Kushner Stein Blecharz

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The #MeToo Movement and Transformation

Theatre and Ecology

Symphony of the Ursus Factory

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

Agata Adamiecka-Sitek Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Theatre Art in Warsaw

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

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

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

The #MeToo movement is often talked about as a revolution, which of course it is not in the strict sense. It defies the old order. It is a violent rupture, an explosion that has triggered a snowball effect.

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

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

goals are up to us, up to those who have been moved.

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

The enduring subject

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

What I find crucial in Savodska's testimony concerns the relational nature of her transformation. Describing her journey, Sadovska speaks about people who have become her allies. But relationality also has another dimension here: Mariana Sadovska's voice is, as she herself admits, induced by other voices, it is part of the ongoing conversation about abuses of power and the price one has to pay for "the opportunity to serve high art", which began in spring 2019 in Ukraine. This conversation is in turn part of the vast polyphony of voices unleashed by the #MeToo movement a few years ago.

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

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

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

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

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

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

relations in such a way as to prevent any acts of solidarity with violence victims, generating situations of psychological and economic dependence. The author points out that all these mechanisms are underpinned by the institution of master and his “true art” which is supposed to require great sacrifices.

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

“I feel guilty but I do not regret”

It is interesting to look at this mechanism in close-up, and also from a reverse perspective. One of the most apt self-definitions of “master arrogation”, provided in 2013 by Bernardo Bertolucci, offers an opportunity to do so. In response to a Dutch TV journalist’s question about the controversial rape scene in *Last Tango in Paris*, which became a source of deep trauma for Maria Schneider and had a lasting impact on her later life, the director openly describes the situation: “The sequence of the butter is an idea that I had with Marlon in the morning before shooting it. It was in the script that he was going to rape her in a way. We were having with Marlon breakfast on the floor of the flat where we were shooting. And there was a baguette and there was butter. And we looked at each other and without saying anything we knew what we wanted. […] But I’d been, in a way, terrible to Maria because I didn’t tell her what was going on, because I wanted her reaction as a girl, not as an actress. I wanted her to react like she felt humiliated. If it goes on she’d shout ‘No, no’. And I think that she hated me and Marlon because we didn’t tell her that detail of the butter used

as a lubricant. And I still feel very guilty for that." "Do you regret that you'd shot the scene like you did?" asks the journalist. "No", Bertolucci answers without hesitation, "but I feel guilty. I feel guilty but I do not regret. To make movies, sometimes, to obtain something, you have to be completely free. I didn't want Maria to act her humiliation [and] her rage. I wanted Maria to feel, not to act, the rage and the humiliation (Bertolucci, Heys, 2013).

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

problem is that manipulation and violence against women, including violence enacted in a sexual manner, are not such reasons.

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

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

This authority serves the director to create a false equality between himself and the actors, to mask the power dynamics and to blur the question of responsibility for the process. Unrestrained "artistic freedom" and the autonomous "artistic dream" are related modernist constructs in which art is a special realm, and – to put it simply – it is a higher rather than a common good. This perspective occludes the political dimension of art, which I see as fundamental, and which involves the common in art – its social embedding, its entanglement in a web of symbolic power and thus any power, in a system of distinctions, exclusions, exploitation processes and emancipation processes rooted in what Walter Benjamin calls "apparatus of production" which is a part of a social system. The kind of theatre that does not examine

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

"We. All. Knew." Institutions in action

It has recently been three years since the New York Times and the New Yorker published articles on Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconduct and Alyssa Milano used the hashtag MeToo. Within the first 24 hours, over twelve million posts were tagged with the hashtag. Their authors, overwhelmingly women, shared their experiences of sexual violence or

responded to other people's stories (CBS News, 2017). The #MeToo explosion illuminated some of the default settings of the social system, re-energizing the feminist movement as one of humanity's liberation movements, "the movement to free democracy from patriarchy" (Gilligan, 2013, p. 176).

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

> […] it is time to confront the abuses of power that have been occurring in our own industry for years. […] The Royal Court exists to tell the stories that are otherwise unheard. We have therefore created an online forum where you can safely, and (if you choose), anonymously tell us your stories. Whether you consider it a big or small thing, if someone in a position of power over you has made you feel sexually compromised, or at all uncomfortable, then be brave, tell us what happened. We will take care of your story (Featherstone, 2017).

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

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

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

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

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

The ultimate objective of these documents is to change the cultural model that normalizes violence, keeps it invisible and irrelevant and shifts the burden of responsibility to those who experience violence. At the core of this new social contract in the theatre industry is the emphatic notion that even

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

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

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

As Chandra and Erlingsdóttir point out, it is clear that questions of responsibility, including criminal responsibility, and of broader justice are at the centre of the #MeToo controversy (Chandra, Erlingsdóttir 2021). We know this all too well after the “paper feminists” case in Poland (Grabowska, Rawłuszko, 2021). What I mean here are the sometimes irreversible effects

of public stigmatization, unverifiable testimonies, the blurred line between personal and power relations, the media's appetite for sensation, its focus on viewer ratings and readership figures rather than on reliable reporting or in-depth debate, and, of course, the mechanisms of cancel culture, which is on the rise thanks to social media (Kuczyńska 2020).

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

interests of the perpetrators" (Grabowska, Rawłuszko, 2021, p. 295). The justice system will not solve the cultural problem exposed by #MeToo, nor will it bring justice to most of those who have suffered violence. Therefore, nothing will absolve us of the responsibility for the reality of gendered violence, which has finally been revealed to us in all its graphic details; we must find ways to tackle this challenge.

"Since the case has been referred to the prosecutor's office, some findings will finally emerge. […] If there has been a transgression, punishment will be the right outcome." (Kornaś, 2020). "It is obvious that all acts of violence and harm, if proven, should be judged and punished" (Kolankiewicz, 2020). "Any transgressions of bodily integrity, especially in business relations, any breaches of the law should be reported by those concerned to relevant authorities, judged by the institutions established for this purpose, and the consequences for acts proven and judged should be strictly enforced against every person regardless of their status and position" ("Poland: Statement on Gardzienice by Representatives of the Academic Community", 2020). I believe that the recurring formulations in the responses of Gardzienice researchers reveal their lack of readiness to face the situation and a refusal to think over both the wider cultural problem and their own entanglement. Therefore, in addition to what has already been said about the current legal solutions and the justice system, it is necessary to state clearly what the authors of the "Statement" seem to suppress in their consciousness: the criminal acts allegedly committed by Włodzimierz Staniewski, which have been described in the published testimonies and which could have resulted in charges – that is, psychological abuse, insults, infringements of bodily integrity, workplace mobbing, sexual harassment, deprivation of liberty and violation of the Labour Code, are all beyond the statute of limitations, so no criminal action can be taken against him[1]. The justice system will not absolve

us of our responsibility for our present and past attitudes in relation to what we have already learned.

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

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

> Witold Mrozek's article published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on October 7, "Workplace Mobbing and Sexual Harassment in Gardzienice", as

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

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

Joanna Wichowska described the relationship between the founder of the Gardzienice Theatre Centre and the researchers who follow the Centre's work in terms of a system of circulating prestige and power:

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

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

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

perspectives.

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

The author argues that the absence of the social concrete and the fact of keeping the research within the limits of an autotelic system whose principal notions came from Staniewski himself, resulted in a complete disregard for ethical questions about the model of theatre practiced by Staniewski. Kapusta points out that the “effect of silence” was linked with and indeed conditioned “the figure of network violence in the academic discourse on Gardzienice”, which she sees as “an institutional, academic situation of ethical silence which is a factor contributing to the state of chronic absence of questions about the ethical functioning of Gardzienice”. The author claims that the two phenomena she had identified had a profound effect on the status of her research, because her empirical material, which included interviews with Staniewski’s co-workers and associates, required her to ask these questions. In her dissertation, the author also examines the institutional resistance she ran up against when she tried to conduct her

research in a university setting. This approach, including an empirical study of Gardzienice, an analysis of its accompanying academic discourse and of institutional resistance to research questions and perspectives coming from outside an authorized circle, may prove particularly valuable for understanding the questions of ethics in theatre research.

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

The subject of a revolution

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

an outmoded concept of sexuality?" asks Sajewska rhetorically, thus setting up an opposition between, on the one hand, the desire to stop sexual violence against women and change symbolic power relations in this space and, on the other, a transgressive queer revolution that makes it possible to "formulate utopias of the impossible" (Sajewska, 2020). I profoundly disagree with this approach, both with its understanding of the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and with the political strategies of resistance and dismantling the capitalist-patriarchal hegemony. Simply put, the rise of capitalism was connected not only, as Sajewska reminds us citing Foucault, with the subjugation of sex, but also with the severing of bonds between women, the blocking of mechanisms of female support and knowledge transmission, the subordination of women's sexual and reproductive freedom to accumulation processes, as demonstrated by Silvia Federici (Federici, 2009), let alone colonial and class exploitation and the exploitation of the Earth. Today, we cannot open the revolutionary horizon in just one direction, unless we mean a utopian revolution understood not as pointing to systemic alternatives which our imagination is yet to grasp but as permanent unfulfillment. In this role, however, the revolution is reduced to being a safety valve on the periphery of the system. In my view, real transformative work must involve building an intersectional front, which in no way means unification and removal of tensions but the maintenance of dynamic alliances, exchanges and cooperation in a process of transforming the world together. #MeToo energy should be included in this constellation of emancipatory movements, which is already happening in different corners of the world (cf. the analyses of China, Japan, African countries, South America, India and Arab countries in Fileborn, Loney-Howes, 2019, and in Chandra, Erlingsdóttir, 2021). This polymorphous movement requires continuous critical debate, the opening up of further avenues such as including the

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

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

When Alyssa Milano first used the phrase MeToo, she claims she was not aware that ten years earlier Tarana Burke had founded a movement of the same name to support black women from marginalized communities who had experienced sexual violence. Even if we take her at her word, Milano's lack of awareness is telling. Another indisputable fact is that #MeToo

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

Rebecca Leung and Robert Williams examine the complex dynamic of the overlap of sexism and racism in their article "#MeToo and Intersectionality". The authors point out, for example, how the far lower visibility of the black women victimized by Bill Cosby enabled his lawyers to portray their client as a victim of racial vilification and to call the trial a "lynching". At one point, Cosby's defenders even compared him to Emmett Till, the black teenager murdered in 1955 for allegedly accosting a white woman (Leung, Williams, 2019, p. 357). The unequal distribution of visibility is not the only problem. In the context of sexual violence, black women also have to face the

consequences of deep-rooted racial inequalities. On the one hand, due to the constantly active set of stereotypes making up the construct of the promiscuous “black slut” who is virtually impossible to harm (Tille, Simon, 2007, as quoted in Leung, Williams, 2019, p. 359), their right to defend their own dignity and bodily integrity is undermined, while on the other hand their willingness to speak up about violence inflicted by members of their own community is hindered by the lingering mechanisms of solidarity against white oppression which stop them from exposing “their own people”. Given how deeply racist the practices of the US law enforcement and justice apparatus are, this resistance is entirely understandable.

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

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

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

Not averse to social media, Me Too uses it effectively in its political struggle. I myself largely share Dorota Sajewska’s deeply critical opinion of the role of social media in contemporary politics and cultural processes, but living in the country of #BlackProtest and the Women Strike, which began with women posting photos of themselves in black, I find it difficult to accept the view that it is at most “an effective platform for informing (each other)” (Sajewska, 2020) and does not really contribute to building political resistance that happens “in the streets”. This dualistic separation of media space and physical space has long since fallen out of step with our

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

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

This revolution is taking place in the streets, in the media, in institutions and in private homes. And it will have to continue in all of these spaces if any change is to happen. Pooling the energy of different movements, it launches what Paul B. Preciado has called a transfeminist and decolonialist uprising (*soulèvement*). Here is an example of a discourse that does not waste its transformative potential, is not squeamish about mass phenomena and

mainstream icons, and does not hesitate to integrate the power of their voices with voices that are not heard in the halls of global capitalism:

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

Amidst the authoritarian regime's assault on women's rights in Poland, the

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

Revolutions of care

Before Mariana Sadovska relates her Gardzienice experiences, she starts with remarks written, as she puts it, “at a remove”. She begins with the

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

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

The institution had to draft new contracts to account for new work circumstances and to accept the risk that the process may take longer and that some shows may have to be cancelled because baby Stefania would be unable to perform. The piece explored the experiences and fears of someone who has entered a radical caring relationship such as taking care of a baby. It also invoked the experience of childhood and the special condition of a

child subject. The presence on stage of a baby who strongly attracts attention but is outside the conscious mode of acting and the theatrical "make-believe", opened the show to a performative dimension marked by unpredictability, modifying the communication set-up. The presence of a baby throughout the work process and during the show transformed what Benjamin called "the apparatus of production". Not in a dramatic or radical way, but deeply and consistently. The performance piece can be viewed as a transformative model for social relations in which care labour – the reproductive labour of sustaining life – understood in its broadest sense, not reduced to parental relations, becomes part of production labour.

I've been observing scattered but steadily built transformative practices in Polish theatre that provide a basis for intuiting the possibility of a systemic alternative. The idea proposed by Agnieszka Jakimiak comes to mind which sees a theatre production as a micro-institution whose creators decide to transform and democratize power relations within theatre (Jakimiak, 2014, p. 23), sometimes turning this principle into a long-term artistic strategy. Many directors, especially of the younger and middle generation, work along these lines. Apart from Jakimiak and Smolar, the list includes Weronika Szczawińska, Katarzyna Kalwat, Małgorzata Wdowik, Justyna Sobczyk, Agnieszka Błońska and Magdalena Szpecht. The same principle underlies the relational and speculative choreographic practices of Agata Siniarska and Anna Nowak. There is no point in providing an exhaustive list here. What matters is that there is a rising trend in Polish theatre that combines the political with production processes in the belief, as I have written elsewhere, "that labour methods cannot be separated from artistic processes, and that each work of art also tells of how it was created" (Adamiecka-Sitek, forthcoming). This trend is also shared by other institutions and practices of varying scope, such as Teatr 21, Teraz Poliż and the Performing Arts

Institute (its mission statement, “On Biodiversity in Theatre”, was written jointly with Komuna Warszawa), curatorial programmes of Agata Siwiak and Pracownia Kuratorska, activities of the Strefa WolnoSłowa (Free Speech Zone), institutional processes such as Teatr Powszechny’s Agreement (*Porozumienie*) or Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Theatre Art in Warsaw anti-discrimination efforts and efforts to democratize the training model in drama education[3].

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

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Autor/ka

Agata Adamiecka-Sitek (agata.adamiecka-sitek@e-at.edu.pl) is a lecturer and Student Ombudsman at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw. Her areas of interest include gender, corporeality, the political in art, and institutional criticism. She was head of Research and Publishing at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute for many years. Agata is a member of the team of curators of the Forum for the Future of Culture, Warsaw, and was part of the team coordinating the development of Warsaw's current cultural policy. As a dramaturg, she collaborates with Marta Górnicka, co-creating the Chorus of Women and the Political Voice Institute under the auspices of the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin. ORCID: 0000-0001-8131-2679.

Footnotes

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

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Angels in America. The Transition and Polish Political Theatre

Dorota Sosnowska University of Warsaw

The text is an analysis of the Polish premiere of Tony Kushner's drama *Angels in America*. The drama, staged in 1995 as *Angels of America* at the Wybrzeże Theatre in Gdańsk, directed by Wojciech Nowak, has not made it into the history of Polish political theatre. However, the testimonies of its reception today allow for a complex analysis of the entanglement of political theatre in the so-called political transition. With the help of the category of "normality", I am trying to expose the meandering paths of emancipation in the Polish theatre of the 1990s - the time of transition.

Keywords: *Angels in America*; normality; transition; political theater

On 26 March 1995 *Anioły Ameryki* (Angels of America), directed by Wojciech Nowak, opened at Gdańsk's Wybrzeże Theatre. It was the now-forgotten Polish premiere of Tony Kushner's drama *Angels in America*. Krzysztof Warlikowski's 2007 production of the play would become one of the most important performances of Polish theatre after 1989. As British scholar Bryce Lease writes in his 2016 book *After '89. Polish Theatre and the Political*:

> Warlikowski's revolutionary staging […] directly attempted to

> rectify the lack of a concrete gay emancipatory movement in Poland cited by Kulpa and Mizielińska as a cause of disequilibrium in political struggle and the dynamics of oppression. Warkocki argued that this was the most significant production of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Warlikowski's determining staging provoked a new public discourse around homosexuality that allowed for a crucial representational counterdiscourse to the *Kaczyński' neoconservative Fourth Republic.* He also established a broadly identifiable historical shift in the treatment and perception of homosexuality and HIV/AIDS […] (Lease, 2016, p. 123).

Following the lead of Polish queer scholars, Lease sees *Angels in America* as the culmination of Warlikowski's work, his greatest theatrical achievement, and an important turn in Polish culture. Even if the actual impact of *Angels* on the public sphere was not so significant, the production's role in shaping the discourse of otherness, identity and politicality seems impossible to ignore. As Lease concludes:

> *Angels in America* gave explicit form to a possibility of a theatre that did not attempt to universalisespecifically gay identities but focused on their visibility as *an expression* of their particularity (Lease, 2016, p. 124).

Although this statement is in line with the present-day reception of the performance and even proposes a vision of Polish theatre that is consistent with the latest understanding of politicality, it stands in stark contrast to the meaning ascribed to the production by critics in 2007. Grzegorz Niziołek pointed to the establishment of a common space by Warlikowski: "common

to the actors and the audience, common to the characters belonging to different threads of the story, common to the external and the internal world, common to theatre and life" (Niziołek, 2008, s. 181). Comparing Warlikowski to Badiou, Joanna Krakowska wrote about the project of universalism contained in the performance. She claimed: "Each of the characters copes with something that brings unimaginable suffering in terms of subjective experience and that can be universalized as an immanent component of the human condition" (Krakowska, 2007). Jacek Cieślak in *Rzeczpospolita* even compared *Angels* to Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Cieślak, 2007). According to critics, it was this ability to translate an American play, the feelings of homosexual characters and the experience of HIV/AIDS into a universal language of community, the appearance of Prior in a crown of thorns and apurple robe as the suffering Jesus, the reduction of "what is too American, directly political and overly esoteric" (Krakowska, 2007), the metaphorization of eroticism, the removal of racial issues (Belize is not black) and similar devices that were responsible for the success of *Angels*.

So the importance of *Angels in America* for Polish theatre can be seen as related to the establishment of a continuously reactivated field of negotiation between the communal and the individual, as well as to expanding the notion of norm and openly subverting it. Depending on the point of view, the meaning of individual scenes and characters can be constantly renegotiated, reflecting the complex process of social changes in Poland, and the changing understanding of politicality and theatre's political commitment. From gestures universalizing the experience of an other, trying to integrate non-normativity into the community of Christian values, to the construction of an identity rooted in otherness and celebrating difference as freedom from the community, *Angels in America*, a play open to disparate interpretations, captures the very essence of the Polish emancipatory project implemented in

theatre and this split reveals its deep connection with the political transition and the consequent paradoxes. In this perspective, the play's forgotten prehistory, its rejected theatrical genealogy, seems worth recalling and examining.

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The Polish premiere of *Angels* is virtually the only theatrical performance directed by Wojciech Nowak. The then thirty-year-old artist had already made a successful first film, *Śmierć dziecioroba* (Death of the Baby Maker) in 1990, and three productions for the Television Theatre, an institution he is involved with to this day. He appeared at Gdańsk's Wybrzeże Theatre at a time when the institution was undergoing a transformational crisis. As Joanna Puzyna-Chojka wrote, the early nineties were a period of apathy caused by poor management, lack of funds and ideas for a new repertoire to attract audiences who were trying to find their way in the new reality. Paradoxically, this situation created space for the events that I am interested in.

Angels of America was based on the first part of Kushner's play *Millennium Approaches*, translated by Marta Gil-Gilewska and published in *Dialog* in 1994 (Kushner, 1994). In the Wybrzeże Theatre's 1995 production, the characters appeared on the stage with an impressive set design by Marek Chowaniec. According to the original drawings, large black plates of Plexiglas now stood for the walls of modern high-rises, now for sterile hospital interiors, and at other times for the streets of a big, oppressive city. But the gaps and small doors in those surfaces revealed vibrant life, symbolized by warm light and objects of everyday use. As Joanna Chojka, then a twenty-six-year-old theatre critic, wrote for *Teatr*:"Marek Chowaniec's set, built from huge, moving planes of black Pexiglas and

mirror-maze panels of reflective foil, allowed for […] the manipulation of depth – New York's cage, formed by the glass walls of skyscrapers, exposed its cracks, leading to other, parallel worlds" (Chojka, 1995). But she objected to the changes of scenery which she thought disturbed the rhythm of the performance:

> Kushner demands that the stagehands enter to replace the furniture in full view of the audience – without any fade-outs. But this idea doesn't work, despite a certain consistency that suggests – at least in the Gdańsk production - a special role for these black-clad "cleaners" (mourners? gravediggers?) (Chojka, 1995).

Anna Jęsiak saw this device differently in *Dziennik Bałtycki*:

> Excellent set by Marek Chowaniec, who has expertly handled the constant changes of location, frequently simultaneous events and supernatural episodes, a good score by Brian Lock, and, above all, at least a few very good roles (Kiszkis, Labijak, Gzyl, Nieczuja-Urbańska as the transvestite Belize) (Jęsiak, 1995).

The atmosphere of New York was also created by Briton Brian Lock's score, mentioned by Jęsiak and universally praised by reviewers, a kind of landscape "with single piano notes trickling like raindrops" (Chojka, 1995).

Roy Cohn was played Jerzy Kiszkis. Alina Kietrys wrote in *Głos Wybrzeże*: "Jerzy Kiszkis's role (Roy) is probably the biggest surprise because it sees the actor's personality metamorphose. Roy is manipulative, ruthless" (Kietrys, 1995). Though, as Chojka pointed out, another key to the character

as played by him was the grotesque. Roy, wearing an elegant black suit and overcoat, has grey hair, a bald spot on the top of his head and a moustache. One of the photographs shows him falling onto the stage laid with shiny Plexiglas just by a park bench that unexpectedly animates this soulless space. Leaning over him is Ethel Rosenberg (Wanda Neuman) in an old-fashioned costume, gloves and a veiled hat.

Louis was played by Grzegorz Gzyl. Dark blond hair, a round, gentle face. Dressed in a leather jacket and denim shirt, he came across as someone modern at that time. As Kietrys writes: “Louis’s fear when he is still healthy and his search for a new partner have the ring of psychological truth” (Kietrys, 1995). In one of the documented scenes, before Louis leaves, he hugs Prior with his powerful arms. Their heads touch. The image is thoroughly unerotic, devoid of sexuality.

The role of Prior was given to Jacek Labijak. Small and lean, he appears on the stage in elegant, though slightly over-the-top clothes, wearing a hospital gown and an embroidered bathrobe. His image is the most plastic and changes over time, conveying the progress of the disease. Chojka writes: “Another standout was Jacek Labijak, whose Prior is built mostly out of fear of death, signalled by a nervousness bordering on hysteria” (Chojka, 1995). Małgorzata Jarmułowicz notes in *Gazeta Studencka*: “Jacek Labijak emerges as the star of the performance […] movingly authentic (thanks also to his physique) in his expressive portrayal of human loneliness and fear in the face of death” (Jarmułowicz, 1995, pp. 12-13). One of the most riveting photographs from the play shows Prior in a bathrobe and a woman’s wig putting on lipstick as he looks at a matzevah as into a mirror. It’s probably the tombstone from the first scene, when Louis was burying his grandmother and listened to the Rabbi’s speech in the cemetery. Here, however, it

becomes the medium of death and the disease that both marks and emancipates Prior's sexual identity. The picture also surprisingly prefigures the themes of an ongoing political debate in Poland, one in which anti-Semitism and the exclusion of non-heteronormative feed each other with language and images of hatred. At the same time, socially marginalized identities – sexual, national, religious – would be at the core of Polish political theatre. Importantly, Jacek Labijak recalls[1] that the application of lipstick on the stage – his own idea – was like breaking a taboo, an act of liberation and transgression. What was at stake was not the actor's individual identity, but an attempt to show otherness, to create a mirror for those others to look into and recognize themselves, to discover his body and corporeality in a new context on the stage. Labijak remembers the gesture as joyful and celebratory, performed with a sense of the power and social impact of the theatrical image, but also formative of new acting in the new reality.

The roles of Joe, Harper and Belize are not mentioned in the reviews. Photographs show a man (Jacek Mikołajczak) in a suit, with dark facial hair and a shiny earring. He holds a leather briefcase. The girl (Katarzyna Łukaszyńska), wearing a baggy shirt and a skirt in subdued colours, has dishevelled hair and a slightly vacant gaze. Belize (Marzena Nieczuja-Urbańska) is extravagance incarnate. In the surprising casting of a woman as a transvestite, femininity is exaggerated, conveyed by means of a ball gown, long false eyelashes, jewellery and an elegant shawl.

Although they praised the set design, music and acting, none of the female reviewers liked the performance. Małgorzata Jarmułowicz wrote:

> The director of the Gdańsk performance, Wojciech Nowak, did

> spare the audience (and the actors) the more graphic images and rightly shortened the fragments overfilled with the characters' political arguments. It didn't change the fact that the primary carrier of meanings in his production should have been the play's text […] enriched, of course, by all those qualities that the actors should have contributed. Sadly, only a few of the performers [Kiszkis and Labijak – author's note] went beyond detached correctness; as a result, the play's three acts were not deeply moving, but deeply tiresome (Jarmułowicz, 1995, p. 12).

Another bored spectator was Barbara Kazimierczyk, who felt that the play "dragged on" (Kazimierczyk, 1995), an impression shared by Anna Jęsiak:

> The blandness of otherwise obvious messages presented in a context that nevertheless seems alien not only to the audience, but also to the creators […]. I had the impression that they approached both the text and the subject on tiptoe, with some distance. And that must have affected the whole, which came apart in the second act, losing dramatic momentum (Jęsiak, 1995).

Joanna Chojka, also bored by the performance, stated that Nowak had failed to "put this dramatically imperfect, cinematically constructed text together into a convincing and interesting whole" (Chojka, 1995). In her opinion, Kushner's drama – completed in 1993 – was no longer politically valid. She asked rhetorically:

> Can Kushner's work, with its explicitly political ambitions, but also a marked allegorical and mystical dimension, matter to us as well?

> Can the exotic mores be translated into a different way of feeling, into the peculiar "European" sensibility? […] What could *Angels of America* be about in the puritan Poland of 1995, where the problems of a sexual minority and AIDS continue to be pushed to the distant margins by the whole gamut of issues tied in with national mythology which still seems more important? (Chojka, 1995).

Alina Kietrys's summary clearly identified the reason for the alleged failure of the Gdańsk production:

> In short, we have a play about a controversial subject (the problems of homosexuals continue to stir up public emotions), but we are also dealing with a rather flat text that couldn't be saved by theatricalization (Kietrys, 1995).

Let us briefly consider the boredom and weariness felt by the authors of all five reviews. We can certainly assume that Nowak's theatrical debut posed challenges that were not fully met by the director. The production may have been poorly paced and the tension may have waned. Confronted by a language and characters that were completely new, the actors may have not risen to the challenge and given dull, unconvincing performances. But, as indicated by the quotations, it was not the direction or the acting, not the decorations or the music, that resisted the spectators the most. They found Kushner's text to be "bland" (Jęsiak, 1995), "flat" (Kietrys, 1995), full of "political reasoning" (Chojka, 1995), alien to the Polish reality and sensibility[2]. Though shortened and free of "graphic images", the drama refused to be absorbed. The escape into boredom was an escape from what

Joanna Chojka claimed was to remain “on the distant margins” in the “Puritan Poland of 1995”, a country concerned with the national cause and a common identity. In his book *Polska do wymiany*, Przemysław Czapliński analyzes Julian Stryjkowski’s *coming out*, or rather *coming off*[3] in *Milczenie* (Silence), offering an insightful look at a similar reaction of the readers. Although critics saw the book as an act of “catching up” and an important gesture of breaking with the intolerance characteristic of totalitarianism, the “silence”, the inexpressibility of male-male desire and its invisibility were a condition for the acceptance or integration of otherness into the collective identity. The work and its criticism „preserved the Outsider’s existence[4] but situated him on the margins; they encouraged him to confess while setting the limits of his expression” (Czapliński, 2009, p. 307). Though in Czapliński’s view nineties literature would ask increasingly difficult questions about sexual identity and depict “various sufferings resulting from the domination of heterosexual normality” (Czapliński, 2009, p. 308), one of the paths of assimilation, apart from the emancipatory attempts at “dethroning normality” (Czapliński, 2009, p. 308), would be to keep Outsiders on the margins and treat their artistic work as an “exotic statement about experiences alien to any normality” (Czapliński, 2009, p. 308). In this perspective, the reviewers’ boredom turns out to be an affective response relegatingotherness to the realm of strangeness, exoticism and silent indifference.

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However, a brief mention of the performance in Paweł Grochowski’s article *Precz z tolerancją* (Down with Tolerance) in the gay magazine *Filo*, published in Gdańsk from 1986 (first as an underground periodical, then legally from 1990 onwards) by printer and activist Ryszard Kisiel, considerably

complicates this diagnosis. The author writes:

> I can only say that during the show I was sometimes moved, and I sometimes laughed, I was sometimes intrigued, but also bored, and unfortunately I didn't find any deeper message, any idea important enough to provoke reflection afterwards, in the play as a whole. To the heterosexual part of the audience, the play may have offered some revealing insights, such as the fact that anyone can turn out to be gay, or that gay relationships are also primarily about love rather than just sex (Grochowski, 1995, p.12).

What is even more striking is that Grochowski also attributes his boredom not only to the production's shortcomings, but to Kushner's text:

> I think that *Angels in America* is nevertheless a play that belongs to American folklore and will not be a success either in Poland or in most countries of the old continent (Grochowski, 1995, p. 12).

As we know, the play became a success not only in Europe, but also in Poland. The claim that Kushner's drama belongs "American folklore" may seem surprising in a community magazine dedicated to promoting knowledge about AIDS and building a self-aware gay counterpublic. Grochowski's boredom, which mirrors the women reviewers' response, can be interpreted as a similar feeling of alienation from the play. But what does it mean?

Taking a cue from Magda Szcześniak, who discusses *Filo* in her book *Normy widzialności. Tożsamość w czasach transformacji* (Norms of Visiblity:

Identity in Times of Transition), we can assume that what was at stake in the reception of *Angels* was not the visibility of the homosexual minority. The author cites an article published by Sławomir Starosta in 1990, in the last "underground" issue of *Filo*, which formulates the tasks of the homosexual movement in Poland. It turns out that the writer sees "normality" as the ultimate goal of emancipation. Szcześniak comments:

> "Normally" means here "as among the heterosexual rest of society", even if that "normally" then meant living at a time of radical social change and dynamic re-evaluation of the existing systems of practices and references (Szcześniak, 2016, p. 200).

The normality advocated by Starosta thus becomes both a right and an obligation of homosexual people, imposing the standards of current morality, Europeanness, civilization and belonging to a capitalist consumerist society on their behaviours, practices and identity gestures. Starosta writes:

> The point is to convince heterosexuals that we homosexuals are as normal as them, neither better nor worse, there are both geniuses and thieves among us, and, basically, the only minor difference between us is the sex of our sexual partner (in: Szcześniak, 2016, p. 200).

