draws parallels with ritual and festival, opening a choreographic fantasy about the community-forming role of the magazine. A multi-hued procession of beautifully dressed figures saunters around the editors' desk, picking up copies of the magazine. They sing a festive song that includes the iconic slogan 'bądź przyjaciółką *Przyjaciółki*' (be a friend of *Friend*). This

choral parade is led by Krówka, who loudly announces shifts in its dramaturgy and marks time. Her role is not so much to discipline the seniors as it is to support them with her presence. The walking bodies perform the pleasure of reading in various ways – by swaying, marching, waving to loved ones, or taking slow, tentative steps.

The composer's role throughout the performance can be described in terms of embodied care. In a sense, her body becomes a prosthetic extension of the seniors' memory, but it does not command all the attention. She is an affectionate ally, not the star of a show in which the seniors' dancing serves as an interesting or touching backdrop. The composer-cum-performer feeds the right steps and transitions. She is not unlike a wedding dance leader tasked with making sure that everyone has a great time. Importantly, Krówka's actions do not seem intrusive or condescending. One reason for this is that she is not someone from outside the scenic world of the show whose role is to oversee the unruly bodies of the performers or possessively protect them from potential failure. She becomes one of the performers, taking on the role of the eccentric conductor.

Kubisiak's empathetic directing, which focuses on the performers' needs and accounts for their varying abilities, is reflected in the structure of *Friend*, which includes a complex support system. Some monologues are read from cards, so that the seniors do not have to rely on their memories. At one point, Kubisiak, who is in the audience, strikes a conversation with one of the seniors, giving her subtle hints as to which lines she should utter next. In *Friend*, the seniors are cared for, but it does not mean they have no agency. Their agency manifests in their often surprising interpretations of their physical tasks and in the way they approach their acting parts, demonstrating the diversity of their acting personalities. The director

constantly reminds us that allied collectives can help expand the range of their members' creative and existential possibilities. The structure of *Friend* may be seen as a theatrical embodiment of the solidarity-based ethic of care.¹⁴ Kubisiak creates a horizontal support network, which is inclusive and flexible and in which fragile and precarious bodies can feel at home and act creatively. Fragility is accepted and strengthened rather than negated or overcome.

In a way, the dramatic development of *Friend* follows the eclectic mix of themes featured in the magazine. In *Przyjaciółka*, tips on how to handle and store canned food and whisk eggs sit alongside advice for those discovering the oft-terrifying world of dating and courtship, for girls who want to exit patriarchal structures and for women stuck in toxic relationships.

Przyjaciółka writers celebrate girlhood and offer an alternative to the narrative of one correct model of womanhood. They address gender inequalities as well as alcohol and co-dependency problems. Some stories cited by Kubisiak are shocking, but the advice given to the readers is prodding and sobering, as well as tender and supportive. *Przyjaciółka* appears to be a medium of grassroots allyship and an alternative non-paternalistic quasi-support-institution dedicated to extending support to anyone who asks for it, regardless of their background or gender.

The seniors take on a number of roles, such as editors, letter writers and story protagonists. They perform scenes of crude courtship and tragicomic intoxication. They speak their lines with impressive intensity or restraint. At times they clown around. Their movements are sweeping and exuberant as well as graceful and charming. There is no single rule - we witness a fusion of diverse energies. The acting parts are interwoven with physical scenes in which the senior bodies explore expression through various dance forms.

In their introduction to *The Aging Body in Dance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, the editors Gabriele Brandstetter and Nanoko Nakajima examine the potential for reimagining the language used to describe the movement of senior-aged bodies in order to highlight the different potentiality of these bodies, eschewing phrases such as 'not so fit anymore' or 'not so spry any longer.' They propose the term 'different ability,' which is not intended to refer to loss but to imply 'gain,' 'access of new possibilities' (Brandstetter, Nakajima, 2017). In the same volume, Kaite O'Reilly describes the aging body as a source of creativity and inspiration. Embodiments of this kind of affirmative practice are present in *Friend*. The repertoire of bodily possibilities is expanded in the aerobics scene. Instructions such as 'heel to bottom' or 'the sun is rising' mean different things to different people, because each person has a different mobility range. In effect, the seemingly conventional movements that normally tend to unify rather than differentiate become unorthodox, unusual. The same thing happens in the waltz scene in which a formalized sequence becomes softer, transforming into friendly, rhythmic swaying. The disco improvisation to the Diana Ross song 'I'm Coming Out,' by contrast, marks an explosion of physical diversity that pays no heed to convention.

In their productions, Bujakowska and Kubisiak create spaces of equitable interdependence, founded on the affirmation of fragility as that which is shared and which is a testament to the social and relational nature of human existence rather than to negatively valued weakness. Both artists choreograph empathy that is born out of the sense of being entwined with others, rather than out of a difference-erasing identification.

The Voice of Seniors and *Friend* dismantle the stereotypical representations

of old age as a period of radically shrunken potentialities. They explore and amplify the creativity of bodies with altered mobility instead of accentuating their limitations. Another aspect positioning the two productions on the side of an alternative imagination that emancipates otherness is the fact that age is not their sole subject. Although the performers in Bujakowska's piece speak and dance primarily about the experience of old age, the critique of the difference-erasing capitalist logic is strongly underscored. Kubisiak, by contrast, creates a space in which senior citizens explore a cultural phenomenon and enact various roles, not only ones connected with their age-related somatic condition.

Notably, neither of the creators stop at including other bodies in their choreographies. They share agency with them, which manifests both in the improvisation-driven scenes and in the adherence to the principle of expressive-motor diversity. The senior bodies are not forced into ready-made forms. Their individual potentials co-choreograph the generated meanings and affects, which is revealed in the scenes based on improvisation tasks. Thus, Kubisiak and Bujakowska empower the seniors, offering an alternative to neoliberal narratives that position old age as unproductive and therefore redundant.

