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Affect and Experience

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Affect and Experience

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Foreword

Ryszard Nycz

Affective Studies in Poland: Probing the Field

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Among contemporary analytic cultural practices, theoretical practices (praxes), and the humanities more broadly, the field known as affect theory occupies a central, perhaps even fundamental, place. Like other theoretical orientations, this term takes its name from a key concept that serves as a guiding principle, one that not only unlocks an important dimension of our social and cultural life, but also shapes its qualities.

One cannot help but observe that this perspective tackles issues that are as old as culture and the humanities themselves, yet it does so in a manner that reorients and restructures the field of study; it generates new sub-disciplines (such as the study of emotional communities and their role in the processes that shape history and civilization) and reconfigures the positions and meanings of other key concepts in the humanities vocabulary (notably intellect, mind, experience, matter, sensuality, corporeality, etc.) in a way that invites other, hitherto unaddressed, questions – ones that can be leveled at established subjects and problems – and produces different and novel answers.

There is much to suggest that affect studies – practiced in the West for well over two decades, but a mere few years in Poland – are not a fleeting trend and have established

a lasting foothold in the humanities. It cannot be ruled out that the theory will permeate deeper into the disciplinary and methodological traditions of the humanities, and in doing so transform our perception of their subject as well as the principles and processes by which they are determined. Philosophers of culture, sociologists, psychologists, writers and artists all assert that we live in affective societies; that we form emotional communities in which social and community bonds are founded on a shared affective amalgam (a predominantly negative one, at that: consider the "culture" of profuse hatred and "flaming" on the Internet) rather than on rational choice and recognition.

It is likely for this reason that collectively expressed and articulated feelings and emotions function in a paradoxical way: they join and separate their participants, at once uniting and dividing them. They stimulate groundbreaking and unpredictable political actions and retroactively revise the collective memory of the past. They dismiss the sterile notion of the classic subject – a rational manager of himself, his relations with others and the world – and propose instead a vision of the individual with an embodied mind, one who elicits and negotiates, rather than manages, his needs, goals, and relations with others; an individual who co-creates the community he shares with the non-human world... All of this takes place within the open horizon of sensual-affective experiences. Complementing this image of a present sensitized to affective relations is technology that will provide – if it does not do so already – applications for electronic communication devices that will display the affective stances of one's interlocutor even before his or her views have been heard.

It is apparent that a similar transformation is occurring in our perception and performance of culture, in which the emphasis is shifting from the nominal and adjectival sense (that is, a product or quality that grounds it in the "objectified heritage" of human output or depicts it as a normative system of symbolic control over human activity) to its verbal aspect. The latter stresses cultivation, or a creative activity that is directed, on the one hand, at prompting growth and the unleashing of hidden capabilities, showing respect for the value of someone or something's existence, and, on the other hand, at planning and controlling development, breeding and nurturing the desired shapes of the developed forms.

The activation of this actional aspect that is central to the etymology of culture (from *cultio* and *colere*: to cultivate, nurture, shape, celebrate) alerts us to the fact that, firstly, culture is above all else that form of creative activity that breathes life into something that would not have been realized without this external and "obstetrical" (somewhat maieutical) – and at once supervisory and managerial – intervention. Unfortunately, this process is not an unambiguously positive one; its nature can be emancipatory or colonial. It is no coincidence that culture and colony (and, by extension, colonization) share their etymology; the process of cultivation contains the possibility of either encouraging the fulfillment of potential or follow-

ing pathways of development that hew to imposed cultural patterns and norms – including ones inflicted by institutions and authorities.

Secondly, the verbal, actional concept of culture demonstrates that an inherent quality of this notion of cultural production is the affective aspect, that is, an outward-facing "inclination" toward someone or something. It does not strive to dominate the object of its attention, but simply to let it be. As testified by *Słownik Warszawski* (the Polish dictionary compiled by Karłowicz, Kryński, and Niedźwiecki at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries; old dictionaries of other languages reveal comparable meanings), aside from *afekt* (affect), the Polish language in the past distinguished *afekcja* (affection: an inclination toward someone or something) from *afektacja* (affectation: excess, feigned affect). Arct's loanword dictionary (published in the interwar period) additionally provides the cognate verb *afekcjonować*: to have a liking for something, to favor. This aspect thus involves a kind of inclination toward something or someone – our "fundamental" predisposition – that is an expression of interest in that which is outside of ourselves and our attraction to the Other, encouraging in turn the growth and being of that which is other. It allows this other to exist; it allows it to be other; it makes way for the ethics of *guest-otherness*[1] – hospitality to the Other and his or her otherness – and responsibility (as Cezary Wodziński emphasizes visually in his elaboration on the idea proposed by Derrida).[2] Unfortunately, it is this latter meaning that has displaced and replaced the former in contemporary Polish – and in contemporary culture – to the detriment of the thing itself and the manner about which it is spoken.

The cultural study of affect is concerned with both (affect and affectation), but places greater emphasis on the first: the methods of articulation and representation (and arousal, influence, organization, etc.) of affects, emotions, feelings, moods, and so on, in artistic and cultural practice. Their typology remains rather unstable and is typically specified by the context or individual and inventive definition projects. One could argue that little has changed since the original endeavors were made in this field (such as the book published by Altieri fourteen years ago[3] and Deleuze's concept of affective intensity[4]).

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1 A play on the Polish word *gościnność*, hospitality, which is divided here into *gość*, guest, and *inność*, otherness. [Translator's note]

2 See Cezary Wodziński, *Odys. Esej o gościnności* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2015).

3 See Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture. An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

4 See, for example Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London, New York: Verso, 1994); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Brian Massumi, *The Politics of Affect* (Oxford: Wiley, 2015); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2004); *The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean

The list of problems "opened up" by this new theoretical dictionary is in fact much longer. To avoid a more detailed and lengthy discussion, let us mention three that are likely the most problematic: (1) are affects (in their myriad forms, modalities, and combinations) represented in texts and other cultural objects, or are they articulated by other, nonrepresentational means of expression, including *via negativa*, that is, by way of gaps, interstices, or the interference of discursive or artistic organization; (2) are affective "meanings" (like the "meanings" conveyed in images) separate modes of communication, or can they be examined within the limits of a broader understanding of the semantic values of the cultural text; (3) can the intellect–affect relationship be regarded as a binary opposition, or are we to pursue a new way of conceptualizing it; if so, what would this new approach entail? As can easily be surmised, the arguments invariably point to the latter of the two positions.

Whether the broad range of scholarship initiated by affective studies deserves to be described as yet another "turn" (a periodization label that has depreciated significantly) – or is simply the latest in a series of cultural studies "vocabularies" – is likely of little importance. What is worthy of notice, however, is that it effectively serves the same methodological purpose. If, as Bachmann-Medick observes,[5] turns are revealed by their use of conceptual vocabularies not just to identify and describe (new) objects, but as entirely new analytical categories – methodical operational procedures that alter the established ways of describing the object of study, identifying new features, dimensions, and functions of the reality being explored – then affective studies undoubtedly fulfill these requirements.

They are used not only to study new qualities (or "intensities") of contemporary culture, but also – and perhaps primarily – to reinterpret the outdated image of past humans, societies, and cultures. And, as is often the case with such attempts at revolutionary reinterpretations, they dispense rather unceremoniously with the existing body of knowledge and nuanced, multi-perspectival views on the field of study. They appear at first glance to often propose a single "affective" point

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Halley (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); *Formy aktywności umysłu. Ujęcia kognitywistyczne*. Vol. 1: *Emocje, percepcje,* świadomość, ed. Andrzej Klawiter (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008); Anne Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); *Emocje w kulturze*, ed. Małgorzata Rajtar and Justyna Straczuk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2012); *Kultura afektu – afekty w kulturze. Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym*, ed. Ryszard Nycz, Agnieszka Dauksza and Anna Łebkowska (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2015); *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2013), 1 (2014) (essays on the subject of affect).

5 Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, trans. Adam Blauhut (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).

of view, narrowly profiled toward the interpretation of a given discipline, system, artistic current, or genre, only to cast in even starker relief the cognitive benefits of this undertaking (even at the cost of presenting an incomplete or biased image). Viewed from this perspective, they can be said (for now) to be mere scholarly manifestos announcing new cognitive standpoints in the public reflection of the humanities on culture and new outlooks therein, rather than meticulous investigations, nuanced conjectures, or robust, argument-driven adjustments to the established image of culture.

On the other hand, however, these incomplete findings, scholarly probes, and analytic inquiries are gradually changing the existing cultural landscape, its perception, the nature of the theoretical and analytic practice, and the prevailing views concerning its nature. Not only do they imply the legitimacy of examining culture through its affective dimension, they also encourage the conclusion that we are now entering "affective culture," that is, a contemporary culture whose distinguishing features stem in large part from its "investment" in affective relations that determine the dominating forms of art and literature, leaving an unmistakable mark on the preferred types of attitudes and behaviors, and on the preferred institutional strategies for organizing and managing the "experience society" whose arrival was heralded long ago by Gerhard Schulze.[6]

Furthermore, upon closer examination, this "affective culture" acquires meanings that prevent it from being placed within the standard dualities of modern thought. One might say that it is located in a sort of "non-place" in the traditional vocabulary of the humanities, as it transcends the oppositions of nature and nurture, intellect and emotion, the individual and the community, the linguistic and the extra-linguistic, the semantic representation of concepts and the sensual experience… seizing a tremendously rich and diverse spectrum of affective excitements and reactions, which take the form of affects, emotions, feelings, moods… that activate in various media, forms, and genres of high ("elite") and popular culture.