The reception of the stage production of *Angels* highlights an interesting paradox of emancipation. Seeking inclusion in the field of normality, it cancels its otherness as a quality interesting only to "heteros", quotidian, trivial, "minor". On the other hand, from the perspective of normality otherness is dismissed as acceptable but exotic and marginal. Czapliński

argues that this shift of otherness, which in his view differentiated the uniform, identity normality inherited from the martial law era, is closely related to the progress of political and social transition (see Czapliński, 2009, p. 285).

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Jacek Labijak remembers the reactions to *Angels* quite differently. According to him, people were engaged and deeply moved by the performance[5]. Scenes of closeness and suffering spoke to the Catholic sensibility, homosexual characters gave heart to those who concealed their own identity, and the subject of AIDS was, for all the marginality alleged by the reviews, still valid and present, if not in shared experiences, then in the early nineties culture imported from the West[6]. The production would thus define a politically undifferentiated field of freedom before clear attitudes and conflicts developed. This perspective may be similar to the legend of Solidarity's inclusiveness which was brilliantly deconstructed as being tainted by Catholic fundamentalism by Marcin Kościelniak in his book *Egoiści. Trzecia droga w kulturze polskiej lat 80.* (Egoists: A Third Way in Polish Culture of the 1980s; Kościelniak, 2018, pp. 125-172), but also allows us to look from a different angle at the Polish emancipatory project in theatre and its entanglement in the transition. Between boredom and religiously inspired empathy, between the sense of exoticism and alienation and the neutralization of otherness, between hostility towards the Stranger and the need to assimilate the Other diagnosed by Czapliński (see Czapliński, 2009, p. 329), lies a spectrum of reactions and artistic strategies that illustrate the political confusion.

The confusion was shared by Tony Kushner himself who came to Gdańsk in June 1995. As Anna Jęsiak reported, he took part in theatre workshops and a

discussion of homosexuality and tolerance held at the theatre (Jęsiak, 1995A). This is how *Głos Wybrzeża* described the event:

> The performance of *Angels of America* last Sunday was followed by an unusual meeting of the audience with specialists in social psychology, drug addiction therapy and AIDS prevention and treatment; it was attended by Tony Kushner, representatives of the gay organization Inicjatywa Gdańska, and a Catholic priest, among others. All those present didn't even have the opportunity to speak as there were no fewer than twenty debaters. The whole conversation was pointless because it did not help explain any issues related to tolerance of homosexual minorities in Poland or to church education or the treatment of drug addicts […] (DSG, 1995)

Jęsiak entitled her piece about Kushner's visit *Tony Kushner zaskoczony* (Tony Kushner is Surprised). We can only imagine the impression that the Gdańsk visit made on an artist who described himself as gay, Jewish and leftist, a child of the New Deal and fierce opponent of Reagan's brand of conservatism, a target of homophobia and anti-Semitism, and a believer in the usefulness of Marxism and the genius of Brecht. (Kushner, 1997). After seeing Nowak's production, he allegedly said it was original and different from the ones he had seen so far. He liked the acting and the staging but was surprised by the cuts (so praised by the reviewers) which, in his opinion, removed not only the political issues, but also humour.

> I realize, he said, that the interest in my play is a result of general interest in the problem of AIDS and homosexuality. The popularity of this work is a little surprising even to me because I see it as a

> political text which, alongside the gay question, also addresses the issue of Reaganism. […] *Angels in America* […] is in a sense a product of the public debate about homosexuality that has been going on in the States for years. In a country like Poland, where these issues have only recently begun to be openly discussed, the reception of the performance is specific. My visit to Poland has also made me realize that Reagan, condemned in the United States, was popular in your country, including for his support of Solidarity. But at the same time, he was systematically destroying trade unions in the U.S. Hence, some political aspects of the drama prove untranslatable in another reality (Jęsiak, 1995A).

The political confusion is thus linked to paradoxes generated by the change of context. Not only is Reagan seen in Poland as a champion of freedom and enemy of oppression, not only are homosexuality and AIDS still a "controversial subject", but even Ethel Rosenberg has different connotations. The story of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, sentenced to die in an electric chair on charges of spying for the Soviet Union and providing information about nuclear weapons, was one of the most famous episodes of the Cold War. The Jews, associated with the Communist Party USA, quickly became a symbol of not only American internal policy and oppression of communists, but also an overused example of Western enslavement as opposed to the communist love of freedom. Leon Kruczkowski's play *Juliusz i Ethel* (Julius and Ethel), which depicts them as heroes and innocent victims of the murderous capitalist system, was staged in Poland four times in the year of its premiere (1954): in Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań and by the Polish Radio. So Ethel is not a symbol of Roy Cohn's criminal practices and his victim, but brings to mind propaganda lies and exaggerations. The meanings

are reversed, disrupted and mutable.

While the surprised Kushner looked at Poland's strange political reality from a clearly defined perspective ("I have a friend who goes to the theater with me and has nicknamed me the Bilious Faggot" – Kushner, 1997, p. 25), the rapid and ongoing change of context brought on in the nineties by the installation of capitalism, the class restructuring of society and the transformation of the social landscape generated more and more political paradoxes. The process is so heterogeneous that cultural anthropology and social sciences reject the concept of transition commonly used to describe those changes, regarding it as an empty category that imposes an artificial coherence on a dispersed and fragmentary reality.

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In *Transition Zone: On the End of Post-Communism*, Boris Buden analyzes the fall of the Berlin Wall as the formative scene of post-communism. The pushing masses captured in a state of euphoria "spill through the wall and its gates like grain from a torn sack" (Buden, 2012, p. 17). But from whose perspective are we looking at the overthrow of Communism? Who is watching the fall of the wall? Buden points out that we do not have access to the experience of the active masses. The foundational scene of the post-communist order shows something else. "Our view of the twilight of Communism is divided into a blind event and its symbolic representation, which was created outside it", the author writes (Buden, 2012, p. 17). Citing Kant and his analysis of the destruction of the Bastille, Buden argues that the fall of the wall is produced as a historical event by bystanders on the Western side, looking on passively and constructing the developments as symbols of the new order. What fascinated them so much in the events sweeping through Eastern Europe? The point seems to be not so much the

“return” of Eastern Bloc countries to democratic ideals because the crisis of liberal democracy was already a known fact of Western life. Quoting Rado Riha, Buden writes: “What fascinated them so much was ‘the assumed fascination without reservation with Western democracy on the part of Eastern Europeans – their naive, almost blind faith in it’” (Buden, 2012, p. 18). It is a constructed position, projected and superimposed like a formatting frame on the processes and events that followed the fall of Communism in Eastern European countries. It’s this position that is expressed by the concept of political transition. Buden points to the origin of the term in transition studies, a research perspective developed in American political sciences in the 1960s and 1970s to describe the political changes that had taken place in South American countries. But when transition begins to be used to characterize political changes in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the meaning of this category is radically altered. It no longer describes actual social, political and economic changes, but projects them. As Buden writes, „the shift is teleological, that is, determined by its goal (Buden, 2012, p. 36). The logic of transition thus understood qualifies the past as decidedly negative, and the future as determined by an unquestionably positive capitalist and democratic order. And the shift must involve a repetition of the West’s path. Buden also links it to the repression of the memory of Communism and the consequent loss of the foundation of social relations that would later bring about the conservative, nationalist-religious turn whereby post-communist societies, still looking through Western eyes, would describe themselves as Outsiders[7].

While transition does not so much describe the processes taking place in Poland after 1989 as imposes on them the artificial frame of an inevitable (and, in the light of Buden’s reflections, unrealized) path towards capitalism and neoliberalism, due to its constant presence in the public space and

public discourse it has become a category of experience and memory, as noted in Aleksandra Leyk and Joanna Wawrzyniak's recent book *Cięcia. Mówiona historia transformacji* (Cuts: An Oral History of Post-Socialism). They write:

> We posit a fundamental breakdown of the popular memory of the transition into two narratives: a narrative of modernization, which expresses the market values of efficiency and optimization; and a narrative of "moral economy", which speaks of the crisis of norms, values and the workings of the community (Leyk, Wawrzyniak, 2020, p. 9).

The contradiction between these two narratives captures the paradoxical character of the transitional experience which, to follow Buden's lead, is not documented from the perspective of its actors and as such remains blind and produces symbolic representations that add to the sense of confusion.

According to Bulgarian theorist Alexander Kiossev, this character of transition can be expressed by the concept of "oxymoron of normality". In his opinion, the beginning of the transition period is marked by a dream of a "normal state". But what does this mean? Tracing the history of the concept of "normality", Kiossev points to its "multiple, historically changeable, contradictory, even oxymoronic" (Kiossev, 2008) meanings. In the course of cultural development, "normally" has meant naturally, in line with the ethical order, as before, or ordinarily – as every day. But in the 1990s, normality took on new meanings in post-communist countries.

Kiossev's essay makes substantial use of the comparison between the understanding of normality in Western Europe and North America and its

dominant meaning in Central and Eastern Europe. The author points out that whereas normality in the western context is closely linked to privacy and results from naturalizing the new ways of living associated with technology, consumption and morality, in East-Central European countries it belongs to the public sphere. Kiossev notes the consumerist motives and the desire for individual comfort behind post-communist revolutions, but he also emphasizes their altruistic, public and social dimension. He uses the concept of "imaginary consumption" to explain the split (Kiossev, 2008). Western goods are not only desired; they serve an identity function, shifting cultural boundaries and affording admission into Europe. What is western thus becomes a medium of normality understood as the desirable condition of the state and society. Importantly, it is a fragile and utopian normality, because the intuitive fear of post-communist societies still concerns their own abnormal condition. We want to be like normal people, the anonymous characters of Kiossev's essay seem to be saying, we want to have what they have, to behave and consume like them. But it's still only a performance, hiding the recognition of our own incompatibility, which is captured in the Polish context by the category of *homo sovieticus* – the one who exposes our non-normality. At the same time – to add to Kiossev'scomments – our incompatibility identified by transitional culture provokes aggression and a violent reorganization of the field of normality: it's them who are abnormal when they disrupt our sense of norm, taken from a fantasy about their life. And since this fantasy is mediated through goods and advertising, it is fundamentally conservative. Hence, what is progressive can soon become abnormal.

This insightful analysis makes it possible to formulate a paradox crucial to the reception of theatrical *Angels*. The play by an acclaimed American playwright, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 and was produced

throughout the world (by 1995, the work had been staged thirty times), determined what Western theatre was. According to the “quilting point” (Sowa, 2011) of transitional culture reconstructed by Kiossev, what comes from the West determines what is normal and necessary. As Anna Jęsiak’s commentary indicates, a similar motivation lay behind the premiere in question:

> This meticulously crafted production once again inspires reflection on the selection of repertoire and the purpose of fighting for the rights to the Polish premiere. Premiere performances are likely to receive additional financial support so they are worth pursuing by a theatre for economic reasons. But from the audience’s perspective, things may look differently (Jęsiak, 1995).

Polish premieres of western plays were attractive to theatres not only as a sign of catching up and building “normal” cultural circulations, but also because they provided an opportunity for financial success and finding a place in the new, “normal” capitalist reality. On the other hand, “from the audience’s perspective, things may look differently” (Jęsiak, 1995), because Kushner’s drama is, as noted before, an expression of an identity that enters into tension with “normality”. *Angels* is a celebration of non-normativity, otherness and difference. No wonder then that when a deeply political drama, even in an abridged version, is staged in a theatre that tries to shake off the “burden of the past” to offer its audience “normal”, “world-class” performances, the production provokes resistance in the form of insurmountable boredom. Labelling it as a politically “invalid” failure thus emerges as a symptom of the desire for Polish “normality”: both that which can be linked to the need for tradition and being rooted in morality and that

which results from the belief in the emancipatory character of capitalism and the free market[8].

Of particular note in this respect is the context provided by the production's programme, especially the assortment of essays, which, read together, clash sharply with the boredom declared by the reviewers. An excerpt from Philippe Ariés's book *The Hour of Our Death* indicates the antagonism between medicine and rationalism and the spiritual forces that find expression in the fear of death and in sex "in unusual and untamed forms" (Ariés, in: *Anioły Ameryki*, 1995, p. 3).

Ariés diagnoses their denunciation as near-sightedness. In his view, the Church and medicine now stand silent and helpless in the face of death because they have rejected these "untamed forms". A passage from Karl Jaspers' *Philosophy of Existence* examines human consciousness and freedom in the face of death, discussing tragedy, guilt and innocence, community and solidarity. An excerpt from a book by American sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson attempts to debunk prejudices against homosexuality. It not only points out the biologically natural status of non-heteronormative orientations, but also reconstructs the reasons for exclusion and oppressive practices rooted in religions and regimes. *AIDS – wprowadzenie medyczne* (AIDS: A Medical Introduction), an article by Jan Suchowiak, until 1987 director of the Department of Sanitary Inspection at the Ministry of Health and Welfare and one of the first Polish AIDS specialists, indicating the immense scale of the epidemic that makes no distinction between homosexual and heterosexual people, and an excerpt from *Seksuologia. Zarys encyklopedyczny* (Sexology: An Encyclopaedic Outline) round out the whole that, by drawing on Western texts, practices, values and Christianity as well as on biologically defined naturalness, takes

the discourse of normality to its limits. Gay culture not only allows us to see identity in otherness, but also draws attention to the cultural and philosophical potential of difference. At the same time, particularity and the value generated by it remain under the cover of naturalness, normality and biological commonality.

I believe the "oxymoron of normality" is the field of politicality that Polish political theatre will try to exploit. Like Nowak's *Angels of America* and Warlikowski's *Angels in America*, it will continue to produce a rift between the transitional pro-Western aspirations and the demand, formulated on both capitalist and Christian or assimilationist grounds, to recognize non-normative identities as normal on the one hand, and the emancipatory gesture of showing the non-normative as radically and joyfully different on the other. The logic of normalization fails to include the most important theatrical medium: the body which, due to its both universal and strictly singular character, can never be a medium of normality. Prior applying lipstick in the reflection of the matzevah embodies otherness regardless of the normalizing order imposed on him by the performance, its programme and reception.

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Let us now take a closer look at the production's director, Wojciech Nowak. His subsequent artistic career raises a few crucial questions about the transition and Polish political theatre. Nowak's 1990 film debut, *Death of the Baby Maker*, was generally regarded as a success. Set in the late 1980s in a small provincial town where the most powerful figure is an secret policeofficer, the film tells the story of Januszek, a local ladykiller. The protagonist returns from his military service after the above-mentioned secret police officer, the father of Blada, had pulled some strings to secure

his discharge. Blada is pregnant with Januszek and wants to marry him. As soon as he returns, the man starts to run away, trying to prevent the wedding at all costs. Along the way, he has sex with one woman after another, borrows some money, steals equipment stolen from Russian transports and is chased by other thieves. Blada, her father and finally the police are after him too. The wedding almost happens – blackmailed with the threat that his fiancée's father will arrest the whole town, Januszek eventually turns up at the church. At the last minute he and his best man get into a car and flee "for America". But before they can leave town, the car stops; eluding pursuit, Januszek jumps into the river and drowns. The film won several awards at the 16th Gdynia Film Festival and sparked controversy.

Nowak's film tells of an attempt to escape normality. The protagonist rejects the model of the family, home and stability offered by Blada. The plot exposes the oppressive character of such normality. "Going to America" is a means of sublimation for the protagonist, an escape from the pattern in which he is stuck. This escape cannot be afforded by the Church, despite his serious conversations with a priest, or any of the women with whom he enters into abusive relationships. Liberation proves impossible – like the heroine of a melodrama, Januszek must die, without ever finding his own "self". Although otherness is an object of desire, it cannot survive in the eighties.

Nowak's next projects were Television Theatre plays. There were thirteen productions between 1991 and 2001, when he began helming the TV series *Rodzina zastępcza* (Foster Family). After this period Nowak worked mostly on television shows. In 2007, which saw the premiere of Krzysztof Warlikowski's *Angels of America*, Nowak returned to the Television Theatre

to direct the play *Stygmatyczka* (The Stigmatic) which aired in 2008. The script follows the life of Sister Wanda Boniszewska, a nun of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Angels who was born in the Vilnius Region and reputedly received the stigmata in the 1930s. After the war she stayed in Vilnius, where she was imprisoned and convicted in the 1950s. In 1956 she was released and came to Poland. The screenwriter used Boniszewska's memoirs, Soviet court records, the security service's operational documents and interviews with witnesses to her life, Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz and Reverend Jan Pryszmont. The play had an impressive cast, starring Kinga Preis in the main role, and told of the heroine's spiritual strength which led even her persecutors to convert. The production's creators garnered a string of awards at the Two Theatres Festival in Sopot in 2008.

The Stigmatic was the first in a long string of teleplays that Nowak has continued to direct (the last one in 2017) between successive series about religious and family values, patriotism, Polish history and the obscurantism of Polish society. This repertoire bears hardly a trace of *Angels of America* and the need to show "gay fantasy" on the stage. The question of what happened must remain unanswered, though the direction Nowak's work has taken is an interesting example of the Polish transition in theatre. This political path, opposite to the movement charted by Bryce Lease's book, raises the question of how we understand the history of Polish political theatre and construct a canon representative of it.

Nowak's production, the Polish premiere of *Angels in America* has been erased from the currently written history of Polish theatre. Since Warlikowski used a new translation, there is no trace of that prehistory in his staging either. But the former performance, its context then and now, can, as I have demonstrated, become a reason for reflecting on the

relationship between emancipation and the transition in Polish theatre. It is also useful to ask if the exclusion of this production may be a symptom of normalization – in this case, of the very emancipation? Is the emancipatory path straight and based on the logic of progress or is it more of a meandering among complicated and ambiguous social and political processes? Perhaps in this perspective, it is worth reclaiming *Angels of America* for the history of Polish political theatre?

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Translated by Robert Gałązka

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Autor/ka

Dorota Sosnowska (de.sosnowska@uw.edu.pl) – assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theater and Performance) at University of Warsaw. The editor of the *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*. The author of the book about three actresses of the communist period in Poland entitled "Królowe PRL. Sceniczne wizerunki Ireny Eichlerówny, Niny Andrycz i Elżbiety Barszczewskiej jako modele kobiecości" (2014). She took part in the scientific projects devoted to the problem of performance documentation (ECLAP), theoretical status of sources, archives and documents in performance studies (Sources and Mediations) and performance and memory (Performing Memory). She published articles on the subject in Polish and international journals such as *Performance Research* or *Theatralia* and coedited a book devoted to the memory of worker's theater ("Robotnik. Performanse pamięci", 2017). Now she is working on conceptualizations of the body in the art and theater of the Polish long 1990s. She is a co-convener of the

Historiography Working Group of International Federation fro Theater Research. Between 2009 and 2011 she worked in Dramatyczny Theater in Warsaw. ORCID: 0000-0002-6073-460X.

Footnotes

1. All references to Jacek Labijak's memories are based on a private conversation I had with the actor over the phone on 14 April 2020.
2. Only Małgorzata Jarmułowicz's review encouraged audiences to read the drama published in *Dialog*, arguing that it's still worth it' (Jarmułowicz, 1995, p. 12).
3. Czapliński explains: "Though sincere, the confession belonged to the poetics of inexpressible desire and was not to be followed by a real change.In this context, it becomes clear that the writer regarded his *coming out* as a *coming off*" (Czapliński, 2009, p. 306).
4. In Czapliński's lexicon, the Outsider is a culturally produced Other, and later Stranger. This category includes the Jew, the Woman, the Homsexual, the Postmodernist, the Ubek [secret police officer] and the Capitalist.
5. In terms of the audience's reaction, it may have been important that a Polish translation of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* came out in 1995 (see Michel Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, trans. B. Banasiak, T. Komendant, K. Matuszewski, introduction by T. Komendant, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1995). Another indication of the production's popularity is Grochowski's mention of a crowded audience (Grochowski, 1995, p. 5).
6. It suffices to recall the immense popularity of Jonathan Demme's film *Philadelphia* which had its Polish premiere in 1994. As Andrew Beckett, an AIDS-infected lawyer fighting in court against discrimination on medical grounds and homophobia, Tom Hanks, regardless of the Hollywood production's effectiveness in advocating emancipation, became one of the most recognizable popular culture figures of that era.
7. This process is indicated by Przemysław Czapliński: "In response to the identification of the new formation as both a permanent ('it's not going to change') and labile ('it can happen to anyone') strategy of exclusion, and as a reaction to the numerous actual exclusions (particularly unemployment) literature performed a simple manoeuvre: it extended the condition of Outsider to the social majority" (Czapliński, 2009, p. 323).
8. Belief in capitalism as an instrument of emancipation in the identity narratives of Polish homosexuals is analyzed by Magda Szcześniak (Szcześniak, 2016, pp. 198-214) and Przemysław Czapliński (Czapliński, 2009, pp. 309-310).

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didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

ecology

Against Great Civilizing Missions. Working on “How to Save the World on a Small Stage?”

Paweł Sztarbowski The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw

From a practice-as-research perspective, the author analyses his dramaturgical work on the performance *How to Save the World on the Small Stage?* directed by Paweł Łysak (Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw, 2018). This particular case is the starting point for complex research of methods and tools for ecological theatre. Una Chaudhuri’s idea of “Fifth Wall Dramaturgy” becomes the inspiration to exceed only human perspective and involve inhuman actors to the theatrical structure.

Keywords: ecology; globalisation; climate change; ecological theatre; Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw

Theatre’s Fifth Wall

At the beginning was the story of Dr. Jan Łysak, who for years worked at the Central Laboratory of Cereals Processing and Storage Technologies in Warsaw on an utopian method of harvesting cereals at the stage of green, immature grain. His idea was ignored, ridiculed even by other scholars. I have been fascinated by it ever since I heard about it from his son, Paweł, a

theatre director I have been working with since 2008 when I adapted *Forefathers' Eve* for him at the Polish Radio Theatre. We currently work together at the Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw. The crazy story about his father trying to reverse thousands of years of farming practice — which is to harvest dry grain and mill it into flour — seemed so picturesque that I thought one day it should be made into a monodrama. The idea of such a show recurred in our discussions from time to time. Jan Łysak's several years' tenure in the 1980s as professor of agriculture at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria served as an important context for it. According to Paweł Łysak, it was there, in reaction to the problem of hunger in Africa, that he first conceived of the idea of harvesting cereal grains "at early maturity stages of the caryopsis" (Łysak, 1996). This combination of personal and global perspectives seemed a perfect start for thinking about a potential project.

In our discussions, we were inspired by the films of the Chilean documentary filmmaker Patricio Guzmán: *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010) and *The Pearl Button* (2015). In both, he tells the story of his country from a perspective that is not only global, but actually interplanetary. Light is the main topic of the first film, and water of the second one. In *The Pearl Button*, the image of a quartz cube from three thousand years ago found in the Atacama Desert in Chile sets off a narrative about the conquest and extermination of the native inhabitants of the land who lived in such harmony with water that they even created its language. The documentary then shifts into Chile's recent past when the junta of General Augusto Pinochet murdered dissidents and dumped their bodies into the ocean. Water, otherwise a source of life, becomes a place of extermination and death. In *Nostalgia for the Light*, women search for the remains of their loved ones, sifting through the sand of the Atacama Desert, one of the driest places in the world. Guzmán himself

narrates both films, interweaving the planetary stories immersed in Chile's history with his childhood memories and personal reflections. Light and water are philosophical concepts that allow for seeing the history of our planet and the whole Solar System as a harmonious process, lasting millions of years, of natural development, which was interrupted by the arrival of the "human era" and the conquest- and domination-oriented human culture. Accordingly, both films can considered as a picture of the Anthropocene — an era when we witness "man's active interference with the processes guiding the planet's geological evolution" (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 12) — and at the same time as a painful reckoning with the history of Chile. As Ewa Bińczyk stresses, "The notion of the Anthropocene does not refer to man's impact on individual ecosystems, but on the planet as a whole" (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 152). The point, therefore, is not that human activities merely leave their mark on the landscape, but that they seriously disturb processes that define planetary dynamics as such.

Theatrical narratives, usually functioning within psychological, sociological and political frameworks regulating the construction of the scenic world, are limited to presenting human stories. We often actually speak of "national dramas" that tackle issues connected with the history and experiences of a particular nation, issues embedded within a specific cultural, linguistic and political context. We also speak of "universal dramas," focused on interpersonal relations and psychology. The challenges posed by globalization, and climate change in particular, mean, however, that these perspectives are no longer sufficient. Garbage patches in the oceans consist of bits of plastic produced supranationally. Carbon dioxide or radioactive materials cross borders freely and uncontrollably. The same applies to viruses, bacteria, or toxins in our food. Timothy Morton has coined the term "hyperobjects" to refer to such objects which activate themselves

unpredictably and are beyond the human scale of time and space (Morton, 2017). Since they are often invisible to the naked eye, it is easy to deny their existence. Sometimes they are actually compared to radioactive materials: “Their impact, the impossibility of their removal or recycling, the unimaginable scale of hazard and destruction are shocking, both cognitively and aesthetically” (Barcz, 2018). This means that when dealing with ecological issues, theatre cannot confine itself to representing only human stories, but needs to consider hyperobjects as well. It is necessary to go beyond human-centred narratives in order to forge a broad, global perspective, taking into account human and nonhuman entities. At the same time, it needs to be remembered that the natural and the social ought not to be opposed because they often form an indiscernible tangle of connections that are subject to constant negotiation. This relational and variable world of mutual influences is a challenge, but also a unique opportunity for theatre — a medium where relations are the basic material.

Una Chaudhuri, a researcher long preoccupied with the subject of ecology in the performative arts, has put forth the postulate of “fifth-wall dramaturgy”. She writes:

> We need to redraw the boundaries and expand the frame within which human meaning is created. We need to understand the human in its complex relation to the nonhuman, a relation that is both determining and determined, partly under our control, mostly outside it (Chaudhuri, 2016).

For her, the “fifth wall of theatre” means looking up, towards the sky, into the atmosphere, searching for a “view beyond the social world.” Climate

change denotes for Chaudhuri forces as powerful and frightening as the wrath of gods and goddesses in ancient tragedies. The classical definition of a social framework as being limited to people is no longer sufficient in the situation of a climate crisis. To understand it, we need to consider entities more powerful than people — hyperobjects that confront man with the weakness of anthropocentric thinking. The ongoing coronavirus epidemic demonstrates very clearly what Bruno Latour, for example, has long emphasized in his concept of political ecology, postulating that we allow for nonhuman actors in describing social relations in order to create a "pluriversum" — a new kind of community based on multifarious relations between entities. The truth is that it is impossible to find isolated social or natural phenomena; they always exist relative to hyperobjects such as the greenhouse effect, the extraction of fossil fuels, the felling of forests, the production of genetically modified food, or the multiplication of viruses and bacteria. The shape of our life depends on all these factors. Therefore, as Chaudhuri rightly notes, it is also in theatre that we must search for their reflection: "Besides expanding the dramatic frame beyond the social world, Fifth Wall dramaturgy also expands it temporally, pushing past cultural history to locate the human story in the deep time of the earth" (Chadhuri, 2016). This makes the past, present, and future interweave, indicating that it took the work of many generations of our ancestors for the Anthropocene to become possible at all. The exact time frame of the "human era" is in fact a matter of lively debate. Most authorities locate its start-time in the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century, based on evidence of growing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, or during the "Great Acceleration" after 1950, when human impact on planetary systems began to intensify. "These attest to an unprecedented ecological pressure exerted by a single species, never before witnessed during any geological epoch"

(Bińczyk, 2018, p. 91).

Transgressing the “fifth wall of theatre” and finding a voice from the above, a voice of Earth — not in the sense of metaphysical or magical investigations, but simply to overcome the anthropocentric gaze — became a crucial element through which the personal story of Jan Łysak gave rise to the idea of *How to Save the World on a Small Stage?*, a show I worked on with Paweł Łysak and a group of actors at the Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw (2018). The figure of the director’s father was crucial at the beginning of our work, but soon the subject of his research — cereals, and especially the early maturity stages of the grain as an element of the utopia of solving global hunger — emerged as an equally important protagonist. Together we searched for a context that would make the story larger, and for material that, rather than merely presenting data, would have the power and authenticity of an individual story to impact affectively on the viewer. That is why we decided to add other fathers’ biographies and invited the Senegalese performer Mamadou Góo Bâ, working with the Strefa WolnoSłowa Foundation and the Powszechny Theatre, who talked about his father, Demba Bâ, and the Ukrainian actor Artem Manuilov, who recounted the life of his father, Alexander Voronov. In their case, too, the story revolved as much around the men themselves as about their work, the causes they devoted their lives too — a colonial merchant ship, symbolizing the machinery of capitalism, and coal, a figure of planetary extraction and pollution.

How to Save the World?

For several months our work consisted in weekly meetings with Paweł Łysak, Mamadou Góo Bâ, and Artem Manuilov. We shared family memories,

anecdotes, reminiscences of TV shows we watched in childhood, musical fascinations — all that could help compose a joint story. Paweł Łysak brought with him a typescript titled *Grandfathers and Fathers. Subjective Memories* — a family history compiled by his father in 2004. Mamadou Góo Bâ kept a diary with drawings and observations, sometimes written in French and sometimes in Wolof, as well as reflections on the customs of the Fulbe people or the history of slavery. Some of those works were later shown in an exhibition of Polish-based foreign artists, organized by Biennale Warszawa (2019). The Donbas, where Artem Manuilov used to live, has been a war zone since 2014 and many of his family souvenirs got lost. However, Artem asked a former friend from the neighbourhood to film his childhood landscape — the house and an industrial reservoir where he used to swim with other kids. All that constituted three vivid stories and their context. While we were interested in customs and cultural factors, we decided from the very beginning to avoid their exoticization, but rather to situate them in a specific political context.

The group was joined quite early on by Edwin Bendyk, a journalist and writer interested in civilizational changes and designing visions of the future, and Janek Simon, a visual artist preoccupied with the topic of globalization, who was the stage designer of the planned show. Their observations and the books they recommended became important references for the script, which at that stage was merely a swelling collection of loose notes and audio/video clips. It was then that we got hold of Marcin Popkiewicz's *Świat na rozdrożu* [A world at the crossroads] and Ewa Bińczyk's recently published *Epoka człowieka. Retoryka i marazm antropocenu* [The epoch of man. The rhetorics and lethargy of the Anthropocene]. Besides providing general inspiration, selected fragments of these books, properly edited, became part of the script; particularly

interesting was Popkiewicz's theory of exponential growth which demonstrates that it is impossible to increase the GDP, productivity, and expansion forever (see Popkiewicz, 2013, p. 50–66). Naomi Klein's books — *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (2014) and *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (2017), published in Polish when the rehearsals were already under way — served as an important reference, to the extent that the character played by Anna Ilczuk was called Naomi Klein in one of the versions of the script. The narrative perspective that we adopted — looking from the future at a postapocalyptic world — was heavily influenced by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's science-fiction essay *Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (2017), which imagines a world devastated by climate change. An excerpt from the chapter *The Coming of the Penumbral Age*, covering the period of 1988–2093, was even used in one of the monologues, and the dramatic questions posed by the authors about the causes of the twenty first century's lethargy proved a crucial inspiration for our work.