Translated by Mirosław Rusek

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Footnotes

1. Bujakowska's piece, co-created by Karol Miękina and Łukasz Laxy and produced by the Kraków Choreographic Centre/Nowa Huta Cultural Centre, was co-financed by the governments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from the International Visegrad Fund. The work was produced as part of the 'Lifelong Art in V4 Countries' project. For details, visit the website of the Kraków Choreographic Centre: <https://nck.krakow.pl/kcc/projekt-artystyczny-dla-seniorow> (in Polish) [accessed: 14.04.2023]. Photos by Klaudyna Schubert, video by Alexander Hordziej. The cast includes Barbara Morgan, Małgorzata Chodzińska, Włodzimierz Żurek, Grażyna Ladra, Grażyna Kuświk, Janina Zarzycka-Bem, Ewa Michałowicz, Bogumiła Simińska, Marta Kuklicz, Urszula Kłosowska and Jacek Dyląg. The production premiered on 2 August 2022 during the Kraków Dance Festival. *The Voice of Seniors* is part of a triptych directed by Bujakowska, who reprised the same format with children and with forty-year-olds.
2. Produced as part of the City of Kraków Scholarship awarded to Kubisiak, the play premiered on 3 March 2023 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków. Weronika Krówka composed the music. The producer is Oliwia Kuc. Cast: Krystyna Herej-Szymańska, Mirosława Gruca, Beata Grzejdziak, Krystyna Kruk, Anna Malkiewicz, Marina Belokoneva-Shiukashvili, Maria Marzec, Krystyna Maciurzyńska, Danuta Namaczyńska, Henia Nowak, Danuta Oczkowska, Wiesława Porębska, Józef Potrzebowski, Neli Rokita-Arnoud, Małgorzata Santorska, Nina Stepanko, Alicja Skotnicka, Barbara Sztandara, Danuta Walecka.
3. Daria Kubisiak is my colleague, with whom I co-curated, together with Zuzanna Berendt and Izabela Zawadzka, the programme 'New Choreography: Directions and Practices,' funded by the Heritage Priority Research Area of Heritage Open Courses (Edition A) as part of the 'Excellence Initiative' programme of the Jagiellonian University (2022). Barbara Bujakowska was our guest speaker together with the cast members of *The Voice of Seniors*. In 2020 I worked with her on the second edition of 'Rollercoaster: Experience Collectors, An

Educational Programme,' which I coordinated. At the time, I watched her intergenerational workshop focused on Kantor's *The Anatomy Lesson of Rembrandt*.

4. This distinguishes their work from productions such as *Once Upon a Time There Was an Old Man and an Old Woman* (Był sobie dziad i baba), directed by Agnieszka Błońska and choreographed by Anna Godowska (2009), which featured retired dancers, or Mikołaj Mikołajczyk's piece produced since 2012 in collaboration with the senior choir Wrzos and the Polish House in Zakrzew, which also included Iwona Pasińska, Adam Ferency, Paweł Sakowicz, Edyta Herbuś and the choreographer herself.

5. This is confirmed, among other things, by the accolade awarded by Katarzyna Waligóra in the 12th episode of Theatre Podcast, Theatre Roundup 2022,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR7CkHpz_1Q, [accessed 14.04.2023]. Kubisiak's piece was created as a scholarship project, which will make its further exploitation difficult.

Projects of this kind tend to have a limited lifespan. In other, more favourable circumstances, the production could become part of the repertory.

6. In their publicity materials, *Friend* is referred to as 'stage event' while *The Voice of Seniors* is described as 'dance piece.' Kubisiak is not a choreographer - she is a director, playwright, dramaturg and educator. Bujakowska has a background in dance and choreography, but she eschews labels. Speaking to Katarzyna Waligóra, she said, 'Who am I? A dancer? A director? A person who makes theatre? I don't know what to call myself, and I don't know if I need it. I often feel I'm not really welcome in the dance community, because there is too little movement in my work. I don't belong in the theatre field, because I have a background in dance, and looking from that perspective, there is too much movement and not enough words in my work' (Bujakowska, Waligóra, 2022).

7. It was revived in 2000 as *Kontakthof: With Ladies and Gentlemen over 65*.

8. Butler defines precariousness, which I treat as synonymous with fragility, as social rather than as a property of individual subjects. The philosopher writes, 'precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other.' (2009, p. 14).

9. In his column, Wójcicki focuses on agism in the field of dance, noting the fact that dancers are prematurely excluded from their profession. In this article I do not address this topic or examine work that features older and old bodies of professional dancers. Yet I would like to note that ageism in the Western dance community is systemic - the presence of older bodies on stage often has subversive overtones, as it involves a radical breach of the status quo (cf. Nakajima, 2011; Burt, Foellmer, 2017; Franko 2017).

10. This is of course only one of the problems associated with this format. One might also examine the differences in prestige between *The Voice of Poland*, *The Voice Kids* and *The Voice Senior*, which are due, among other things, to their unequal airtime and different awards, and the decision to launch a version for seniors, considering the fact that the rules of *The Voice of Poland* do not stipulate an upper age limit

(<https://s.tvp.pl/repository/attachment/e/d/0/ed04a75d084a4f75a8d32bcbe8d7234f.pdf> [accessed: 9.06.2023]). Such an analysis, however, would significantly exceed the thematic scope of my article.

11. The quote comes from the project website:

<https://nck.krakow.pl/kcc/blog/projekt-artystyczny-dla-seniorow-o-procesiepracy/> [accessed 14.04.2023].

12. The notion of kinesthetic empathy - related to the sensation of other people's movement and the work of mirror neurons but not necessarily to emotional empathy - figures

prominently in dance theory. The spectator, Gabriela Karolczak explains, “resonates” with the performer of an action through partial simulation of the same movement at the neural level’ (2012, p. 107). Susan Leigh Foster (2011) writes about ‘choreographing empathy,’ referring to Edith Stein’s ideas, for whom empathy involves both the bodily experience of connection with another person and the awareness that that experience is not directly ours (in Karolczak, 2012, p. 109). Following Foster’s proposal, which chimes with Łebkowska’s theory cited above, one should seek the possibility of an empathic relationship with the Other through the recognition of difference rather than through building an illusion of unity or identity. When discussing ‘choreographing empathy’ in the context of Bujakowska’s work, I primarily mean the dramatic development in which distance, irony and (black) humour combine to inactivate the difference-erasing mechanism of ‘getting inside someone else’s skin.’