This brings us to another significant aspect of affective studies, aside from its preoccupation with affective states and processes in their relationships with other human organs, senses, faculties, and predispositions: namely, the projection of affective readings (as well as the affective perception and cognition) on all sorts of objects. This can be likened to the psychological, sociological, or semiotic practice of "framing." Affective framing directs our attention, allowing us to identify the desired objects and goals, and select the appropriate strategy with which to accomplish the task… At the same time, the process of affective framing is general in nature: it involves directing our attention to an "exciting" element (phenomenon,

6 See Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1992). On this subject, see also Scott Lash, *Another Modernity. A Different Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

event, or thought), isolating it from others, intensifying it, performing a value judgment and the re-hierarchization of its qualities, and correlating it with other elements with which it forms a sort of constellational whole or figure.

In this manner, the process can describe not only techniques for organizing the emotional impact of popular or elite art, but also the broad development of new cultural texts or even theoretical discourses in the humanities, particularly at the stage of incomplete crystallization, exploration, or the search for systemic regularities among the amalgam of phenomena encountered in experience – that is, when the theory is at the stage of "practicing theory" or "theory in practice." It is also in this territory – the scholarly discourse of the humanities – that affect first operates as the Spinozian conatus: as an impulse or stimulator of attention, which then activates, profiles, and organizes cognitive processes in close ties with the environment.

The theoretical practices of new currents in the humanities (in such fields as the engaged humanities, posthumanism, and enactivism) undoubtedly make deliberate use of this affective tool in their critical explorations: they excite and direct our attention; they create perceptive–cognitive frames that structure the organization of components according to their implicit value; they activate audiences, influencing their attitudes, mentality, behavior, and actions. The discourse of these new humanities is affective in the aforementioned sense and for more fundamental reasons: it is excited and energized by its inherent affection – its inclination to act for the good of the other, an inclination that combines affective stirring with cognitive curiosity and ethical sensitivity.

I propose that this method of cognitive action – a dominant one among the procedures of inquiry employed in the new humanities – be called probing, as it is to a certain extent a unique methodical tactic. It has several distinct features that distinguish it from the standard methods associated with the humanities. Firstly, it involves studying the environment in question from within, in the field of a mutually shared experience. Secondly, it relies on the tentative, selective penetration of the problematic territory, typically through the study of specific cases. Thirdly, its preferred technique is the peculiar "plying" of objects, events, and processes with questions and experimental interventions, enabled by new conceptual vocabularies, thus eliciting and presenting hitherto imperceptible qualities of the object of study.

This issue presents a selection of essays from the field of affective studies in Poland, spanning – and probing – nearly all the disciplines and orientations within the humanities today. The texts deal with matters ranging from philosophy to the overlapping domains of the sociological and cultural, the political and psychoanalytical, the ethnographic and anthropological, and the aesthetic and theoretical. They comprise studies in the fields of literature and film, theater and gender studies, memory studies and Holocaust studies, focusing on analyses of key complex

affects, such as love, shame, and guilt, as well as on their transformations and the flows of affective "intensities," which often remain in the state of amalgamative indeterminacy.

Considering the sheer diversity of subjects and methodologies contained within this brief selection of texts, I believe they provide a decent introduction to the field of affective studies in Poland at their current stage of development. They invite the realization that affective studies tend not toward the creation of a new area or discipline of study, but rather toward a reorientation and critical reinterpretation (redefinition) of the objects, tools, methodologies, and theories of study within the humanities, both in their classic and new forms.

Translation: Arthur Barys

Essays

Agata Bielik-Robson

Love Strong as Death: Towards Another Finitude

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When, in late-modern Western culture, the belief in personal immortality begins to wane, the problem of finitude returns with the naked destructive force of the repressed. The late-modern "breaking of the vessels" indeed bears all the features of a major epochal catastrophe. The returning finitude breaks the Christian forms which, although refuted on the metaphysical level, survived in modernity as regulative ideas of cognition; their last exponent was Edmund Husserl whose whole phenomenological project still rested on the notion of an infinite "transcendental life." The newly rediscovered finitude destroys Christian conceptuality and liberates powers of negativity, which, since Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, result in a series of deaths: that of God, the cosmos, and finally, man. The "sting of death," once removed by Saint Paul, hits painfully again, by making – in Nietzsche's formulation – the desert of destruction grow ever wider. Finitude indeed delivers the final blow: it reveals the ultimate truth and damns all efforts to avoid it as futile and weak. With the truth-saying (*veri-dictive*) power of the ultimate sentence, it condemns to death all attempts to evade death. Death thus becomes the new alpha and omega, the new Real of the post-Christian world

turned into ruins: the melancholy waste-land of the Benjaminian *ponderacio dolorosa*, which transforms into one great Golgotha, the hill of the "naked skull" – as well as the entropic chaos of Blanchot's permanent disaster, the ill-starred, irreparable *désastre*.[1]

In this broken reality, it seems only natural to think about finitude in thanatic terms. Since the word "finitude" derives from *finis*, and *finis* is death, then finite life must be primordially a being-towards-death. The Heideggerian *Dasein* is the first paradigmatic realisation of this new vision in which *Endlichkeit*, newly rediscovered after a millennia of Christian repression, redefines human existence by focusing on its inevitable end. Death, the solitude of dying, and the authenticity of this terrifying *Je-Meinigkeit*, in which *Dasein* grasps itself as finite and thus finally de-fined, create the new affective horizon of late-modern philosophy. It will be now dominated by anxiety and care, *Angst und Sorge*: the negative "moods" of the subject constantly referring to its own lonely end. From this time on, the late-modern line of thought inaugurated by Heidegger will always insist on the isolated experience of authenticity as the anticipation of *Dasein*'s solitary death.

But is this the only way in which to think contingency and finitude? There is, perhaps, an alternative which works through the problem of finitude differently: not under the auspices of death, but of love. While Heideggerian philosophy links finitude to thanaticism, and thanaticism to authenticity, in which *Dasein* cares always and only about its own being, this other thought, which chooses love instead, links finitude to the care of others: to the Hebrew ideal of the intense love relation between neighbours.

New Contingency

In *Minima Moralia*, Theodor W. Adorno recommends that we look at the world from the vantage point of redemption which allows us to see it as potentially happy and satisfied, yet without sublating its finitude. A responsible use of compassionate "despair," which we feel towards the suffering of all contingent beings here and now in their unredeemed and distorted state of things, should consist in the disinterested care for their finite condition: it is precisely this caring sentiment, this "felt contact," which complements, but also motivates, our knowledge. Adorno does not call this affect explicitly "love," but this light without which the technical skill of philosophy remains blind can only be conceived as the loving affect for the fellow creatures:

1 Comp. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), and Maurice Blanchot, *Writing of the Distaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought.[2]

This messianic affectivity, in which love lends light to critical knowledge, emerges for the first time in Saint Paul. In his *First Letter to Corinthians* love appears as the perfect affect for an imperfect world. And if love alone is perfect within a created reality, it is because it has a unique capacity to anticipate the perfection of a redeemed future state of things:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13)

Both these recommendations refer to an alternative affective horizon surrounding the notion of finitude: not deadly fear, but love which grasps the finite without trying to "dishonour" it. In this non-thanatic vision, contingency appears in a different light: it is not just the negative – the miserable transience given over to the destructive power of time – but also not just the positive to be left as it is. The perfect affect for the imperfect creation contains a good dialectical tension which does not allow love to passively affirm the

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 247.

contingent existence: contingency, having no ultimate reason for being the way it is, opens itself to the possibility of transformation. At the same time, love does not condemn contingency to the shame of illegitimacy: it does not plunge it into the "dishonour" of a lesser being whose destiny is to merely pass away in the lower spheres of emanation. Its "despair" is active, not vanitative.

Love, therefore, is the affect perfectly attuned to the contingent existence which constitutes, as Freud would have it, its first object choice. Love does not look for *Grund*, the Heideggerian reason justifying contingency, but, precisely because of that, it does not treat contingency as statically given in its ontic *status quo*. Love is not a contemplative affect which orients itself towards the absolute and immutable; "it is not proud," which means that it operates horizontally, without "dishonouring" anything it encounters in the sublunary world. Unlike the Platonic Eros, which only temporarily chooses contingent beings in order to abandon them for the sublime heights, Pauline-Adornian love fully accepts creatureliness in its transient condition. The term "creatureliness" – Franz Rosenzweig's *Kreatürlichkeit* – does not appear here accidentally: love as the perfect affect maintains within the created world the satisfaction of the Creator, who himself commented on his work – *ki tov*, "and it was good." Love, therefore, is the trace of transcendence within the immanent reality: it watches over creation and attempts to "complete" it, by pushing it towards *creatio continua* here and now. The non-sublime acts of earthly messianism are the daily works of neighbourly love which, in its passion of relationality, "connects all."