A coal miner from the Donbas, a Senegalese deck mechanic working for a French carrier, and a Polish grain-technology scientist: worlds so different that there seemed to be hardly any contiguities between them. And yet we soon discovered that their trajectories met through the history of Jan Łysak, who was born in Stryi county, in what is now Ukraine, the native country of Artem Manuilov, and during his stay in Africa lived and worked in northern Nigeria, an area inhabited by the Fulbe people, which Mamadou Góo Bâ comes from; although the latter is a Senegalese by birth, he often stresses that national identities in Africa are an artificial construct, forced upon the continent by Europeans, and what really matters as anchors of tradition are tribal identities. These geographical coincidences were of course very precious, but we soon decided they were not enough to constitute a

dramaturgical axis. Reading Bińczyk and Popkiewicz, we came up with the motif of saving the world through work passed from generation to generation, which is streaked with a desire of conquest and domination. What according to a lofty idea is supposed to be the work of saving the planet, constant development underpinned by the theory of economic growth, is in fact driven by a desire to exploit its resources and devastate the successive ecosystems. Male fantasies about conquering the world and big plans for the future are supposed to serve the future generations, but in fact impoverish them, leaving a legacy of polluted air, poisoned water, and tons of garbage. Paweł Łysak talked about it in an interview ahead of the premiere:

> Fathers are people who care about the future. They build, like men, a world for their children; and they've built it the way they did. The places we're talking about show how the world is being devastated — by exponential growth, by the extraction of fossil fuels; how we are heading into an abyss. And our fathers put really a great deal effort into making the world the way it is. They were convinced it would be so great (Łysak, 2018).

As I said, we soon realized that the topics carried by human actors alone would not support a narrative and that it was necessary to introduce nonhuman actors — geophysical elements, such as climate changes, apocalyptic forest fires, images of a devastated planet, oceans with heaps of garbage. The ecological crisis — a condition that many generations worked for, billions of individuals fascinated by the capitalist prospect of constant growth — became the leitmotif of our research. Combining the perspective of three fathers and a broad planetary gaze offered a chance for stepping

beyond the social framework and tackling the topic of climate change, which has little theatrical tradition in Poland. We felt we were navigating unknown terrain, which is why the documentaries of Patricio Guzmán or Werner Herzog provided such an important context. Polish critical theatre has developed tools for representing historical reckonings, social and identity exclusions, or feminist issues, but has dealt very seldom with ecology and the climate crisis, failing to recognize them as political topics *par excellence*.

In the show, the fathers became representations of historical and social topics related to domination and conquest. The story of Demba Bâ illustrated the conquest of Africa by white colonizers. His ancestors for centuries grazed cattle in the Sahel, a geographical region south of the Sahara, once fertile and now semi-arid to the extent that its inhabitants face hunger every year. Senegal was a French colony and it was the French who introduced an unsustainable groundnut-growing monoculture to the region; without any crop rotation, it quickly led to deforestation and soil sterilization. Since his youth, Demba worked on a merchant ship owned by the French company Maurel et Prom, founded in 1831 at the slave island Gorée (a corruption of Dutch *Goedereede*, "good roadstead") and shipping groundnuts and other goods from West Africa to Bordeaux. When the trade in groundnuts became less profitable and the African soil too sterile for their cultivation, Maurel & Prom switched to oil drilling. "They began at the tiny slave island of Gorée and ended up polluting the environment in Gabon, Tanzania, Nigeria, South America, and Indonesia," Mamadou says in his monologue. The history of the African clan of Bâ, which according to legend traces its roots to ancient Egyptians, is a history of a forced civilizational leap brought about by colonialism, based on the exploitation of resources and local populations and resulting in the collapse of centuries of tradition.

Artem Manuilov’s father was seventeen when he started working at the Barakov Coal Mine in Sukhodolsk, Ukraine. The “Donbas coal fever,” which began in the 1880s, attracting experts from all over Europe, mainly Britain, to the area, formed a context for his biography. Also people from all over Russia flocked to the Donetsk coal basin in search of a better life, and that was how Artem’s grandparents came here; they worked, in harsh conditions, in the electrification sector. After the 1917 revolution, the Donbas became one of the pillars of the Soviet economy, and coal miners enjoyed great respect. “They said that Donbas coal provided energy for the whole world. To this there are numerous monuments devoted to miners who achieved five hundred percent of norm for the socialist homeland. A miner with a pickaxe, a miner with a lamp, a miner carrying a lump of coal like Prometheus carrying fire. He looks like a saint, blessing people with it,” Artem narrates in the show. The exploitation of the planet and of the miners, who worked in hazardous conditions, risking their health, was covered up by a propaganda message: “My father was very proud to be part of this powerful socialist machine. Six hundred thousand tonnes of coal were extracted there annually. In total, during the whole span of its existence, the company mined thirty two and a half million tonnes of coal, digging over two hundred and twenty kilometres of pits. Some journey to the centre of the world!” After the fall of communism, the mines began to be closed down and it turned out that no one needed the recent heroes anymore. Their wages were withheld for many months and safety norms were sharply lowered. Alexander Voronov died of a heart attack at the age of thirty six after a lump of coal fell on his back a few months earlier. Half a year after his death, an explosion of methane and dust killed eighty one miners at the Barakov Mine. “There is an alley of miner graves at the cemetery in Sukhodolsk. My father rests very close to his colleagues.”

In the case of Paweł Łysak's father, the main topic was farming — an element of a family tradition, underpinned by an ideology of organic work, of educating the masses about hygiene or the mechanization of farming. In Łysak's reminiscences there often recur images of his parents working at the farming school in Bereźnica, and of the many uncles and aunts associated with the sector. The school was founded in the late nineteenth century by Count Julian Brunicki, who saw in the development of farming and its mechanization a great economic reform project for the whole area. Jan Łysak's dream of using living, green grain before it dies was thus deeply rooted in tradition and the upbringing he received. He worked on this dream while being seriously ill, despite ridicule and sarcasm: "The reviewer's caustic remarks that I had declared a war against bread and noodles are misplaced, to say the least. This is about reducing world hunger! About reducing hunger through the introduction of an efficient technology of using green ear and stalk." His homemade "civilizing mission" was to be a response to the global hunger crisis: "And so a green goo started flowing out of an old meat mincer screwed to the table. The caryopsis at an early stage of maturity. So that's the goo that may save the world one day?" asks Andrzej Kłak, narrating the story of Jan Łysak, at the end of his monologue. Naomi Klein calls this kind of responses to crises "explosions of utopian imagination" (Klein, 2018, p. 217).

Presented next to each other, the three biographies inscribed in great civilizing missions demonstrated the failure of different versions of the Enlightenment, which Edwin Bendyk called a classic macho project. In an essay written for the show's programme, he cited Jason W. Moore and his research into the development of capitalism and its relation to ecology. He notes that the crucial aspect of the capitalist project was to "commodify work and nature. Human labour, grain, or the forest became commodities —

concrete abstractions whose value was determined and expressed in money by the market" (Bendyk, 2018, p. 8). Of course, the colonial version of modernity differs from its Soviet iteration, but both share a dream of building a better world, a dream streaked with oppression and violence.

In European culture, Faust is the embodiment of the macho project of conquest. Writing in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Marshall Berman calls Goethe's *Faust* a "tragedy of development," arguing that one of the work's most original ideas is that of an "affinity between the cultural ideal of self-development and the real social movement toward economic development" (Berman, 1982, p. 40). This is particularly evident in Part Two, where Faust "connects his personal drives with the economic, political and social forces that drive the world; he learns to build and to destroy" (Berman, 1982, p. 61). He outlines a great project of harnessing the sea in the service of man, consistent with theories of modern industrial organization:

> . . . man-made harbours and canals that can move ships full of goods and men; dams for large-scale irrigation; green fields and forests, pastures and gardens, a vast and intensive agriculture; waterpower to attract and support emerging industries; thriving settlements, new towns and cities to come — and all this to be created out of a barren wasteland where human beings have never dared to live (Berman, 1982, p. 62).

Economic growth becomes his highest ideal, which is why Berman calls Faust the prototype Developer.

The biographies of three fathers, protagonists of *How to Save the World on a*

Small Stage?, even though they never met, have a lot in common and arrange themselves into a structure like tiny cogwheels in the great development machine of the Enlightenment. From the confrontation of their individual stories with the great mechanisms of development there emerges the paradox of the Anthropocene, which is that “although mankind has been hailed as the extraordinary causal power of this epoch, most people are in the position of being victims of the climate crisis rather than causal subjects of the changes” (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 111). The height of the three fathers’ careers coincided with the Great Acceleration of the second half of the twentieth century, while the juxtaposition of their stories with that of Faust allows for extending the perspective of the Anthropocene back to the Industrial Revolution. It was the beginnings of the latter that Goethe captured in his work, and especially in its final parts. “Power and Estate to win, inspires my thought! The Deed is everything, the Glory nought” (Goethe, 1870, p. 233), says Faust played by Kazimierz Wysota in the first scene — to then, at the end, sickly and in hospital pyjamas, still defend his indomitable desire. Nothing has changed in his consciousness, he still remains faithful to his ideals of conquest and taming of nature:

> Yes! to this thought I hold with firm persistence;
> The last result of wisdom stamps it true:
> He only earns his freedom and existence,
> Who daily conquers them anew.
> Thus there, by dangers girt, shall glide away
> Of childhood, manhood, age, the vigorous day:
> And such a throng I fain would see —
> Stand on free soil among a people free! (Goethe, 1870, p. 294)

Anna Ilczuk was a counterpoint to the male characters. At first, her monologues were to be based on theoretical texts dealing with climate change, serving as a kind of ecological warning. We imagined her as the only character alive, a narrator or guide presenting the post-catastrophe world. She is the only one who responds to the crisis, trying to save the catastrophe-struck planet, and possesses an ethical imagination. We envisaged her character as embodying Naomi Klein's thought that if we are to change from a society based on exploitation into one based on care and renewal, then all interpersonal relations have to be rooted in reciprocity and mindfulness because it is precisely such relations that are our most precious wealth — and that is the opposite of a situation where some people force others into submission (Klein, 2018). Books by authors associated with the philosophy of ecofeminism, investigating parallels between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women, can also serve as a reference here. We searched for a form for such a counterpoint for a very long time. Theoretical texts, even when edited for script, conveyed a proper message and narratively bound the stories together, but still seemed insufficient. They lacked the power of affective pull; their didacticism irritated the actress. In one of the improvisations, she started talking about her own sense of confusion and anxiety over her daughter's future: "My name is Anna Ilczuk. I am thirty seven years old. My daughter is four. In twenty years' time, I'll be fifty seven. I've never assumed I'd live long. It frightens me that if all those reports [on climate change] are true, then my daughter will not only miss healthy food or water, but even air." And so it was the personal perspective of a mother concerned about the future that proved the right counterpoint to the personal stories of sons talking about the past.

Towards an Ecology of Theatre

The idea of the “fifth wall of theatre” and of going beyond the anthropocentric vision of theatre may bring to mind the classic motif of *theatrum mundi*, which originated, after all, in the field of geography. The irony of the title *How to Save the World on a Small Stage?* refers to this idea. How to save the world without exploiting it further? Or at least how to minimize the exploitation? Can a small stage become a great theatre of the world? Consequently, Janek Simon thought from the very beginning about a stage design that would utilize existing elements. He used cubes of compressed waste paper which in a simply way conjured up an apocalyptic landscape of a littered planet. Postulating a dramaturgy of the climate-change era that would break through the “fifth wall of theatre,” Una Chaudhuri argues that instead of the “mimetic” mode it should use a “diegetic” one, that is, to simply tell rather than imitate or enact. In the ecological model, all particles are equally important and compose the whole. Accordingly, work on the show provided for community, for sharing stories and adapting them together so that none emerged as dominant. The initial idea of integrating these stories proved impossible because the most interesting thing was how these parallel narratives interacted with each other.

Making music together was an important part of the work. Andrzej Kłak was responsible for editing it, but it was produced by all members of the team playing together, sharing music from their respective cultures. Mamadou Góo Bâ brought a piece he composed in which a Senegalese drought song turned into a Belarusian rain song. It was during our sessions that we came up with the idea of singing, in the final part of the show, the recently published IPCC Special Report on Global Warming, based on the assessment

of around 6,000 peer-review publications. It warned that if global warming exceeded 1.5ºC above levels from the beginning of the industrial era, that is the time when we started emitting carbon dioxide on a massive scale, an ecological catastrophe would become imminent by 2030. A joint song, a lament over a dying planet, gave a voice to science and the experts who signed the report. An artistic project clashed with scientific research, without losing the power of affective action.

Working on *How to Save the World on a Small Stage?*, we approached, in many ways, the making of "ecological theatre." The question remains whether we managed to go beyond exploitation-based structures of theatrical work. Writing that it was the Enlightenment that "pitched nature and culture, 'man' and the 'environment' against each other in what has turned out to be a potentially disastrous opposition," Baz Kershaw accuses performance that as a category it became "synonymous with progress, making theatre a pervasive model for separating culture from nature" (Kershaw, 2007, pp. 15, 63). Consequently, for theatre to continue to matter in a changing world, it is necessary to start transforming it into an ecological medium. Kershaw tries, in an interesting way, to transpose to the field of theatre the concept of the "ecotone," that is an interface between ecosystems, such as a river and the riparian zone, where a strip of land turns, imperceptibly sometimes, into an aquatic environment. "Ecotones often produce new hybrid life-forms as a result of the 'edge effects' characteristic of the meeting of ecosystems" (Kershaw, 2007, p. 19). Theatre as an ecological medium is simultaneously durable and ephemeral, real and unreal, partial and exhaustive. Thanks to these characteristics, it allows for subverting and transgressing conventional ways of thinking and feeling, providing a set of critical tools that offer a chance of bringing the "saving of the world on a small stage" over into the space of the *theatrum mundi*.

If we decide that theatre is an ecosystem, then a theatre ecology should mean more than just dealing with topics related to climate change. Remaining on this level would be but a declarative gesture. A true theatre ecology should not only mimetically represent, but also actually shape relations within the theatre ecosystem, change modes of production, and constantly renew the effort of rethinking them, aware that all of its elements are equally important. By definition, ecology concerns webs of interdependencies and refers to relations between all organic and inorganic parts of ecosystems, from the simplest to the most complex ones. Consequently, it becomes a theoretical model for thinking about new relations in theatre, based on solidarity and care and rejecting domination and exploitation. A single show cannot bring about such a change. It is necessary to rethink the whole ecosystem.

Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak

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Autor/ka

Paweł Sztarbowski (pawel.sztarbowski@e-at.edu.pl) – dramaturg, publicist and teacher at Theater Academy in Warsaw, Deputy Director of Powszechny Theater in Warsaw since 2014. PhD. of Theatre Arts. He graduated from Philosophy studies at the University of Warsaw, studied Theatre Arts at the Theater Academy in Warsaw and defended his PhD dissertation entitled “Theater and Solidarity. On theater of the community” at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He was the founder of Nowa Siła Krytyczna - a group of young reviewers writing for the Polish Theater Vortal e-teatr.pl. As reviewer and publicist, he has co-operated with an abundance of polish and foreign magazines focused on the topic of theater (Theater der Zeit, Svet e Divadlo and Theater Seasons, Didaskalia, Dialog). He is the author of numerous scientific texts on theater declaimed on both all-Polish and international conferences and published in collective works. He is the editor of books *Liberated Energy* (Warsaw 2011) and *Teatr wspólny* (Bydgoszcz 2013). ORCID:

0000-0003-4787-9959.

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didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

participation

The Signifier Cannot Be Detached from the Body

Zofia Dworakowska University of Warsaw

The text is a proposal to analyse the film *Symphony of the Ursus Factory* from three different perspectives: performance studies, qualitative research, and participatory art. Departing from a quote by the director, Jaśmina Wójcik, where she reminisces about her first encounters with the former employees of the factory, the author focuses on the issue of embodied knowledge. Through discussing different moments of the film and its visual and audial strategy, the author also shows how theatricality mixes with documentality in the production. The author also refers to different events and activities from the nine-year-long Factory Ursus Project to show it as a long-term process grounded on different modes of participation and collaboration, without which the movie could not have been possible and which legitimates its artistic form.

Keywords: qualitative research; participatory art; performance studies; representation; Symphony of the Ursus Factory

For Rafał

"When they mentioned their work in our first conversations, they would often stand up and demonstrate it to me. After all, I had no idea what hubs and bergers were! I was absolutely speechless watching them. These people performed a kind of dance for me" (Wójcik, 2018). This is how Jaśmina Wójcik recalls the interviews with former employees of the Ursus Tractor

Plant, which gave her the idea for a film, *The Symphony of the Ursus Factory* (2018). The above brief quote is not a random choice: it recurs in the stories told about the film, including the numerous interviews with the director. It telegraphs the intersecting and overlapping perspectives that can be adopted to examine the project: qualitative research, performance studies and participatory art, all of which emphasize the question of representation.

“when they mentioned their work, they would often stand up and demonstrate it to me”

Jaśmina Wójcik’s interest in Ursus began with a casual walk she took with her friends around the disused factory site which led to her fascination with that space. The recollections of the director’s father, an Ursus native, who liked to reminisce about the past glory of the district and the factory, was a factor too. In 2011 and in the nine nine that followed, together with Izabela Jasińska, Pat Kulka, Igor Stokfiszewski and Jakub Wróblewski, Wójcik engaged in a series of activities in the Ursus area,[1] including an audio tour of the factory grounds, during which excerpts from interviews with former Ursus employees were played; a screening on the walls of the former factory buildings of archival footage depicting life in the factory (2014); a parade in which tractor lovers from Poland drove their vehicles from the Palace of Culture in downtown Warsaw to Ursus (2014); neighbours’ gatherings; the shooting of a short film entitled *Ursus Means Bear* (2015); the publication of excerpts from memories of former employees on the website of *Krytyka Polityczna*(2015); the development of a mobile app charting the history of the plant (2015). To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1976 worker strikes, Wójcik, her colleagues and the local authorities published a book with memories of workers from that period,[2] and together with Ursus

residents, they built, out of tractor parts sent in from across Poland, a memorial, *Tractor – Idea – Ursus*, which was unveiled in front of the Ursus district office (2016). They also spearheaded a campaign to buy the plant's historic collection from private owners and set up a museum in the district (which has not yet happened due to the lack of support from Warsaw authorities).

The first conversations with the former employees of the factory, referred to in the excerpt quoted at the beginning of this article, are not dissimilar to ethnographic or sociological fieldwork interviews. Researchers are familiar with the moment described by Wójcik in which an interview is no longer just a conversation as the information that needs to be conveyed cannot be verbalized. One needs to stand up and demonstrate. What I refer to here are corporeal practices, an embodied knowledge that can only be acquired and transmitted through performance, the kind of performance Wójcik was part of.

In this particular case, the situations in which physical action is called for reveal a key methodological and theoretical problem discussed in the context of qualitative research, a research methodology dating back to the first half of the 1970s (see, among others, Denzin, Lincoln, 2005; Jawłowska, 2008)[3]. Within its framework, "the social sciences and policy sciences and the humanities are drawing closer together in a mutual focus on an interpretative, qualitative approach to research and theory" (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005, p. 2). Researchers who have embraced this methodology hold that traditional social research, in its ambition to achieve (impossible) objectivity and be accorded equal status with the sciences, overlooked the fundamental reduction that occurs in the process of any field research – that is, the fact of representing a multi-media cultural reality by a single medium

– text (see Clifford, 1995). For this reason, among others, they challenge the "privilege of language-based ways of knowing" (Finley, 2005, p. 685) and experiment with various forms of representation.

From the perspective of their historical research, performance studies scholars such as Rebecca Schneider and Diana Taylor point out that "the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies" (Taylor, 2003, p. 16) is due to the high position of knowledge that can take material form, become a document, be archived (see Schneider, 2011, p. 23). In her book with the telling title *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Taylor sets out to reclaim space for the knowledge excluded by the archive – that is, for the repertoire. "The repertoire … enacts embodied memory-performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge" (Taylor, 2003, p. 20).

Symphony does offer a reproduction – what Wójcik saw during the interviews was included in the film. At one point we see former workers arriving at the site of the abandoned factories from all corners of the district as if they were returning to work after a very long hiatus. They locate their former workplaces in the crumbling buildings and perform the actions they used to perform every day as part of their jobs while making noises to imitate the sounds of the machines they used to work at. Past events are performatively repeated, but the repetition does not resemble most of contemporary Polish reenactments, which tend to reconstruct momentous historical events, mainly military operations. Instead, it deals with everyday life and the sphere of labour. Besides, it is not the type of repetition that emphasizes faithfulness to the original. On the one hand, many of the former employees make a considerable effort to perform their actions exactly where

they performed them in the past. A man carefully climbs a pile of rubble and approaches a wall that used to be in the middle of the building as testified by the remnants of the oil-paint dado. Close to the wall, which has broken fittings or equipment jutting out of it, he makes the motions of switching on machines and moving things around. On the other hand, the workers perform their actions without the carefully reproduced props and costumes of historical reconstructions. Theirs are barebone actions performed "in the air", without the objects they were originally associated with – writing without a typewriter or driving and shifting gears without a car. Standing on a rough patch of land rutted by construction vehicles, bent in half, a woman, makes the motions of moving something from one place to another, fully dedicated to her task. The people do not "work" in their work clothes but are all dressed up. One man even has a medal pinned to the collar of his jacket.

The filming of the performance unfolding in *Symphony* is questionable both for the performance studies tradition underpinned by the dogma of the performance's ephemerality and the impossibility of repeating or recording it (see Schechner, 1985, p. 50; Phelan, 1993, p. 146) and for the stance critical of that tradition taken by Schneider and Taylor. Taylor's distinction between two types of knowledge and its storage, the archive and the repertoire, is founded on the assumption that performance is repeteable, but also on the notion that it is clearly distinct from any material recording. "The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive", the researcher argues. "A video of a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire)" (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). Schneider argues against this approach, demonstrating that Taylor, in seeking to legitimize the repertoire as another kind of archive, actually succumbs to the logic and order of the latter, while failing to notice its performativity (see

Schneider, 2011, p. 108). Elsewhere, however, Schneider notes that the recording of oral transmissions or other practices of saving the immaterial lead to “the loss of a different approach to saving” (see Schneider, 2011, p. 101). She thus shares Taylor’s belief that “embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge” (Taylor, 2003, pp. 20–1). Both researchers acknowledge the medial efficiency of performance. Being a proper mode of preservation itself, performance needs no other recording.

It is important to realize, however, what is reenacted in *Symphony*. The reenactment is mostly a repetition of the physical actions that the workers performed in their workplaces many years ago, but it is also a repetition of their first meetings with the director, and, as it will later turn out, of other similar situations in the past and in the future. The reenactment in the film is thus a part of a series of repeated performances. It also has the hallmarks of performative repetitions of this type, which are “always reconstructive, always incomplete, never in thrall to the singular or self-same origin” (Schneider, 2011, p. 100). It is capable of coming back multiple times, of moving between the repertoire and the archive, in different variants and at different times. It thus provides evidence for the central thesis of Rebecca Schneider, who has waged a long-standing battle within her discipline, arguing that “performance does not disappear” (Schneider, 2011, p. 130), as the classics claim, but remains.

“hubs and bergers”

At one point in the film, we see people take their vintage tractors out of sheds and garages across Poland and set off towards Ursus. These “homecomings” are filmed in a spectacular fashion – in wide shots, from above, with landscapes in the background. There is no commentary. The only

sounds that can be heard are those of the engines and the regular beat of a single sound. When the tractors reach the former factory grounds, they assemble into a formation and perform a kind of choreography intended not only to cover the distance but also to demonstrate their power and grandeur. The vehicles enter the factory yard where the former employees, dressed up and holding pennants with embroidered factory symbols, stand motionless, waiting. The encounter between the people and the machines is emotional. Some of the employees approach the tractors. They smile, touch and stroke the vehicles, one woman even kisses the burnished metal. What follows is spectacular aerial footage of a pre-planned show of tractors encircling the assembled crowd, which brings to mind a parade of vehicles at some official ceremony. The film culminates in a still night scene, lit by the tractors' headlights. The protagonists are filmed up close, sitting behind the wheels of their vehicles and then the camera pans back to show the tractors together before the image cuts out.

In each symphony, the tempo changes in successive sections. A similar variability is present in *The Symphony of the Ursus Factory* as its segments and themes are marked by different temporalities. The film begins with black-and-white footage from the factory's heyday which shows workers assembling vehicles, participating in mass gatherings in the factory buildings, celebrating the birth of the millionth tractor and leaving the factory after work. Then we see the other protagonists, the former workers, as they go about their daily routines, preparing a meal, riding a bicycle, driving a car, while their voices can be heard offscreen, recounting their memories.

> "I was responsible for all core-making machines and other core processing units: the moulding machine, the melting furnace and

the doghouse. I wanted to work, prove myself, do things, because I had grown up working."

"I was strong. I was the first and only woman working with the bergers. The only woman who could handle that sort of work."

"I worked fifty years as a driver, but I didn't even break a side mirror. I didn't have a single accident. I should get a medal."

"You didn't have to take sandwiches, there was a cafeteria, there was soup, meat chunks for the soup, there was milk, there was soda. Anything you wanted. Package holidays, for children too, one in the summer and one in the winter. They paid and everyone was happy."

"Noise levels at the hammers were 80 decibels and we got no earmuffs. People were going deaf, they worked very hard, sweated, got sick, but we had a clinic and the doctors would help."

"The sheer scale of it was terrifying, a few thousand people in one building, three shifts. Some heavy machinery, big and small. You didn't know where to enter and how to leave. There was dust, smoke, foundry coke gas, rumbling hammers, tons of smoke."

"I remember us standing and watching as it went under the hammer, when it was all being destroyed. A factory that used to give people bread, a livelihood."

"This is how all factories in Poland were carried off. They were making democracy for those in power, not for us, the working class."

This segment of the film is an observational documentary – the camera follows the protagonists, we can hear nothing but their voices. From time to time, however, there are disruptions, which gradually escalate. They include

the reenactments and silent stills with protagonists frozen in different situations, individually and in groups. In one of the stills, workers wait for the arrival of the tractors, in another, we see the company band, frozen, standing front of a pile of earth and a factory stack, instruments in hand, trumpets, saxophones and trombones raised to their lips. Because of the stillness and the fact that the people face the camera, these scenes are not unlike photographs. Gradually, the documentary mode becomes diluted, the protagonists' voices pass into silence, the narrative gives way to music and images. The final scenes of *Symphony* are purely visual.

Playing with the documentary mode results in symphony-like tempo changes. The film interweaves an array of temporal registers: the now of 2018 and the historical events "quoted" in the newsreels, recounted or evoked by performative reenactments. Another variant are the scenes at the end of the film, which take place neither in the past nor in the present, but can hardly be viewed as flashforewards. The shifts between the different registers are marked by stills which slow down the pace of the film from time to time.

All these measures challenge linear temporality, which is typical of most documentaries and indeed of most research. They suggest "that time may be touched, crossed, visited or revisited, that time is transitive and flexible, that time may recur in time, that time is not one – never only one" (Schneider, 2011, p. 30). They are best thought of as not merely film experiments but as attempts of distancing oneself from the dominant modes of doing history, and more broadly, from the characteristic Western attachment to originality and authenticity (cf. Schneider, 2011, p. 30).

“I was absolutely speechless”

The abandonment of the documentary mode also entails a kind of disillusion – that is, it directs attention to the medium of film, revealing its existence and agency. After all, the repetitions, slow motion sequences and flashforwards do not pretend to be real events. They did not exist outside the film but now are visible because of their overtly creative, theatrical nature. At the same time, *Symphony* continues to be a documentary – its participants are real people, who take part in the film on their own behalf, whose faces, bodies, voices and memories we get to know from the beginning of the film, and it it set at a specific site – in the ruins of the former Ursus Plant. *Symphony* fuses the theatrical and the documentary (cf. Schneider, 2011, p. 29).

A similar duality is also seen in the audio and visual aspects of the film. The *Symphony* proper on the audio track comprises recordings of workers’ recreating the sounds of the old factory, music played by the factory band, recordings of tractor engines and sounds of one of the factories still operating in the Ursus grounds. It is therefore, in part, another reenactment, a devised piece – at once a document and a composition. The camera films the protagonists discreetly at the beginning but regularly breaks out of the documentary mode. The first time this happens is when, a few minutes into the film, the camera abruptly changes its point of view to soar high above a protagonist riding her bicycle, a tiny speck moving through the neighbourhood. The disruptions of the documentary mode are usually achieved by moving the camera away from the subject to obtain wide angle shots. We see a man walking silently along the corridors of the former factory until he approaches a staircase where the stairs and wall end in mid-air. After the man stops at the top of the stairs, the camera pulls away to

reveal the whole building and then the vast area in front of it. Through the broken wall we still see the man at the top of the stairs as he is turning into a little speck. At times, the movement of the camera slows down noticeably, as when it films the vacant post-industrial buildings in an almost contemplative way. These shots do not merely record events but ostensibly construct them.

The simultaneity of creation and documentation in many aspects of *Symphony* further complicates the distinction between action and recording, between repertoire and archive, which is fundamental to the performance studies tradition (cf. Schneider, 2011, pp. 154, 163, 168). This distinction derives from the above-mentioned ephemerality thesis, according to which "we are encouraged to think of performance as that which eludes capture because it occurs in time and so we are comfortable saying that a film or a photograph is a record of the live, but not itself the live that it captures (or fails to capture, if one accepts Richard Schechner's and Peggy Phelan's terms […])" (Schneider, 2011, p. 142). In *Symphony*, the overt theatricality invites life into the document, while the repetitions, slow motion sequences and flashforwards reveal the possibility of another temporality in which performance can repeatedly recur, even through mediation. *Symphony* eludes the established media and temporal distinctions – it is at once a performance and a document.

This "temporal and medial blurring or simultaneity" (Schneider, 2011, p. 168) is a challenge for audiences. It invites uncertainty, jolts viewers out of their viewing habits, and renders rational analysis insufficient. The tension between then and now, the looping of the real and the fantastic, and the intensified sensory impact achieved through the dominance of the audio and visual narrative demand an emotional response.

“these people performed a kind of dance for me”

Unlike most such performances, the reenactments in *Symphony* do not evoke actions of others from the past, such as in reenactments of the Battle of Grunwald, in performative ethnography research (when situations observed during field studies are re-enacted; see Denzin, 2009, p. 583), or in the re-performances of Marina Abramovič’s work at her famous 2010 MoMA exhibition *The Artist Is Present*. In *Symphony*, the actions of labour in the deserted factory grounds are performed by the same people who performed them “originally”. Michel de Certeau’s words “the signifier cannot be detached from the individual or collective body” become strikingly literal here (de Certeau, 1988, p. 216), and allow us to see the empowering power of this type of performance. Taylor emphasizes that “the repertoire requires presence – people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being a part of the transmission. […] The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” (Taylor, 2003, p. 20).

A similarly understood presence of “these people”, also factory workers, is the premise of one of the early concepts of participatory art in Poland – Witold Wandurski’s workers’ theatre. In keeping with Wandurski’s concept, the community shapes the theatre not by changing the repertoire, but by bringing onto the stage its own actor, “who ‘distorts’ the theatre’s tendencies in favour of the needs of the audience who elect the actor from their midst” (Wandurski, 1973, p. 322). According to Wandurski, empowerment occurs by seizing power in each performance, here and now, before the eyes of the audience, and consists in making overt, even

ostantatious modifications to the text, meanings and acting style. When discussing the means by which the “distortion” was achieved, Wandurski mentions parody and caricature, which highten theatricality, and “the overdrive” (see Wandurski, 1973, p. 322), which implies a possible temporal dimension of the “distortion”, both in terms of the dynamics of acting and indeed in terms of challenging realism. Wandurski thus links theatricality with regaining control, which for him has a political dimension.