13. At its peak in 1952, the circulation of the magazine reached two million copies (cf. Zajko-Czochańska, 2021, p. 156).

14. Following Carol Gilligan, I understand the ethics of care in opposition to the ‘ethics of justice’ (2015). The former is not founded on universal principles and, as Joanna Różyńska explains, it situates ‘the ideas of autonomy, pure rationality, impartiality, objectivity, functionality, normal equality and universality in opposition to a completely new set of values, foremost among which are interdependence, care and empathy, particularity, contextuality and focus on the needs of the other’ (2005, p. 44).

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/ EXERCISES IN ACCESS INTIMACY

Co-being in Walking – Exercises in Access Intimacy

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The main topic of the article is walking performances by artists with disabilities (Carmen Papalia and Noëmi Lakmaier). The author pays particular attention to Katarzyna Żeglicka's performance *Weź się przesuń!* (C'mon, Make Over!) presented at the Arsenal Gallery in Poznań in 2022, a walking relay that took place in the space of the exhibition *Politics of (In)Accessibilities: Citizens with Disabilities & Their Allies*. In her reflections, the author refers to the concept of access intimacy developed by Mia Mingus, Carmen Papalia's idea of *open access* and Sunaura Taylor's and Judith Butler's reflections on the interdependence of walking.

Keywords: walking performance; artists with disabilities; access intimacy; accessibility; interdependence

Accessible walks

Artistic walks (or more broadly, walking performances) have great potential for inclusivity. The simplicity of the activity and the use of space make them easily adaptable to the needs of persons with disabilities (hereafter 'PWDs'), and artists with disabilities can take part in them without much difficulty.

Walking performances are actions in which the movement of participants and/or performers is the fundamental element of the drama. They take a variety of forms (individual and group walks, aural or multisensory walks, walks with a guide or with a map or script in the form of instructions), use a variety of locations (building interiors and open spaces), and are linked to a specific place, or can be performed anywhere; they activate urban spaces and rural areas. What they have in common is the use of walking as a key structural element.

Walking performances by artists with disabilities more than other ones attract the attention of passers-by who do not realize what they have accidentally stumbled upon. The otherness of bodies with disabilities attracts the eye (cf. Garland-Thomson, 2020). Non-standard actions in public space performed by non-normative bodies become more visible and exposed to viewers. At the same time, they provoke the question of what standard actions are, who introduces norms and who is excluded from them.

In order to understand the specifics of walking performances created by artists with disabilities, the category of hypervisibility of PWDs introduced by Petra Kupperts, may be useful. The researcher notes the double presence and visibility of the artist with a disability: 'invisibility as an active member in the public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorisation' (Kupperts, 2017, p. 17). On the one hand, they do not have unrestrained access to public spaces as people without disabilities do. On the other, their action is immediately noticed, and they focus attention on themselves. Kupperts links this to breaking the 'stereotypes of passive disability' (2017, p. 17), which is associated with taking control of one's own image and breaking with the medical and charitable model of perception of PWDs.

Ewelina Godlewska-Byliniak uses Kupperts' category of hypervisibility to

explore activist actions of PWDs. As she writes,

It can be hypothesised that people with disabilities who undertake direct acts of civil protest or disobedience in the public space become hypervisible in a particular way for their visibility is enhanced by a type of activity that deviates from what society is used to expecting from people who are considered to be dependent, lacking willpower or powerless. Here, however, hypervisibility becomes an ally in the struggle for rights, and the presence regained in subsequent protest actions becomes a political presence (Godlewska-Byliniak, 2020, p. 111).

An analogous situation is produced in the performances of walking artists with disabilities. Their bodies, being a tool and often the subject of moving around, become active and causative, define methods of using public space and establish new rules of presence in it. PWDs' actions not only encourage the search and exploration of space in ways other than the everyday routine (which is typical of walking performances), but also pose an additional challenge for those who participate. They direct attention to the space as well as the performers' bodies, their capabilities and potentialities, the broadening of the category of walking and its inclusivity.

Who and how can be seen in public space, how walking can build the drama of performance – all these themes are addressed in Katarzyna Żeglicka's workshop work *C'mon, Move Over!* (Weź się przesunąć!). This was a three-day meeting with a group of female workshop participants held as part of the exhibition *Politics of (In)Accessibilities: Citizens with Disabilities, and Their Allies* at the Arsenal Gallery in Poznań. It ended with a walking performance

open to the public.

In this article I will look at the production of the post-workshop show and the preparations for it. I will reference different types of walking performances that draw on a set of similar strategies. I will utilize my discussion of the tools used in creating walking performances to analyze *C'mon, Move Over!*

The intimate visibility of walking

Katarzyna Żeglicka calls herself a *crip* and *queer* theatre educator. She is a dancer, activist, arts facilitator as well as a WenDo instructor (self-defence training for women and girls). She created a walking performance even before the event at the Arsenal Gallery. In 2021 she presented *I'm Coming!*¹ (Już lecę!) as part of the *PedestrianMayDay* (Pieszymaj) project. As she wrote in her announcement, 'For some time I have been fascinated by walking; walking as motion, as a process, as a path; walking as a struggle against balance, time and gravity; its diversity and complexity.'²*I'm Coming!* was a slow walk, extended in time, along the runway at the disused airport Kraków Czyżyny. The work was intended to last two hours, but was discontinued after ninety minutes due to difficult weather conditions. Żeglicka did not complete the route. She rested her hands on her knees and, after taking a few deep breaths, walked off the runway before reaching the end. As Katarzyna Waligóra noted in her review,

In other circumstances, such a surrender by the artist would have meant a failure of performance. This time it is different; the performer's breakdown turns out to be touching, and her hour-and-a-half-long struggle with balance and weather conditions was admirable (Waligóra, 2020).