This passion of relationality is the opposite of the affective position dominated by fear and anxiety. *The Song of Songs* talks about love that is as strong as death (*azeh hamavot ahavah*), which also means that love is as strong as fear. Psychoanalytically speaking, love and anxiety are the interchangeable affects which constitute two different forms of the same *libido*: the indefinite, unique, and simultaneously excessive human drive. Freud introduces his own version of the Herderian anthropological difference: while animals possess instincts with their well-defined goals and destinies, human beings possesses only drives: the pulsational *Sturm und Drang*, which does not have its orientation established *a priori* and because of that can connect with everything and nothing at the same time. When this excessive libido chooses nothing, it disperses into a halo of anxiety, a non-concrete and non-objectified fear which troubles the psyche with a notorious sense of unfulfillment and detaches her from the world of objects. The anxiety dominated psyche plunges thus into solitary depression and melancholy.

In his studies on *dementia precox*, Carl Gustav Jung analyzes anxiety as the libido which has withdrawn from the world and does not choose any object in its stead; in all cases of depressive withdrawal, *Angst* comes forward as the

affective sign of isolation and the lack of relation, which often expresses itself in the loss of speech. Unable to connect libidinally with any object, including the self, the "dement" falls into a mute stupor which makes him dead while alive.[3]

Love as the passion of relationality occupies the opposite affective pole. Its passionate will to cathect everything without "dishonouring" it (St. Paul again) orients itself towards all elements of reality which it tries to grasp in the net of intense relations. From this perspective, language itself would be the opposite of demential muteness, but also, as such, a derivative of the loving affect: the "living speech" (Rosenzweig's *lebendige Sprache*) connecting the self with all that surrounds it – the being-here of *Da-sein* with the being-there neighborhood of *Fort-sein* – appears to be the libidinal bedrock of language in which all can be bound to all. Thus, just as Gothean love "connects all," so does language. In its libidinal passion for relational binding, love, which "does not boast and is not proud," and language, which strikes up far-reaching connections between designates, would be one and the same thing.

Love strong as fear: this peculiar equivalence does not refer to the content of affect, the way it was wrongly understood by St. Augustine who, as we shall soon see, identified love with death. It refers merely to the formal – or, better, energetic – aspect of affect, where life-giving love and death-bringing fear emerge as two forms of the same human libido, its indeterminate excess. The libido constantly oscillates between fear, in which the psyche withdraws from the object–cathexes and falls into dead silence, and love, in which the psyche encounters and binds objects thanks to "living speech." The human libido, therefore, always transcends the animal link with being determined by instinctual needs: it is characterised either by a lack of relation to anything or by the passionate excess of relationality, which would like to cathect and connect everything.

Yet, the relation between love and language grows more problematic once language begins to emancipate itself from its affective source. Although love, as Rosenzweig has it, strives to "pace the orbit of the creation,"[4] it is also strictly nominalistic: it can choose its objects only "one by one" and never via general categories. Language, on the other hand, swiftly detaches itself from the concrete thing and, rather like the Platonic Eros, chooses the "icy abstraction" of general ideas, with their sublime aloofness towards anything

3 Comp. Carl Gustav Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* (London: Routledge, 1967).

4 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 235.

sensuous and concrete,[5] where the original affect which gave birth to speech, possible only between the two living singularities, dies. Love thus simultaneously gives rise to language and subverts it, by constantly "breaking the wholes" – this is how Rosenzweig puns on the kabbalistic *shevirat ka-kelim*, by turning it into *shevirat ha-kolim* – the aim of which is to once again nominalize the general abstractions and turn them back towards the contingent. The living, nominalistic, affective source of speech undermines language as an abstrct system and does not allow it to close upon itself in the hermetic realm of Platonic ideas. The living relation which "connects all" can thus never be simply identified with the linguistic structure where the connection ossifies into a systemic reference.

Love not only simultaneously creates and subverts language. The love–affect for the world also changes the perception of contingency itself, by subverting the traditional negative approach to transience, temporariness, and finitude, upheld by most orthodox religions and philosophies. Philosophy has always defined the contingent as something merely possible, that is non-necessary: it can come into existence but does not have to. *Contingentia* does not possess its sufficient reason which Leibniz regarded as the minimal condition of a being worth its name – that is, a being that is better than nothing. Hence still in Hegel, contingency as such is pure negativity close to *nihil*, which must be forged into rational necessity: the "reduction (*Abkürzung*) of all immediate content of experience"[6] is the Hegelian task of philosophy.

Yet, in the world where all contingency would be eliminated for the sake of rationally grounded necessity, love would become simply spurious and inoperative. This is why in Hegel's system, love is only a transitory stage used by the cunning of reason which strives towards its ultimate goal: freedom as necessity made conscious. Hegel makes room for love solely on the level of familial ties where it develops the first ties; later these ties will be handed over to reason which will give them the final form of systemic necessity. Thus, similarly to language, which tends to forget about its living/loving source and freezes into an abstract sublime structure, a philosophical system can also forget about love by seeing in its acts merely a camouflage for the works of reason. To attempt to recover the true meaning of contingency, therefore, equals the deconstructive attempt to recover the proper meaning of love as – to recall Saint Paul again – a perfect affect for an imperfect world, lying at the bottom of our linguistic/cognitive activity.

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5 Comp. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

6 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 11.

Active Love

To see the world from the standpoint of redemption is to wish to change the world in such a manner that it becomes as close as possible to the messianic "slight adjustment" within creaturely reality.[7] Unlike philosophy, which speaks the idiom of rational necessity and the Hegelian "reduction of contingency," messianic thought regards redemption as yet another – slight but decisive – transformation of the contingent, which does not change its ontological status. Due to this manoeuvre, contingency does not become eternal and immutable, absolute and infinite; it is still a finite transient being, yet happy and satisfied in its condition. Unlike in Hegel, therefore, contingency does not jump into the Kingdom of Necessity, but also, unlike in Giorgio Agamben, it does not remain "irreparable."[8] The truly recovered contingency is neither necessary, as in the last reckoning offered by the philosophical Owl of Minerva, nor beyond reparation, as in the Agambenian melancholy gaze.

Love precludes passivity towards which these two above approaches gravitate, despite all the differences between them. For Hegel, activity is, in fact, merely a *Schein*, an appearance which hides the truly operative rational laws of history, whereas for Agamben, contingency makes sense only as eternally "irreparable," that is, only when passively contemplated from the point of view which resigned from all messianic practice of "mending the world," in other words the exact opposite of the Adornian perspective on redemption. Yet, to see the world through the light of redemptive love means to see it as an arena of action: being which has no sufficient reason to exist is also a being which does not have its pre-established *telos*, so it can be fashioned according to love's will. Part of the redeeming force of love lies precisely in this radical c o n v e r s i o n: in turning the vice of negativity (lacking ground and justification) into a virtue of chance (a positive futuristic project of a better being). Here, contingency is neither a veil for necessity nor an object of passive contemplation, but offers itself instead as an infinite plasticity: an unfinished work still open to an ongoing *creatio continua*.

This, however, is not the plasticity of chaos, where contingency is "let loose" and abandoned to the "ontology of accident."[9] Love for the contingent world is driven by Adornian ethical "despair" which responds to the suffering and tries

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7 This term, coined by Walter Benjamin, appears in his essay on Kafka: Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 134.

8 Comp. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

9 Comp. Catherine Malabou, *Ontologie de l'accident : Essai sur la plasticité destructrice* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2009).

to prevent it. It does not see the suffering as the mysterious "irreparable" kernel of existence, but merely as a "clash" or, in Spinoza's terms, a "bad encounter": a wrong set of elements which collide instead of cooperating which could be repaired with one messianic "slight adjustment," *mit einem geringen Zurechtstellen.* This, for Adorno, is precisely the Archimedean point of support which allows one to move the whole globe, as well as the ultimate criterion of all serious thought: the suffering of the contingent being which is, just as contingency itself, never necessary. Contingent suffering, unnecessary by principle, thus opens to change, adjustment, transformation, or – simply – work.[10]

The Hegelian tradition considers work as the derivative of fear, more specifically, the fear of death. Unlike the Master, who does not fear death and looks negativity straight in the eyes, the Slave is in the grip of mortal anxiety: he is forced to work only because he fears death from the hand of the Master. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom," says Hegel, paraphrasing the sentence from the Book of Job: this is also the beginning of work and the civilisational transformation of nature.[11] In his early theological works, young Hegel still experiments with the idea of love only to abandon it at the stage of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he rejects it as a passive and ineffective sentiment. The Christian community, which he describes in "Christianity and Its Fate," realizes the Pauline ideal of love with a swiftness of a "pistol shot," and then rests on its affective laurels: instead of working, that is transforming natural reality, the Christian *Gemeinde* turns out to be satisfied and lazy in its sectarian seclusion. Lulled by the vision of advancing redemption, the members of the Christian sect do everything *hos me*, "as if," lovingly waiting for the apocalypse which will end time, while being lies there untouched as an indifferent lump of matter which only blocks the quick access to the realm of immortality. Hegel, who, in his private notes, called himself somewhat immodestly the "Aquinas of the Protestant world," cannot agree with such a triumph of passivity and holy laziness: as all Lutherans, he wants a theological justification of work.

And Hegel indeed succeeds in his endeavour, but under the aegis of a different religion which he changes as if imperceptibly, until Alexandre Kojève

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10 In *Negative Dialectics*, in the all-telling chapter "Suffering Physical," Adorno insists on maintaining the non-theoretical and non-conceptual moment of compassion as "the moving forces of dialectical thinking": "The smallest trace of senseless suffering in the empirical world belies all the identitarian philosophy that would talk us out of that suffering [...] The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different *Woe speaks: 'Go'*": Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 202-203.