Picking up on these ideas, it may be said that the overtly theatrical repetitions, slow motion sequences and flashforwards in *Symphony*, like the scenes of stillness in contemporary dance examined by André Lepecki, reveal “the possibility of one’s agency within the controlling regimes of capital, subjectivity, labor and mobility” (Lepecki, 2006, p. 15). Through these formal features, the former factory workers “distort” linear time, and so interrupt and disrupt the course of history in order to regain a presence in it by establishing a grassroots, collective and affective version of history. This version sidelines the “official” history of the factory, full of dates and numbers, which tends to seen as nothing more than a contribution to the history of the collapse of Poland’s large-scale industry after 1989, or more broadly, of Poland’s political transformation. A few basic facts about the factory offered at the beginning of the film is all we get in the way of background information, which has been noticed by reviewers: “Anyone who wants to know the history of the monumental plant should do some extra reading before or after the screening” (Bodziony, 2019), “These facts and narratives are not found in Jaśmina Wójcik’s film” (Madejska, 2018). *Symphony* offers a change of scale and a shift of perspective. The factory as recalled by its former workers reveals itself as a formative experience and a space of everyday life. This version of the story provides insights into the factory as a cultural reality with a network of relations, a value system,

knowledge and technology. This reality pivots around work, and it is only the presence of former workers that allows for a different angle than seeing the factory through the lens of the propaganda of the People's Republic of Poland or of post-transformation socio-economic analyses. In individual experience, work is associated with respect for the following: effort, joint action, production of useful objects.

The question of the presence of "these people" is also an important focus of the debate concerning traditional research in which community representatives took part as information providers, or "knowledge sources", only in the first part of the research, in the field. The later stages of the research process – compiling data, drawing conclusions, writing a report and its publication – occurred at a physical distance from the "field" and without the community's involvement, which meant losing control over representation in favour of the researcher. By engaging in a critique of this tradition, representatives of qualitative research seek to redefine research relationships so that community members are "no longer … subjects but instead" are "collaborators or even researchers" (Finley, 2005, p. 682, cf. Wyka, 2004). On the other hand, they wonder how "researchers 'write up' their understandings without 'othering' their research partners, exploiting them, leaving them voiceless" (Finley, 2005, p. 682). The strategies they experiment with include consulting research progress and findings with research participants, writing polyphonic narratives, constructing open texts, and finally conducting research in the form of arts-based research, including, of course, performance-based research (see Finley, 2005, Alexander 2005, Madison 2005, and others). The intention is always to un-seal the research process to offer insights into its various stages, to hear the diverse voices of its participants and thus to trace the processes of knowledge collection and representation.

It seems that the footage that follows *Symphony* proper, separated from it by the end credits, serves a similar function. The footage, which is perhaps the most documentary-like part, shows the preparations before filming – a voice workshop with Dominik Strycharski and a movement workshop with Rafał Urbacki, attended by former factory employees and others including Jaśmina Wójcik and Igor Stokfiszewski. The word "workshop", which is used to describe the nine months of sessions leading up to the creation of *Symphony*, is misleading. Judging from the footage, Strycharski and Urbacki did not teach the participants anything. Rather, the sessions were not unlike a field research situation in which artists-researchers collaborate with participants/information providers. They were neither interviews nor surveys. They resembled focus groups except that their medium was the body. Responding to questions asked by Strycharski and Urbacki, participants reminisce about their former work activities and use their voices to recreate the sounds of the machines they used to operate. We witness a transfer of knowledge directly from body to body (Schneider, 2011, p. 33) in reenactments of the kind we are already familiar with.

If we adopt a research perspective, we can view these sessions as a kind of research through collaboration, in which the community together with the researchers create a public presentation of the collected knowledge.

One should not be misled by the fact of placing workshop documentation footage after the film credits, because it is more important than the bloopers sometimes included at the end of a film. The footage provides a different perspective and insight into a process, something many researchers seek in their own work.

Another perspective on *Symphony* is provided by the footage that has been made available by the producers but is not included in the film[4]. The making-

of footage provides insight into the process at a different point in the production of *Symphony*. Of the materials discussed so far, it is the only one that includes comments on *Symphony* by the director, creators and former Ursus employees. It offers their views on what they think they are taking part in and why they're doing this:

> "There used to be industry in Ursus for almost a century and it seems very important to us that that industrial identity is somehow preserved" (Igor Stokfiszewski).
> "I wanted to appear in the film to preserve some of these memories, these remnants of Ursus." (Jerzy Dobrzyński). "This film is very much needed for young generations – those who worked at the plant pass [this] on." (Henryk Goździewski). "In some way it honours people, many of whom dedicated their lives to working at the plant" (Stefan Sobczak).

Evidently, the intention of the co-creators of *Symphony* is to document, to save from oblivion, to leave a material trace. In this brief report from the set, the comments quoted above are juxtaposed with footage of shooting scenes, in which the former factory workers assume the role of actors – they perform the tasks set by the director, they act. Incidentally, speaking on the set, Dominik Strycharski draws attention to this involvement (2018). Thus the making-of footage reaffirms the role of simultaneity in the film, the simultaneity of creating and recording, of performing and documenting, or of documenting through performing.

Revealing the behind-the-scenes preparations for *Symphony*, the workshop footage and the footage from the set conclusively expose the film's creative

character while legitimizing it, revealing that it is not only the product of the artistic imaginations of the filmmakers but can be traced back to a long process shaped by a number of different people. The footage makes it possible to reconstruct the method used during this process, which is analogous to *site-specific*activities in art, and to the fundamental tenets of grounded theory in social research, according to which "Theory emerges […] in the course of systematic field research from empirical data that relates directly to the observed part of social reality" (Konecki, 2009, p. XII). The idea is not to link in any way the activity/research with a specific site – here the Ursus community and the factory – but to "ground" in it the concepts, theses and artistic forms that emerge later. The words of the film's director quoted at the beginning of this article allow us to trace a line between her meetings with former factory workers during which they spontaneously demonstrated the actions they used to perform at the factory and a film in which they agreed to appear and re-perform these actions.

This is one of the numerous lines that connect *Symphony* with the various activities undertaken as part of the 9-year-long "Ursus Project" before and after the film was made. There is no simple causal relationship here. *Symphony*'s relationship to the project as a whole can hardly be taken for granted – it is not a documentary about the project and, contrary to some accounts (see Bendyk, 2018) and the producer's description[5], it is not its summary. *Symphony*, which uses the medium of film, has become the most visible element of the project, but it should not obscure the wider constellation of which it is a part.

"The Ursus Project" has an extended, processual, multifocal structure, which, whether intended from the start or not, should be seen as a strategy developed through practice. Suzanne Lacy has worked in this mode for

years, initiating participatory projects with groups and communities. This strategy is well-illustrated by Lacy's project that shared a similar theme and mediality with "The Ursus Project", which ran from 2015 to 2017 in Brierfield, North West England[6]. "The Circle and the Square" explores the demise of the textile industry in the region, which led, among other things, to a severing of ties between the South-Asian-heritage and white communities who used to work together. At the core of the project were conversations with members of these communities, which often involved singing, a practice important to both groups. Many activities took place in a cavernous, empty, post-industrial building to which former workers returned in order to sing together songs from various traditions and to attend a dinner for five hundred people, the largest gathering at the site since its closure. In the same building, Lacy and her collaborators created a spectacular exhibition from the materials they had collected. The exhibition included a multi-channel video installation featuring memories of dozens of former workers, a presentation of other materials and objects created during the project, as well as project documentation.

The strategies of public projects such as "The Ursus Project" and "The Circle and the Square" envisage the initiation of a long-term process, whose parts differ in scale, in their openness to the outside and in their use of media, enabling various kinds of participation and commitment. Projects of this type involve real-life situations such as navigating diverse institutional frameworks and ongoing negotiations with local authorities, organizations and communities. They take place at the interface of art, research and activism.

Lacy describes the Brierfield project as a "localised critical inquiry into race, work, and capitalism" (2017). If you replace the word "race" with "class",

the same words can be used to describe the activities of “The Ursus Project”. The initiative is one of the few arts and community projects exploring the history of the rise and fall of huge industrial plants in post-war Poland; a history that has been repressed because of the way it was exploited by the propaganda of the People’s Republic of Poland on the one hand, and due to the failure to acknowledge it in the affirmative narrative of Poland’s political transformation on the other hand. It seems that “The Ursus Project”, more than Lacy’s work, tends more towards commemoration, “identity preservation”, but the way the repressed theme is handled and the forms it takes has a critical edge. It is political in a Rancièrean sense, as it interferes with the way reality is perceived (see Rancière, 2007), but also at the level of urban politics, as a civic attempt to initiate discussion about this part of Warsaw. As such, it met with the passivity and resistance of the local government which at the same time invested in the housing estates that were being developed at the former factory sites, promoting Ursus as a modern location. Under pressure from local authorities, the *Tractor – Idea – Ursus* memorial was removed from the neighbourhood on February 27, 2021, and the act of bidding farewell to it became a symbolic event marking Jaśmina Wójcik’s and her collaborators’ leaving the site. The memorial tractor was handed over to the Open-Air Museum in Łochowice, run by village head Jacek Grzywacz, who had been involved with “The Ursus Project” for several years. “A Ursus resident, Stefan Sobczak, was named the continuator of efforts designed to commemorate the Factory. He was presented with a symbolic squawk-horn which he used to invite everyone to attend the Second Rally of Historic Tractors” (Gorzkowska, 2021). The conclusion of the project changes the meaning of *The Symphony of the Ursus Factory*, which becomes even more a trace of the project but can also become more autonomous. Its performative and documentary function,

however, stays the same – *Symphony* is an action that remains.

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Autor/ka

Zofia Dworakowska (zofia.dworakowska@uw.edu.pl) is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw, where she is Head of Social Arts and, together with Justyna Sobczyk, Head of Theatre Pedagogy. She has degrees from the University of Warsaw (Institute of Applied Social Sciences) and the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Theatre Art in Warsaw (Faculty of Theatre Studies). Zofia edited, among others, *CZ/PL. Teatr po rekonstrukcji* (2008), *Wolność w systemie zniewolenia. Rozmowy o polskiej kontrkulturze* (together with Aldona Jawłowska, 2008), *Tysiąc i jedna noc. Związki Odin Teatret z Polską* (2014). She is on the editorial board of *Teatro e Storia*. ORCID: 0000-0001-5617-5975.

Footnotes

1. Knowledge about the project is dispersed. The primary sources are the project's Facebook page and a variety of publications on the *Krytyka Polityczna* website, and the website of *Krytyka Polityczna*'s Institute for Advanced Study, with which the project has been affiliated since 2016 as "The Ursus Programme".
2. See *Ursus. To tutaj wszystko się zaczęło*, ed. Jaśmina Wójcik, Ośrodek Kultury „Arsus", Warsaw, 2016.
3. The foremost forum for researchers who embrace qualitative research, which presents latest research is *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. In 1994–2017, five updated editions of *The Sage Handbook* were published, all edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln.
4. See *Symphony of the Ursus Factory_making of*, https://vimeo.com/238380530, accessed 1 March 2021.
5. The words "*Symphony* is a summary of five years of artistic and research work" recurs in many online descriptions of the film, I assume it comes from the producer's publicity

material. See information about the film on filmweb.pl, vod.pl and filmpolski.pl.
6. Information about the project has been obtained from: https://www.suzannelacy.com/, https://www.art-agenda.com/announcements/184620/suzanne-lacythe-circle-…, accessed 1 March 2021.

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didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

participation

They Are the Future. Hope and a Call for Action

Agata Siwiak Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

The text discusses two theatre performances, *h.* directed by Daniel Stachuła and *To my jesteśmy przyszłością* (We Are the Future) directed by Jakub Skrzywanek. Both productions are primarily addressed to teenage audiences and represent engaging theatre. Their main subject is violence suffered by young people due to their psychosexual orientation and gender. The author of the article notes the efficiency (effectiveness) of the two projects, which she associates with the concept of 'performance of possibilities'. Performative ethnography, but also experimental pedagogy, feminism and studies of homophobic violence provide the research framework for the text.

Keywords: theatre; ethnography; homophobia; pedagogy; violence

Daniel Stachuła's *h.* (premiere: 15 October 2019) and Jakub Skrzywanek's *To my jesteśmy przyszłością* (We Are the Future; premiere: 19-20 October 2019) have a lot in common, though their creators come from completely different artistic backgrounds. Skrzywanek is a young director, graduate of the Krakow Academy of Theatre arts, and has a strong position in mainstream theatre; Stachuła – a theatre pedagogue, Ph.D. student at the Faculty of Polish Studies in Poznań, opera director and former teacher. The two productions are addressed to young people. Both Stachuła and Skrzywanek used the method of performance ethnography oriented towards

critical pedagogy. Stachuła carried out an ethnographic intervention and performative action in a school; Skrzywanek conducted a series of interviews with young people and then invited four of them to take part in the performance in an independent Krakow theatre. Both artistic actions make changes in the lives of the audience and the participants, transforming their vision of the world and its cultural scripts. Lastly, both performances were created on the fringes of mainstream theatre.

According to Bryant Keith Alexander, performance ethnography[1] is a social action, based on the union of performance and ethnography, that is an excellent method of researching and inspiring culture and presupposes political activism and the possibility of social change; "This social action… is not necessarily that which is set into violent motion to overthrow dominant structures of oppression: it is a physical force set against the desire of knowing and being in the world" (Alexander, 2009, p. 412). I understand being in the world as the opportunity to express a self that is honest and critical of culture and the fields of power generated by it. A self that decides what it will speak and take action about. Alexander also highlights the value and social and educational effectiveness of the alliance of ethnography and critical pedagogy. One of the authors invoked by him to describe this phenomenon is Peter McLaren, an acclaimed scholar of critical pedagogy. His concept of enfleshment is based on the assumption that the body is "that meeting place of both the unthought social norms in which meaning is always already in place and the ongoing production of knowledge through particular social, institutional and disciplinary procedures" (McLaren, 1993, p. 275). The researcher claims that it is the body – feeling, dialogical, discursive and performative – that gives rise to the awareness that can lead to transformation.

Both Stachuła's *h.* and Skrzywanek's *We Are the Future* are excellent examples of work under the rubric of critical performance pedagogy. Both performances expose the cultural mechanisms of patriarchal power and the related hegemony of heteronormativity which entails a culture of silence, a culture of fear and power over the body. They also offer hope, pointing to the potential of the politics of the voice and the practice of freedom which can change the biographies of children and young people. To describe the works under analysis, I carried out interview-based research. In the case of *h.* I spoke with pupils of Dr. Franciszek Witaszek Primary School in Poznań, which was a partner in the production, the Polish teacher who supervised the project on its behalf, the school's principal, the director and the counsellor who led the after-the-show workshops with him[2]. I conducted a group interview with the director and performers of *We Are the Future*. Due to the pandemic, I was not able to talk to the audience. The aim of these meetings was to acquire an ethnographic base that would enable me to produce a "dense description" of the two works, comprising the impact and transformative potential of the plays, the methodology and ethics of the artists" work and the environment and context in which the performances were created.

h.

The play premiered in a classroom in the above-mentioned primary school. It received financial support from the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw[3] as part of the the 4th Jan Dorman Competition and was produced at the Stanisław Moniuszko Wielki Theatre in Poznań. The starting point for the work was Aleksandra Szyłło's report *Mamo, jestem zerem* (Mom, I'm a Zero; Szyłło, 2015) in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, about the suicide of Dominik Symański, a first former of a lower secondary school in Bieżuń. Although the boy's

psychosexual orientation is not known, he was a victim of "violence motivated by homophobia" (Pogorzelska, Rudnicki, 2020, p. 43). As Szyłło writes, Facebook fan pages such as *Dominik Szymański – dobrze, że zdechł* or (Dominik Szymański – It's Good That He's Dead) *Pedał Dominik Szymański* (Dominik Szymański Homo) continued to be created even after his death. A comment on one of those pages read: "Higher school of tying shoelaces"; Dominik hanged himself at home with shoelaces tied to a doorframe.

I watch the play in one of Poznań's private schools. We enter a large classroom along with an audience of eight-graders and sit on the benches around. A plywood chest sits in the middle of this space. Also present in the room are female teachers, who help us to our seats. We sit cramped. At one point one of the teachers says: "Silence, please, the artists are about to begin the performance." A travestied motif from Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* (the production's audiosphere was created by Przemysław Degórski) plays in the background. As the lids at the sides and top of the chest open, a boy (Olaf Przybytniak) and a girl (Julia Korbańska) emerge who perform a neoclassical choreography around and on the chest. According to the script, the dancer is an alter ego of Franek, the play's protagonist, and the girl clearly symbolizes death. This poetic, even elaborate scene is an introduction to a very dynamic theatre edited like a video clip whose rhythm is set by an online soundscape and videos made on TikTok (the latter by the duo Ośko/Bogunia). The text is based on the newspaper report, the performers' improvisations and Marcin Teodorczyk's article *Black Pink*[4] about Dominik Szymański's story. The dramatic structure of *h.* is both simple and strongly affective, which was the director Daniel Stachuła's intention from the beginning:

> At one point I realized that the play has the structure of a classic melodrama. It is based on emotions, provokes the audience to empathize with the protagonist and revolves around three figures: the victim, the tormentor and the defender (Stachuła, 2020).

The victim is Franek (Michał Kurek), his friend Kaśka (Angelika Mierzwa) comes to his defence, and the violence is perpetrated by his schoolmates and the Counsellor (also played by Mierzwa), who epitomizes the Polish education system. Franek and Kaśka record a video clip that they post online. This marks the beginning of an "internet drama" as "injurious speech" (Butler, 2010) appears under the clip: "homo", "what a faggoty face, I feel sick." The girl urges Franek to delete the video, and when Franek says it doesn't make sense because they are not going to stop writing, Kaśka asks: "So? You're just going to sit and wait until they stop?", "Well, I can't really walk up to them and say, "hey, don't do this", Franek replies. When the boy, encouraged by Kaśka to report the situation to an adult, visits the school counsellor, she says: "I was on hall duty today. You had history there and I deliberately watched to see if something was going on. And nothing was going on, sunshine." She adds that such nice students couldn't possibly hurt Franek.

When the boy lists the insults from online comments: "homo", "moron", "slag", "faggot", the woman interrupts him, unable to bear these words. She clearly wants to end the conversation and suggests two solutions: telling the boy's mother about the situation (shifting the responsibility for school violence onto the parent) and removing his TikTok account: "No TikTok, no problem, right?" She thus victimizes the boy: "If you hadn't been there, the whole thing wouldn't have happened so you asked for it." (This is reminiscent of blaming raped women: "If you hadn't dressed like that…").

Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska's studies (2019) of the relationship between gender and school violence show that when young people sexually harassed because of their gender or orientation seek help from adults, the most recommended strategy is to minimize contact with the perpetrator, endure the attacks in silence, escape and evade. On the other hand, some students point out that teachers often take the side of the perpetrators, particularly when the latter have a strong position in school and are popular (Chmura-Rutkowska, 2019, p. 276). The silence of the victims is convenient for those who have real and symbolic power over the education system.

Marzenna Pogorzelska i Paweł Rudnicki, authors of the book *Przecież jesteśmy. Homofobiczna przemoc w polskich szkołach – narracje gejów i lesbijek* (2020), begin a chapter on homophobic violence with teachers who act as guardians of gender norms, even though the highest percentage of perpetrators are boys and young men. But, as the scholars write, it's the teaching staff who wield special power in school; violence of on their part has a much stronger impact (Pogorzelska, Rudnicki, 2020, p. 97). The already-mentioned Peter McLaren (1998) notes that there is no stronger voice in school than teacher voice. It can be a destructive or emancipatory factor in a student's life. One voice can change a young person's circumstances. McLaren points to a particularly harmful aspect related to concealments. Any discussion of teacher authority would be incomplete without the mention of Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence – subtle and transparent even to its victims (see Bourdieu, Passeron, 2006). Symbolic violence is used in the "hidden curriculum" – unofficial, elusive and implicit messages conveyed by required readings, students' relations with teachers and the vision of the world reproduced by adults. The hidden curriculum always represents the dominant ideology and unreflectively recognizes it as natural, normal and the only true one. Pogorzelska and Rudnicki note a fact

that is obvious but deserves to be mentioned also in this context. Socially internalized normality and naturalness are historically conditioned in Poland by the Communist regime's policies, opposed to those of the Catholic Church, but consistent with them as regards non-heteronormative people. Today they are associated with the dominant nationalist groups and still with the Church, whose presence in school is symbolic (crosses in classrooms) and real (clergy and catechists). Both these centres of power stigmatize homosexuality and non-binary gender: they describe them by means of pogrom ("the Bible condemns gays"), pathologize them (disease, deviation), regard homosexuality as a sin (one of the dominant narratives in religion classes), produce and disseminate the story of alternativeless heterosexuality (textbooks which depict only heteronormative families, send messages along the lines of "when you grow up, you'll have a girlfriend or wife" to boys and "boyfriend or husband" to girls), and use the strategy of "significant absence and silence" (Pogorzelska, Rudnicki, 2020, pp. 61-68).

Let's go back to the Counsellor's advice. Dominik refuses her suggestion that he close his social media accounts. It's his struggle to have a voice, to be present; his only gesture of resistance. Rudnicki and Pogorzelska emphasize that "silencing, depriving of a voice, suppressing the narrative, and training in silence are all instruments of domination over children and youth, used not only by teachers, but also by their peers from the dominant group." They add that the strategy of taking away the voice has a long history in modernist societies, and the alternative to silence is the "adoption of the language of the dominant group" (Rudnicki, Pogorzelska, 2020, p. 64). In schools the language of the dominant group is adopted most often by boys (and, on a broader social plane, by men) – Polish and foreign studies show that they are usually the perpetrators of violence against LGBT people. Homophobia is often intertwined with sexism; some of the comments under

Franek's video read: "he dances like a homo", even the boy repeats: "I was a cunt (for them)". A boy who does not comply with the patriarchal model of "hegemonic" or "dominant masculinity", as R.W. Connell (1995) would say, will also be a "chick", "slut", "skank" (Chmura-Rutkowska, 2019, p. 260) for the dominant group.

In the play Franek commits suicide like Dominik Szymański, hanging himself with shoelaces, though not at home but in a classroom. The scale of young people's suffering in Poland is unprecedented. The 2017 report of the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę Foundation (Włodarczyk, 2017) states that "in terms of suicide attempts resulting in death among children aged 10-19, Poland is second in Europe after Germany" (2017). According to Marta Abramowicz's (2017) studies, 67.2 per cent of LGBT people aged 14-17 confirmed they had suicidal thoughts in the months preceding the survey; in the 18-25 age group, the percentage was 46.1. The rate was 10% in the general population. Still, the government sees no need for changes in the Polish education system so as to make school a safe place. Sex education in schools doesn't exist and is equated by those in power with the sexualization of children and promotion of pedophilia. And there is no systemic anti-discrimination education either for teachers or children.

In the last scene, Kaśka fantasizes about the boy's possible alternative life:

> He smokes cigarettes with his mates behind the school. His mother lays into him for that all the time. …
> He goes to gym and wants to be strong.
> He's overcoming his insecurities.
> He's a boring teenager who doesn't stand out from the crowd.

He’s like you.

Franek’s friend is another victim of the tragedy – a defenceless witness without the support of adults. The trauma of her friend’s suicide – a burning wound, a hole – will stay with her for a long time, perhaps forever. Admittedly, Kaśka is brave: 60 per cent of witnesses are only passive bystanders to violence, 51 per cent pretend not to see or hear anything, 41 per cent respond to violence with laughter (Chmura-Rutkowska, 2019, p. 268). In addition, being friends with the victim condemned her to isolation and exposed her to peer violence.

Daniel Stachuła also engaged students from the Primary School No. 9 to work on *h.* in an advisory capacity as experts. The function was performed by the people who had accepted the teacher’s invitation. They were the first to see the performance and, with Stachuła’s encouragement, could suggest changes to the authors.[5] The experience was very important to the young people in terms of agency; they were also proud that an adult artist treated them as partners: he suggested that they work together on the production and took their opinion into account (“We felt that our opinion mattered, that it later worked in the performance and that it was thanks to us”; “It was super that we were responsible for that [the performance – AS]”; “It was incredible that we had said something and the result was a real change).

The experts, Anastazja, Ania, Kamil, Kuba, Oliwia, Sandra and Zuza[6] from eight grade, said that watching the play was a very strong emotional experience for them (“We’ve never been to a performance that has moved us so much. Many of us were crying”) and expressed belief in the transformative power of theatre (“I watched the teachers” reactions; some were crying, they were moved. Something may have fallen apart for them.

Maybe they saw themselves as they once were. We sometimes assume that adults don't understand, but, in fact, they can understand, they can even change their worldview"). They also thought that theatre can serve as an intermediary between them and adults ("It was great that the play was both for us and for adults and helped them understand our life better"; "It's good that the performance gave some adults something to think about, especially the teachers, who should know that you need to help young people when they have problems"; Anastazja, Ania, Bartek, Jaźwińska, Kamil, Kinga, Kuba, Oliwia, Sandra, Zuza, 2020). The pupils who saw the performance – Oliwia and Sandra from sixth grade and Bartek and Kinga from eighth – told me how the play had helped them work through violence: it "was very useful because me and girls from my class used to post hate comments and we now know what it means"; "When we left after the show, we didn't have to say anything. And we have never hated online since then" (ibidem).

Even though Stachuła invited "experts of experience" to consult them about the play as early as the rehearsals, *h.* could be regarded as a classical form of theatrical performance with a closed structure and stage performers. But that would be an oversimplification. The key consideration here is where and for what audience the show is performed and how it affects and transforms relations in that community. The performance is not played in a theatre or a community centre, but in a school, an institution whose practice is subject to the authors' critical insight and a place where the story told in the play may have happened. School is also a space of intervention and change. An important element of the intervention is after-the-show workshops, where the moderators can resolve with the audience and performers what has happened during the play on an emotional and real level (such as the early departure by one of the female students). As a result, the school and the attendant situation become a kind of ethnographic "trap" – it can capture the

interactions, tensions and relations generated in the school community. Caught in the trap, they are exposed and can be viewed as though in freeze-frame, and then reflected upon and worked through. A case in point is the understanding of the hate that happened in Poznań's Primary School No. 9. In Poland, the phenomenon of "trap" was expertly analyzed by Tomasz Rakowski, Dorota Ogrodzka and Ewa Rossal (2017), who proposed a project of creative and opening ethnography combining "the spheres of anthropology and its 'dense participation' with a simultaneous creative process that brings out unnoticed and unknown cultural potential." According to the scholars, this concept of "trap" becomes a new metaphor in anthropology and art theory.

We Are the Future

The production was staged as part of the *Laboratorium młodego teatru* (*LAB*) , a programme of the Proxima Nowy Theatre in Krakow. The *LAB* brings the youngest generation of Polish theatre artists into contact with renowned international artists who serve as tutors. This format is an excellent method of alternative education for directors. Skrzywanek worked with the visual artist Katarzyna Kozyra, German playwright Jens Hillje, Romanian director and dramatist Gianina Cărbunariu and French dramaturge Camille Louis. Hillje, associated with Berlin's Gorki Theater, which specializes in participatory, engaging and documentary theatre, inspired Skrzywanek with the work methodology of the acclaimed Argentine artist Lola Arias. Her works network "experts of experience", who would probably never meet outside theatre. Skrzywanek was guided by the same idea.

The American art critic and historian Hal Foster, author of “The Artist as Ethnographer”, notes the transfer that has occurred in avant-garde art: the artist’s role changes from producer to ethnographer. As ethnographer, he leaves the mainstream and its institutions to identify the places of social exclusion, the periphery shut out of the privileged capitalist universe, and acts with and on behalf of its inhabitants (Foster, 2010). During the eight weeks of work in Krakow, Skrzywanek, who matches Foster’s concept of “artist as ethnographer”, interviewed twenty-seven teenagers, with each conversation lasting from one to three hours. He collected more than seven hours of recorded material. He had earlier made around a hundred phone calls and sent seventy e-mails, occupational therapy centres, care and education centres, parish youth clubs, Catholic youth circles, schools, young environmentalists acting as part of Climate Strike, volunteers for Caritas and animal shelters as well as musical bands. Seventy per cent of the calls and emails remained unanswered. Of the twenty-seven people, only four boys wanted to meet with him, and they would later cancel the meetings anyway. The girls, on the other hand, were eager to meet and talk:

> There was no shame or fear in them, even though they were talking about their biggest experiences and problems. When I asked, Why did you trust me right away, I heard many answers similar to that given by Aga (one of the four participants in the project): “Because no adult has ever asked us about it” (Skrzywanek, 2020).

Skrzywanek selected four people aged from fourteen to eighteen who took part in the rehearsals and later in the performance. He justified his choice of collaborators by his desire to introduce young people to each other who would otherwise probably never have met, but “could do something for each

other” by working on the play (ibidem). He met Aga – K-Pop Fan – at a music school; Eryk – Man Who Wasn’t There – through the schools” Polish Red Cross Club; Patrycja – Future Madam President – through Climate Strike, Martyna – Escape Artist – through the Centrum Placówek Opiekuńczo-Wychowawczych “Parkowa” (Parkowa Centre for Care and Education Facilities) and through his collaborator, artist Alex Freiheit, who had worked with Martyna at a workshop as part of the *Karioka* Girls *Rock Camp*Kraków[7]. The director’s original idea was to fantasize with the young people about the future. However, at the first meeting attended by Martyna, which lasted almost three hours, the plan was, to quote Skrzywanek, “steamrollered flat.”

> I felt helpless. I was supposed to exchange fantasies about the future with a teenager, and she tells me in detail about the acts of violence experienced by her in a mental hospital. I get hit with all this stuff and I don’t know what to do with it. After that conversation I went to the Planty[8] and started crying. I called Tomek Kireńczuk (project curator), who looked tenderly after us and I got a lot of support from him (ibidem).

The emotional experience was accompanied by a change of the work paradigm: “After a few meetings I decided I had to get rid of all the dramatic frameworks I had prepared. I had to switch from my usual mode of expression and direction: from speaking to listening” (ibidem).

After the interviews, Skrzywanek met with the group over four months. Two-week workshop rehearsals were held in July. The director of *We Are the Future* sees workshops as the basis for making art, and here he used the tools of theatre pedagogy from his earlier cooperation with Justyna Sobczyk

and Dorota Kowalkowska,[9] experienced experts in the field. He met with the young people in early September to present the proposed script for the performance – Aga, Eryk, Martyna and Patrycja told me later they were very happy with it. The script was based on the interviews and rehearsal improvisations, but the performers could decide what they wanted to say in the performance – they could introduce changes until the third dress rehearsal.

“If something changes in their lives now, they’ll be able to include it in the dramaturgy of the play. Working in this way, I took into account the fact that the production might fall apart,” Skrzywanek adds (Skrzywanek, 2020). Before the premiere in October, the group worked for another two weeks. I really appreciate such a long process; as a curator of engaging projects I know that this type of work should be spread over time so that the relations and mutual trust between artists and participants can mature. The director told me about the special, intimate atmosphere of the rehearsals, at which the other adult was Kalina Dębska, the producer and, to use Skrzywanek’s words, “much more”: his support in the creative process and work with the young people. The rehearsals described by Skrzywanek evoke the relaxed ambience of a summer resort where a group of friends meets: “It was a great experience, the theatre was closed for holidays and we had the building to ourselves, we were like a commune; we ate, chilled out and fooled around together. There were no rigid hierarchies – for example, I was also the scene shifter and the general stagehand.” This mood facilitated the release of stories – some people shared very intimate accounts of violence with Skrzywanek. Some of them didn’t make it into the production. Each time the director asked: “Are you sure you’re ready to tell these stories?” At the same time, he was asking himself the question: “Where is my role as an artist, where as a confidant, guardian, sharer of responsibility?” When he told

Katarzyna Kozyra about the very emotional character of the creative and relational process, her first question was: “Kuba, do you have supervision?” (ibidem). The experience of working on the production has convinced the artist that psychological supervision is necessary as a support in this type of projects.