In this disruption of the transition there is something close to another walking performance, *One Morning in May* by Noëmi Lakmaier. On 28th May 2012 in London, the artist set off, without the wheelchair she uses on a daily basis, on a route from Toynbee Studio to The Gherkin building.³ Dressed in a graphite suit and a lilac shirt, she crawled through the streets of London.

According to Google Maps, the route she had mapped out had about eight hundred metres, and should take eleven minutes to complete. After seven hours, Lakmaier was roughly halfway through the route, and ended the performance. Exhausted, in torn clothes and with dishevelled hair, she leaned against a building and lit a cigarette.

What Lakmaier's walk and *I'm Coming!* have in common is the withdrawal before the end of the walks, but the audience reactions to the artists' presence were extremely different. *One Morning in May* caught the attention of passers-by. A video recording shows some of them asking Lakmaier if she needs help. Others filmed her with their phones. In an essay accompanying the documentation of the performance, Mary Paterson draws attention to Lakmaier's double visibility in the space:

Unlike her surroundings, Lakmaier does not appear visually. What you see is not what you get – the crawling woman is both apparent and inexplicable to comprehend. Instead, she represents (amongst other things) visibility, and its processes (2012).

Paterson calls Lakmaier's strategy a disruption of visibility. By this he means that the artist's action in public space attracts the gaze of passers-by, but by not fitting into the accepted norms, it becomes both visible and displaced.

The simplicity of the action and its uncommonness, and its incompatibility with the norms all trigger extreme reactions from the public, from actively not paying attention to the artist's presence and looking away to wanting to help and not understanding her refusal.

In *I'm Coming!* Żeglicka's dual presence was taking place on a different level. Few people came specifically to see the performance, and Żeglicka's walking did not draw the attention of passers-by. Her petite figure escaped the gaze of people walking along the old runway. The movement, slowed down, unnatural and hypnotic, was not visible either. A short woman with a disability moved at an alarmingly slow pace within a popular walking spot. Hardly anyone stopped to check what was going on. Few people even turned their heads. While Lakmaier's performance was dealing with the artist's hypervisibility on the street, *I'm Coming!* achieved the opposite effect, i.e. Żeglicka became invisible to most walkers. However, when someone accidentally fixed their eyes on the artist walking in slow motion, her presence became mesmerizing. The action was not spectacular; in a crowded place it resonated with a small group of people who noticed something doubly absent from the Polish streetscape, i.e. the presence of PWDs and walking.

This invisibility combined with hypervisibility is unusual for walks created by artists with disabilities. Often it is the visibility of the action that is crucial in them. It is masterfully employed by Carmen Papalia, a Vancouver-based artist. Although he is a blind person, he does not want disability to be the basis of his identity, which is why he describes himself as a non-visual artist. In his walking performances, Papalia proposes that those who participate depart from the hegemony of sight and open up to other senses in the reception of art and space. But to outsiders, Papalia's performances are

exceedingly spectacular, hyper-visible and attention-grabbing.

One of his most famous projects was *Blind Field Shuttle*, a walking tour for groups of up to ninety people. The route followed city streets or paths along lakes or forests. Participants lined up, one person behind the other, holding hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Their eyes were shut. At the head of the march walked Papalia with a white cane. *Blind Field Shuttle* took place for the first time in 2010 in Portland. Since then, it has been repeated more than a dozen times in the United States and Europe. As Papalia emphasizes,

I don't think of this walk as like a walk in my shoes or like a simulation of my experience, because there's like a lot that I can't share with people in that way. I really think of this more as like time in which we're - intentional time spent with your eyes closed, time where you're exercising your non-visual senses (*AGNES Talks*, 2020).

The walking tour enables Papalia to create new conditions for his own functioning in the public space. On the one hand, it changes his position - from a person stereotypically perceived as needing help to a group guide. On the other hand, it forces the participants not only to activate their non-visual senses, but also to be more attentive to each other. As the creator tells us,

The walk is a completely interdependent organism, and this makes for an encouraging, empowering experience. Perhaps this is why I have never thought of myself as the point for empathy with this work because when I'm leading a walk we're all choosing to

navigate by way of our non-visual senses (Papalia, 2016).

Blind Field Shuttle is not an activity that goes unnoticed. A group of several dozen people lined up one after another and led by a man with a white cane is a sight that must attract attention. Thus, Papalia makes the presence of people with disabilities visible. He utilizes their hypervisibility and at the same time, like Lakmaier, the uncommonness of the action.

Papalia's performances are an artistic quest for safe moving around on one's own terms and breaking with the socially imposed position of a victim. The artist draws on his experience and examines what kind of presence on city streets would be attractive and useful to him. He seeks the comfort of his being in a space. This can be seen in spectacular performances in which he moves through the streets with a white four-metre cane (*Long Cane*) or with the support of a marching band which uses Papalia's route as a kind of score signalling to the artist by means of sounds what obstacles he has in his way (*Mobility Device*).

As well as in public spaces, Papalia's actions have just as often been performed in institutions. It is in this context that a long-standing artistic and anti-political project under the banner of *Open Access* was developed. In it, Papalia demands the development of new inclusive practices for PWDs, giving them greater agency and decision-making in accessing the offerings of institutions. In *Open Access*, Papalia criticizes reducing the issues of accessibility to the elimination of architectural barriers. He demands that the thinking of accessibility be extended to include mutual aid and attentiveness to each other.

In *An Accessibility Manifesto for the Arts* Papalia lists the five tenets of *Open*

Access (2018). As he points out, these are his own preferences for producing networks of relationships in which he would like to work and create. The demands presented to institutions influenced the remodelling of the approach to accessibility. Firstly, *Open Access* presupposes the presence of the people it is intended to affect, the recognition of their needs and the mutual trust and exchange of support. Secondly, it demands recognition of the heterogeneity of those with specific needs. It does not strive to create a common experience for disparate participants, but assumes that 'everyone carries a body of local knowledge and is an expert in their own right' (Papalia, 2018). *Open Access* is based on embodied learning in which everyone can determine their own position. This, of course, requires the trust of all participants in the process. The fourth tenet refers to interdependence as the basis for a radical reconstruction of power. This requires a reimagination of normalcy as 'a continuum of embodiments, identities, realities and learning styles' (Papalia, 2018). Finally, Papalia defines *Open Access* as a shared, temporary space of free sharing. It is adaptable as the needs of its participants and the resources available change. It creates a 'responsive support network' (Papalia, 2018).