11 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 117.

reveals the hidden trumps of his cunning theological game. According to Kojève, the new Hegelian religion consists in the revelation of death, since only fear of death can be the source of work: first slavish, then more and more autonomous. More and more, but never fully so. Members of Western civilisation can work only under coercion fuelled by the fear of losing their life, first because of the direct external threat coming from the Master, and subsequently because of the internalised drive towards self-preservation. The source of work, therefore, is the traumatic revelation of pure negativity: the deadly anxiety of the contingent being who knows that he is issuing inevitably into death.[12]

Yet, if we try to look differently at contingency and finitude, we also gain a new understanding of the idea of work. Perhaps, we do not even have to go beyond – or against – Hegel in order to find a theological justification for what Kierkegaard used to call "the works of love."[13] The anti-Kojèvian and more Kierkegaardian reading of Hegel was offered by Emil Fackenheim in his *Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, which discusses the Hegelian variant of Judeo-Christianity as a religion of the active transformation of the world. According to Fackenheim's interpretation of Hegel, Christianity – unlike "pagan" religions regarding reality in terms of the necessities of fate – is the first religion of radical contingency. It perceives the world not as an "iron cage" which can only be escaped by mystical contemplation, but as the Pauline "passing figure" which, precisely because of that, is infinitely malleable. For Hegel, Pauline transience/passing is merely a reverse of the radical plasticity and malleability of the contingent being which can "pass" in its figure passively, but can also be actively "trans-figured": transformed by the Spirit itself which penetrates matter and works through it from within. In Hegel's system, therefore, contingency is a necessary moment in the plan of creation: "According to Hegel's theory, contingency itself is necessary without qualifications. On account of the necessity of the Notion there must be contingency in the world."[14] Conceived as such, love, incarnated by the all-active, all-reaching, and all-penetrating Spirit (*der angreifende Geist*) has nothing in common with the simple escapist negation of the contingent realm:

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12 Comp. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the "Phenomenology of Spirit" Assembled by Raymond Queneau*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

13 Comp. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Works of Love*, trans. Edna Hong (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

14 Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 115.

> But faith by itself – the pristine faith of New Testament – only begins the confirmation. The believer who first hears the good news of the transfigured world exists in a world still untransfigured. Therefore, to begin with, he can only be in this world and not of it, negating it like Stoics and Skeptics. But the quality of his negation differs from theirs. He does not flee from the world, abandoning it to the control of untransfigured wordliness. Rather, he must dispute that control, and indeed, radically 'invert' the world with all its untransfigured values. Only when this inversion has become wholly actual will the divine confirmation of the human have penetrated the whole of the human being [...] Hegel's Christianity will be not New Testament Christianity, but rather the life of a church only initiated by New Testament faith. This life will be [...] of the modern Protestant rather than of the medieval Catholic church. Even the life of the Protestant faith will be fragmentary unless it is in creative interrelation with secular life [...] The life, death, and resurrection of Christ has initiated a process which seeks completeness until an infinite, transcendent heaven has descended to a finite, transfigured earth. (Fackenheim, 143; my emphasis)

On this reading, contingency is not being reduced to necessity, just as the immediate living concreteness is not to be sublated into "icy abstraction" of the ideal concept. On the contrary, contingency itself becomes necessary *as such*: as a maleable "figure of the world" which offers itself to the continuous transfiguration, until it "paces the orbit of creation" and completes the "work of love."

Neoplatonic Ero-Thanatos

It does not really matter here which of these two interpretations – the death-oriented one offered by Kojève or the love-oriented one offered by Fackenheim – is truer to the spirit of Hegel's system. What matters is the conceptual nexus which emerges with the latter, Judeo-Christian, reading: active love – *agape/ahavah* – aiming at the radical transfiguration of contingency which for the first time finds fully positive theological justification. What also matters is that this nexus locates itself on the opposite pole to Greek heritage whose main concepts depart from the ambivalent affinity between Eros and Thanatos.

The thinkers who first pointed to this difference were Denis de Rougemont in his *Love in the Western World*, but also, quite independently, Hannah Arendt in her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine, written a decade earlier,

in the 1920s. Just as de Rougemont criticizes Plato from the Christian/Pauline position, Arendt objects to the Neoplatonic framework of Augustinian Christianity, while evoking the alternative, Hebrew, version of love, which cannot be accommodated into the Ero-Thanatic mode of Plato's theory of sublimation. Both share the opinion that such love is, in fact, merely a T h a n a t o s i n d i s g u i s e: a thinly masked death drive which invalidates the finite dimension of our worldly existence, making no room for the love of the other as the concrete living singularity.

According to de Rougemont, the Western world cannot be understood without a thorough analysis of the concept of love. But also, because love is here the key concept, it is almost impossible to define. The word "love" comprehends the vast plethora of phenomena which seemingly have nothing in common: from the simplest carnal desire (*libido*), through sublimated forms of romantic love (*eros*), up to the disinterested neighbourly love which Christianity decided to turn into the main social tie (*agape*). For de Rougemont, a self-professed Catholic, it is the latter form of love which is most precious and worth preserving and, at the same time, most endangered. De Rougemont perceives the greatest danger to the notion of *agape/ahavah* in the increasing domination of *eros*: the sublimatory kind of passion which Western culture has dubbed as romantic love.

According to de Rougemont, romantic love, which favours "affective misfortune," did not emerge only in Romanticism, but much earlier: in the era of the "waning Middle Ages" (to use Johan Huizinga's title), when the Cathar heresy spread through the south of France and the Church sent against it the new-fangled Dominican Order, with Saint Thomas on the frontline. Aquinas would soon attempt to refute the Cathar type of the Gnostic dualism, by creating the last Catholic system based on one grand premise – that being is good (*ens et bonum convertuntur*). This re-affirmation of the biblical thesis, God's *ki tov* [and it was good] was directed against the raise of the Manichean mistrust towards the world, which tended to perceive being as the creation of a lesser – or even openly evil – archon. The Manichean Cathars abhorred matter, as well as all affairs of flesh, and subordinated their extremely ascetic life to the principle of pure spirituality, which, as de Rougemont demonstrates, is nothing but the principle of "death in life," where death becomes the gate to the higher form of a non-carnal, pneumatic, but also solitary form of living:

> Eros […] requires union – that is, the complete absorption of the essence of individuals into the god. The existence of distinct individuals is considered to be due to a grievous error, and their part is to rise progressively till they are dissolved in the divine perfection. Let not a man attach himself to his fellow-creatures, for they are devoid of all excellence, and in so far

> as they are particular individuals they merely represent so many deficiencies of Being. There is no such thing as our neighbour. And the intensification of love must be at the same time a lover's *askesis*, whereby he will eventually escape out of life.[15]

Here love not only is not opposed to death (as in *The Song of Songs*), but leads straight to it: it wants death as the ultimate liberation allowing one to "escape out of life." Eros and Thanatos flow into one another, by forming a higher spiritual synthesis: "love and death, or mortal love" transforms into the "love of death" (de Rougemont, 43). It is, therefore, not Jacques Lacan who discovers the death-wish as the secret reverse of all our erotic longings: he takes it directly (and admittedly so) from the Provencal troubadours for whom "the consolation of death is the seal of the only possible marriage that Eros was ever able to wish for" (191). De Rougemont, who together with Lacan attended the celebrated Hegelian lectures of Alexandre Kojève in Paris in the 1930s, indeed anticipates the later Lacanian thanatic inversion of desire: according to his analysis, "the language of passion can be accounted for on the view that mind comes before matter because it expresses, not the triumph of nature over mind, but an encroachment of mind over instinct" (167). His findings also perfectly coincide with Kojève's thanatic reading of Hegel who, due to this manouevre, becomes inscribed into the Gnostic lineage of pure spirituality which can always encroach over matter thanks to the absolute power of death: "Suffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and self-awareness are in league [...] On this alliance Hegel was able to build his general theory of mind and history" (51).

Unlike Kojève and Lacan, however, De Rougemont sides with St. Thomas (the original Aquinas of the Catholic world) and his emphatic "affirmation of existence," deeply convinced that the conflict with the Catharist form of spirituality is far from finished or solved. Once liberated, the Gnostic spirit of negation is to stay and prepare the coming of the new Ero-Thanatic era of modernity – even if all the cities of Albi have been reduced to the ground and all Cathar heretics have been burnt on stakes. It is to stay true above all to the form of romantic love which begins as Provencal courtly love for *la belle dame sans merci*.

This is not a love for any concrete living human being with whom one would like to spend their real life here and now. It is rather a love for a derealised, disembodied, and dehumanised absolute which becomes purified of all signs of life and thus transforms into an immaculate representation

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15 Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1940), 65-66 [my emphasis].

of death. To love the idealised *la belle dame sans merci* from Chretien de Troyes's poems means to desire death by a slightly roundabout route: to court Thanatos itself, only thinly disguised as Eros. As de Rougemont says about *Tristan and Iseult*, the most celebrated Breton romance, which till nowadays remains a paradigm of highest romantic transports, the love that unites the heroes is, in fact, "a passion for the Night and triumphs in Death which transforms passion from within" (de Rougemont, 25). To love this way means to love death, negation, and self-destruction, but it also implies the incapacity to endure life with all its inevitable imperfection, contingency, and frustration. Romantic love, which, in the conditions of early modernity, reiterates the Manichean irreconcilability with being, demands absolute perfection and reorients the desiring gaze towards the non-existent: the original Night of nothingness, which remains unsullied by the impurities of life.