Bruno Bettelheim’s *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male*, travestied by Skrzywanek and recurring like a refrain, provides the framework for the play. The offstage voice of a male narrator describes the stages of the rite of passage in French, but they are differentiated in terms of gender only when mutilations are discussed: penile subincisions, excision of the labia and cuts from the vagina to the anus. Carol Gilligan, American feminist, scholar and developmental psychologist writes about initiation into patriarchy in terms of gender differences. Niobe Way’s studies of boys (2011), cited by Gilligan, prove that at successive stages of development, they become increasingly ashamed of intimacy, friendship and emotional expression, rightly fearing that they will be branded with the patriarchal stigma of non-masculinity. In boys, the repression of relationships, the language of tenderness and empathy causes self-aggression – depression and, in extreme cases, suicide – and aggression, including homicides. Girls, on the other hand, are trained to make sacrifices, to be nice and polite. The process deprives them of a voice and the opportunity to articulate anger for the sake of avoiding conflict and protecting relationships, which translates into self-destructive behaviours such as eating disorders and cutting. Patriarchal training always involves violence, against men and women alike, and does not privilege either sex. It is based on silencing and suppression of women’s and men’s true emotional selves.

The voice of the play’s narrator turns into the young people’s stories about

the fear that paralyzes the body and causes them to inflict pain on themselves. A huge cocoon (the set is designed by Aleksandr Prowaliński) appears on a dark stage and splits, its parts enveloping the performers who dance to Rihanna's hit *Where Have You Been*. Shedding the cocoon in the insect world does not signify adulthood but subimago – the penultimate stage of ontogenetic development. The play then unfolds into a series of ethnographic autoperformances in which the young people explore the self in and in relation to society and the self as transformative force of society (see Alexander, 2009, p. 598). During the workshops Skrzywanek asked the teenagers to write hate speeches that later formed part of the play's dramatic structure. The first hate speech is given by Patrycja: she talks about how much she hates her body and its sexualization. The body that prevents her from being taken seriously and makes her perceived as weak and stupid. Martyna's hate speech comes next, a study of the terrible institutional violence in Polish psychiatric hospitals for children and young people. Martyna describes one of the punishments to the audience like a definition:

> Pyjamas – a punishment used in children's psychiatric hospitals. It consists in isolating the punished person, taking away all her things (including cosmetics and clothes), leaving her only in underwear and making her wear striped pyjamas (hence the name). While in confinement, the person is obliged (depending on the offence, e.g. swearing, smoking, attempted self-injury or physical contact with another person) to memorize a stanza or an entire poem or read a required book, e.g. The *Laments* by Kochanowski[10].

Aga uses her hate speech to make a serious change in her life. Her appeal,

with the recurrent words “You heteros”, reveals the difference between herself and the majority addressed and accused by her of creating a world in which coming out and the attendant disclosure of her own voice and lovelorn body carries the risk of violence, fear, shame and exclusion. In Aga’s case, Skrzywanek was confident that she was ready to come out. He asked her: “Are you sure a theatrical performance is the right place for something so intimate?” Her answer was unequivocal, strong, and, in my view, full of belief in the transformative power of art: “Kuba, you’re giving me a chance to do it in the most perfect way and this chance will never come again” (Skrzywanek, 2020). The performative act allows Aga to make a change in her relationship with her father:

> Immediately after the premiere, my father hugged me and said he loved me. And then we didn’t talk about it for a month – my father had left because he lives abroad. When he came, we started talking about the performance and I was surprised at how well he had coped with what he heard there; my father told me he wanted to work on himself (Aga, Eryk, Martyna, Patrycja, 2020).

All of the hate speeches reveal oppression of the body, its weakness and vulnerability.

Patrycja is explicit about her hatred of the body. Martyna speaks of its self-annihilation and an illness related to her eating disorder: “How am I supposed to do it when the same thought from two, three or four years ago comes back to me! I DON”T WANT TO FEEL MYSELF! I WANT TO NOT LIVE! I WANT TO BE FORGOTTEN, BURIED. How can things get better when I’ve been throwing up your fucking dinner week after week!” (ibidem).

Aga addresses “heteros” to express her pain that she can’t fulfil her needs in a non-heterosexual relationship without being stigmatized. The girls feel their bodies as burning wounds, Eryk has no sensation of his own body – he is a Man Who Is Not There. He says in his hate speech:

> Why am I not there? Because I have no imagination, I have no interests. People call me a chameleon – black at night, can’t be seen. Transparent during the day – can’t be seen. …They didn’t see me at all when I escaped from the hospital as a child and ended up in the jungle… And I tried to raise myself in the wild.

Gilligan claims that boys are trained into patriarchy, which results in the separation of body and self, much earlier than girls; the process begins around the age of five (Gilligan, 2013). Even then, they are put to shame when they “cry like girls”; they have to manifest their courage and strength, they have to be “real boys”.

Eryk defends “traditional” values in the play:

> … We people were once created as animals, we were created to reproduce. I think that’s why a relationship should be between a man and a woman, only they can have intercourse for there to be a child. For me, a good family is when there’s peace between the parents and the child, when it’s raised in a good spirit, when it’s provided with essential goods and values. Love, respect… When people feel a homosexual attraction to each other, want to have sex, for me it’s not forcing things, but it’s just abnormal.

His vision of the social order, body, gender, love and sexuality is incompatible with the beliefs of Aga, Martyna and Patrycja. Eryk's encounter with the girls creates an agon in the field of patriarchal power, an outcome that Skrzywanek claims was not designed by him: "I wasn't aware of the nature of the female protagonists" relationships with their fathers or their sexual orientation" (Skrzywanek, 2020). The situation points to the emergence (see Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 225, 230-232) of social and artistic projects that spread like a virus in the apparently hermetic fields of power. Eryk seems sealed off in his vision of the world, but our conversation will show that his strict principles have broken down:

> I was a little tougher before working with the girls. I didn't like the word "gay" or "lesbian", I wasn't okay with it. But when I talked to the girls, those barriers cracked a bit. My principles gave in already during improvisation. I actually thought, "Shit, why don't I go to one of these parades?" But the more I thought about this, it affected me badly. I started to lose all my traditional values and I couldn't find myself. I began to neglect school. I had a lot of questions on my mind. Everything had changed, nothing gave me joy when I started to think that way, because I'm a man who lives by principles. Two sides were fighting in me. Now I want to find a golden mean so that I still have some principles. And I think now that homosexuals are – I don't want to use the wrong word – a normal part of society. I don't care what they're going to do at home, whether they will walk holding hands, but I still don't like those marches – and that's my golden mean (Aga, Eryk, Martyna, Patrycja, 2020).

A feminist revolution takes place in the next scene. We see an effigy of the Great Creator Old Man on the stage as the performers conduct a ritual ceremony around the figure. They give sarcastic thanks to the Old Man for their despised breasts, fat bellies, arms, hands, invisible waists and stretch marks … Finally, they stick knives into the Old Man and rip the effigy to play with feathers from the stuffing. It's the women's revenge for the incorporated hatred of the body and the related shame, for its sexualization, for the body vomiting every meal, for the alternativeless heteronorm… For the performers, patriarchy is not transparent. By identifying it and expressing the recognition in the performance, they are initiated into a new order established on their own terms. The articulated aversion to one's body is in fact a chance to identify with it again. The symbolic "killing of the father" by the sons described by Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1993) is transformed and adapted by a feminist narrative: the act is performed in the play by daughters, women and warriors.

"Disfathering": the performers move from the symbolic to the real and personal plane. Patrycja radically rejects her father, a violent, abusive alcoholic. Aga, who will tell me later, "I have a different situation at home than the girls – everything seems right on the surface, but I've noticed in the last year that some things bother me," accuses her father of indifference. Martyna's father is absent, his place has been taken by her mother*:* "I remember he wasn't there and I don't know what kind of father he would have been for me, … but I know what my mother was like." Martyna accuses her mother of aggression and discrediting her. At the same time, the girl tries to protect her love for her mother, justifying her behaviour and dissolving her guilt: "I know it's not her fault, she couldn't cope"; "I remember she didn't have it easy". The next scene brings forgiveness: the girl calls her mother to tell her that she loves her. The language of the

performance changes: the words are tender and kind. Rebellion mingles with care, empathy and femininity. Gilligan notes: “Within a patriarchal framework, care is a feminist ethic. Within a democratic framework, care is a human ethic” (Gilligan, 2013 p. 25). The patriarchal division is maintained in the performance; democracy is still a distant prospect.

I was deeply moved by the scene of disfathering. I interpreted the erasure, absence and indifference of the fathers only in terms of a deep wound, disbelieving that a radical need to amputate the biological father was possible and regarding a repressed desire for his closeness as the real reason behind it. But I was reminded of the studies of the evolutionary anthropologist Sara Blaffer Hrdy (Hrdy, 2009) cited by Gilligan (2013, pp. 47-52). According to Hrdy, qualities such as empathy, ability to cooperate and mind reading continued to develop over the course of evolution. These characteristics are already evident in infants, who seek contact with their caregivers and read their emotions. The anthropologist holds that empathy was needed even by early hominids – in hunter-gatherer societies, a child had to be attended to also by other members of the group to survive. A baby who was better at gauging the intentions of adults was more likely to find a new caregiver and survive into adulthood. Allofamilies, which allow for the care of a child by people who are not its biological parents, are an alternative to nuclear families (two-generation families consisting of parents and their child or children), deeply rooted in our culture by the Holy Family. In this perspective, the disfathering scene represents not only the harm done to daughters, but also the choice of strong women who decide for themselves if they want to have a father. His presence no longer determines their happiness and sense of being fully in the world as women and human beings.

Hope

I am writing this at a special time. For several months now, we have been in partial isolation due to the pandemic. The government has used this time to commit multiple violations of democracy and human rights. According to the 2020 ILGA Europe ranking – Europe's most important review of LGBTI equality – Poland is the most homophobic country of the European Union. The ranking is based on the assessment of the rights of LGBTI community. There are six categories:equality and non-discrimination; family; freedom of assembly, association and expression; hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition and bodily integrity; and asylum laws[11].

Domestic violence, including violence against children, continues to increase, as indicated by the studies of the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę Foundation. Children who are not logged into e-learning sites receive practically no protection from the state, as though they didn't exist. The consequences of child suffering will be dire, translating into acts of destruction and self-destruction. The tragedy of non-heteronormative and non-binary children continues.

If we, people involved in theatre and art, want a new world, we should treat working with children and youth very seriously. We should not make theatre educators solely responsible for this. Rebecca Solnit writes:

> Hope and action feed each other. … Political awareness without activism means looking at the devastation, your face turned toward the center of things. Activism itself can generate hope because it already constitutes an alternative and turns away from the corruption at center to face the wild possibilities and the heroes at

> the edges or at your side (Solnit, 2019, p. 66).

I too see hope in action. I see it in the released voices of the heroines *We Are the Future*; in the split that occurred in Eryk; in the Primary School No. 9 in the Łazarz district of Poznań – in its staff and students, who told me how they realized the impact of the wounds they inflicted by their hate speech; in Zuza's account of her resistance in a religion class; in the creators of both projects.

I also see hope in the fact that almost all of the young people I have talked to appreciate theatre's power and agency. They would all be willing to work with Skrzywanek and Stachuła again. They blame adults for the scarcity of theatrical offerings for them. Patrycja put it explicitly: "Theatres are not friendly to young people. We're not even an object of marketing or anything" (Aga, Eryk, Martyna, Patrycja, 2020). Young people see theatre as a potential space for working through social tragedies and understanding class mechanisms and differences, motivation of adults, experience of mental illness and disorder as well as their own adolescence. Everything that is close to their hearts and that worries them. When asked what they would like to see plays about, they replied:

> About growing up, what it's like for different people in different environments, in rich and poor homes; for someone who seems perfect but in fact they are not.
> About a person who harasses someone at school and then they go home and we're beginning to understand what goes on there and why this person is a bully. Such a play could show what's beneath this person's mask.

About how someone had a difficult situation at home, but they've pulled through.
About the world of adults so that we could understand them better. We get upset when adults answer our questions with: "You can't understand this because you're a child."
About young people's psychological problems.
About hate.
About tolerance.
About depression (Anastazja, Ania, Bartek, Jaźwińska, Kamil, Kinga, Kuba, Oliwia, Sandra, Zuza, 2020; Aga, Eryk, Martyna, Patrycja, 2020).

There is too much grumbling about the ineffectiveness of theatre. Change is possible, though perhaps not immediately and on a large scale; I'm convinced of that also because I have seen it many times as a curator of engaging art projects. As Solnit notes, change begins in microsituations that wear away a stone. I combine this view with the "performance of possibilities", an idea proposed by D. Soyini Madison (1998, pp. 276-286) who believes that performance matters because it can bring about a change in the world. It seeks to expose harmful systems and motivates people to action. It offers hope that the public can learn more by revealing and eliciting silenced or disregarded voices about how power works. The performance of possibilities assumes that it can help audiences, performers and artists make a change in themselves and the world.

Translated by Robert Gałązka

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Autor/ka

Agata Siwiak (agata_siwiak@o2.pl) – culture and theatre studies expert, curator and producer of performative and interdisciplinary projects, assistant professor at the Institute of Theatre and Media Arts of the Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM) in Poznań. As a curator, she works at the intersection of various media, critical practice and socially engaged art. She executed her projects in important public cultural institutions (a.o. Warsaw Biennale, Polski Theatre in Poznań, Polski Theater in Wrocław and National Stary Theatre in Cracow), as well as in a children's home, a refugee centre, a social welfare centre and detention centre. ORCID: 0000-0003-1830-0493.

Footnotes

1. An excellent Polish researcher and practitioner of performance ethnography is the anthropologist and ethnologist Tomasz Rakowski. He observes that an ethnography that joins forces with art and animation shifts its focus from the textual level to pretextual cognition, which is realized in action and being in the world. He emphasizes that the procedures of such cognition have only begun to be scientifically investigated and tested.
2. I also interviewed the performers and dancers of *h.*; after talking to Daniel Stachuła, I suspected that the play may be for them a form of reenactment of their recent school experience. The amount of material is so vast that it requires a separate study.
3. Thanks to the subsidy from the Theatre Institute, which not only co-finances productions, but also provides funds for individual performances, the play has been staged 27 times so far: in Poznań and nearby towns and villages. Around 85 per cent of the performances were shown in public schools, 15 per cent in private schools. About a dozen schools are in line to stage the play. The production received financial support again as part of the 5thJan Dorman Competition (2020), which will allow twenty more presentations to be held in Poznań, the Poznań County and the Wielkopolskie Province.
4. The drama was published in *Nowe Sztuki dla Dzieci i Młodzieży* 2019, no. 45.
5. The students suggested changes to the character and behaviour of the Counsellor, whom they found anachronistic and unrealistic (for example, she didn't know how the Internet works) in the play's original version. They argued that such a person could not work in contemporary school and they really wanted the world portrayed on the stage to be realistic so as to ensure full identification with it. The director made changes in the play that were consistent with the students' recommendations (Stachuła, 2020).
6. I decided not to reveal the children's names due to the necessity of obtaining the consent of their legal guardians. Such consent would mean that the guardians could control the content of the children's statements. As a result, the material could lose its authenticity.

7. A feminist educational project implemented by the Stowarzyszenie Kobieca Transsmisja.
8. Planty is a green area in the center of Krakow.
9. Skrzywanek co-directed *Superspektakl* featuring actors of Theatre 21 with Justyna Sobczyk at the Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw (2017) and worked with Dorota Kowalkowska on the production of *Kiedy mój tata zamienił się w krzak* (When My Dad Turned into a Bush; based on Joke van Leeuwen's story) at the Jerzy Szaniawski Theatre in Wałbrzychu (2017).
10. Jan Kochanowski was a XVI-century Polish poet.
11. See https://www.ilga-europe.org/.

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Agata Siwiak's conversation with Anna Kicińska, principal of the Dr. Franciszek Witaszek Primary School No. 9 in Poznań, held on 20 February 2020.

Agata Siwiak's conversation with Daniel Stachuła, author of the concept and director of *h.*, held on 4 February 2020.

Agata Siwiak's conversation with Joanna Jaźwińska, a Polish teacher at the Dr. Franciszek Witaszek Primary School No. 9 in Poznań, held on 9 March 2020.

Agata Siwiak's conversation with Joanna Żygowska, a theatre pedagogue who led the workshop after the performance of *h.*, held on 16 May 2020.

Agata Siwiak's conversation with Michał Kurek, the actor playing Franek in *h.*, held on 12 February 2020.

Agata Siwiak's conversation with Aga, Eryk, Martyna and Patrycja, performers in *We Are the Future*, held on 29 February 2020.

Agata Siwiak’s conversation with Jakub Skrzywanek, author of the concept and director of *We Are the Future*, held on 19 March 2020.

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Between Body and Sound: The Theatre of Wojtek Blecharz

Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska University of Silesia in Katowice

The article attempts a synthetic overview of Wojtek Blecharz's major theatrical projects, including specifically his opera productions, such as *Transcryptum*, *Park-Opera*, *Body-Opera*, *Fiasko* [*Fiasco*] and *Rechnitz-Opera* (*Anioł Zagłady* [*The Exterminating Angel*]). What these shows have in common is a clear tendency to transcend traditional operatic conventions, associated with both the form of the genre and its reception.

The composer's musical and theatrical experiments focus on sound – its performativity and inseparable link to corporality. The privileging of the body and musical gesture goes hand in hand with enhancing the visual aspect of music, which makes it possible to see even Blecharz's autonomous compositions in terms of performance and often also instrumental theatre. This article presents the operatic work of Blecharz against the background of contemporary theories related to the performativity of music and its intermedia contexts.

Keywords: Wojtek Blecharz; opera, musical theatre; performativity; body

At the heart of a majority of Wojtek Blecharz's theatre projects is sound — not only as the principal matter, the material of the show, but also as a topic and an issue subject to broader aesthetic and philosophical reflection. What is crucial for Blecharz as a composer and director is above all the question of acoustic perception — opposing established modes of hearing that concert halls and theatre stages have accustomed us to.

> At some point I felt . . . that we have been repeating the same perceptional patterns and models for generations, but there is little reflection on why we receive art in this way. I get the impression that as a listener — whether it is an opera, a concert, or a theatre performance — my body, my physicality disappears the moment the show begins, that I am in a way deprived of it. My role then is to participate in an aesthetic experience, but chiefly through the senses of hearing and sight because I cannot move or express my emotions, which contradicts the fact that perception is embodied and we perceive the world 'with our whole body' (*Na co dzień zajmuję się tym…*, 2017).

The above reflection conveys not only a critique aimed at the institutional frameworks that codify the modalities of listening to music, but also an attempt to define one's own attitude to sound and its perception. In the compositions of Wojtek Blecharz there is a very strong need to express music through the body. The issue of corporeality relates closely to both the suggested performance practice and the process of sound perception itself, which is meant to be a thoroughly somatic experience. The privileging of the body and the musical gesture is paired with the appreciation of the visual aspect of music, which means that even Blecharz's autonomous compositions can be considered in terms of performance art, and sometimes even of instrumental theatre. Features borrowed from the visual arts or dance theatre are often an immanent part of his works. Characteristically, Blecharz constantly searches for inspirations beyond music, employing various cultural codes in his compositions, including philosophical, literary, pop-cultural and autobiographic elements. Composing appears here as a broader process of "installing" sound in cultural space, as well bringing out its

performative potential. This strategy is close to what the Irish composer Jennifer Walshe defines in her 2016 manifesto as “The New Discipline”:

> ‘The New Discipline’ is a term I’ve adopted over the last year. The term functions as a way for me to connect compositions which have a wide range of disparate interests but all share the common concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical; pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear. In performance, these are works in which the ear, the eye and the brain are expected to be active and engaged. Works in which we understand that there are people on the stage, and that these people are/have bodies (Walshe, 2016).

Wojtek Blecharz’s preoccupation with the corporeality and performative dimension of music has led him to step into the realm of theatre, and that with works that make up an aesthetically cohesive and unique stage project. It includes operas, sound installations and music performances, as well as compositions written for other directors’ shows, always however constituting a highly distinct component of the production, and sometimes actually coming to the fore, as in Magda Szpecht’s *Schubert. A Romantic Composition for Twelve Performers and a String Quartet* (2016), Wojciech Grudziński’s *Rodos* (2019), or Katarzyna Kalwat’s *Staff Only* (2019).

Opera/Installation

Wojtek Blecharz debuted on the big theatrical stage with the opera/installation *Transcryptum* (2013), commissioned by the National Opera in Warsaw. Blecharz not only wrote the music and the libretto, but

also directed the site-specific show. He decided to eschew the traditional stage and auditorium, installing the different parts of the opera in the hallways and various corners and recesses of the Grand Theatre building. The public was divided into five groups that, led by a guide, navigated the designated routes, visiting, among other places, the painting workshop, the laundry, or the choir rehearsal room. These places, usually off limits for the spectators, corresponded with the opera's five acts. The overarching theme that connected all parts was trauma, the record of a specific, individual experience that is translated into the language of sounds and accompanying images. The opera's title alludes to a term coined by the Israeli visual artist and psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger: "transcryptum is the art object or art event, art operation or artprocedure, which incarnates transcription of trauma and cross-inscriptions of its traces" (Ettinger, 2007, p. 166). Blecharz's opera can be considered as a musical transcription of trauma — a sonic record of the painful experiences of a woman who is confronted with a double loss: of her husband and her son. The story however is not recounted directly; the different parts of the opus deal only with its fragments, becoming its enigmatic traces, chaotic signs with which the viewers, passing through the winding corridors, composes the story proper. Each time, sound is what guides them around this labyrinth — sound as the "medium of memory, a binding agent that connects images into shreds of recollections" (Blecharz, 2013). The possible interpretations of *Transcryptum* are determined not only by the viewers' individual experience, but also the sequence in which they visit the different spaces of the venue.

Importantly, the musical events "installed" throughout the Grand Theatre took place simultaneously, and each part could function as an autonomous whole. The opening piece, *K'an for steel drum and ca. 130 sticks*, was actually written much earlier, as a composition inspired by John Cage's

Branches, a famous work for cacti and other organic instruments. Other *Transcryptum* pieces too were turned into concert versions, such as *The Map of Tenderness* for solo cello (Act III) or *3rd phase* for two accordions (Act IV). The compositions that make up the opera/installation share a common theme, but they do not constitute an organized sequence of meanings, nor are they bound by a stage narrative in the traditional sense of the word. Alinearity and fragmentariness as compositional principles were meant to correspond with the structure of trauma, its chaotic and unpredictable representations; hence the use of association, symbol, and brachylogy, in both the auditory and visual elements.

Though lacking narrative continuity, *Transcryptum* has a precisely defined beginning and end. During the show, percussionist Katarzyna Bojaryn performed the initial *K'an…* in a darkened auditorium, rearranging and shuffling thin wooden sticks with great concentration. The piece, in which the gesture as such featured prominently, brought to mind a ritual, thus prefiguring the opera's successive acts, in which clichés from the past are obsessively revived and trauma is worked through. The viewers too, of course, partake in this process, gaining access — through sounds, visuals, and fragments of the libretto (files containing evidentiary documents) — to the most intimate and darkest personal details about the show's protagonist, played by the mezzo-soprano Anna Radziejewska.

Musically, Blecharz's opera employs a limited range of the means of expression, including a highly reduced performing apparatus. The *Transcryptum* score is written for seven instrumentalists and a soloist, although their parts combine only in the final act. Before that, the audience listens only to one or several instruments, as well as Radziejewska's voice and her disturbing, rhythmic breathing, recurring in various iterations. This

is enriched with electronics. Locating the different parts of *Transcryptum* backstage allowed for very close, virtually intimate contact between the viewers and the musicians, which a traditional stage would not have been able to provide. The reception of the sounds was intensified by the particular acoustics of the rooms; in this way, also the architecture of the venue became a resonating system.

To a large extent, Blecharz's first opera deals with issues that were already tackled in his earlier works. Principal among those is the relationship between music and the body. An interest in the corporeality and gesture of the performer and in the somatic reception of sound can be considered as a consequence of Blecharz's long-time collaboration with Jacek Łumiński and the ensemble of the Silesian Dance Theatre. It is also an effect of searching for inspirations beyond the realm of music: in philosophy, visual arts, dance, theatre, or pop culture. This physical aspect of music and its performative potential were already manifest in compositions such as *Phenotype* for a prepared and amplified violin (2012) or *Means of Protection* for female voice, accordion, and cello (2012). These pieces, in which the performer's corporeality matters as much as the sound they produce, can be regarded as a prelude, as it were, to *Transcryptum* and Blecharz's subsequent stage projects. The word "stage" is in fact merely notional here, for both *Transcryptum* and the operas produced in association with other theatres usually go beyond the bounds of the traditional stage and the perceptual conventions associated with it.

The Park Opera and Cross-Modal Perception

In 2016, at Skaryszewski Park in Warsaw, *The Park Opera* premiered, produced by Warsaw's Powszechny Theatre. As the title suggests, the "plot"

is set in a park, and the opera's main theme are nature sounds. The libretto, peculiar as it is, comprises nine acts, each written for a specific section of the park, which the audience freely wanders around. This musical trip is preceded by a short lecture on the history of opera and its connections to nature. Next, the viewers enter a highly diverse and sensual world of sounds, originating primarily from the natural environment. The sensations occurring in this encounter are deliberately intensified, by means, for example, of "sound binoculars," wireless speakers, or instruments installed around the park to be used by the participants. In *The Park Opera*, Wojtek Blecharz again plays slyly with the operatic convention, stripping it of monumentality and depriving of its elitist nature. As a setting, a park is not only an open space, but also one that provokes a new type of reception. The perceptual process proceeds here according to the individual choice of the viewers, who decide what they listen to (roaming around the park is inherent to the opera), how they listen (assuming positions other than a seated one is highly recommended), and how long they listen (one can leave the given section of the park at any time).

As in *Transcryptum*, the composer's purpose here is to integrate the viewers into the show's structure and to bring them as close as possible to the materials that constitute it, including the principal one, that is sound. Besides natural sounds, *The Park Opera* features pieces composed for particular objects or places in the park: an overture performed by Sinfonia Varsovia musicians situated around Lake Kamionkowskie, the aria of a water-pond Mermaid (voice by soprano Barbara Kinga Majewska), or a mini-concerto for a toy piano played by Bartek Wąsik at one of the clearings. The chorus parts, consisting of the voices of the park's birds, were pre-recorded. Walking along the map-indicated route, viewers were also certain to come across the ballet — a group of volunteer joggers equipped with wireless

speakers, who were meant as a “living, moving sound installation, a cloud that. . . interacted with the audience” (*Publiczność przykłada ucho*, 2016). Even more than *Transcryptum*, *The Park Opera* encouraged the audience to listen actively and discover sounds for themselves. Thus the viewers became co-authors of the libretto, which changed depending on the route adopted, the degree of participation, and individual sonic sensibility.

Analyzing the form of *The Park Opera*, it is not difficult to notice that, on the one hand, the composer made sure to preserve all of the genre’s constitutive elements (aria, recitative, chorus, ballet), but, on the other hand, invested them with completely new meanings, thus undermining the integrity of the operatic work. The different acts, or materials, that make up *The Park Opera* can be arranged in any sequence, or perceived selectively. In this sense, Blecharz’s compositional strategy is close to the experiments of other contemporary opera authors, such as Peter Ablinger, Heiner Goebbels, or Brian Ferneyhough, who replace a consistent narrative with fragmentariness, a collage of images and forms, emphasizing the viewer’s active participation in the process of interpreting musical events[1].

The sources of a similar philosophy of musical theatre and opera — a philosophy underpinned by conceptualism, experimentation, and a turn away from the institutionalization of art — should however be sought already in the musical/theatrical practices of the Fluxus movement. Acting with great determination and a keen sense of humour, artists such as La Monte Young, Nam June Paik, Henning Christiansen, or Dick Higgins pushed the limits of traditional opera, undoing its structure and searching for unobvious sources of sound, finding them in the urban landscape, everyday objects, machines, domestic appliances, or the “musicalized” corporeality and speech of the participants.

> What these different compositions and the practices that the Fluxus artists categorized as operas share is, above all, the ironic testing of the boundaries of a form considered as fossilized. All of the Fluxus "operas" put the meaning of the term in parentheses, revaluating and examining the relevancy of the formula of the operatic work in the reality of post-Cagean aesthetics. Although their provocative edge has been dulled by time, the questions raised by the titles of specific pieces remain valid (Michnik, 2016).

The theatrical experiments of the precursor of Fluxus, John Cage (*Water Music*, *Water Walk*, or *Theatre Piece*), performances such as Paik's *Robot Opera*, Christiansen's *Kartoffel Opera*, or finally Dick Higgins's operas laid the groundwork for new thinking about the connections between music and theatre. Instead of traditionally defined narrativity, as present in classical opera, the Fluxus artists proposed a new kind of music theatre, where sound and image are linked through a formal concept rather than a plot. Even though they had very precise scores — take for example Eric Andersen's *Opera Without Title* or *Opera With Title*, or Emmett Williams's famous *An Opera* — the music shows of Fluxus were highly open to chance and active audience participation. Aleatorism, simultaneity, and a new status of the viewer (as a co-creator of acoustic events rather than merely a passive recipient) form the basis of Fluxus operas, which clearly stem from the spirit of Dadaism[2]. Not without its significance was also the issue of space, or rather an irresistible striving to lead the viewer out of the traditional concert hall, situate them at the centre of the event, encircle them with sound and image, and thus to bring forth a new perceptual situation that would activate various sensory channels.

In an analysis of the effect of Fluxus events, which are usually associated

with intermedia art, it seems adequate to introduce the notion of crossmodal perception, or, as Hanna B. Higgins (2002) proposes, crossmodal aesthetics, which takes into account the interactions of various senses (hearing, touch, smell, taste, and sight). According to Higgins, already John Cage's *Theatre Piece No. 1* (1952) showed that what the Black Mountain College artists were interested in was not merely a random juxtaposition of practices from the fields of different artistic disciplines (David Tudor's concert, Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, John Cage's lecture on Zen Buddhism, or Merce Cunningham's dance), but above all a mutual permeation of the senses, inscribed, as it were, in the "logic of the piece" (Higgins, 2014, p. 209). The polysensory, interdisciplinary and immersive qualities of Fluxus events define a certain model of the spectacle, one that has found a continuation in the practices of numerous twenty-first-century composers. Regardless of how we label their work — what applies broadly here, besides the notion of "The New Discipline," is Harry Lehmann's category of relational music[3] — there is a clearly noticeable shift towards the performativity and intermediality of musical works. It is somewhere at this pole — between the Fluxus event score and today's performative turn in music — that the theatrical and musical work of Wojtek Blecharz is located.

The "Embodying" of Sound

The absence of traditionally defined narrativity, a search for new sources and spaces of sound, as well as a turn towards the corporeality of the performer and the viewer are the characteristic features of the operas and installations/shows of Wojtek Blecharz. An affinity with Fluxus is evident in the way the composer treats the sonic material (experimenting with the instrumentarium, making use of non-instrumental acoustic phenomena) as much as in how designs the relations with the audience (interactivity,

polysensoriality, removing the distance between the viewer and the performer, going beyond the concert or theatre hall). The work in which these principles have been most fully implemented to date was *The Body Opera*, which premiered in 2017 at Warsaw's Nowy Theatre[4].