Papalia's actions provoke questions about the openness of institutions, the accessibility of the space and its public status. They point out that public is not always synonymous with social, and that the audience is defined by institutions as a narrow, elite group with the privilege of taking advantage of the institutions' offering. Papalia emphasizes that access requires mutual aid and attentiveness to each other.

An affective, social rather than purely technological approach to accessibility is called access intimacy by one of the creators of the Disability Justice Collective, Mia Mingus. It is the ease of contact

emerging in a particular relationship, resulting from an understanding of the other person's accessibility needs. It is about understanding and intimacy in which there is no charity. Accessibility in this sense is therefore not a technological requirement, but a process and a relationship (Król, 2020, p. 62).

Mingus' approach described by Agnieszka Król is close to Papalia's recognitions. The concept of access intimacy discussed by the activist emphasizes the individual nature of the needs of all individuals within a network of relationships, requiring attentiveness to each other. Like Papalia, Mingus departs from the charitable model and focuses on seeing the other person's subjectivity first and foremost and trying to find a common field of access.

Sometimes access intimacy doesn't even mean that everything is 100% accessible. Sometimes it looks like both of you trying to create access as hard as you can with no avail in an ableist world. Sometimes it is someone just sitting and holding your hand while you both stare back at an inaccessible world (Mingus, 2011).

For Mingus, access intimacy is a tool for the empowerment and liberation of people with disabilities, not just their inclusion in the world of those without disabilities. It creates the conditions for transforming the balance of power, giving space to people who hitherto could only find themselves in the field of hearing exclusively on the terms set by the majority, i.e. people with normative bodies (Mingus, 2017). Access intimacy can refer to a variety of areas and people, and apply to 'mamas and parents, women of colour, queer and trans folks, etc.' (Mingus, 2011). Mingus does not associate it with

knowledge of discourse or knowledge of disability studies, ableism or accessibility. She makes a clear distinction between it and the willingness to help, the coercive implementation of accessibility or the charity model of perception of disability. She defines it as a relation, an attitude of openness and vulnerability towards the other person.

Access intimacy, like Papalia's institutional practices, goes beyond thinking of accessibility as combating architectural barriers and extends it to include issues of relationships with PWDs as well as understanding, humanizing and empowering them. It is a conscious observation of the impact of ableism on reality, and co-being with PWDs in a world subject to ableist rules. It is an attitude of solidarity, of noticing each other's needs and seeking opportunities to support each other in meeting them. At the same time, it is a shift in focus; 'the power of access intimacy is that it reorients our approach from one where disabled people are expected to squeeze into able-bodied people's world, and instead calls upon able-bodied people to inhabit our world' (Mingus, 2017).

Politics of (In)Accessibilities

It is this kind of accessibility, militant, independent and responsive, that can be discussed when describing the exhibition *Politics of (In)Accessibilities: Citizens with Disabilities, and Their Allies* which was on show at the Arsenal Gallery in Poznań from February to April 2022. Katarzyna Żeglicka delivered two performances as part of the exhibition. In addition to her workshop work, culminating in a walking performance in the exhibition space, she showed her own performance *The Resonance of Contrast* (Rezonans kontrastu) in which she addresses the topic of oppression of women (including women with disabilities) in Poland.

In addition to some ephemeral events, such as Żeglicka's performances, the exhibition at the Arsenal features eleven works addressing the issue of disability. For the most part, they are an artistic record of personal experience (Pamela Bożek, Kolektyw Nurkowy Bojka (Bojka Scuba Diving Collective), Daniel Kotowski, Grupa Nowolipie, Paulina Pankiewicz & Grzegorz Powalka, Joanna Pawlik, Rafał Urbacki, Karolina Wiktor and Liliana Zeic). A departure from this rule is a series of photographs by Artur Żmijewski, showing naked men with and without disabilities in a way that is both objectifying and aestheticizing.⁴

Politics of (In)Accessibilities was an example of an action that could be a response to the demands of access intimacy. This is already apparent in the way the exhibition is talked about. Zofia nierodzińska,⁵ the initiator of the project and at the time deputy director of the Arsenal Gallery, is listed in the exhibition credits as an assistant. This is an important gesture emphasizing her role as the instigator of the process, someone who supports the artists and does not impose her curatorial vision on them.

In a conversation, nierodzińska emphasized that the *Politics of (In)Accessibilities* was co-created by invited artists. Rather than drawing on the solutions of other institutions, the assistant curator opened the conversation to inventing the best possible accessibility options (nierodzińska, 2022a). Together with the artists, she looked for ways in which the artists could be present in the exhibition. The Bojka Scuba Diving Collective organized its own guided tour, Daniel Kotowski chaired a meeting with d/Deaf immigrants from the East living in Poland, and Karolina Wiktor organized a workshop for people with aphasia and their carers. Other events accompanying the exhibition included a workshop by Katarzyna Żeglicka, culminating in a walking performance around the exhibition.

While viewing the exhibition, one can notice at several points its connections with walking. The most obvious is the movement of the visitors. As nierodzińska recalls, it was important for her to develop an audio description of how to move around the exhibition, from entering the building to walking around the exhibition.⁶ The decision to develop a detailed description of the route through the exhibition forced the gallery to fine-tune the exhibition layout much earlier than usual. The provision of mp3 files with the audio description enabled visitors to use them on their own terms.

The theme of walking and co-being in the process of moving along was present in Paulina Pankiewicz's installation *Psychogeographical Views* (Widoki psychogeograficzne). It is a record of urban drifts that the artist embarked on together with the blind runner Grzegorz Powalka. Joined by a rope, they walked or ran around the city. The work is a collection of visual and poetic notes from their wanderings.