Therefore, "the most beautiful is the object which does not exist." This saying of Zbigniew Herbert, opening his *Study of the Object*,[16] derives directly from the Gnostic lore of absolute negation, which de Rougemont tried to refute. No wonder that Herbert's verse did not find acceptance in the eyes of Czesław Miłosz who, himself a Catholic and advocate of the Thomist affirmation of being, scolded Herbert for paying lip service to "this scoundrel, Mallarmé," the poet whom Miłosz regarded as the literary epitome of the Gnostic type of nihilism.[17] Just like de Rougemont, Miłosz believes that there is nothing more dangerous existentially than love for "the beauty which does not exist" and that such form of the romantic Eros, merely thinly masking the destructive impulses of Thanatos, leads us away from the necessary recognition of our contingency and finitude. In its longing for the impossible and unattainable, paradigmatically represented by the cold and impersonal *belle dame sans merci* from Provencal poetry, the romantic Eros is nothing but a disdain for the inner-worldly; it is thus the very opposite of Pauline love which is patient and kind; "bears all things, believes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:1–13). Agape loves by affirming the finite and the frail; it keeps close to the non-ideal finitude, convinced that one can only love what is marked by imperfection. The romantic Eros, on the other hand, does not bear and endure anything in its impatient longing to get out of the earthly condition crowded with the noisy multitude of beings into the Herbertian "uncreated world" where "no one is admitted." It accepts nothing, while making this very *nothing* a secret

16 Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems, 1956-1998*, trans. Alissa Valles (New York: Ecco, 2008).

17 Miłosz's anti-Manicheanism, underlined with an implicit fascination for the dualistic Gnosis, is an obsessively constant feature of his writings. See most of all his assault on Samuel Beckett, parallel to his attack on Mallarmé, in *The Land of Ulro*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

object of its passion; it detaches itself easily from any concrete object in order to seek mystical transport and annihilation in the sublime infinite.

Having criticised Neoplatonic Ero-Thanatos, de Rougemont leans towards this different – Pauline – affect: love for contingency, capable of an "active affirmation of being,"[18] not despite but because of its finitude. The part devoted to Pauline *agape* bears the characteristic title: "Beyond Tragedy" – that is, beyond the influence of the Greek topos of thanaticism. And, had he not inscribed Hegel into the Gnostic lineage before, his own positive proposition would have sounded in perfect accordance with Fackenheim's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> There is a new happiness beyond tragedy. A happiness which reminds of the old one, but it does not belong to the figure of the world, because it transfigures the world. (Ibid., 321)

This new promised happiness, however, which would allow the contingent being to feel satisfied in its finite condition, is now hard to be found. For de Rougemont, the crisis of the Western world consists precisely in the demise of the capability to love others/neighbours caused by the repression of *agape*, gradually replaced by the affected cult of Neoplatonic–Romantic Eros–Thanatos, which negates the finite by longing for the infinite. And although himself a devout Christian, Rougemont frankly admits that Christianity is not without fault here. For it is Christianity after all, which gave every individual a faith in her personal immortality and thus promised a "true life" beyond "this life," no longer limited and exposed to the dangers of finitude. The Christian desire, therefore, *nolens volens* bears a strong similarity to the Neoplatonic–Romantic Eros, just as the post-Christian desire which, modeling itself after romantic love, craves for the nocturnal "object which does not exist." They all lack attachment to the horizontal dimension of life inhabited by real others and both share an excessive passion for the vertical dimension of escape which Neoplatonic writers call *regressio*: away from this world and back to the pleromatic union with the Infinite, which knows no difference and no harm.[19]

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18 De Rougemont, *Love*, 268.

19 See, for instance, Bernard de Clairvaux, commenting on *The Song of Songs* in "On Loving God," *in Bernard of Clairvaux. Selected Works,* trans. Gillian R. Evans (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 205: on man's journey towards the mystical union with God "every need of the flesh will vanish and fleshly love will be absorbed in the love of the spirit, and the weak human affections we have now will be changed into divine affections." Whereas, as de Rougemont rightly says, "*agape*, on the contrary, is not directed to a union that can only occur after life is over," de Rougemont, *Love*, 66.

Good Enough Love

The issue of affective attachment to the world is the main tenet of Hannah Arendt's doctoral thesis, *Augustins Liebesbegriff*. Anticipating de Rougemont's critique, according to which the Western world has lost the faculty of *agape*, Arendt emphasizes the crucial moment in this process: the non-acceptance of finitude. She demonstrates this epochal change on the example of Saint Augustine. Caught in the terminological net of Neoplatonic thought, which defines love as a craving for the Infinite (*appetitus*), Augustine inevitably runs into trouble with his account of neighbourly love (*caritas*). For him, "life on earth is a living death, *mors vitalis*, or *vita mortalis*. It is altogether determined by death; indeed it is more properly called death."[20] "The fearlessness is what love seeks" (Arendt, 11), which means that "the good, which can be understood only as a correlative to love defined as craving and which is unobtainable for mortal life, is projected into an absolute present commencing after death" (13). The final goal of love, therefore, lies beyond the world: "The 'good' of which man is deprived and which he therefore desires is life without death and without loss" (30).

Just like de Rougemont, Arendt contrasts Augustine's *Liebesbegrieff* with Saint Paul's concept of love by claiming that in the latter, "love is by no means a desire that stands in need of fulfillment" for "*caritas* contains its own reward" (31). This love never fails for it is perfect and finished, even as finite, and it will not change in the future world; as already accomplished, it is the sure messianic sign of the new coming community which will be run by love only. Moreover, Arendt continues, Pauline love does not depend on the Greek preconception of being that can only truly be when it is infinite and eternal. For Paul, the world that passes and all its transient parts *do* exist, for they are created as such – temporal and transient – by their Maker. It is not an internal quality of being, which determines "true being," but its source or its status as creatureliness; though transient, nondurable, and passing, a creature nonetheless *exists*, precisely as a *creature* is given (if not the "eternal gift of life") at least a certain lifespan. Creatureliness, therefore, is not a nihilized world of becoming in the Platonic sense of the word, since it enjoys its own fully affirmative way of existing, which is *finite being*; it is not infinity tinged with nothingness, but a separate mode of existence based on the positively conceived finitude which knows its own happiness and satisfaction.

For Augustine, however, neighbourly love is only a stage in the development of *appetitus* which, as all appetites, grows beyond the realm

20 Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11. In *The City of God* 12.21 Augustine says: "If indeed it is to be called life, when it is really a death."

of contingency and demands ultimate fulfilment in immortal life. This is why he can immediately inscribe the famous verses from *Song of Songs* – "Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is strong as Death, jealousy relentless as Sheol. The flash of it is a flash of fire, a flame of the Lord himself" – into the scheme of Neoplatonic mysticism:

> Love itself is our death to the world, and our life with God. For if it is death when the soul leaves the body, how is it not death when our love goes forth from the world? Therefore, love is as strong as death.[21]

Augustine's *Liebesbegriff* is thus wholly dependent on the thanatic structure of desire born out of fear and deprivation. In Augustine's view, love is indeed as strong as death, but only because it is essentially the same power, capable of taking the human soul *out* of this world. Arendt, inspired by Paul, understands this conclusion differently: not as the reaffirmation of the deep affinity between Eros and Thanatos, but as the opposition which points to the equal power of both adversaries. Since ben Akiva, one of the Talmudic founding fathers, insisted on introducing *Shir ha-shirim* into the canon of the Hebrew Bible, this erotic poem served as an allegory of the passionate elective love between God and his people, which then was taken over by the Church Fathers who reinterpreted this allegoric love in Neoplatonic mystical terms (as in Augustine). Yet, for the Jews, who remained mistrustful of mystical transports (Arendt included), the *Song* has always been a canvas for the meditation on neighbourly and creaturely love: the love which does not seek God but orients itself towards all neighbours/creatures who happen to be next to one.

Without love, all those neighbours/creatures – the multitude of contingent beings who just happen to spring into existence next to us – would indeed be "like those who go down to the pit" (Psalms, 28) or like the Paulian "clanging cymbals," that is, nothing but automata briefly animated by a mechanical trick. Love, however, bestows the spectacle of creaturely being with autonomous and autotelic meaning. Love's goal is not to give those creatures life after death, but to give them life before death: to offer them active and affirming light, thanks to which – as Franz Rosenzweig claims – they will be able to see their life again and say *ki tov*, "yes, it is good." Love lifts existence

21 Augustine, *Tractates on John's Gospel* 65.1; my emphasis. While commenting on this fragment, Arendt issues a great warning, which is also Rosenzweig's deep concern: "The Christian can thus love all people because each one is only *an occasion*, and that occasion can be everyone. Love proves its strength precisely in considering even the enemy and even the sinner as mere occasion for love. It is not really the neighbour who is loved in this love of neighbour – it is love itself," Arendt, *Love*, 97; my emphasis.

to the second power in which the ephemeral phenomena of the contingent being are raised to the dignity of "essences."[22] Thus, if David's Psalms are so full of fervent invocations to God who gives life, it is not because of the future possibility of life immortal, but because of the fear of death in life, in which the contingent creature recognizes its negative fate and "becomes like those who go down to the pit." To have faith in active love means to believe in another finite life which will be able to *live* – instead of waiting for its end in the fearful mode of *imitatio mortis*.