"This opera is dedicated to your body" is the message that opens the show and encourages the viewer to sensually "experience" the work's successive parts. The very design of the performance space, by Ewa Maria Śmigielska, indicated an abolition of operatic conventions and receptive habits. In the Nowy's auditorium, all chairs were removed and replaced with yoga mats. Each of the stations was equipped with an electric pillow, a blanket, and a black box with gadgets that are used to intensify the process of listening in the course of the show. A rectangular platform dividing the space into two even parts served as a substitute of the stage.

In virtually ascetic conditions, without the glamour and glitz usually associated with opera, a two-hour musical performance was initiated that had listening as its subject — the way acoustic signals are perceived and processes by the body. "We don't have to consider *The Body Opera* as an opus," the composer said shortly before the premiere. "It can be simply an introduction to the next concert or a clue to how to open up to sound" (*Body-Opera jest wskazówką…*, 2017). As in *The Park Opera*, Blecharz does not look for anchor points in fiction, literature, or the narrative order, instead urging the viewer to look into their own body, perceived not only as a resonator of sounds, but also as a kind of instrument. The first of the propositions of alternative, anti-operatic listening is the overture, which the spectators take in in the dark, lying on the mats. A recumbent position is actually recommended for most of the scenes in the show. The overture, which consists of acoustic waves of various intensity, is a dozen-or-so-

minute-long “sound massage,” experienced through vibrating transducer speakers hidden in the pillows. This relaxing prologue is followed by a warm-up — a Resonance Training session led as a video conference by Wiebke Renner. The session includes breathing and muscular exercises meant to stimulate certain parts of the body so as to facilitate and intensify the process of experiencing sounds.

In *The Body Opera*, listening to music is a somatic experience — the different parts of the work are meant to mobilize particular senses, among which hearing is but one of the receptive instruments. The performative and perceptual agenda for the successive musical parts is to activate sight, taste, smell, as well as different parts of the body. One example of such polysensorial experiences is the *Candy Aria*, during which the viewers eat popping candy, and perfume is sprayed in the air to enhance the intensity of auditory sensations. In the final part of the show, audience members listen to music blindfolded and wearing earplugs, so that the sounds coming from the pillow speakers are experienced mainly through the body, as vibrations. It can be said, therefore, that the “multimodal sensory experience,” which, as Higgins reminds us (2014, p. 212), is a legacy of the avant-gardes of the first and second halves of the twentieth century, is inscribed, as it were, in the work’s score and shared as much by the performers as by the audience.

In Blecharz’s opera-for-the-body, music reaches the viewer from various sources and in many forms: as instrumental live improvisations, as pre-recorded material (the voices of the featured artists or a self-quotation — the track *Techno* from the show *Soundwork*), or as the effect of the audience’s active participation (breathing, rustles, a joint mantra, experiments with bodily acoustics). Quotations from classical operas — a fragment of Richard Wagner’s *Valkyries*, the *Nessun dorma* tenor aria from Giacomo Puccini’s

Turandot, or the *Scherza infida* from George Friderick Handel's late-Baroque opera *Ariodante* — form an important part of the show's musical layer. All these works, however, are evoked in novel perceptual conditions, much different from the standards of the concert or theatre hall.

Live music is performed by two instrumentalists only — Beltane Ruiz Moline on double-bass and Alexandre Babel on percussions. However, the way they elicit sounds from their instruments is unorthodox and includes hitting the resonating chamber, rubbing various parts of the body against the instruments, or combining their sounds with shouts, foot stamps, and loud, spasmodic breathing. Thunder sheets — thin sheets of metal than can produce a wide variety of sound effects — play an important role in creating the soundscape of *The Body Opera*; significantly, the very way the performers interact with these idiophones is spectacular. What comes to the fore in Blecharz's experimental opera is a close relationship between the body and the instrument — based on the testing of performative and acoustic possibilities, and, at the same time, forging a network of surprising interferences. Most importantly, its reflection is also to be found on the level of the viewer's experience, for, as Higgins writes, music by its very definition "initiates a shared physical, tactile, auditory, temporal experience" (2014, p. 213).

The process of "embodying" music, that is of emphasizing its performative dimension through interaction with the performer's body, is an issue to which Blecharz devotes a lot of attention, both in his autonomous works and in those made for theatre. The musician's body, which he never considers solely as a tool, each time becomes a vital element of the performance, a bearer of meanings, a source of associations and of visual and auditory codes. This tendency, perfectly exemplified by *The Body Opera*, can also be

found in Blecharz's joint projects with other directors. In Magda Szpecht's *Schubert. A Romantic Composition for Twelve Performers and a String Quartet* (Teatr Dramatyczny im. Jerzego Szaniawskiego, Wałbrzych, 2016), the instrumentalists' musical gesture not only provokes stage action, but also determines the structure of the whole show. This is evident in scenes that quote the different parts of Franz Schubert's *String Quartet in D minor (Death and the Maiden)*, as well as in Blecharz's composition *Liminal Studies*, which complements the main musical motif and serves as a kind of body-and-sound laboratory. Also in Katarzyna Kalwat's *Staff Only* (Biennale Warszawa/TR Warszawa, 2019) we witness the process of the "embodying" of acoustic events — the show's musical layer is produced by immigrant actors through rhythmic speech, singing, and the playing of percussions. Their frustration, anger, and disappointment at the way foreign actors are handled by the system are translated into a highly rich and precise language of sounds that reveals its performative and subversive properties. Blecharz made use here of a similar technique as in his earlier show *Soundwork*(TR Warszawa, 2016), which means that the actors' gestures, movements, and actions gain musical meanings.

In *The Body Opera*, the performative dimension of music[5] is enhanced by the presence of dancer Karol Tymiński. His choreography is a kind of spontaneous response to the acoustic events, illustrating the process of struggling with musical matter: its unpredictability, dynamics, and chaos. Tymiński's movements tell no particular story, convey no specific meanings; rather, they are simply a somatic reaction to sound, its "embodiment." Dance is here a pure visualization of music.

The Body Opera explores the relationship between the body and sound extensively and on many levels, drawing attention to the materiality and

performativity of the latter. In other words, it is precisely the body, embedded in a particular space and time, that invests music with a performative function:

> Sonic performativity in theatre is born . . . in encounter with the living body of the actor, with the space, and above all in direct contact with the viewer who becomes a co-author of the images and meanings emerging with music's participation. . . . On the one hand, this specific correlation of corporeality, spatiality, and sonicity emphasizes the materiality of the show, exposing the phenomenal status of its different elements; on the other hand, it undermines the stability of the traditional perceptual process, where viewers decode meanings arbitrarily dictated by the performers (Figzał, 2017, p. 208–209).

Interestingly, few meanings are in fact arbitrarily dictated by the author in *The Body Opera*. The viewer is almost constantly encouraged to discover the different acoustic events for themselves and to connect them with (potential) subjective associations. The lack of a plot and of specific semantic assignments are features that put Blecharz's show in opposition to classic opera works, based on a libretto and musically unfolding action. What is challenged here is not only the function of the basic formal elements of the opera, but also the reception model that they imply. What matters the most here is the gesture of eschewing the traditional stage and replacing it with an environmental arrangement of the performance space, where the distance between the performers and the audience disappears and their shared bodily presence becomes a source of the proper theatrical and musical experience.

Projects such as *The Park Opera*, *The Body Opera*, *Soundwork*, or *House of Sound* (Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, Cracow, 2017) share a focus on sound, its parameters, and the ways of producing and perceiving it. *Transcryptum* breaks with this model, awarding a prominent role, besides the music itself, to the outline of a concrete story that the viewer compiles in the course of the successive acts.

A firmer shift towards narration, though not yet towards a plot, occurs in two subsequent projects by Blecharz: the opera *Fiasco*, which premiered in 2018 at the Staatstheater Darmstadt, and the installation *The Black Square. A Musical Game* presented in the same year at the Dom Kultury Kadr in Warsaw. What the two projects had in common was not only an open and performative form that allowed for moving freely (or according to directorial instructions) around the performance venues, but also the subject: the collapse of a particular system of cultural regulations. In *Fiasco*, this is the ecological and social order; in *The Black Square*, the linguistic and semantic one.

A joint project with Małgorzata Wdowik and the directing collective K.A.U., *Fiasco* can be seen as a story about Europe's crisis and a search for new communities that would ensure the restoration of the bond and lost equilibrium between man, culture, and nature. As pointed out by the show's co-author, Matthias Schönijahn, this is an utopian search (Schönijahn, 2018, p. 6–8).

A film documenting the artists' trip beyond the borders of the European Union is the actual libretto of *Fiasco*. The recorded images and the sounds that accompany them present different varieties of the forest, considered here as a metaphor of the relationship between man and nature. These screenings correspond with parts performed live by a trio of musicians

(Stefanie Mirwald, Sylvia Hinz, Rupert Enticknap). The music layer of *Fiasco* is a sonic collage combining various performing practices and styles, experimenting with the instrumentarium, and making use of quotations and borrowings. However, Antoni Michnik is right to note that this complex structure finds its point of departure in the breath: "individual breathing is paired with the swoosh of nature, with which it remains in a constant dialogue" (*Nigdy więcej nie poszliśmy do lasu…*, 2020). As in *The Park Opera* or *The Body Opera*, the role that the viewer plays in this polyphonic space is based on active and selective listening. A bit like a wanderer in a forest, the audience can take different paths, which again brings attention to the highly participative nature of Blecharz's stage projects.

Interactivity and participation form also the basis of *The Black Square. A Musical Game*[6], a performative installation featuring actresses of the Teraz Poliż collective. Directed by Blecharz, the project's main inspiration came from Anna Świrszczyńska's one-act play, *The Black Square*, a blend of the theatre of the absurd and grotesque. The adaptation focused on the sound qualities of the text, which the poet's theatrical miniatures actually never lack in:

> In her one-act plays, Świrszczyńska creates bizarre worlds beyond comprehension or classification. These images undermine the logical order of reality, indicating a poetic imagination, a sensibility to the sonic values of the word, surrealism (Puzio, 2019, p. 46).

In Blecharz's *Black Square*, therefore, the viewers follow the sound, and laughter is their main guide around the floors and recesses of the Kadr culture centre. In fact, in the different spaces of the installation there

constantly reverberate Świerszczyńska's words: "After all, you're a human being. If you can't do the absurd, you'll die" (1984, p. 78). Characters, props, visual symbols, and single lines derived from the play become a source of performative musical situations in which the viewer is included. The very process of moving around brings to mind the labyrinth of *Transcryptum*, but in *The Black Square* these are mostly individual wanderings, requiring a greater degree of commitment and participation. Interacting with sounds, words, and the bodies of the actresses-as-guides, the viewer becomes a co-author of the performance.

Rechnitz. Opera: The Sound of Crime

"I don't refer to literature, I look at what I feel closer to, above all contemporary art" (*Body-Opera jest wskazówką…*, 2017), Blecharz said in one of the interviews accompanying the premiere of *The Body Opera*. Despite a radical disavowal of literary sources, which is evident in his early operatic projects, he never does completely without a libretto, but rather constructs it on the basis of non-literary sources. In *The Park Opera*, those were natural sounds; in *The Body Opera*, the body's activation and opening to sounds; and in *Fiasco*, the narrative comprised pre-recorded film footage. This strategy, which in a sense consists in fleeing away from literary text as the basis of the operatic universe, was relinquished only in *Rechnitz. Opera — The Exterminating Angel*, a joint project with Katarzyna Kalwat.

Rechnitz… is Blecharz's fifth opera. Unlike the previous ones, it was written for a specific literary text: Elfriede Jelinek's moving drama about a crime perpetrated in Rechnitz, Austria, in March 1945. The opera's first version, labelled by its authors as the "performative" one, was presented during the 61st "Warsaw Autumn" International Festival of Contemporary Music on the

stage of TR Warszawa. Ultimately, it differed only slightly from the full version which was shown five months later on the same stage, using the same scenographic elements and maintaining similar proxemic relations; what was extended were certain parts of music and text.

In both versions, intimacy and performativity was brought to the fore. The opera is written for ten performers: six actors and a cello quartet. No professional singers are involved; all text-and-music parts are delivered by dramatic actors. This gesture found its justification in the work's main formal concept, which was to emphasize the recitative and find musicality in the text of the drama. In fact, the extraordinary polyphony and rhythmicity of Jelinek's writing made the process easier. It is therefore not the aria, but the recitative that gains first-rate significance in *Rechnitz. Opera*. Interestingly, the composer modifies also the fundamental function of this structural element:

> *Sprechgesang* does not serve here to advance the plot, which is actually not to be found in Jelinek's drama. Instead, the recitative becomes a means of intensifying the text's meanings, allowing its latent spheres to resound. The musicalization of speech not only makes it more powerful, but also makes it easier to interpret the work's different parts (Figzał-Janikowska, 2018, p. 106).

Elfriede Jelinek titled her work *Rechnitz (The Exterminating Angel)*, an allusion to a 1962 film by Luis Buñuel, a sly parable about the fragility and relativity of cultural and ethical norms. In Buñuel's *El ángel exterminador*, a group of aristocrats find themselves inexplicably unable to leave a lavish party and gradually turn into hostile barbarians. Their offensive and

unconventional behaviour cannot, however, be equalled with the mass murder that was perpetrated at the castle in Rechnitz in the final months of the war. During a party thrown by the Countess von Batthyány, about 200 Jewish forced labourers held in the basement of the castle were hunted down and killed as entertainment. After perpetrating the massacre, the guests — local SS and Gestapo officers — returned to the party. The crime was covered up and those responsible were never brought to justice.

Jelinek's drama is an attempt to evoke those events, to speak up for the repressed and hushed over. It is a detailed report from the scene of the crime, one that combines several perspectives: journalistic, literary, factual, and surrealist. Delivery Persons/Messengers confined in the castle offer a testimony of what happened there. They assume different identities, and the tone of their statements varies too: the voices of witnesses, accusers, and perpetrators get muddled, forming a polyphonic narrative. Even though there are no dialogues and no individual speaking subjects in Jelinek's text, Blecharz and Kalwat sense these changes of tone perfectly well. The fluid, dynamic and dense avalanche of signs, connotations, and allusions to the contemporary world that the drama comprises is tamed in Blecharz and Kalwat's show by means of musical precision, which applies to both the word and the gesture. The different parts of the text were ascribed to specific actors who through vocal modulation, the repetition of sonic motifs, and speech rhythmization emphasize not only hidden meanings, but also the "sound" of the language of crime. The voice of the Countess (Magdalena Kuta) occupies a special place in this polyphonic structure. Her lines, moving from whisper through demonic laughter to spasmodic and ecstatic exclamations, arrange themselves into a cruel, irony-streaked testimony that resounds like a fragmented, ominous aria. The voices of the other actors, in turn, provide various contexts for the Rechnitz massacre — testing its

variations, paraphrasing, deconstructing, but also deceiving and covering up traces, making it impossible to arrive at the truth. The different testimonies contradict each other and offer no conclusions, breaking off instead or making a narrative twist.

The fragmentariness of Jelinek's text becomes also the supreme compositional principle of the opera: individual phrases never resound completely, always overlapping, at times producing an intended cacophony. There are moments, of course, when polyphony turns into consonant choral singing, as in the phrase "This is how the world ends!", borrowed by Jelinek from T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. In the show, the words are intoned by one of the actors, then transposed into a characteristic musical leitmotif which the other performers take up vocally.

Blecharz's *Rechnitz. Opera* approximates the form of a performative audio drama. The two principal spheres of the show are defined by the actors, seated behind the score lecterns, and the musicians on the dais. Decorative elements are confined to a symbolic hunting trophy and the Messengers' "worn evening dresses," a clear allusion to Jelinek's stage instructions (Jelinek, 2016). The term "performative audio drama" seems all the more apt because, besides music, the performers' bodily expression plays an extraordinarily important role here. This is true for both the actors and the cellists, whose musical gestures correspond closely with the opera's text layer. "The cello quartet symbolizes what has been left of the palace orchestra from the times of its former glory," the composer explained (Blecharz, 2018). Interestingly, it is precisely the cello that appears in scenes of apocalyptic visions in the Buñuel film. "History always only tunes its instruments, but seldom plays them," Jelinek writes in *Rechnitz*. Wojtek Blecharz and Katarzyna Kalwat's show can be seen as a musical attempt to

attune to history and memory, an attempt that exposes the ineffectiveness of language as a means of bearing witness. The musicalization of speech through the use of *recitativo*, as is done here, does not make it more lucid, but it draws attention to two crucial issues: the ambiguity of the message and — what is particularly important in this case — the performative power of the word.

Rechnitz. Opera occupies a rather special place among Wojtek Blecharz's stage projects to date. On the one hand, it is a continuation of explorations focused on sound, its performativity and its inseparable connection with corporeality; on the other hand, it goes far beyond the acoustic-somatic horizon. Sound becomes here a carrier of meanings, a bridge between history, literature, and postmemory. It helps to express the unimaginable and impossible to describe, revealing its new — semantic — function.

Performative practices of contemporary composers are not a new phenomenon; a turn towards corporeality, materiality, and rituality seems to be a natural consequence of some artists' turn away from absolute music, or simply of their realizing the fact that the "bodies playing the music are part of the music, that they're present, they're valid" (Walshe, 2016). One can also look at the trend from a somewhat broader perspective: playing music in front of an audience is always a performative act, and the visual and bodily experience becomes then an inextricable part of the perceptual process. Quoting Georges Aperghis, a leading figure in the field of new musical theatre, one can say that "there is always a hidden element of theatre in music" (*Hidden Theatre*, 2017).

While Wojtek Blecharz's stage projects fit into the above-described trends present in contemporary music composition, they nonetheless stand out with their highly individual, conceptualized approach to sonic material. The issues

that the composer devotes his theatrical productions to usually revolve around similar topics: relations between body and sound, the process of listening, viewer participation, or (as in *Rechnitz* or *The Black Square*) the semantic function of musical language. These threads are, however, taken up anew each time: it is not only their cultural/philosophical context that changes from work to work, but also the designed perceptual situation or performance concept. Thus Blecharz's music shows can be perceived as open laboratory projects, where he tests certain possibilities rather than proposing radical and obligatory solutions. These, of course, are possibilities concerning those aspects of audio culture that he is currently preoccupied with.

Operating at the intersection of different art forms (opera, installation, performance art) and different disciplines (music, film, video art, dance), Blecharz's shows can be classified as multimedia theatre, where the viewer is required to mobilize a number of sensory channels. One should not forget, however, that what seems most important in these productions, and doubtless constitutes their distinctive feature, is a constant striving to open, or sensitize, the audience to sound. This is of particular significance because these shows are very often aimed at dramatic-theatre audiences.

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Autor/ka

Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska (magdalena.figzal@us.edu.pl) is a theatre studies and

cultural studies scholar with a PhD in the humanities. Assistant Professor in the Institute of Cultural Studies of the Silesian University in Katowice. Theatre critic, author of the book *Przestrzenie muzyczne w polskim teatrze współczesnym* [Musical spaces in contemporary Polish theatre] (2017), editor of the books *Dramat i doświadczenie* [Drama and experience] (2014) and *Pisanie dla sceny – narracje współczesnego teatru* [Writing for the stage: the narratives of contemporary theatre] (2019). Her research focus is on stage music and experimental forms of musical theatre. ORCID: 0000-0002-6913-2648.

Footnotes

1. For more on selected compositional strategies of contemporary opera authors, see Biernacki; Pasiecznik, 2013.
2. It is worth remembering that John Cage, the patron of Fluxus, considered Marcel Duchamp as one of his masters. Cage's fascination with the work of this leading protagonist of the Dada movement and the two artists' long-time friendship resulted in the famous musical performance *Reunion*, staged in 1968 in Toronto. More on the event in: Cross, 1999.
3. The term "relational music" was introduced by Harry Lehmann in response to the identity crisis of the hitherto used category of New Music and the lack of a terminological equivalent for the work of twenty-first century composers, which is based to a large extent on a relation with other media and non-musical contents; see Lehmann, 2013.
4. The work's planned world premiere at the festival in Huddersfield had to be cancelled due to an electrical failure; only fragments were presented.
5. More on the performativity of music in theatre in: Magdalena Figzał, 2017 (chapter 4, *The Performative Dimension of Stage Music*). See also Jan Topolski's paper on the performative practices of contemporary Polish composers (Topolski, 2017).
6. The performative installation *The Black Square. A Musical Game* had its premiere in October 2018. The project was followed up with *The Black Square. Sonata for Keyboard and Tape*, a piece whose premiere performance, featuring Teraz Poliż actresses, took place in July 2020.

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Gertrude Stein plays video games

Paweł Schreiber Kazimierz the Great University in Bydgoszcz

The article juxtaposes the problems of spatiality and repetition in video game narrative with Gertrude Stein's notion of the landscape play, in which the linear plot dissolves in favour of a complex network of connections between different elements of the work. Several examples are discussed, from The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild to the Dark Souls series, showing the possible links between video games and Stein's writing techniques, especially in the field of open world games, where the large, easily accessible spaces make it more difficult to build coherent, organised plots.

Keywords: landscape; video game narrative; Gertrude Stein; The Legend of Zelda; play

Play, play every day, play and play and play away, and then play the play you played to-day, the play you play every day, play it and play it.

Gertrude Stein, *Play*

When there's a way, I play, and there's always a way, so I'll play till my computer fails…

MC Archero, *A True Tibian's Song* (*Piosenka prawdziwego Tibijczyka, trans. PS)*

Putting Gertrude Stein's work alongside video games may seem strange – the hermetic avant-garde author seems, at a first glance, to have little in common with one the most important phenomena in contemporary popular culture. However, some devices present in Stein's writing are a surprisingly good match for the problems faced by today's game designers. One of the crucial design issues in games is the relationship between narrative and landscape – large spaces represented in games make it difficult (and sometimes even impossible) to deliver a coherent and clear narrative, as they encourage the players to wander freely rather than follow the main plotline. It is a problem very similar to the one described by Stein in reference to her model of plays, a radical departure from traditional drama and its strictly determined structure. The notion of the landscape becomes an alternative for linear narrative, introducing a completely different approach towards the perception of the events and their sequence, as well as the passage of time. The postdramatic element of Stein's work can become an interesting source of inspiration for designers coping with the problems of video game dramaturgy, and a familiarity with the experience of playing games can help understand some approaches to Stein's complex texts. Their relation to games is natural inasmuch as Stein's understanding of the word "play" is very ambiguous – as a noun it might refer to drama and theatre, but its meaning as a verb refers to ludic activity. Children (and many adults) know that there is nothing frivolous about play – it is an important way of understanding and creating the world, giving more freedom in terms of action and thinking than activities guarded by prohibitions and limitations.

In research there is a long tradition of looking at video games through the

focus of narrative. Janet H. Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck. The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* is one of the key books in the field of digital humanities. Imagining the future of digital culture in 1997, Murray focuses on storytelling – it is the ability to present complex, moving stories that is supposed to be an indicator of quality and innovation in the emerging medium. Interestingly, it is drama and theatre, not film or the novel, that becomes the main reference point here. The reference to *Hamlet* probably needs no explanation, but the word "holodeck" used in the title might require a few words. For MIT scholars of the time, *Star Trek*was at least as important as Shakespeare's work. A holodeck is an uncannily realistic VR environment present in the *Star Trek* universe since *ST: The Next Generation*. It allowed the crew and passengers of spaceships to get a temporary respite from the tight corridors. In her book, Murray refers to a particular application of the holodeck. In *Star Trek: Voyager*, captain Kathryn Janeway enters a simulation where she plays the role of the heroine of a Victorian melodrama. She acts according to the rules of the genre, and the virtual environment adapts to her actions; at the same time, she is fully aware that she is taking part in something highly conventional (Murray, 1997, p. 24-25). It is similar not to watching a film or reading a novel, but rather performing in improvisational theatre or LARP. As the improvisation is controlled by a computer, it never loses its clear narrative structure – still not that impressive in comparison to *Hamlet*, but who knows what the future will bring.

Murray calls this form (in which an ordered narrative emerges from the participant's interaction with a virtual world reacting to her actions) cyberdrama (Murray, 1997, p. 271); seven years later she will point out *The Sims* as one of the most interesting embodiment of the idea (Murray, 2004, p. 5). The game (in which the player observes and, to a certain extent, guides

the interaction of AI-driven characters living in a small neighbourhood) can be regarded a plot generator, creating narratives on the basis of the shifting relationships between the characters, whose actions are determined both by the player and computer algorithms. Even though the term “cyberdrama” clearly refers to drama, Murray refers predominantly to examples drawn from film (some crucial arguments are based on *Casablanca*) and a number of TV series. More substantial links between her thought and classic drama appear in the work of researcher and game designer Michael Mateas (2004, p. 20), who mentions Brenda Laurel, the author of *Computers as Theatre*, as an important precursor of the idea of cyberdrama. Laurel suggests that Aristotle’s *Poetics* should serve as an inspiration for interface design, so that each user experience could take the form of a distinct dramatic structure, with a clearly determined beginning, middle and ending (Laurel, 2013, p. 79-95). Together with Andrew Stern, Mateas created the experimental game *Façade*, in which the player enters the role of a guest visiting a conflicted couple. The point of departure is clearly reminiscent of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and the game itself is like a chamber play, taking place in the small space of the couple’s flat. The player enjoys complete freedom, and the characters dynamically react to her actions and words, and the narrative engine of the game constantly adjusts the plot, so that the final result could be an ordered story with a distinct ending. Mateas and Stern dreamed of a program generating (together with the player) a plot whose structure would be based on a variant of Aristotle’s theory from *Poetics*, taking into account the player’s actions (Mateas, 2004, pp. 19-23).

Dreams of creating a digital Sophocles or Shakespeare have long been an important element of the development of video games. Emphasising the role of a well-constructed plot, which could compete with film, television or literature, often became a key argument in building the cultural prestige of

video games. Serious research on video games started with Mary Ann Buckles' PhD thesis which juxtaposed the interactive fiction game *Adventure* with Vladimir Propp's work on the folk tale. The authors of the earliest articles on games in academic journals also looked at the subject in the context of the narrative arts – this was the case with Niesz, Holland 1984 (introducing into the humanities the still functioning term "interactive fiction") or Costanzo, 1986 (viewing text adventure games as a new narrative literary genre). Infocom, a company specialising in text adventures, sold its games not only in computer stores, but also in bookshops. Well-known authors were sometimes hired as game writers – Robert Pinsky co-created *Mindwheel* (1984), and Thomas M. Disch wrote the text for *Amnesia* (1986). The narrative aspect developed more dynamically in adventure games (originally text-based, and later – starting with Sierra-On-Line's breakthrough *King's Quest* from 1984 – showing the gameworld by means of animated graphics). However, other genres, where the plot played a secondary role, gradually enhanced their narrative layer, first through a short backstory in the physical documentation of the game, and later through more and more complex cutscenes, giving a narrative context to the players' actions. As the computers and consoles grew more powerful in terms of graphics, games started to refer to film, using its narrative devices. The narrative became a favourite catchprase not only for researchers, but also game developers – today, "storytelling" is one of the most common words used in promoting digital culture products (from various apps, through social media, to games), and video games are particularly adept at telling stories.

The rapid development of the narrative layer of video games, as well as the attention of such researchers as Laurel or Murray, led to the famous conflict known today as the debate between the narratologists and ludologists. In

2001, Markku Eskelinen complained that when "[…] when games and especially computer games are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonised from the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies. Games are seen as interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema" (Eskelinen, 2001). The ludologist camp (including Eskelinen, Gonzalo Frasca or Jesper Juul) pointed out that games are first and foremost complex rule-based systems, and presenting them in terms of the narrative arts moves us away from their essence. This essence often runs contrary to a structured plot, because it assumes the player's freedom of action, which can make the situations emerging within the game evolve in various directions, not only in ways imposed by the designers. Of course, there are also a lot of games where the narrative aspect is nonexistent or purely decorative, with no impact on the gameplay.

The dispute ended with a series of conciliatory articles (such as Gonzalo Frasca's *Ludologists love stories, too: notes from a debate that never took place*) – the two rivaling camps disappeared, and what remained was a deeper awareness of the fact that there are numerous features specific to games which resist classic narrative devices. One of the more interesting voices looking for a common denominator linking games and narratives is Henry Jenkins' *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*, where the author points out a vital connection between narrative and organisation of space in video games: "The organization of the plot becomes a matter of designing the geography of imaginary worlds" in such a way that some places will contain obstacles stopping the player, and others will give specific affordances, allowing them to progress (Jenkins, 2003). Thus, the plot becomes encoded in the game space, and the narrative emerges during the traversal from a clearly defined beginning to the goal, like in classic spatial stories, starting with the *Odyssey*. It is one more variant of the dream of a

system which collaborates with the player in creating varied, but properly structured plots – within the large game space, the player can act freely, so the playthrough will be different each time, but in specific places she will have to deal with specific challenges, and the affordances created by the designers point at specific ways of overcoming these challenges.

Michael Nitsche points out that games are based on a strong connection between time and space, similar to the one present in architecture – the user is able to experience the space only in fragments, which change as she traverses it, i.e. in time (Nitsche, 2007, p. 147). Building spatial and temporal axes for the player may therefore mean building a specific narrative, consisting of events situated along the axes. Such trails are easiest to construct in closed spaces, where the walls allow the designer to control the player character's movement. The more freedom of movement, the more difficult it is to keep control of the plot. It is the most difficult in a vast landscape, where the player can roam wherever she wants.

As the computers and consoles became more powerful, the designers of many narrative games created larger and larger settings. It is the most visible in RPGs, such as *The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* or *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, and action games with a clearly delineated plot, such as the *Grand Theft Auto*, *Red Dead Redemption* and *Assassin's Creed* franchises. In earlier 3D games it was necessary to reduce the number of elements displayed on the screen for technical reasons, for example by covering them with walls, darkness or dense fog. New technical solutions gave the designers the opportunity to display vast landscapes, where even the most distant objects are visible (a tendency particularly visible since the release of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* in 2006), but then the landscape often proved to overwhelm the characters acting within it, and the story emerging from

these actions.

Writing about the role of landscape in Gertrude Stein's work, Linda Voris refers to the tradition of spectacular illusionist theatre, whose development initially weakened the impact of individual characters, less and less visible in the complex stage design, and ultimately led to the creation of dioramas – a form in which the characters simply disappeared (Voris, 2016, pp. xix-xx). It can be said that many designers of video games and virtual spaces are in a similar position. However, landscape does not have to be viewed as a problem – for Gertrude Stein it was a way out of the crisis of the traditional dramatic forms. Some of her thoughts about the relationship between stories and landscapes resonate with the way the issue of landscape is handled in video games.

In her lecture *Plays*, delivered in New York in 1934, Getrude Stein describes the reasons for which theatre makes her "nervous". The most important one is the lack of synchronisation of the viewers' emotions with what is happening on the stage. The emotions always either move ahead of the scene, or cannot catch up with it. The time of the performance runs at a different pace from the time of the audience – a shift which Stein compares to syncopation in music (Stein, 1995, pp. xxx-xxxi). This approach to the theatre, focusing on the relationship between the emotions and perceptions which give rise to them, may result from the fact that Stein's thinking was largely shaped by William James, who perceived emotions as the result of specific physiological phenomena, which in turn followed the perception of facts causing them (Frank, 2015, p. 100). In everyday exciting situations, the movement between these stages is instantaneous. In theatre – it can be much less obvious.