Walking also appeared, albeit not explicitly, in the curatorial rationale accompanying the exhibition. In it, Zofia nierodzińska refers, inter alia, to Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden*, Jadwiga Stańczakowa's *The Blind* (Ślepek) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies*. Already with this choice, the curator points to the direction of thinking about the exhibition, i.e. as a space for co-thinking about disability in social, ecological and political contexts. One of the focal points of nierodzińska's curatorial rationale is the documentary film *Examined Life*, directed by Astra Taylor (2008), an important voice regarding the analysis of art walks by people with disabilities.

Taylor invited eight male and female philosophers to take part in her documentary in which they move through various locations (primarily in New York) reflecting on themes set by her. For nierodzińska, the key

segment of the film is the one featuring Judith Butler, who is the only one who chose to share her time with another person. As Kathryn Abrams rightly points out,

The other seven philosophers respond to questions from Astra Taylor, the director, who remains mostly off camera. They are, in effect, occupying the entire screen of their segments. Butler chooses to share the frame. She situates herself as the interlocutor, rather than the primary subject. and her segment foregrounds a disability activist-Sunaura Taylor, the sister of the director-whose work might at first seem orthogonal to her own (2012, p. 73).

Butler and Sunaura Taylor, who uses a wheelchair due to arthrogryposis, walk through San Francisco's Mission District discussing the conditions that must be met in order to be able to walk in public space. The camera follows both their movements through the colourful streets and the steps of other passers-by. The conversation begins with Butler asking what walking means to Taylor and what it looks like. Taylor explains, 'I always go for a walk. ... I use that word and most of the disabled people who I know use that term also' (Taylor, 2008). The following minutes of the conversation (an extended version of which was transcribed and published in the book of the same title that accompanies the film (cf. Taylor, 2009) concern, on the one hand, the city's relatively highly accessible architecture (San Francisco is referred to in the conversation as one of the most disability-friendly cities), and, on the other, with the normalization of ways of staying and moving in public spaces (Taylor describes the reactions evoked in observers when she uses her mouth to carry a coffee cup to a table in a café; Butler recalls the story of a Maine boy who was murdered because his way of walking was deemed too

feminine). The most important theme of the meeting, however, is the interdependence and apparent sense of independence among people without disabilities. Passing a shoe abandoned on one of the side streets, the interlocutors wonder how the person who left it walked on.

BUTLER: So what seems clear to me is that we're always conditioned to take a walk. Certain conditions have to be met. We need means of mobilization, we need support, we need surfaces. And it seems to me that having the use of your feet is not a necessary condition for a walk. That's one of the things that becomes most clear when you talk about taking a walk or taking a stroll. Feet can be one means of mobilizing the body, but certainly not the only one, and not even a necessary one. And that means we get to rethink what a walk is in terms of all the things that power our movement, all the conditions that support our mobility.

S. TAYLOR: And I have many friends who don't have feet who go for walks (Butler, Taylor, 2009, p. 188).

The conversation between Butler and Taylor is important in my research on walking performance for several reasons. Firstly, it broadens the context of walking to include diverse bodies and opens up the category of walking to moving with assistive equipment. If going for a walk always (or at least in the vast majority of cases) involves the use of equipment that is not an organic part of the body, any movement can be considered as walking, be it in sports shoes, in stilettos, using a wheelchair, a crutch, or a white cane. A walk is not an activity reserved for those using two legs. It is the shared experience of all movers.

Secondly, Taylor and Butler pay particular attention to interdependence in the world. When it gets cooler during the walk, Taylor requests that they go into a second-hand shop that they are passing by to buy some warmer clothes. Butler helps her take a jumper off the hanger and put it on. Although the shop sells clothes by weight, the shop assistant estimates the price without weighing the jumper so that Taylor does not have to take it off and put it on again. This situation becomes an example of tender responsibility for each other and attentiveness to each other's needs.

BUTLER: Do we or do we not live in a world in which we assist each other? Do we or do we not help each other with basic needs? And are basic needs there to be kind of decided on as a social issue and not just my personal, individual issue or your personal, individual issue? So there's a challenge to individualism that happens in the moment in which you ask for some assistance with the coffee cup. And hopefully people will take it up and say, 'Yes, I too live in that world in which I understand that we need each other in order to address our basic needs. And I want to organize a social and political world on the basis of that recognition!' (Taylor, 2008).

We live in a world where we need one another's support and help to meet our basic needs. The very recognition that the world is structured in this way makes it possible to reject the concept that people without disabilities are independent and that PWDs need special treatment. We all need help and support. The question is what our needs are and how we can assist each other in satisfying them. Taylor and Butler's joint walk is an embodiment of interdependence on several levels, 'interpersonal interdependence, theoretical interdependence between gender theory and disability theory,

interdependence between resistance and reform' (Abrams, 2012, p. 73).

C'mon, Move Over!

Co-being, interdependence, mutual care and attentiveness to each other's needs were prominent in *Politics of (In)Accessibilities*. These were also important themes in Katarzyna Żeglicka's three-day workshop process entitled *C'mon, Move Over!* The workshop was designed as a movement laboratory for women and people with experience of living as a woman, open to the participation of people with and without disabilities.

The three days of meetings were intended to culminate in a performance open to the public. In the workshop announcement, Żeglicka wrote,

'We are not going to be doing the job of the state and institutions in building an accessible and safe environment because that is their responsibility. Instead, we will try to define them in our own way. We will focus on the environment in which we live. With attention to individual needs and in an atmosphere of mutual care, with (im)mobility and voice, we will decide how to transform the inaccessible space. We will expand it, change it and, if necessary, demolish it.⁷

There is a large potential for institutional critique in this description, which appears to bring the performance that concludes the workshop close to Carmen Papalia's practice. Reclaiming one's own place in the public institution and a bodily intervention in the exhibition space was supposed to conclude the series of meetings with a group of female participants.