As Franz Rosenzweig demonstrates in his *Star of Redemption*, whose second book is wholly devoted to the "grammatical analysis" of *Song of Songs*, the poem is, in fact, about a disenchanted love – yet, disillusioned for its own good. Indeed in the beginning, love strives towards God, but is rejected and, thanks to this fortunate frustration, comes back to the creaturely world where the one great unattainable object (like the Lacanian *objet A*) becomes diffused into a metonymic sequence of small objects (*objets a*), namely, the neighbours. In the psychoanalytical terms of D. W. Winnicott, the Rosenzweigian God resembles "a good enough mother" who gently rejects the passionate possessiveness of her child and teaches it a lesson of "positive frustration."[23] For Rosenzweig, "disenchantment makes love only stronger […] Love cannot be other than effective. There is no act of neighbourly love that falls into the void,"[24] because it is precisely the disenchantment which shows love its proper trajectory: away from the elusive Grand Object and towards the contingent beings of the outside world, which just happen to be next to one in the most direct vicinity (*Platzhalter*). In consequence, love – the active affect turned away from the false path of sublimation and back towards contingent beings – assumes the task of "connecting all" and "pacing the orbit of creation" (Rosenzweig, 235).

Christianity's role in this development seems highly ambivalent: torn between Pauline *agape* and Neoplatonic Eros, the Christian doctrine oscillates between the recognition of the creaturely mode of being and its violent rejection. Christian thinkers have a natural tendency to misread the main line of *Shir ha-shirim* as "Love s t r o n g e r than death."[25] This characteristic

22 Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 239.

23 Comp. Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971).

24 Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 269.

25 For instance, Werner Jeanrond, in his recent monograph on the Christian theology of love: "All we need is love. God is love. Love is all that matters. L o v e i s s t r o n g e r t h a n … d e a t h": Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1; my emphasis. Actually, it is the very first paragraph!

misreading very aptly depicts the shift from the Jewish covenant to the Christian one: it expresses the ultimate triumph of faith, hope, and love over the earthly misery of suffering and death. The Jews, however, read it the way it is written: "love *as* strong *as* death," which builds simultaneously a correspondence and contrast between the two antagonists. The correspondence here consists in the fact that both, love and death, are the *markers of finite life*; the contrast, on the other hand, lies in a radically different interpretation of finitude. Love does not function here in a Christian way, that is as an index of grace that anticipates the state of future life eternal. Love functions here as another way of seeing our finite life; not in a vanitative–melancholy manner of *Sein-zum-Tode*, a deplorable mode of a being destined to perish from the moment of its inception, but in a more "bearing–enduring" approach in which finitude, the universal condition of a creaturely life, becomes lovingly accepted, asserted, and affirmed. As Rosenzweig often emphasizes, Judaism is a "religion of the finite life": a religion which does not desire infinity and immortality, always more life-after-life, but powerfully desires life-in-life which will not fear the verdict of death and will be able to love itself as finite. "Love Thy neighbour as Thyself": the commandment, which for the first time appears in the Hebrew Bible, formulates the new rule of *ahavah–agape* as the active love which chooses for its objects only finite, contingent, and imperfect beings.

For love is indeed strong as death. Not stronger – but also not weaker. Just good enough.

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To Feel the Thinking: Affective Procedures of History and Criticism (Today)

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Thinking is thought through concepts, or functions, or sensations and no one of these thoughts is better than another, or more fully, completely, or synthetically "thought."[1]

In his lectures from the years 1977–1978 included in the volume *Le neutre,* Roland Barthes spoke about "a hyperconsciousness of the affective minimum, of the microscopic fragment of emotion… which implies an extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer."[2] He had in mind intense,

1 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Percept, Affect, and Concept," in *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), 198.

2 Roland Barthes, *The Neutral,* trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 101. I use fragments quoted in Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in ***The Affect Theory*** Reader, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). In my description of the role of the affect theory in the humanistic practices I extensively use recognitions presented both in this introduction and in the entire volume. See also the critical review of this volume by Todd Cronan, "The Aesthetic Politics of Affect," *Radical Philosophy* 172 (2012): 51-53.

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so far unexperienced states unfit for divisions established by means of binary oppositions or existing contradictions. They are rather situated between other recognizable states, in intervals; always in relation towards some kind of space, objects, subjects, or times. The project of critical practice emerging from such recognition is a neutral kind of immanent *pathos* or *patho-logy* which could create something like "an inventory of shimmers" gathering and arranging into constellations of sensations and affects. It is characterized by "the passion for difference."[3] Tracing Barthes's thoughts, the affect theory may be perceived as a project of such critique where the passion for difference is cognitive, existential and ethical–political at the same time.

As numerous academic publications of recent years prove, the affect theory serves well not only as a handy frame for several interpretations of constantly emerging practices of cultural life (together with their new media, forms of communication, collective experiences, etc.), but above all – despite many sceptics – as a form of engagement, a critical language, a new instrument of cultural criticism. In opposition to what Hal Foster states, this theory may help the leftist project of fighting the crisis of criticism or even post-criticism. The author of *The Return of the Real* writes:

> Bullied by conservative commentators, most academics no longer stress the importance of critical thinking for an engaged citizenry, and, dependent on corporate sponsors, most curators no longer promote the critical debate once deemed essential to the public reception of advanced art. Indeed, the sheer out-of-date-ness of criticism in an art world that could not care less seems evident enough. Yet what are the options on offer? Celebrating beauty? Affirming affect? Hoping for a "redistribution of the sensible"? Trusting in "the general intellect"? The post-critical condition is supposed to release us from our straightjackets (historical, theoretical, and political), yet for the most part it has abetted a relativism that has little to do with pluralism.[4]

However, how do we perform criticism when we are overwhelmed with the feeling of having exhausted the available repertoire of forms, tricks and strategies; when we feel that well practiced procedures are not working any more – the ones we called into being in another, earlier, both academic and historical reality. Foster does not answer this question. Instead, he tries to mobilize

3 Seigworth and Gregg, *Shimmers*, 11; Barthes, *The Neutral*, 77.

4 Hall Foster, "Post-critical," *October* 139 (2012): 3. I would like to thank Ewa Domańska for attracting my attention to this text and its problematic character.

us to be critical and engaged, applying the often recurring analogy between contemporary times and the 1930s. And if so, let us go back to the problems encountered and to the solutions searched for back then. For example, Bertold Brecht:

> Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new. The oppressors do not work in the same way in every epoch. They cannot be defined in the same fashion at all times. There are so many means for them to avoid being spotted. They call their military roads motor-ways; their tanks are painted so that they look like MacDuff's woods. Their agents show blisters on their hands, as if they were workers. No: to turn the hunter into the quarry is something that demands invention.[5]

Working with the affect theory does not mean, and it surely does not have to mean, that contemporary art or literature, or even cultural criticism itself, lost their political significance. It is rather about their political force – and, above all, recognition of their own presence and their political nature which results from other operations and procedures: global political acts concern other areas of experience, impact new aspects of life, control them to an unexpected extent. The overwhelming excess of (both textual and visual) information and the comparably overwhelming scarcity of meaning – "the meaningful meaning" – as well as the necessity of working out new ways of contestation and criticism caused by the present time and the pressure of history made artists, writers, critics, and their addressees look for another area of agreement, influence, and engagement.[6] In this context, the key question is about the potentiality of affect, hence the way diverse ephemeral affective stimulations and distractions from the rationally regulated attention and symbolic balance alter affectation (being stimulated) into action (affecting, the possibility of stimulation).

Affect, as Brian Massumi and others have written, is a notion that captures the pre-individual as something common, dynamic and circulating, or even

5 Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs," trans. Stuart Hood, in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 83. See also interesting materials collected in the academic magazine *Nonsite.org* dedicated to Brecht and affects as well as effects, issue 10: "Affect, Effect, Bertolt Brecht" accessed November 18, 2013, http://nonsite.org/issue-10-affect-effect-bertolt-brecht/.

6 Ernst van Alphen, "Affective Operations of Art and Literature," RES 53/54 (2008): 21.

binding. It is a concept that makes it possible to go beyond the body and at the same time understand changing interrelations between different bodies (and in different combinations: human bodies with unhuman ones, unhuman bodies with human ones, etc.), images (produced both by people and by machines), narratives, and so on. Affects, however, as pointed out by a Dutch scholar Mieke Bal, allow us to analyze and be critical about difficult and complex relations between "the wandering notions," between regimes of knowledge production, between various media, disciplines, and finally, between science and art.[7]

Interest in affect theory in the humanities, therefore, seems to stem from disappointment with available technologies, methods of interpretation, as well as analyses of artworks, epistemology, and politics. However, it also stems from a great urgency to be critical towards one's own moment in history. Reference to the affective dimension of experience indicates such aspect of this experience which is beyond language and which always loses from its specificity in the process of being translated into language. Affect and cognition are not separable; one always thinks through the body (thinking is embodied), while affect is indispensably linked with the life of the body and among bodies. Hence, being in the world and exchanging with its other elements takes place on two levels, separate but unequal: the level of meaning and the level of feeling. Although it is impossible to separate affects and cognition, their relation remains problematic and is continuously tormenting scholars who explore these topics. Theories of affects enable establishing the subject and the community on another basis that is less coherent and stable. Affect appears in-between, in clearances, in cracks, in gaps between communication and mutual understanding, in accumulation of intensity and experiences which – not always fully assimilated – torment our narrative about ourselves, sit somewhere, stuck in photos, in documentation – like spectres in the archives, recorded but not assimilated, registered but not developed.