The reasons for this lack of synchronization are varied – Stein puts a special

emphasis on the question of the viewer's acquaintance with the characters (Stein, 1995, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii). She compares theatre to life and literature, showing how different it is in terms of such acquaintance. In exciting situations we experience personally, one usually knows the most important participants, and perceive the situation as exceptional precisely because one knows them – and sees they are behaving in unusual ways (Stein, 1995, p. xxxvi). Reading a play, the reader becomes acquainted with the characters in a longer process, and when they get confused, they can always go back to an earlier fragment or the list of characters (Stein, 1995, p. xxxviii), all of which allows to get through the process of remembering and getting to know characters at one's own pace. The constant returning to the list did not mean that Stein found plays with a large cast problematic – on the contrary, she recalls rereading Shakespeare's *Henry VI* numerous times with pleasure, because "there were so many characters and there were so many little bits in it that were lively words" (Stein, 1995, p. xxxix). Therefore, the problem lies not in the complexity, but in the conditions in which we get acquainted with it. In the theatre it is difficult to find time for this task, because one has to focus on too many things: "it was a matter of both seeing and of hearing were clothes, voices, what they the actors said, how they were dressed and how that related itself to their moving around" (Stein, 1995, p. xli). Moreover, the performance is over too quickly – when reading, one can return to earlier parts of the text, which is impossible in the theatre (Stein, 1995, p. xli). In Stein's childhood memories of her contact with the theatre referred to in *Plays*, she never remembers entire performances, but discrete details – a specific escape scene from a stage version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or the way Edwin Booth as Hamlet lay down at Gertrude's feet. At the age of sixteen, Stein experienced some relief – and an awareness that a different kind of theatrical experience is also possible – watching Sarah Bernhardt

guest performance in San Francisco. She remembers it as follows: ”I knew a little french of course but really it did not matter, it was all so foreign and her voice being so varied and it all being so French I could rest in it untroubled. And I did” (Stein, 1995, s. xlii). The performance was „a thing in itself and it existed in and for itself as the poetica plays had that I used so much to read, there were s omany characters just as there were in those plays and you did not have to know them they were so foreign […]. It was for me a very simple direct and moving pleasure” (Stein, 1995, p. xlii).

At a first glance, Stein moves away from understanding the performance, starting with the level of language, the most basic one for many of her contemporaries. The fact that Bernhardt speaks a language the American teenager barely understands, encourages the girl to stop trying to understand what the actors are talking about. Her reception focuses not on the unfolding plot, explained by the characters’ speeches, but on the moment-to-moment experience. It is one of the patterns that will determine the course of Stein’s later plays. The departure from understanding is only apparent – Linda Voris proves that Stein’s works feature a different kind of epistemology. It does not look for referents for signs, but rather for relationships between elements of equal status – here, Stein clearly follows the empiricism advocated by her teacher, William James (Voris, 2016, p. xxxvi). James distinguished two kinds of knowledge – knowledge by acquaintance, i.e. direct experience of a given phenomenon in all its complexity, and knowledge about, derived from information on the phenomenon (Gutowski, 2011, p. 173); cognition in Stein’s works has more in common with acquaintance. In *Plays*, she explains the bases of her thinking through a reference to the landscape she saw through the window of her home in Bilignin: „I felt if a play was exactly like a landscape then

there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it but it does not with you, it is there […]" (Stein, 1995, p. xlvi). The landscape does not impose a pace at which one makes acquaintance with it (the word choice clearly refers to James) – it's simply there, waiting for free exploration, whose course is determined by the observer, paying attention to the relationship „trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other". For Stein, such a form is more general than a traditionally understood story: "the story is only of importance if you like to tell or like to hear a story but the relation is there anyway" (Stein, 1995, p. xlvii). The story can also be viewed through the focus of landscape, whose elements are present at once, in the present. Stein recalls the display window of a Parisian photographer's shop, where she saw a sequence of photos documenting the transformation of young women into nuns (Stein, 1995, p. li). She used this idea in *Four Saints*, featuring a vision of a similar series of photos of St. Theresa (Bay-Cheng 2003, p. 58). When the subsequent stages of a story are put next to each other, they all exist at once, and the relationships between them unfold not in time, but in space.

This way of thinking formed the basis of a number of Stein's plays, starting with *Lend a Hand or Four Religions* (1922). The first part of this play contains an unclear description of a situation – a woman kneels by a stream and sees somebody approaching. The characters (if the word can be used in the case of this text) – the eponymous four religions - take turns speaking about her. Each time they repeat more or less the same information, but every now and then a new layer appears – the origin and religious beliefs (she is a Chinese Christian), her plans for the future (furnishing her home), the grass growing in the area… The text builds the impression of an image

that does not change, but gradually grows.

For Stein, landscape is a model for the text, and in video games it is often the most important way of showing the virtual world. It definitely is a significant difference, but for our purposes the most important fact is that vast landscapes in games encourage (and sometimes indeed force) the players to traverse the game world like a reader, listener or viewer traverses Stein's texts – meandering, examining the relationships between elements at their own pace, exploring unknown trails.

In the first scene of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* the protagonist, a young man by the name of Link, stands at the edge of a grassy cliff and looks at the boundless space unfolding before him. Wandering across this space will constitute most of the gameplay, sometimes reminiscent of an orienteering exercise. In the distance, Link can see a huge castle, a smoking volcano and two peaks separated by a ravine, so that the whole makes the impression of a mountain cut in two. All these landmarks will not only help in finding the way, but also serve as places crucial for plot development. It is a common device in video game openings: showing a place which the player is supposed to reach in the end. In the experimental narrative game *Dear Esther*, the protagonist explores a dreamlike space built partly from landscapes reminiscent of the Scottish Hebrides, and partly from his own traumatic memories he is trying to cope with. In the first scene he sees a red light blinking from the top of a tower he will climb in the final scene, where he will remember all the details of what happened to him. At the beginning of *Fallout 3*, an RPG showing the United States after a disastrous nuclear conflict, the player character emerges from a fallout shelter purposely placed on a mountain in order to provide an unobstructed view at the distant ruins of the Capitol and the Washington obelisk towering over the skyline –

this is where the ending of the game will unfold. The emotional image of the ruined US capital is on the one hand a point of departure, showing the dismal reality of the game world, and on the other – the promise of a spectacular ending. In *Journey*, a poetic metaphor of life, filled with Buddhist symbolism, the landscape in the opening scene lies at the foot of an enormous mountain with a luminous summit, which the player character will ultimately climb – and which will serve as a landmark directing the player for almost the whole of the game. In all these examples, the point in which the story begins offers a good view on the inevitable ending. In *Dear Esther* and *Journey*, the route of traversal is strictly determined by means of subsequent challenges and landmarks. It's a very common practice – even though large spaces give a feeling of total freedom, designers fill them with tasks whose stages are placed in such a way as to determine specific routes for the player character (Burgess, 2017, p. 259).

Such solutions are not limited to games – the appear in various kinds of virtual spaces, also those present in the theatre. It was the way taken by Dream Adoption Society, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski in the performance *Nietota*, based on fragments from Tadeusz Miciński's experimental mystical novel (Teatr Powszechny, Wasraw, 2018). Parts of the performance take place in virtual reality – the audience put on VR goggles and enter a digital, psychedelic vision of the Tatra Mountains based on Miciński's text. They find themselves in a large open space which they can freely explore by jumping (with each shake of the the goggles, the viewer's avatar moves forward). There are a lot of landmarks – houses, trees, a stone circle not unlike Stonehenge, a giant spiral path going up, towards the sky, or a chapel embedded in the rocks. In order to prevent feelings of confusion among the viewers, the performance features a guiding narrator, whose voice directs the audience along a particular route, explaining the sights.

The viewers are encouraged to follow a trail of totems. The guided tour is not obligatory, but the narration accompanies also those who choose to follow their own path. It is understandable – for many viewers this can be their first exploration of such a space. At the same time, it can be felt that the guide's narration and the vastness of the space are somehow at odds. A viewer following the guide is unable to grasp all the environmental details. They have to become acquainted with them at a pace that is imposed on them from the outside. They can feel the kind of anxiety Stein describes in *Plays* – the audience's emotions are not always synchronized with the course of the performance. It is similar to the experiences of a player in a game from the *Assassin's Creed*franchise, exploring an immense, meticulously detailed reconstruction of ancient Athens or Alexandria, but instead of being able to focus on the environment, they have to follow the trail of tasks and challenges planned by the designers.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild chooses a different strategy. After completing some initial tasks meant to familiarize with the most important gameplay mechanics, the players are given access to all the important landmarks – they are within their range of view and walking distance. The game world is built in a way that makes them visible from most locations. It is enough to climb a suitably high vantage point. These include not only higher hills or mountains, but also huge towers scattered over the area, allowing the player to freely examine the landscape. What is more, the game lacks natural barriers, such as mountains too steep to climb – here, with a bit of ingenuity and determination, it is possible to reach almost any spot. In such an environment, it is much more difficult to present a linear, ordered narrative – it is built in such a way that it constantly reminds of the freedom of movement and places the player character has already visited or means to

visit. The plot of the game is constructed out of discrete episodes which can be experienced in any order or skipped altogether – their aim is to increase the player's chances in the final confrontation with a powerful enemy. Each of the episodes is strongly linked to a specific place, so discovering the plot is strictly connected to spatial exploration. Building a network of relationships "trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other" is something natural in *Breath of the Wild* – climbing another vantage point, the player immediately looks for others they have already visited. The progress in the game is not as much about the fragments of the narrative the player has experienced, but recognizing more and more places visible in the distance (sometimes – but not always – tied to the narrative). The game often helps – some of the buildings the player character has visited change their colour from red to blue, and thus become a visible reminder of the earlier stages of the journey. Their constant presence in the field of view results in a different perception of the plot – instead of viewing it diachronically, the player can think about it in synchronic terms, like the series of photographs mention by Stein in *Plays*. The atomisation of the elements of the plot and the reduction of their importance are particularly visible in *Breath of the Wild*, but the issue of the blurring of the plotline within a vast landscape is a problem for all designers making games set in large three-dimensional spaces. Instead of trying to overcome it, the designers of *Breath of the Wild* decided to use it in creative ways. Like in Stein's writing, instead of linear progress, the game builds the impression of a gradual growth of subsequent layers of the landscape – it gains new meanings and reminds of places already visited.

The landscape leads to an emancipation of the present. It no longer plays the role of a link between the past and the future, a transient stage of the process of getting acquainted with the characters and the plot. It becomes a

dominating element, which not as much connects the past and the future, as contains them. Thus, it allows the viewer (or player) to focus on the here and now, on the continuous present. Stein introduces the terms “prolonged present” and “continuous present” in her lecture *Composition as Explanation* (1927). In them, she sees the principle organizing her earlier works, such as *Melanctha* or *The Making of Americans*. Ulla Dydo suggests that the emphasis on the present could be linked to the experience of the First World War, disrupting the normal functioning of time – after such an ordeal one can be no longer sure of the future, and thus has to focus on the present (Dydo, 2003, p. 95).

As Dydo notes, one of the ways that Stein consistently employs in order to achieve the effect of the continuous present is “beginning again and again” , visible in all of her work (Dydo, 2003, p. 95). Her texts base on cyclical repetitions of words and phrases, even though, as Stein insists, repeated words are never identical to those said earlier (for a broader discussion of this uniqueness of each repetition in Stein’s work cf. Lorange, 2014, pp. 206-222). Each iteration is different, maybe because, like in the description of the young woman in *Four Religions*, in enriches the repeated fragment with some new information, rearranges the words or simply works differently from what came before by virtue of being a repetition. In Stein’s texts it is the words that are repeated, but Robert Wilson, a great enthusiast of her work, showed how to translate this device into stage action. Even though *Einstein on the Beach* does not use Stein’s texts directly, it is a model embodiment of her idea of the continuous present. Wilson neutralises the passage of time, building repetitions in many different spheres, on many different scales. What is repeated are not just the words or phrases, but also gestures and choreography. Subjects and stage design from earlier scenes also recur. Like in Stein’s vision, these repetitions are not identical – the

performance plays with combinatorics and links the previously used elements in all possible configurations, just like Stein liked to check the number of ways in which the words of a recently written phrase could be recombined.

The principle of “beginning again and again” has been natural for games ever since their beginnings. The first text adventure games (one of the earliest genres of digital literature, which gained immense popularity at American universities in the early 1970s) did not allow to save the game state, so the players had to start from scratch every time they played, trying to avoid the hazards that ended their previous session. The narrative took shape in layers, with each subsequent attempt – these layers were very similar to each other, but differed at crucial points, where the players took different decisions – a process surprisingly similar to Stein’s technique of building and developing her textual landscapes by layering repetitive descriptions. Repetition was also the basis of game arcades, key for the early history of interactive entertainment. Arcade games were relatively short, but very difficult, so the players had to make numerous attempts at completing them (and each attempt meant another coin left in the game cabinet). For the layperson each subsequent playthrough appeared similar, but the connoisseurs saw the differences determining the victory or failure.

Repetition in games is often linked to the necessity to overcome difficult challenges, requiring at least several attempts. Failure usually means returning to an earlier stage – an interesting example of rupturing the temporal continuity of the events unfolding within the game world. Jesper Juul proposed fundamental division into play time and event time. The former refers to the time spent by the player on playing the game, and the latter – to the time that passes within the game world (Juul 2004, p. 138). In

a more traditional view, failed attempts belong to play time, but not to event time. However, there are also different approaches. In *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* the protagonist also serves as the narrator, telling the story of his past exploits. When the player fails, the narrator says that the *actual* story was different. This attempt at merging play time and event time results in a very complex, diverse and multi-layered temporal structure (the protagonist recalls his past experiences, including the narrative dead ends, and the player is able to slow down and turn back time – cf. Hanson, 2018, p. 152).

In *Dark Souls*, a series of games famous for the high level of difficulty, the protagonist belongs to the caste of the undead. They cannot die – when they do, they are reborn at one of the campfires scattered around the game world. The sinister, Gothic world of *Dark Souls* is based on a similar principle – it is imprisoned in a cycle in which a magical fire directing the course of the world, which strengthens and wanes. In the game world, this form of immortality is consider a curse rather than a blessing. The undead are doomed to an incessant cycle of deaths and resurrection, and every time they go back to a specific moment in time, so that the enemies they have already defeated reappear in the same places. Thanks to the in-game explanation of this process of repetition, game time involving failure is included in event time. In early video games, repetition stemmed from the necessity to start all over again. Later, with the possibility of saving game states, the experience of playing became much more fragmentary and mosaiclike – one could play in smaller sessions, testing different approaches, returning to earlier saved games in case of failure. This changed the aesthetics of the games and the experience of playing – breaking the uniform playthrough into fragments moving in different directions can be compared

to the changes in painting effectuated by cubism, a great inspiration for Stein's fragmentary writing. *Dark Souls* and its imitators do not treat these changes as a mere side effect of the idea of saving the game state, but also try to thematize the resulting structure and incorporate the instances of branching and repetition into the overall flow of the game.

The action of fighting is, of course, also repetitive. *Dark Souls* features a large, but ultimately limited number of opponents who can be defeated by means of a limited set of movements. The essence of the gameplay is not that each confrontation is very different from the previous one, but in the varied ways of combining the elements of a limited arsenal of moves and opponents. The fighting mechanics and enemy behaviour are interesting enough to allow the player to find pleasure in discovering different possibilities of acting in the same places, with the same moves used against the same opponents. This combinatorial pleasure is typical of video games, where good design relies on the ability to create the largest possible variety by means of minimalist, repetitive means. Another parallel could be drawn between this use of repetition and the way in which Stein uses it in her texts.

In video games, repetition can also carry complex meanings. Porpentine is one of the leading designers working in Twine – a simple tool for text game creation, which became the main form of expression for queer designers in the early 2010s. Porpentine's games use repetition and loops to build images of confinement. In *Howling Dogs* the player character is imprisoned in a cell, and the rhythm of her life is determined by everyday actions, such as washing or eating. Their monotony is interspersed with surrealist, transgressive visions experienced by the protagonist in virtual reality – their leading motif is escape, be it from an abusive partner or from rules ordering women's lives. After each such vision, the protagonist returns to her

gradually deteriorating cell. The confinement can also be metaphorical – the protagonist of *With Those We Love Alive* is imprisoned in a web of complex rituals she is involved in as a craftswoman at the court of a monstrous insect empress. The monotony of the passing days is sometimes broken by the empress's orders or increasingly disturbing national holidays. The empress molts and the protagonist also changes her body – she takes hormone medication and tattoos her body (the players are also encouraged to mark their bodies, e.g. with felt-tip pens). Both games rely on minimal, sometimes hardly visible differences between the following days. The rhythm of action is determined not by the plot, but by the basic actions concerning the needs of the body – eating, drinking and hygiene in *Howling Dogs* or hormone therapy in *With Those We Love Alive*. In both games Porpentine refers to her experience as a trans woman, but here they are a point of reference form common experiences of our bodies, responsible for our simplest and most direct experience of repetition.

Stein's texts always focus on the here and now. Even though in their repetitiveness they return to earlier fragments, they do so not in order to look back, but rather to build, like a playing child, new buildings from the same blocks. A more and more complex textual universe grows around simple actions (playing with merging or intertwining meanings; using words in new contexts)– not through linear progress, but because thanks to the repetitions the reader has more opportunities to examine it. Video games – even the narrative ones – do not grow out of complex, structured stories. On the contrary – everything starts with a simple action, with play, basic mechanics around which the world of the game grows. This is a description of designing games, but also playing them – and play in general. Stein was one of the foremost experts on sometimes humorous, and sometimes dead serious play.

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Autor/ka

Paweł Schreiber (pawel.schreiber@ukw.edu.pl) – doctor, lecturer at the English Linguistics Department at Kazimierz the Great University in Bydgoszcz, and a specialist in contemporary British drama. As a theatre critic, he has written for *Teatr*, *Didaskalia*, and *Chimera* magazines. Co-author of the *Jawne Sny* ('Lucid Dreams') blog on video games and their links with other branches of culture. He has written about games for magazines such as *Przekrój* and *Pixel*, as well as *dwutygodnik.com*. ORCID: 0000-0001-9094-1741.

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Be Gone! Or, Clear Away, Chop Chop

Łucja Iwanczewska

Dziady at 34/36 Mickiewicza Street

concept by Aurora Collective; directed by Oskar Sadowski; music by BAASCH; dramaturgy by Anka Herbut; lighting by Jacqueline Sobiszewski; video by Adrien Cognac & PUSSY MANTRA (Marta Navrot & Jagoda Wójtowicz); make-up by Anna Piechocka; poster design by Bartek Arobal Kociemba

Recordings by Wojciech Kaniewski and Adam Abramczyk; drums by Anna Sierpowska – Movement Medicine, Agnieszka Dziewanna, Anna Szyszka; combative fan dance by Lia Stula, Sylwia Domańska, Anna Juniewicz, Patrycja Pati, Ula Bogucka; scenery by Malwina Konopacka, Teresa, Aniela I Jula, Piotr Kowalski; grassroots initiative by the residents of the building at 34/36 Mickiewicz Street; produced by all.

> Brotherhood and citizenship
> For woman
> Life companion
> And laws equal in all respects
> (Adam Mickiewicz, *A Set of Principles*, Rome, 29 March 1848)

Staged at 34/36 Adam Mickiewicz Street in Warsaw's Żoliborz district, the performance/ritual of *Dziady*[1], a "sacrilegious rite brimming with wrath,

”was an act of defiance and resistance. *Dziady at 34/36 Mickiewicz Street* happened on 31 October 2020 in response to the Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling tightening Poland’s abortion law. The principal performative act was the sending away of the “dirty” (see Młynarska, 2020) old men and women, the boomers who denied us the right to make our own choice to decide about ourselves, our bodies, our lives, our sexuality. They are the patriarchal old geezers who, in alliance with the Polish Catholic Church, guard the violent mechanisms to which Polish women are subjected in the familial, economical and social spheres. The Polish word “odprawić” means both “to perform,” but its second meaning is “to send away;” in this context, it asks certain people to leave the political arena where the fate of women is decided. It urges them to go away, be gone, get out of here, clear away, scram, #wypierdalaj dziadu (#pissoffoldgeezer).

This is what Leszek Kolankiewicz writes about Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*: “Revivals of this drama have the extraordinary ability to act as salient meta-commentary on social life: Aleksander Bardini’s 1955 staging provided commentary on the watershed period which followed the Stalin era, Dejmek’s revival spurred the student protests of 1968, Maciej Prus’s 1979 version heralded the birth of the Solidarity movement in its cradle (Kolankiewicz, 2000, pp. 195–96). The performance dramatized by Anka Herbut, directed by Oskar Sadowski and performed by actors, musicians, apartment tenants at 34/36 Mickiewicz Street and audience members embodied this extraordinary quality of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*, and provided important meta-commentary on civil life in Poland. The ritual of Dziady performed in the current socio-political climate had little to do with a festival for the dead, remembrance, a celebration of mementos, or the coexistence of the living and the dead and their never-ending conversation and efforts at reconciliation.

The poster announcing the event shows Jarosław Kaczyński's paper-white face, his features marked with pencil, and streams of blood-red liquid rolling down from his eyes.

> What a monster! Bless my soul!
> See theghost in the window?
> He's whitelike a bone in a field;
> Look! Look at his face!

The Dziady ritual in Warsaw's Żoliborz was held across the street from Jarosław Kaczyński's house, and the words about the ghost in the window refer to him. There is also no doubt that Jarosław Kaczyński (the Ghost of the Old Geezer in the performance, a contemporary incarnation of Dziady's Ghost of Evil Lord) is the central protagonist of the ritual of Dziady. The ritual participants assembled outside his windows want to send him away without consolation, mercy, food or water, because anyone who wasn't a human being even once cannot be helped by humans.

The event announcement said, "On the night when the Dziady ritual used to be performed in Poland, join us for *Mickiewicz's Dziady* in Warsaw's Żoliborz district. Instigated by residents of Mickiewicz Street, a performance drawing on the work of Poland's national bard will be staged. The ghosts from *Dziady Part II* return to this earth to seek what they lacked when they were alive. Some of them get what they want while others get what they had generously given to others but would not wish to experience themselves. Karma is a bitch, particularly when part of the population has to fight for their fundamental rights while the authorities turn a deaf ear to what their citizens want."

At a time when “all is dark” and “all is quiet” in Poland – to paraphrase *Dziady*’s most famous lines – and we ask the question, “what’s going to happen?” Romanticism again proves to be a gesture, a ritual, and a form of remembrance. However, *Dziady at 34/36 Mickiewicz Street* cares little about the sacred covenant of community, rebirth, transformation, and renewal. The creators chose *Part II* of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*, which is a clear sign of their move away from messianism (*the 19th-century idea that the Polish nation has been chosen by God to be sacrificed for the freedom of the world in a way similar to how Jesus Christ was sacrificed to redeem humanity*). If their version can trigger a transformation, it will be one of consciousness relating to a deep disagreement with the shape of the community we’re currently living in. Dariusz Kosiński writes: “Adam Mickiewicz built into *Dziady* the concept of theatre as an act taking place here and now, exerting a real influence on reality by the agency of the audience” (Kosiński, 2007, p. 73). The scenario of ritual transformation that plays out in Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* involves a task for each participant. If any community is created during the Żoliborz performance, it is one of the angry, the disgruntled, or the pissed off. It is a community of those who reject the violence exercised by the authorities. The performance of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* screams out loud, driven by a violent, ecstatic rhythm. It is militant in its sonic palette (voices, drums) the movement of the bodies and the red smoking flares, militant like the war the Polish government has declared on Polish women and Polish society. “This is war,” chant the protesters rallying against the controversial ruling. It is about our here and now, about having a real impact; the participants of the Żoliborz happening performed *Dziady* to make an impact.

Kosiński writes elsewhere: “Now I think that the power of *Dziady* might derive from the fact that Mickiewicz brought into the “light” of collective life an arch-drama, or perhaps an “archedrama” – a scenario impossible to be

reduced to words, or expressed in words, one that can only play out whenever the collective finds itself in deep, fundamental crisis threatening its existence. To be sure, these enactments differ in expressive means, words, images and the way they enfold but beneath these superficially different forms, deep down, shines the dark light of the *Dziady* scenario that Mickiewicz's *Dziady* is still closest to" (Kosiński, 2016). Now the community (of women in particular) has been plunged into an existential crisis – the script of *Dziady* has been once more re-enacted in Poland, played out to express this crisis and to scream out loud about it.

The Sorcerer in *Dziady at Mickiewicza Street* is a woman who shares the stage with the chorus of goddesses playing ghosts "in the name of the Mother, the Daughter, the Spirit." First, two children appear – light spirits, Rózia and Józia – asking for two charlock seeds. The collective, resounding cry of "Be gone! Be gone! Be gone!" can be heard from and outside the windows of the Mickiewicz Street building.

Next, the ghost of Zosia, an intermediate spirit, turns up. Wearing a garland of flowers on her head, Zosia comes down from the clouds like a rainbow, accompanied by a rainbow flare. In her earthly life, she was undecided as to whether to go out with a boy, had no desire to get married and preferred to follow a lamb rather than a lover. She doesn't know whether she is of this world. She is always alone. Zosia has since made her choice.

Michał Szpak, Ralph Kamiński and Maria Sadowska sing a song to music by Baasch:

> In the mornings in spring,
> Zosia, the fairest damsel in the village,

Tended her lambs,
Hopping and singing a merryair.
My body,
My choice.
When Oleśwanted to kiss her on the lips
For a pair of doves,
The vapid girl but laughed
In scorn ofhis offering and request.
Józio gave her a ribbon,
Antoś gave her his heart,
But coy Zosia
Just laughed:
My body,
My choice.

Back on earth, Zosia may be denied her right to choose.

The last ghost to appear is the Ghost of the Old Geezer (the Evil Lord in Mickiewicz's play). Speaking the words of the Ghost of the Old Geezer, an off-stage voice imitates the voice of Jarosław Kaczyński – everyone recognizes the heavy, inhuman ghost whom a human being cannot help. We see his face in the window as a video projection. A chorus of birds– women who speak together – deny the Old Geezer compassion, empathy, pity and understanding. They tear at the food, rip the flesh into pieces and shout, "Be gone!" Talking to him or negotiating with him is out of the question. they want to send the Old Geezer away for good.

The ghost of the Old Geezer, who in his earthly life had no respect for his fellow human beings and denied their rights, will never find peace,

especially here on earth. This is because, according to Mickiewicz's ethics, you are allowed to challenge God, but you're forbidden to hurt anyone. This offense would not be forgiven. "Leave us alone! Be gone!" shout the participants in the ritual. This is followed by loud, explosion-like thunder interrupting the ritual of Dziady. Anna Kłos-Kleszczewska poignantly recites the words spoken by the Spirit at the end of the Prologue of Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part III*:

> Man, if only you knew how powerful you are
> When a thought in your head, like a spark in a cloud,
> Flashes unseen and pulls together clouds,
> Creating fertile rain or thunder and storm;
> If only you knew that every time youset a thought alight,
> The elements, Satan and angels await
> For you strike at hell or light heavens;
> And you blaze like an errant cloud,
> Knowing not where you fly, or what you do.
> People! Each of you could, alone, in a prison cell,
> Topple and lift thrones with your thoughts and faith (Mickiewicz, 1984).

Dziady is over. Now it's time for a political call for courage, agency and action, for giving account of our human, and civil power in the belief that anger can beget change. The communal ritual of anger in Mickiewicz Street ended with everyone singing John Lennon's *Imagine*, celebrating freedom and equality. The song was punctuated by performers' interjections addressed to the Ghost of the Old Geezer: "Mister Kaczyński, we want one world, we won't be divided!" "We want to have choice!" "Our life is our life,

Mister Kaczyński," "Mister Kaczyński, you won't sleep easy!"

The Żoliborz ritual of Dziady belongs to all of us, because human rights are not a question of opinion. This Polish Dziady – our Dziady – restores faith in equality, freedom and human rights. The performance also clearly demonstrates that we barely need tribal ghosts, the deaths of past heroes, retrotopian memory or identities immobilized by tradition. Instead, we need more courage and political imagination –courage to send away the old geezers, and imagination to help us realize the truth of the slogan of the May 1968 revolt: "Under the paving stones, the beach!"

This was also my *Dziady* – I joined in shouting with other citizens: "Be gone!"

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Łucja Iwanczewska – assistant professor at the Performativity Studies Department, Jagiellonian University. Doctor of humanities. She graduated from theatre studies at the UJ and postgraduate studies in gender in Institute of Audiovisual Arts at the UJ.

Footnotes

1. Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve), written between 1820 and 1832, is considered sacred to Polish national theatre's heritage. Its title refers to a pagan festival held on the 31st of October, during which the living communicate with spirits. The word "dziad" also means "forefather" and "old geezer." The below review focuses on a happening based on the play which was performed on 31 October 2020 at Adam Mickiewicz Street in Warsaw's Żoliborz, the neighborhood where Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the Law and Justice party currently ruling Poland, lives. At the time of the performance, protests were happening in Poland following ruling that abortion of malformed fetuses is incompatible with the constitution, ultimately banning abortion in Poland.

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Feedback Loop

Piotr Dobrowolski

The Aleksander Fredro Theatre, Gniezno

No One's Gonna Believe Me Anyway (*I tak nikt mi nie uwierzy*)

by Jolanta Janiczak

directed by Wiktor Rubin; set design by Łukasz Surowiec and Wiktor Rubin; music by Krzysztof Kaliski

premiered on June 19th, 2020

"No one's gonna believe me anyway," says Barbara repeatedly. She knows there is no point in answering her father's questions. The ruling surprised no one, yet she accepts it. She is not guilty of anything, but her will to resist has been broken. In Gniezno's Fredro Theater's production helmed by Wiktor Rubin and Jolanta Janiczak, this unmarried, luscious, and provocative shepherdess represents those who have been bullied and harassed over the centuries. Considered mentally frail, the low-born woman is turned into a scapegoat. Who will defend the sexually abused "harlot" accused of practicing witchcraft and conspiring with the devil? Her married lovers? Distanced relatives? Intimidated daughters? Perhaps it will be the town's

authorities, it's elite, the jury, or the judge? Disenfranchised, Barbara is unable to defend herself against the accusations. She is not unlike those who were likened to lice and rats and led to the Umschlagplatz (the holding areas in occupied Poland where Jews from ghettos were assembled for deportation to death camps during the Holocaust), or refugees from the Middle East and Global South who are allowed to drown in the Mediterranean, or gay people who are stigmatized by the powers that be as a danger to Polish families. Few want to listen to the stigmatized who inspire superstition and fear.

No One's Gonna Believe Me Anyway (*I tak nikt mi nie uwierzy*) is a frighteningly relevant show exploring collective ignorance – a particularly acute form of violence. By depicting the suppression of victims' voices, it connects collective ignorance to the theme of shaping history through a dominant narrative, in this instance one that sees victims as provocateurs. The play illustrates the relationship between subjectively conditioned ways of seeing, describing, remembering, and reporting events, and the version of events that is considered to be true. As a result, it depicts and exposes the mechanisms of Foucault's power of discourse.

Jolanta Janiczak was inspired by Barbara Zdunk, who is widely regarded as the last person burned at the stake in Europe. However, the play is not documentary but – characteristically of Janiczak's and Rubin's earlier work – counter-historical. Put together on the eve of the pandemic at the Fredro Theater (the lockdown delayed its opening by more than three months), the play deconstructs the narrative of a witch burned in 1811 in Rößel (now Reszel), Ermland. The creators remind us that at the root of the now-trivialized story, which is used as a local tourist attraction, there lies a real human tragedy. By processing extant information and filling the gaps with excerpts from research papers providing a psychological perspective to

explain certain behaviors, they craft an alternative version of the story while remaining true to their own ethical and aesthetic principles. Like feminist theater (for example, Agnieszka Błońska's *Devils* at Warsaw's Teatr Powszechny), they combine the themes of demonic possession and female sexuality. The difference is that Rubin and Janiczak do not intend to inspire a moral revolution, but to stigmatize violence by revealing how it is distributed.