However, not even one person with a visible disability signed up for the workshop. As Żeglicka mentioned in the interview, there could have been several reasons for this (the time of Covid, the methods of workshop promotion, or the way the information about the workshop was presented). Consequently, Żeglicka changed the starting question. It was worded as follows: 'How can fit bodies make their presence known and speak about those bodies that are not here?' This question, rooted in the practice of co-presence and close to access intimacy, was an important starting point for the work for a group of six.⁸

On the first day, Żeglicka and all six workshop participants worked in the exhibition rooms, performing a series of attentiveness exercises (to become more attentive to each other, their own bodies and the surrounding space). For the next two days, the work moved outside the gallery. The exercises proposed by Żeglicka can be described as a practice of testing hypervisibility in the public space. On the second day, the participants were tasked with finding places around the Arsenal Gallery that resonate with the slogan 'C'mon, Move Over!' One of these was a wheelchair ramp that was located next to a door in such a way that it made it impossible to use the door. Participants engaged in physical actions with this space (e.g. sliding down the stairs or lying down on them), activated it and drew the attention of passers-by to it, and to themselves. Then, during a walk in the vicinity of the gallery, they stood still in their chosen locations (e.g. in the space between traffic lanes), aiming to attract strangers' eyes. In her interview, Żeglicka drew attention to the unfavourable reactions from passers-by and their distrust towards the participants' actions. She mentions that this unprecedented behaviour was commented on ('Must be some nutcases!' (Żeglicka, 2023) and created distance.

Although Żeglicka does not reach for the term hypervisibility, her description of the actions refers precisely to this kind of crippling space:

A disabled body attracts the gaze by its very appearance in space. Bodies without disabilities that do strange actions in space have mental disabilities, a mental illness attributed to them (2022).

It was not the participants' aim to pretend they had a mental disability; nevertheless, their activity (i.e. not conforming to accepted norms) became a determinant of disability. Żeglicka's observation is a repetition and inversion of Taylor's narrative; a body that does not behave in a typical way becomes defined as sick and disabled. Thus, its otherness becomes hypervisible.

On the last day of work, the participants took to the streets of Poznań again. It was 22nd February 2022, two days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when social unrest was evident. Żeglicka says that the group felt the need to react to the situation, to translate their fears and anxieties into action. The participants prepared banners with slogans of support ('We are with Ukraine') and walked with them across an intersection or stood still in the street. The reactions were enthusiastic, 'people came up and thanked them, took pictures' (Żeglicka, 2022). Although the actions were similar to those of the first day (standing motionless by the street, occupying a zebra crossing), the use of a banner to highlight the subject of the action changed its perception.

I am not sure if this perception was the same as Żeglicka's observations. The performers did not confront their assumptions with passers-by, and it is not possible to say with full confidence that the hostility they recognized on the first day was real, or only perceived as such due to the emotions and

reactions of the performers. I rely exclusively on Żeglicka's observations, her account and interpretation of the situation. According to her, when she and the performers talked as a group about the two days of work, they all agreed that the reactions of the audience were different on each day. This was related to the themes raised in the conversations, i.e. the (non-)presence of the body with a disability in public space, and the visibility of disability and how it is shaped by society. Starting from the category introduced by Mingus, one can regard the practice proposed by Żeglicka as generating a situation of access intimacy. Guided by the theme, the workshop participants were sensitized to the inaccessible when entering the street. They did not have the ambition (or possibility) to make public space more accessible. The purpose was to make a change at the level of their own mind-set, to reverse their own perspective and notice what might be a barrier for others. The exercises proposed by Żeglicka enabled the participants to test hypervisibility at the level of performance, to see what it is to work in public space and how their bodies without disabilities might be interpreted by passers-by depending on the nature of the actions and their understanding of them.

The third day of the workshop was also a time to work on a twenty-minute performance open to the public. Żeglicka proposed the form of a relay. The actions of the performers were to be broken down into specific points in the exhibition and performed in relation to them. 'I imagined it as a relay between the body and the work; I abandon something, but the work also takes something from me' (Żeglicka, 2022). The successive stations were connected by a joint procession of the performers and the audience. Participants randomly grouped into three pairs worked in contact with three works in the exhibition, the mural *Samoreal* by Karolina Wiktor, Liliana Zeic's installation *Apples Growing on Oaks* (Na dębach rosną jabłka) and *All Is Not*

Gold by (Nie wszystko złoto) Pamela Bożek.

The Relay

The performance *C'mon, Move Over!* took place on Tuesday 22 March 2022, at 4 pm. 'It was a rather intimate gathering for those people who can at all afford to come to the gallery during the day, but quite a few people turned up nonetheless,' reported nierodzińska (2022). I reconstruct the course of the performance based on conversations with nierodzińska and Żeglicka and a small amount of archival material from the Arsenal Gallery (no full video documentation was produced, only a few shots were included in a video clip summarizing the exhibition).

Upon entering the gallery, members of the audience were not given instructions as to where they should take a seat. There was no clear division between the performers and the spectators. The audience, moving slowly through the exhibition, chatting freely and waiting for the performance to begin, after a while could see the first couple in action. Two female performers performed a choreography based on gestures of care and tenderness, hugging and the closeness of partnering. The movement actions were scripted in response to Karolina Wiktor's work *Samoreal*, a mural presenting an alphabet invented by the artist.

'Inverted alphabet' or in other words 'inverted fonts' are minimalist incomplete-concept letters. The author, Karolina Wiktor, created her 'inverted alphabet' in a state of aphasia following a stroke she suffered in the year two thousand and nine.⁹

The alphabet was intended to serve as an aid in relearning communication

skills. Probably this is where the choreography came from, with the performers partnering each other and reaching out to the audience with their actions. They invited the audience to hug them, directed the fingers of their hands from their eyes to the eyes of the audience. As Żeglicka recalls, they were entering the viewers' personal space. At the same time, by moving among the audience, they reinforced the group's sense of unity and togetherness in which there are no divisions between the stage and the audience.