It is quite commonly believed that the breakthrough moment for affect theory to appear in the field of interest of the contemporary humanities were the 1990s[8] (the theory of trauma was also in bloom at the time). Back then

7 See Mieke Bal, *Affect as a Cultural Force* (The text was made available by the author for the seminar organized in IBL PAN on October 15, 2013 within the project financed by the National Science Centre, grant decision no. DEC-2011/03/B/HS2/05729: *The Affective Turn after 1989. Strategies and Styles of Representation in the Interdisciplinary Research Perspective* under the supervision of Prof. Marek Zaleski).

8 This genealogy as well as the attempt to characterize the field of interest in affects by the contemporary humanities, I recreate after Seigworth and Gregg, *Shimmers*.

– in 1996, to be precise – two key articles, at least in Anglo-Saxon academia, were published: Brian Massumi's *The Autonomy of Affect* and *Shame in the Cybernetic Field* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. They excited scholars not only because they pushed certain categories in cognitive theory focusing on its affective dimension, locating not only experiences, but also knowledge in the body. They also introduced specific affective operations in the space of the academic text itself – its content and its form. The above mentioned publications immediately enable us to catch the double-track tendency typical of the affective field: one of these tracks follows interpretations of Silvan Tomkins's psycho-biological concepts (Sedgwick, Frank, et al.), while the other draws from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, but also others' readings of Deleuze and Guattari (Massumi, van Alphen, Val, et. al.). These paths do not really meet and it seems futile to introduce a general profile or to determine parameters of the "turn" in the humanistic research. In this sense, it is not justified to talk about the turn towards affects or the establishment of a new, affective paradigm in the humanities. It appears that this is rather about shifting attention and sensitivity to a slightly different area, about exposing other possibilities of cognition in the world in general and in the world of scientific research; about privileging or showing the value of models so far excluded, seen as worse, and finally, about pointing to new ways of practicing criticism and, just as importantly, new ways of practicing history, including history of literature, art, and theatre.

Consequently, instead of speaking about the turn and establishing an order in the field of the contemporary theory of affects, I will let myself introduce a bit of disorder by indicating diverse branches, tendencies, quasi-tendencies, and further distinctions which, I hope, will be most explicit about this heterogeneous field.[9] They include non-Cartesian or non-humanistic philosophical traditions implemented by avant-garde versions of academic feminism as represented by Rosi Braidotti, Elisabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, or Genevieve Lloyd; Italian autonomism as represented by Paolo Virno or Maurizio Lazzarato; cultural studies strongly inspired by the philosophy of Massumi, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris; or even the philosophy of politics developed by Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Another area are reflections over intimate relations and interconnections between the human and non-human or post-human, phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies of corporeality in the broader field (practiced by such scholars as Vivian Sobchack, Don Ihde, Michel Henry, and Laura Marks). This tendency is linked with the interest in the juncture of what is human with the non-organic and technological. To put it more simply: man

9 Seigworth and Gregg, *Shimmers*. 6-7.

and machine.[10] A part of this field may also be constituted by – inspired by – psychoanalytical and psychological readings (e.g. projects by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Cathy Caruth, et al.). A crucial, strongly political or even activist element of this puzzle is developed by male and female feminists, queer researchers, representatives of disability studies and subaltern studies as they reflect on alternative forms of being and co-being as well as experiencing and being political, where efforts are firstly made to formulate alternative concepts of power (Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant). Academic practices in the field of the humanities inspired by neurology, life science, physics, and other disciplines (Cathherine Malabou) should be taken into account as well. To many scholars, the crisis of the supremacy of language turned out to be a fundamental one, making them refer to such historical concepts as Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling," Franz Fanon's "third-person consciousness," or Walter Benjamin's non-sensual mimesis, in order to search for what is outside of language, and how things which are pre-, para-, or beyond linguistic meet or even cross with what is sensual (related to touch, taste, smell, etc.), corporeal, connected with stimulations of the nervous system and so on. Such operations should help extend the definition of what is social and cultural, open the ethical–aesthetic space to other subjects who have equal rights to feel and understand. This constellation should be complemented with critical and philosophical discourses of emotion, for example, by Rei Terada or Sianne Ngai. And finally, interest in affect may also turn out to be an emancipatory gesture of the exact science for which what is impossible to be systematized, accidental, astonishing, disorderly is what enforces reflection on the methodological assumptions and the ethics of cognition within the given discipline.[11]

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10 An interesting example of implementation of this tendency may be the 2013 edition of Malta Theatre Festival (an interdisciplinary festival, in fact) entitled *Oh man, oh machine* directed by Romeo Castellucci. See the catalogue under the same title, Poznań 2013.

11 Here we may recall an utterly unfair draft list of publications which contributed to the current shape of the "theory of affect": *Exploring Affect: the Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tompkins* (1995); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004); Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: an Aesthetics of the Affects* (2003), articles of Laurent Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics" (*Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, 2000); "Love, a Queer Feeling" (*Homosexuality/Psychoanalysis,* 2001); books by Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002); Joan Copjec, *Read my Desire: Lacan Against the Historicist* (1994); Melissa Gregg, *Cultural Studies Affective Voices* (2006); Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: the Making of Emotional Capitalism* (2007); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2007); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (2004); Eve Kosovsky-Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003). The critique of the "affective turn" is presented by Ruth Leys in her extensive article "The Turn to Affect: a Critique," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434-472.

And now the problems. Because they are there. The first and perhaps the most widespread is terminological confusion. The notion of affect is often used interchangeably and/or as a synonym with emotion or feeling. Emotion however is subjective, a social–linguistic gesture of assigning a certain quality to an experience, which is subsequently defined as being personal. In this sense, emotion is elaborated and modified intensity (affect), a conventionalized and consensual mode of including intensity (affect) into the semantic and semiotic network, into the dynamics of action and reaction which can be narratively structured, and into function and meaning. In other words, it is the intensity (affect) that is identified and taken into possession. On the other hand, feelings are personal and have a biographical nature as they belong to the story (experiences) of a given person, while emotions are social, and affects are pre-personal. A feeling may be thought to be a sensation which, in combination with the current experience of the one who feels it, finds its proper time and name. Everyone, therefore, has their personal archive of sensations from which their emotions originate. Feelings are sincere, while emotions can be faked, or even forged according to the current cultural codes of communication. In such a rough frame, affect is mainly the aforementioned intensity, but in reality its unconscious experience: an abstract, shapeless, and nameless potentiality. Understood this way, affect is situated beyond, or maybe before consciousness, in a single body and between bodies. As a result, affects are evoked by factors that are out of the subject's control, beyond her/his consciousness and will, but they define the very possibility of our experience and vulnerability to stimuli, and the possibility of processing them.[12]

The last question is about conveying affects (or affecting?). This certainly does not mean that someone's feelings are transfered to another person, simply becoming the latter's feelings. It is rather about staying on the level of the body and its "communicative" structures. Transmission of affect is here pre-symbolic: untamed bodies produce intensities and stimulations, affecting each other. One body enters the other's space of intensity, the sphere of its affective impact, and starts to receive these stimulations, to resonate, then to react.

The primacy of what is affective in a work is marked by the gap between the work's content and effect.[13] It may be traced in several examples of contemporary literature, plastic arts, dance, or music. To a great extent, the

12 See Deleuze and Guattari, *Percept, Affect, and Concept.*

13 I wrote about it more broadly in the text *Obóz-Muzeum. Afektywna przestrzeń przekazu doświadczenia traumatycznego (i sztuka)* which was published in the volume *Pamięć w krajobrazie traumatycznym Ekspresja i reprezentacja we współczesnym wystawiennictwie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014).

aforementioned articles perform such a role, explaining how intensity translates into emotional states. The level of intensity in the reception of a work is not semantically or semiotically ordered, while the order of meaning and the order of intensity seem desynchronized. And this disruption enables another kind of connection between what is separated: not only the content and the effect, but also the form (the way meanings are being constituted) and intensity. Separating the form and the content, the intensity and the effect enables their re-connection on different terms.[14] Following Gilles Deleuze's thoughts, we may say that affect should primarily serve as an effective detonator of a deep experience and thought resulting from the way it grabs us and forces us to be involved. The feeling becomes a "catalyst" for critical insight. The thought itself becomes less important than the path that leads to it – the sensual impressions that arise during an encounter and demand a different look, an interpretation or transformation, a reworking of current readings. In this sense, it seems that art based on "affective operations," but also interpretation, produces an experience rather than reproduces it.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

14 Brian Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995).

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Affective Avant-gardism

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Creative works must clearly communicate the author's emotional states but also be able to "infect" the audiences with them; intellectualized or formally complicated creations, or those which indicate the author's detachment are manifestations of degraded and dishonest art (Leo Tolstoy). Art should be an escape from personality, a skilled depersonalization and an infiltration of extra-aesthetic experiences (T.S. Eliot). Avant-garde art is an expression of emotional reticence and reluctance (Tadeusz Peiper). New art is an experiment, a technique, a practice aimed at disturbing the aesthetic and perceptive habits of the audiences (Viktor Shklovsky). Sincerity of the author is legitimate only when it is constructed (Karol Irzykowski). Modern art breaks away from realism which induces simple psycho-physiological reactions (Ortega y Gasset). The avant-garde is rationalist, formal, and founded on the primacy of science and the idea of progress (Clement Greenberg). "The artistic adage of the directness of feelings resembles a person with their heart on a plate – it seems thus either banal, or childish. Especially as the said directness is frequently accompanied by the triviality of feelings" (Julian Przyboś). Art is not about creating things but about detachment from

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things (Greenberg). Avant-garde consists of conceptualism and formal innovation (Luigi Pareyson). Abstract art cannot be arbitrary or accidental, it must redirect attention from the subject of experiences to the means of its own craft (Greenberg). Avant-garde cannot be constantly innovative – it is a continuous repetition (Umberto Eco). Modern art privileges all that is anti-natural, anti-mimetic and anti-real (Rosalind Krauss). Modern art is ocular-centric (Martin Jay), male-centered and oppressive (Nancy K. Miller), holistic and dualist (Jean-François Lyotard). The avant-garde is repression (Krauss).