Accused of practicing witchcraft and of starting a fire to take revenge on her lover, Barbara spent four years in a prison cell. After countless rapes and many pregnancies, defamed, humiliated, and tortured, the shepherdess was put to the stake. The stage play starts after her death by her father (Roland Nowak), who seeks to reconstruct the events, guided by the principles of enlightened reason. He allows no ambiguity, uncertainty, or hesitation. Like a typical member of Poland's current justice system, he examines all the circumstances of the case, trying to catch his daughter in a lie. He repeatedly asks questions about details. Trying to ascertain how it all started, Barbara's father learns that when she was a girl, Barbara was raped by her uncle and later sexually abused by many other men. Her words are not enough for him, though. He keeps asking the same questions. Seeking to recreate all the circumstances of the case in detail, he initiates new scenes. Sporting white neckbands, he is his daughter's judge, prosecutor, and defense counsel. As soon as Barbara appears to be the victim, he rejects the presumption of innocence and obliges her to explain herself. He demands convincing arguments: detailed descriptions, physical evidence, photos, and witnesses. But what Barbara remembers best are not the faces, outfits, names, times and places, but the fact she was counting in her head while she was being raped. She got to 228, 300, 400, and then she said a prayer – a litany. Does the victim have to remember every detail of the traumatic

event? Does she lose the right to oust bad memories and replace them with dreams of love and happiness? In these dreams she sees the cheerful Farmhand (Paweł Dobek), always accompanied by a cheerful tune (Krzysztof Kaliski's memorable unorthodox leitmotiv), the man she would like to share her future with.

What the characters do and say on stage is akin to a crime-scene inspection attended by the defendant; her father and re-enactors who follow the defendant's instructions and repeat her words. The detached acting of the non-professional actors – the theater's technical team (Sławomir Grajek, Maciej Sadowski, Bogdan Stachowiak, Marcin Wojciak) – imparts an aesthetic starkness to the show and stresses the constructed aspect of truth. The participants of the reenacted events are – like the factual evidence collected by the defendant's father – the pieces of the puzzle that he tries to fit together. The projected live footage streamed from cameras suspended above the stage shows a collection of objects on a glass table. From time to time, among these objects, we observe bodies, the living carriers of memories, feelings and emotions reduced to the role of just another objectified piece of evidence. Can the "intellectual" male gaze, conditioned by its habits, provide an objective description of the fate of the defendant who proves to be the victim? The pressure of harmful stereotypes has curtailed women's self-belief for centuries, limiting their independence and resistance, and making them more susceptible to violence, which is thus reinforced in a feedback loop. Rubin and Janiczak's production explores this mechanism in action as suggested by Barbara's father, the narrator, in the prologue: "Tonight I will invoke the findings of an experiment designed to provide insight into the loss of self-preservation instinct in women."

The red cloak in which Barbara appears on stage is a nod to psychoanalytic

readings of the story of Red Riding Hood. In them, a girl – out of curiosity inspired by her newly discovered sexuality – risks being "devoured" by a wolf who has designs on her virginity. The hood stands for the character's budding femininity that, in keeping with some cultural schemata, is linked not only to frailty but also to promiscuity and infidelity. In Bruno Bettelheim's approach, the red color symbolizes violent, sexual emotions. The red cap the girl receives from her grandmother signifies the premature transformation of a child into a person who cannot cope with her new, sexual abilities. The perspective sketched in the play transcends the limits of youthful innocence. Through masturbation, which a child can use as a lifejacket against anxiety, Barbara discovers her desires that – as she matures – morph into the desire for erotic intimacy. The red cloak then gives way to red boots in which Barbara steps into independent life. The boots, which once belonged to the girl's mother, represent not only sexual maturity but also appeal to men who are keen to exploit her without asking permission.

Barbara's daughters (Kamila Banasiak, Martyna Rozwadowska, Joanna Żurawska) add some details to her story. Even though they all look very much alike, each provides a different point of view, broadening the overall perspective. The first admits she misses the bonds that tied their family together, attributing their disintegration to a hormonal imbalance caused by hunger. The second is ready to seek revenge on her mother's rapists, especially the one likely to be her father. The third constructs a demonic legend, confabulating about her mother's supernatural powers that allegedly come from Satan, who visits her in the form of a goat. There is only one person who can act as a witness for the defense – Barbara's brother – but he is not entirely guilt-free either. The emotional vulnerability of this character is perfectly captured by Michał Karczewski, who subtly sketches his

ambiguous sexuality. He brings to mind other supporting characters in Rubin and Janiczak's work (Chancellor Dawid Żłobiński in *Caryca Katarzyna* or Esquirol Michał Pesta in *Żony stanu…*). The inquisitive father, even if he keeps up the façade of neutrality and objectivity, comes down on the side of the oppressors. Meanwhile, the carefree Farmhand who, whenever he enters the stage, provides a lightening of the mood and brings on a cheerful tune, seems to be a character from a different world, one imagined by Barbara. The whole cast is presented with rather challenging tasks. Karolina Staniec (Barbara, guest appearance) gives a show of determination and acting skills in her brilliant portrayal of the multihued, ambiguous character of the defendant and victim. She plays a lost woman bewildered by her sexuality but able to dream, broken by violence from which she escapes into a world of numbers and religious formulas but hiding her dramatic experiences behind a cavalier tone. At times she is detached and at times present with full awareness and corporality.

No One's Gonna Believe Me Anyway spotlights the feedback loop of violence and the loss of credibility of its victims, which leads to further violence. The creators examine the far-reaching effects of traditional social hierarchies, which open up space for abuse and exploitation of those occupying the lower rungs of the ladder. Rubin and Janiczak make no secret of their point of view. They don't try to equate the actions of the executioner with those of the victim, but manage to avoid one-dimensionality in creating the stage world and steer clear of the dangers of a formulaic portrayal of attitudes. Although they pile up levels of fiction by reconstructing a succession of events, the show packs an emotional punch. *No One's Gonna Believe Me Anyway* is not only the title of the play but also a recurring declaration of Barbara's beliefs, a woman who is sure that her words will make no difference. She knows that her voice, like those of many other women, will

not be heard.

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Autor/ka

Piotr Dobrowolski – Professor in The Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland.

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Who Let the “Lady Of Pestilence” in?

Magda Piekarska

Teatr Dramatyczny im. Jerzego Szaniawskiego, Wałbrzych

Lady of Pestilence (*Pani Moru*)

written and directed by Sebastian Majewski; choreography by Wojciech Marek Kozak

premiered on September 4th, 2020

The Jerzy Szaniawski Dramatic Theater in Wałbrzych opens the season with a play built on one of the most basic building blocks of theater – language. Visually, *Lady of Pestilence* (*PaniMoru*) is conspicuously sparse. To greet the new world emerging out of a disaster, Sebastian Majewski has penned a brusque, dissonant, and chafing fairy tale that holds up a broken mirror to the world.

When the pandemic hit, Szaniawski found his own way of responding to it; it was one very much unlike uploading a series of recorded shows to the Internet. This, of course, does not mean that he had no online presence, which seems an absolute must these days. As part of a project called *Szaniawski in Slippers* (*Szaniawski w kapciach*), his actors streamed from

their homes, some of them delivering self-authored World Theater Day messages. Reviewers and directors, on the other hand, discussed eagerly awaited productions that had failed to materialize due to the pandemic. What these efforts had in common was a focus on maintaining links with audiences and reminding them that, lockdown or not, theaters were still working, albeit in a limited fashion. When preparing for the premiere of *Lady of Pestilence*, Szaniawski posted a series of conversations with directors whose work was interrupted by the pandemic and with managers of other Wałbrzych-based arts outfits. Meanwhile, the actors fielded questions from theater critics, those who were to tread the boards of Wałbrzych theaters in the new season spoke about their hopes, while everyone involved in the project recorded the sounds of the pandemic in their homes, gardens, in the woods and meadows. These preparations and Szaniawski's earlier project, the online play *Field 150 sq.m.* (*Pole 150 mkw*), which opened in May and included his actors' pandemic-era monologues, could lead to the expectation of another self-referential story. Is *Lady of Pestilence* such a tale? If it is, its self-referential aspect is not straightforward. What is more, theatrical self-referentiality is just one part of the story.

Arguably, the creators did not intend to enchant audiences with anything other than words and the actors' interpretation of them. The lights are purely technical, illuminating the entire stage without splitting it into sections, and the actors can see us– masked, spaced out around the auditorium – as clearly as we can see them. This deliberate oddity is reflected in what is seen from the stage – only half the seats are occupied, and this was the case even during the first performance. On top of that, the actors can hardly read the emotions on the masked faces of the audience. Even the applause is muted as if the empty spaces between audience members disrupted the flow of energy. Something's happened; the world,

including the theater, has slipped out of its frame – this is clear for everyone on stage and in the audience.

The process of getting into make-up and costume has been moved to the back of the stage – the actors tear and cut white paper into pieces and tape them together into costumes, and they paint their cheeks red to signal health or fever. Before our eyes, they turn into Harlequins and Colombines in a semi-throwback to *commedia dell'arte*, but they are somehow imperfect, underdressed, and under-made-up. The impression of austerity is heightened by the absence of music; the only exception being a snippet of a minuet sung *a capella* by the actors. One element evading the rule of ostensible improvisation in the "DIY theater" mode is the "screen" suspended above the stage on which scraps of paper are arranged into words. This is a window leading outward, outside the performance space, where the combinations of words form a dry, headline-worthy chronicle of the pandemic, including its impact on theatre: First Infection in Wuhan, First Theories of Virus Origin, Social Isolation Begins in Poland, Weronika Szczawińska's World Theater Day Message, Vaccine Research Funding, Polish Government's Emergency Measures, Edyta Górniak's Theories. But before the performance really gets off the ground, the key message of its form is "this is the future of theater, get ready for it." We will have to tighten our belt and – for the sake of survival – shed the ornaments. Instead, we rely on fundamentals, the very essence of art, without which it would have no *raison d'être*. Paring things down is the order of the day.

So much for form, but what about content? The play is set in a kingdom ruled by a royal couple (Irena Sierakowska and Piotr Mokrzycki), where life is so good that you can let go of all worries, including concerns about the world's future, and dedicate yourself to coining new words. One day this

exercise proves to be dangerous, though. The words take on a life of their own and chaos descends on the kingdom. This is what happens to the word “virus,” which emerges our of the royal alchemist’s (Ryszard Węgrzyn) alembics and, once released, conjures other perilous notions such as “infection,” “outbreak,” “pandemic,” “soap,” “mask,” “regime,” “the web,” “zoom,” “online.” This glossary of the pandemic must be expanded to include new definitions: “remote work,” which designates a new slavery, “shield”– a new currency, “mail”– ballot boxes, and “flattening,” referring to a new branch of mechanics. And there are also creepy words such as “hoi polloi” and “social exclusion.” The thing is that the term “democracy,” which had been vitally important until very recently, has just ceased to exist, so there is nothing to fall back on.

The words multiply like viruses and their pandemic will soon be ubiquitous. The trouble is that the kingdom has no doctors (or everybody ignores them), so the President of the Web (Michał Kosela) is elevated to be the sole authority on the nation’s health. He gives a host of contradictory diagnoses, each of which gains an instant following. While conspiracy theories abound, the theater stage, where artists would be able to say something sensible about the virus, is shut down, covered with soil and sown with seed. Given all this, a disaster seems imminent.

Lady of Pestilence (the theatre’s stage manager Anna Solarek) utters only a few dozen words in the show. Most of the time she saunters around the stage in silence or paints decorations on the characters’ paper outfits. She doesn’t speak until the finale when she declares that she never arrives uninvited. Who’s invited her? In Majewski’s production, it is society itself that leaves the door ajar to the epidemic. Its members are lazy, indolent, desensitized by comfortable living and indifferent to the world’s crises.

When everything people need is provided, nobody worries about the problems of mis-sold Swiss franc mortgages, the quality of democracy, or the deteriorating climate. Idleness cracks open the door to galloping stupidity, making us susceptible to conspiracy theories. We start to believe that the virus, the crazy "Miley Cyrus," is a big scam engineered to enable Bill Gates to enslave us with mind-control chips injected with the vaccine, and some people (quite a few, actually) react aggressively when asked to mask up in public. The pandemic has undermined the world as we know it, but we prefer to hang on to it tightly rather than make an effort to steer our minds onto new paths.

Majewski's use of the fairytale genre has significant ramifications for the dramaturgy of the show. The characters not so much play their respective parts but form a choir of storytellers, with soloists emerging from time to time. They are all there: the King, the Queen, the Alchemist, the Jester, the Multimillionaire, and the President of the Web, but monologues are rare. Rather, the characters juggle the narrative between each other, bouncing it off one another like a tennis ball. The actors do not engage in interactions to reveal the feelings and emotions of their characters but recount the successive chapters of a fairy tale. This creates detachment, which is only intensified by the dominant third-person narrative. The fairytale characters and the visual form of "imperfect" *commedia dell'arte* places the story in "quotation marks," automatically turning it, as it were, into a metaphor. Given the duration of the show (a mere hour), the metaphor is surprisingly capacious as *Lady of Pestilence* is a reflection of a whole spectrum of aspects of the pandemic: the political entanglement of the battle against the virus, the deepening of social divisions due to the pandemic, and the notion of post-truth, which predates the epidemic but has been injected new life in recent months. *Lady of Pestilence* is a parable about manipulation of power and a

lost society, and a theater that must be laboriously rebuilt from scratch. A challenging, dissonant fairy tale, the play may not leave you euphoric but will linger in your mind for a long while, nagging like a pebble in your shoe.

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Autor/ka

Magda Piekarska – journalist, reviewer, together with Grzegorz Chojnowski she hosts a programme about theatre on Radio Wroclaw Culture, publishes in *Dialog*, portal teatralny.pl, *Wysokie Obcasy Extra*.

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Inside Virtual Rooms

Katarzyna Lemańska

Balladyna

by Juliusz Słowacki

produced, adapted and directed by Oskar Sadowski; music by Baasch; editing by Adrien Cognac and Wojciech Kaniewski; animations by Sebulec, Pavlo Mazur; additional dramaturgy by Monika Winiarska; co-produced by As Media, Agnieszka Sznajder-Leśniak; sound engineering by Kuba Sosulski.

premiered online on May 28th, 2020, on VOD player.pl

In March 2020 in the midst of social isolation, Oskar Sadowski suggested to his friends that they read *Balladyna* in a group video chat. The reading sparked the idea of making what the creators call a "virtual video-based show" (*wirtualny wideospektakl*) as an alternative to streaming pre-recorded performances. As a result, *Balladyna* was made entirely online with the aid of video conferencing tools. The motto of the show, which is available on VOD player.pl, are the words from the Prologue to Juliusz Słowacki's play: "That we know how to fly to visit each other in thoughts is a gift from God."

With theaters shut down across Poland, actors have produced many projects

from home with online audiences in mind. Two such shows, assembled from cell phone recordings, were pilgrim/majewski's *Field150 sq.m.* (*Pole 150m2*) directed by Seb Majewski at the Dramatic Theater in Wałbrzych and *The New Decameron* helmed by Jacek Głomb at the Modjeska Theater in Legnica. The novelty of Sadowski's project lies in its juxtaposition of insight into the private life of actors in isolation – a metatheatrical mode of accessing theater online – and the play's rather unorthodox form. The screen is split into windows in which we see individual actors in a gallery view. The actors play scenes that they recorded themselves and were later edited using social media effects by Adrien Cognac and Wojciech Kaniewski. A case in point is the nymphs Chochlik and Skierka (Rozalia Mierzicka and Karolina Staniec), who appear in chat windows modified with filters, masks, and emojis. The artists recorded their scenes with cell phones in private spaces, when driving, and in a number of outdoor locations. Katarzyna Figura (Goplana) is seen on the shore of the Baltic Sea and in an unfinished loft, Sandra Korzeniak (Widow) appears in the countryside in a wooden mountain cottage, Marta Zięba and Maja Pankiewicz (Balladyna and Alina) pick raspberries in the woods. The camerawork, which follows Sadowski's ideas, is consistent throughout, which helps achieve the enticing effect of film polyphony and simultaneity. The actors gaze directly at their phone screens, some of them holding their cameras very close to their faces; the intensity resulting from looking into the camera and the direct contact with the audience help establish the online audience as an equal partner. To make it possible to combine many scenes in one master shot, the performers delivered their lines while listening via headphones to the audio track of the video that Sadowski edited from footage of a rehearsal involving all actors, which included cues and director's comments. There are no cuts within the scenes, which adds tension to the dialogue. This is clear in the second act

when Zięba performs three scenes – raspberry picking, Alina's murder, and conversations with Goplana impersonating Alina – in one master shot.

Unlike *Homemade*, Netflix's anthology of short films, and HBO Europe's *At Home*, *Balladyna* is not intended to share a personal experience of forced confinement. However, the work was, in a way, self-therapeutic – the actors had the chance to engage in artistic work when no theater or film jobs were available (Sandra Korzeniak admits, "I was beset by all sorts of demons, severe crises. I was moping around the house"). Sadowski's *Balladyna* centers on the theme of loneliness, both interpersonal and artistic. The show begins with an off-stage reading of an excerpt from the Prologue addressed by Słowacki to another poet, Zygmunt Krasiński. The parable of the old, blind and lonely harpist who mistakes the rumble of surf for a crowd of listeners ("So he leaned on his harp and sang to the deserted seashore: and when he finished, he wondered why there was no human voice, no sigh, why the song earned no applause") at once places us in the current context of pandemic isolation and presents a vision of a future where actors perform without a live audience. Though Sadowski insists that the play is not a "Covid work," he adds the following sentence to the original text: "Come, I'll take you to the theater." These words are spoken by the Hermit, the exiled King Popiel III, who is voiced by the director. In Sadowski's work, the Hermit becomes an animated avatar, the Golden Elephant, who receives the protagonists in a virtual theater rather than in his hermitage (animations by Sebulec).

The show's premiere on a streaming platform was designed as a community experience. All audience members watched the play together ("You will be part of a remote Audience scattered all over Poland who will experience something utterly new together!") and the performance was followed by a

Q&A session with the creators. Once the show ended, the director prompted the actors to bow despite the absence of applause. With this simple gesture, Sadowski gave a nod to the story of the lonely harpist in Słowacki's *Prologue*.

Social isolation also affects Słowacki's characters. They are lost in the virtual world and desperately look for meaning. There is poignancy in the scenes where the characters fail to find common ground and feel lost in technologically mediated relationships. One such scene takes place at a virtual party in a castle, where each guest appears in a separate chat window, and all break into dance to Beverly Craven's *Promise Me*.

The absence of physical contact is heightened in the scene where Balladyna and Kostryn make love, and at the moment of Alina's murder when one feels that the actresses (seen in different windows) are about to come together in the same space. The corporal aspect of sex and murder brings home the agonizing impossibility of physical contact. Touch becomes a divine attribute – it appears only between the naked, entwined bodies of Paweł Smagała and Sonia Roszczuk as they play out the allegory of Love. Strikingly, the show incorporates motifs from an online game, *World War 3*, which depicts a fictional armed conflict. From a gamer's perspective, the audience watches a battle contested by Kirkor (Marcin Kowalczyk) and Kostryn (Jan Dravnel) in a contemporary Warsaw, including opposite the Palace of Culture and Science. The game adds additional levels of reception: the audience gain insight into a gamer's experience, *World War 3* presents the plot of Słowacki's play, and the battle is a virtual experience for the characters in the created world rather than the real one. In the context of the pandemic, the loneliness of social isolation that the play explores documents the time – *Balladyna* premiered in the last week of isolation but the problem of human

alienation in the virtual world remains relevant.

Sadowski offers a psychological reading of the character of Balladyna. He wonders when evil took root in the protagonist's mind and how Balladyna's relationship with her oppressive, possessive mother factored into this. The Widow, played by Sandra Korzeniak, is Balladyna's recollection, which the audience doesn't find out until the Widow's trial scene when her daughter, played by Gaia Dravnel, spontaneously interrupts one of Korzeniak's lines. This is the most powerful scene, where the line between the character and the actress's private life becomes blurred. The girl tries to pull her mother away from the phone, reminding her she had been promised fun. This scene, added by the director, is a flashback where Korzeniak's daughter becomes a young Balladyna. The actions of the protagonist, portrayed by Marta Zięba, are determined not only by her childhood experience but also by the fact that she's going to be a mother herself – by the time the action starts, she is already pregnant by Grabiec (Maciej Grubich). Both Korzeniak and Zięba create in-depth portrayals of their characters, which, combined with the experimental montage, provides the center of gravity for the show.

Even though *Balladyna* explores a new online experience, its vision of digital performance is strongly undergirded by the 19th-century theater. A camp aesthetic dominates; Balladyna and Kirkor are enclosed in richly decorated golden frames redolent of both historic paintings and a proscenium arch. Each act starts with the raising of a "painted" animated curtain that features Konrad Żukowski's erotic paintings populated with skeletons, human bodies, and fantastic animals. This serves to underscore the illusory nature of theater and the division into stage and audience. Another impressive aspect is the cast of more than twenty performers including theater actors from all over Poland (supporting parts are played by the likes of Jacek Poniedziałek,

Bartosz Gelner, Dominika Biernat, Julian Świeżewski, Magdalena Celmer, Bartosz Ostrowski) and top models, Dominik Sadoch and Ola Rudnicka. Plus, there are extras who serve as Kostryn's queer army lined up in the messenger's gallery view are bare-chested young men. Subtly emphasized, the theme of visibility of queer people seems to be the director's personal commentary on today's Poland.

Sadowski's *Balladyna* is marked by visual excess, flashy animations, camp aesthetics, its unmasking of artificial and theatrical, and conscious use of language, styles, and social media tools. The music, composed by Baasch, reflects the eclectic nature of the show, blending rave-inspired music with electronic and other sounds so the pieces reflect the characters' moods. These span from unease, fear, and loneliness to indignation. They also inject a great deal of humor. The focus of the production, which is a formal experiment, is not so much on interpreting Słowacki's drama (though one should note the innovative take on Balladyna's relationship with her mother) as on the metatheatrical reception of "virtual theater." This does not pretend to be able to fully compensate both the actors and audiences for the absence of live engagement with the arts and other humans. Today, amid a glut of work produced as part of *Online Culture* (*Młodzi w sieci*, a program dedicated to supporting online performance work), we can also view Sadowski's "virtual video-based show" as an interesting document of the work by artists in isolation.

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Autor/ka

Katarzyna Lemańska – graduated in performance studies and editing from the Jagiellonian University. Her works have been published in “Didaskalia”, “Dialog”, and taniecPOLSKA.pl and CzasKultury.pl websites. Editorial Assistant of online research journal Performer. One of the judges of the 26th and 28th National Competition for Staging Contemporary Polish Plays.

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Privileges of the Imagination

Olga Katafiasz

Teatroteka Fest 2020 Nowe Kadry Teatru

6–8 March 2020, Warszawa

When, nearly three years ago, I wrote about the first Teatroteka (*Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*, No. 142), I looked at the language and narratives of what I then referred to as “plays/films”. I also mentioned the controversy that bubbled up in the Polish theatre and film circles over the form and generic status of the productions, including the inconsistent treatment of the plays produced by Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych [the Feature and Documentary Film Studio] by the selectors of the Dwa Teatry [Two Theatres] competition. I do not want to rehash my arguments from three years ago, so I will only repeat my conclusion that the plays have a “cinematic quality”: Teatroteka productions are the kind of shows that Polish Television Theater (Teatr Telewizji; now a shadow of its former self) would produce today.

With the festival in its fourth year, the controversy I mentioned above is now

a distant memory. Teatroteka has become a part of the Polish theatre landscape, but one can't fail to see a certain trend emerging: the first Teatroteka (2017) included 25 adaptations of Polish dramatic works, the second (2018) and third (2019) ten each, while this year there are just eight. To be sure, in 2017 we saw shows that had been produced since 2013 – the best of contemporary Polish drama. Inevitably, the editions that followed were more modest in scope, but the program of this year's Teatroteka proves, in my view, that the format is experiencing a crisis. This, perhaps, will prompt its creators to make some changes, like turning the event into a biannual affair to showcase more plays and, as a result, have more variety.

Quite understandably, the top prize of the festival went to the female creators of the production of Marta Guśniowska's *A niech to Gęś kopnie!* [Literally "may the goose kick it" which is used in a similar context like "I'll be the monkey's uncle"], directed by Joanna Zdrada – to its directors, set designers, costume designers and make-up artists. Agnieszka Przepiórska (Goose) and Arkadiusz Janiczek (Fox) took home awards for Best Lead Actress and Actor, with Łukasz Lewandowski (Narrator) recognized for Best Supporting Performance. *A niech to Gęś kopnie!* is one of three productions in this year's Teatroteka Młodego Człowieka [Young People's Teatroteka] section. The other two are Maria Wojtyszko's *Królewna Logorea* [*Princess Logorea*] directed by Justyna Łagowska, and Malina Prześluga's *Dziób w dziób* [*Beak to Beak*] directed by Magdalena Małecka-Wyppich. Teatroteka creators view them all as pioneering but, as I see it, they are just three great TV theatre shows for children – of high artistic merit but not innovative. In my book, these three plays are much more interesting than the other five, intended for adult audiences.

All the Young People's Teatroteka plays are excellently produced and full of

bravura performances. Based on Marta Guśniowska's widely produced and awarded play, *A niech to Gęś kopnie!* is the story of a poet goose who goes on a quest for the meaning of life but fails to find it. She secretly lives in a henhouse suffering from depression and poor appetite. When the chance to depart this life comes her way, she jumps at it and offers herself up for dinner to the Fox. In other words, the Goose, who thinks of herself as unloved and useless, decides to commit suicide. Apart from the meticulously built sets (the forest really resembles a forest, and the foxhole TV with an antenna brings up nostalgic memories for not-so-young audience members), I liked the brilliant make-up (Sonia Bohosiewicz looks convincing as Lady Hare) but even more, I liked the detachment of the narrative voice. The detachment is already there in the text of the play, but the director cranks it up with the camerawork, characters' directly addressing the audience and, above all, the figure of the Narrator. As in the text of the play, the Narrator acts as a guide to the story, but he becomes an oddball combination of low-budget interventionist TV show reporter and nature filmmaker who, like David Attenborough, shows us nature's beauty, this time in a slightly more complex way, more thriller-like and romantic. With the excellent turns by Przepiórska, Janiczek, Lewandowski and Krzysztof Dracz (The Wolf), the (seemingly) simple story of seeking the meaning of life is poised to enchant the young and old alike.

What do the Goose and Princess Logorea (Monika Frajczyk) have in common? They both seek their place in the world, but the king's daughter's world is limited to her father's kingdom. The princess would like to rule or, more precisely, to not be excluded from succession due to being a women. Besides, she is a bit lonely because King Honorariusz [Honorarius] (Tomasz Schimscheiner) and Queen Biżuteria [Jewellery] (Dorota Landowska) are self-absorbed and immersed in their hobbies such as sugarcraft. They try

hard to find a successor to the throne because, obviously, the princess can become at most a King's wife, not a ruling Queen. Maria Wojtyszko's *Królewna Logorea i Niedźwiedź*[*Princess Logorea and the Bear*], directed by Justyna Łagowska, delights with its unorthodox sets: the geometric, almost empty palace interiors are like a game of imagining a castle, while the individual trees a game of imagining a forest. The director and set designer (together with Natalia Horak), Łagowskadoes not choose to stage the fairy-tale world in an old-fashioned way, which seems a reasonable strategy: instead of a poor excuse for a castle (the budgets of Teatroteka's productions are modest) what we see is a sign, a suggestion. I liked the way Wojciech Suleżycki's camera moves: it captures the vast palatial spaces and small glades in a way that makes you forget they have been built on a soundstage. Plus, Łagowska gives the audience the great pleasure of watching well-known actors in unusual, fairytale roles. In addition to the already mentioned Frajczyk, Schimscheiner and Landowska, the play also features Robert Roth, Piotr Polak, Michał Majnicz, Piotr Żurawski, Sonia Roszczuk, Marta Ścisłowicz, Bartosz Porczyk, Jacek Braciak, Mateusz Łasowski and Maćko Prusak. The leads and supporting thespians turn in excellent and funny performances, and the bit roles are no different. As it happens in fairy tales, at first the princess makes a bit of a mess, which lands her in trouble – she has to go through a number of trials – but her courage and nobility help her emerge victorious. She peacefully takes over the throne so that her loved ones (including the friends she made during her dramatic adventures) can do whatever they can and like.

Łagowska's show is a good one because of its exquisite directing and acting, but also, just as importantly, because it plays with fairy-tale conventions. The creators of Young People's Teatroteka productions exploit a variety of narrative approaches, aware that modern-day fairy tales are different in

form than those even twenty years ago. I also liked the adaptation of Malina Prześluga's *Dziób w dziób* in which the director highlights the theme of the lost brother of Przemek the Sparrow (Filip Orliński). In the play's finale the protagonist recovers from a trauma he suffered in the past – he forgives himself for accidentally pushing his brother out of the nest. The pigeons in the show not only rap but also carry themselves like real hip-hop artists. They rule the roost in the small grey backyard sometimes visited by Dolores the Cat (great Marta Malikowska). Most importantly, however, they manage to get over their own mental stereotypes and overcome their birdly xenophobia.

What the creators of the 'adult' Teatroteka lack is a sense of form (or of its exhaustion). This year's five productions (Wojciech Tremiszewski's *Kasa*, dir. Filip Gieldon; Szymon Jachimek's *Matka Boska Niespodziewana*, dir. Maciej Buchwald; Karol Lemański's *O człowieku, który siedział tyłem*, dir. Maciej Wiktor; Malina Prześluga's *Pustostan*, dir. Tatjana Logojda; Waldemar Pasiński *Żona łysego*, dir. Tomasz Jeziorski) held little interest to me. Yes, Teatroteka has excellent actors, so the shows are well acted, but I felt that this year's propositions were derivative in their narrative approaches, in the use of the film medium and, finally, in their subject matter. *Kasa* [*Dosh*] is a story about a housewife (Agnieszka Skrzypczak) overwhelmed by everyday life. Her husband earns a good salary, and she fantasizes about what would happen if… Identity problems are also explored in *O człowieku, który siedział tyłem* [*The Man Who Sat with His Back Turned*] where a Millennial, Artur (Jakub Zając), swaps real life for virtual reality. *Pustostan* [*Empty Home*] shows a contemporary family in crisis, and *Matka Boska Niespodziewana* [*Our Lady of the Unexpected*] follows a teacher from Sanok (Cezary Kosiński) as he mourns the loss of his wife, with Maria (Agnieszka Podsiadlik), who claims to be Mary, mother of Jesus, helping him through his

grief. In the intimate psychological drama *Żona łysego* [*The Bald Man's Wife*], Aleksandra Konieczna and Sławomir Orzechowski portray a childless couple. The two characters are excellently defined but not fully developed – the misfortune of the woman who wanted to be a mother is drawn too sketchily during the mere 42 minutes of the play.

This year has brought us three excellent Teatroteka productions for young audiences. All in all, this offers hope that the whole festival will evolve and grow, not only its children's section. It would be unfair to criticize a long-running, really interesting project judging it by only one edition.

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Autor/ka

Olga Katafiasz – theatre and film studies researcher. Dean of the Drama Directing Department at AST. In 1995-2008 in the editorial team of *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*.