After a short sequence, the group moved on to Liliana Zeic's installation, the work of an ally. *Apples Growing on Oaks* was an object lying on the floor, with an elongated, floral shape, resembling a cactus made of straw. Hanging next to it was a white fabric imprinted with the shape printed on it, which was a simplified replication of the object, and some key words placed around it, which 'are directly related to the experience of processing trauma through non-normative sexual practices, or BDSM practices.'¹⁰ Zeic's work was 'a symbol of a queer body processing trauma, a non-normative body being traumatised.'¹¹ Another couple emerged from behind the fabric hanging from the ceiling and very slowly began to approach each other. The performers held out their hands towards each other in a gesture alluding to *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo. nierodzińska recalled how electrifying it was to wait for the performers' fingers to make contact, and their concentration on the action focused the attention of those watching (nierodzińska, 2022a).

The final stage of the relay was Pamela Bożek's work *All Is Not Gold* which consists of a photographic self-portrait of the artist wrapped in gold fabric with her son and a gold-painted plaster cast removed from his leg. The installation is 'a record of how to deal with the experience of a child's

disability in public space' (nierodzińska, 2022b). The performers prepared a short prayer. Starting the action, they recited it with small books modelled on prayer books in their hands. They then switched to singing, to protest shouting, and finally read the text while kneeling in front of the artwork.

God, c'mon, move over!

It's time to move to the background

to let the human being into the foreground.

A perfect being.

You, me, one person, a golden umbilical cord.

You, me, one person, a golden umbilical cord.

God, c'mon, move over! (Żeglicka, 2022)

They repeated this several times with different intentions and energy. nierodzińska recalls this sequence as the most disturbing. Żeglicka remembers it most accurately. The action was intense, corresponding to the artwork presented. It evoked anxiety and fascination. The text, styled as a prayer, reinforced the image of a mother with her child in her arms, creating a para-religious situation of celebration. As it grew in intensity, the action departed from the calm and tender atmosphere of the previous sequences.

That was the end of the performance. All the performers gathered in the middle of the exhibition hall, Żeglicka thanked them for their time and the workshop together and said goodbye to the audience. She did not participate in the performance; she observed it together with the audience.

The relay nature of *C'mon, Move Over!* took into account the particularity of a walking performance. The performers' movement and the choreography were part of the architecture of the exhibition. nierodzińska hesitates to call

the stops at the individual works stations. She points out that not all viewers walked with the group. Some watched the performers from afar, others approached them closely. Such a structure implies freedom and an independent decision on how the participants of the walk-around relay would walk. The form was close to that of a guided tour of an exhibition, except that the authors' narratives about the individual works were a choreographed movement. They embodied the themes dealt with in the artworks, but also created their own complementary and expanding contexts.

The relay by Żeglicka and the female workshop participants stands out from the other examples of walking performance discussed here. It is carried out by bodies without disabilities moving through an exhibition space that presents works of artists with disabilities. There is something tender about this co-being in this particular situation, in producing it by diverse bodies attracting attention to shared themes. This presence is an affirmation of Butler's and Taylor's thesis; we live in a world where we are interdependent on one another so we need to notice one another's needs.

Activism

While the actions performed by Żeglicka and the participants around the Arsenal Gallery were a search for inaccessible places, the work at the exhibition and the performance did not address this issue. Despite real changes towards architectural accessibility, Żeglicka recalls that the exhibition space was difficult for her as a person with a disability. The red walls and red floor were not conducive to work. She recalls that she tried and failed to negotiate a room change. However, she admits that despite her fears and initial resistance, the red space blended well with the activities

proposed by her. It is possible that this experience, the incorporation of the space into the performance, weakened the critical potential. It is possible that despite the rather emphatic wording of the text informing about the workshop, it was not incorporated in the movement activities. It is possible that if the workshop had included people with visible disabilities, the course of action and themes would have been different. This does not change the fact that Żeglicka's work, her very presence at the exhibition, the practice of seeking the visibility of people with disabilities and the question of how they are visible, worked well in the *Politics of (In)Accessibilities*. The work was a process that became a component in creating an allied institution and shared space for people with and without disabilities. It was an exercise in access intimacy, the shared looking of diverse bodies and individuals at an ableist world. It was based on relationships; between the participants in the process, with Katarzyna Żeglicka, and with the work of artists with disabilities. Through co-being the participants had the chance to practice attentiveness to each other, to their own and others' needs, and to explore these in a joint presentation at the exhibition. Finally, *C'mon, Move Over!* was an attempt to open both the participants in the process and the people watching it (on the streets of Poznań and in the gallery) to potential interdependence, the necessity of conscious co-being in a world that we cannot change, but in which we can only function by caring for each other.

Katarzyna Żeglicka describes herself as a burnt-out activist. However, looking at her practice against the background of the work of other male and female artists with disabilities, one can see that the aspect of fighting for the rights of people with disabilities is constantly present in her work. Through her (non-)presence, hypervisibility and partial invisibility, Żeglicka questions the rules of shaping public space and repeats demands that can, at least to a tiny extent, contribute to fighting the ableist social order.

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Footnotes

1. Repeated on 22.07.2003.
2. Description of the performance is available on <https://www.kzeglicka.com/taniec> [accessed: 1.03.2023].
3. Documentation of video-performance is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPGoaBMH60s&ab_channel=HydarDewachi [accessed: 28.02.2023].
4. The juxtaposition of Źmijewski's work with that of other artists has caused some controversy in the disability community as mentioned by both nierodzińska and Źeglicka.
5. Surname spelling consistent with the way nierodzińska signs her texts.
6. The audioguide descriptions were created in collaboration with the Culture Without Barriers Foundation and Remigiusz Koziński.
7. Information about the workshop is available on the Arsenal Gallery website: <https://arsenal.art.pl/event/wez-sie-przesun-performatywne-przekształcanie-niedostępnych-przestrzeni/> [accessed: 1.03.2023].
8. The participants of the workshop and the final show were Misia Źurek, Monika Wińczyk, Natalia Klupp, Agata Tomorowicz, Wiktoria Sobora and Magdalena Przybylska
9. *Karolina Wiktor AD*, Galeria Miejska Arsenał, 9.02.2022, https://youtu.be/Wo94_shP4EU [accessed: 1.03.2023].
10. *Liliana Zeic AD*, Galeria Miejska Arsenał, 9.02.2022, <https://youtu.be/Fxh07mZoKkI> [accessed: 1.03.2023].
11. *Ibid.*

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