This is what an argumentative, postulative-receptive development of the assumptions behind the modernist aesthetic would look like if we were to abbreviate it to an almost absurd length of a single paragraph.[1] Or, more precisely, this is what the development of its avant-garde, intellectualized, "high" variety (to use the outdated typology) could be said to look like – juxtaposed with the popular, "rear-guard" artistic developments.[2] Even considering the gradual evolution of its critical attitudes, one notices easily the extreme dualism of these reflections on the modernist artistic tendencies, as well as the intellectually dubious, declarative essentialism of these and similar diagnoses. Importantly, due to their nature, assertions of this kind fail to capture the complex specificity of several, first-rate artistic productions – meanwhile, reflecting on them raises several questions only seemingly "unrelated" to the phenomena of modernism. Can the avant-garde be viewed only through categories of depersonalization, detachment, reticence, and rationalization? Why does the gulf between the modern current of intellectual art and the figurative mode seem so vast? Are there really no intermediary forms connecting these polar opposites? What was the contemporary status of affect, emotion, impression, and empathy, and where do the obvious (maybe just too obvious) answers come from? Perhaps there existed a current in the arts which eludes the above aesthetic distinctions? And if it does, what is its nature?

Following for a while the declarative stylistics of the binary diagnoses presented earlier, I will start by proposing at least one answer, namely: modernism may, for certain reasons, be viewed both as rationalistic and affective; meanwhile, the avant-garde is the artist's state of mind

1 Referring to "avant-garde" and "modernism" in this article, I am following Astradur Eysteinsson's distinction which assumes (speaking generally) that modernism is a broader term that includes avant-garde – a subordinate term which can be characterized by a tendency to experimentation and discovery. See Astradur Eysteinsson, "Awangarda jako/czy modernizm?," in *Odkrywanie modernizmu. Przekłady i komentarze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz, trans. Dorota Wojda (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), 195-199.

2 Clement Greenberg, *Obrona modernizmu. Wybór esejów*, trans. Grzegorz Dziamski and Maria Śpik-Dziamska (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 8-18.

(and body) – and as such it is as rational as it is emotional; finally, I believe it is possible to distinguish a different, "alternative" kind of modernity, a certain avant-garde of the avant-garde whose specificity relies on problematizing the tensions between the intellectual, the somatic and the emotional. In the following parts of my argument I am going to elaborate on those initial propositions, reconsider the legitimacy of making a connection between the well-established and well-discussed modernist artistic phenomena and the recently popular category of affect and – last but not least – propose a model of reading and analysis of those artistic realizations, further referred to as "affective criticism."

Modernism as a Spatial *Agon*

The degree of impact of modernist art was determined largely by the tensions (rarely explicitly verbalized) between emotions and rationality. Naturally, earlier artistic tendencies also depended on the oscillation between these two spheres, but (as I will try to prove in the present essay) the specificity of modernism resulted directly from its innovative methods of transposing affects into the substance of art.

The history of the relations between the intellectual and emotional spheres, defined as mutual opposites, may be presented in the form of a sinusoid. The sinusoid would illustrate (in a greatly simplified manner) the movement from the primacy of reason dominant throughout the Enlightenment, through the Romantic privileging of expression identified with an eruption of authentic feelings, toward the Positivist restoration of rationality, and finally – at the turn of the twentieth century – the returning focus on the author's spirituality and his or her individualized expression of the most affective contents, accompanied by the postulate of authenticity, directness of expression and the sincerity of emotions represented. However, Wilhelm Worringer's famous 1907 *Abstraction and Empathy* posits art history to be shaped not by subsequent artistic tendencies but by simultaneous, competing currents. These include, on the one hand, a tendency for naturalization (in the case of the artist's affirmative attitude to the surrounding reality and a belief in the possibility of successful artistic representation) and on the other hand, a tendency for stylization (when the artist, searching for a rational order of expression, experiences an anxiety toward the surrounding realities and toward the artistic medium itself). From this perspective, simultaneous yet radically different currents (differing not only in the complexity of formal expression, but also based on different existential and aesthetic worldviews) determine the parallel tracks of modernity's development, including its entire system of internal fissures. Consequently, the specificity of modernism would

involve a continuous aesthetic oscillation between these models: on the one hand, the realistic or empathetic model utilizing the representative rhetoric of emotion, experience, and authenticity, which was perhaps realized to the greatest extent in the popular variety of so-called high art; and on the other hand, the opposing intellectualist model accompanied by the abstract, cubist, formalist, and other modes which, as a principle, rejected all non-rational and non-intellectual elements and refused to assign any aesthetic significance to what is realistic and recognizable.[3]

Searching for the "Third Mode"

In the brilliant conclusion to his reflection on the epiphanic character of the modernist attempt to "express the inexpressible," Ryszard Nycz "risked" a certain intriguing "hypothesis":

> the third mode (which so far has found its fullest realization in the marginal or "liminal" modern and postmodern art) aims to gather evidence – symptoms, impressions, signals, accounts – for the positive existence of the shapeless factuality (monstrous or merely constituting background) sensed largely through an ambiguous resistance: as much to the subject's actions (by the force of its inertia) as to the subject's powers of representation (through the plasticity of its substance). It seems that the modernists refused to assign a positivist ontological status to what was formless and protean not only out of fear but quite deliberately. They sentenced it, after all, to both a negative and dependent (i.e. partial and only "formal") existence: that of a necessary but always negated part of the binary opposition only in relation to which the perceptible, comprehensible and representable forms of existence became truly positive and valuable. Consequently, one could conclude that the value of the works of the third mode would lie in documenting that significant fortuitousness of being… If modernist aestheticism located [reality – AD] in the ultimately hidden order, internalized and embodied in the (auto) revelatory form of art, then for that postmodern art, reality would constitute first and foremost that which modernism refused to attribute to existence: the essence-less matter of the real; the shapeless, the insignificant, the meaningless, and elusive.[4]

3 Arnold Berleant, *Prze-myśleć estetykę. Niepokorne eseje o sztuce*, trans. Maria Korusiewicz and Tomasz Markiewka (Kraków: Univesitas, 2007), 76.

4 Ryszard Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 48-49.

For some reason, Nycz's argument begins to resemble the object of description. In other words, there is a repetition of a gesture resulting from the modernists' "fear" and "deliberation"; the category discussed in the conclusion is once again sentenced to a fleeting, "partial" and "only formal" presence. The sense of factuality and significance of the "third mode's" existence does not resound fully in Nycz's argument, abandoned (or temporarily suspended hopefully) in favor of other analyses. However, while the argument remains unfinished, a lot has been said. The rather enigmatic quality of "shapeless factuality," of that which is "formless and protean," "shapeless, insignificant, meaningless and elusive" refers precisely to what I believe to be the affective dimension discussed in this paper: the irrational, emotional-sensational amalgam of human (in this case, writerly) experience. At the risk of simplification, it seems that Nycz's thesis (or intuition) asserts the following: despite their various declarations, the modernists had feelings and used them repeatedly as a reservoir of possible formal-thematic inspirations, even though they were reluctant to admit it. They did not want to admit it, or rather (as also suggested by Nycz) rejected, sublimated, or repressed that which repeatedly returned in the act of writing as "negative epiphanies."

Its meandrous nature, or perhaps its subtle, localized (maybe intentional) inconsistency is another interesting aspect of Nycz's reflection. The so-called "third mode" registering evidence for the existence of insistent reality, different from the main intellectual stream of modernism, is first situated within: 1. "the marginal or «liminal» modern a n d postmodern art," and then more declaratively within; 2. "that postmodern art." The possibility of a synchronous coexistence of different modern streams – the ones defined so far, that is, the intellectual and realist ones, as well as the "third mode" proposed by Nycz, constituting perhaps the "lining" of the avant-garde (proposed in 1) – is now replaced by the postulate of a diachronic succession of interesting regularities (proposed in 2) where the "modernist" period is followed by post-modernity from which there emerges (like a posthumous child) the late "third" child of modernism. Ultimately, Nycz seems to lean toward refusing modernity its marginal or liminal tendencies, attributing them instead to the postmodern order. I would like to conduct a "defense of modernity" in the rest of the article and postulate so as not to cede too quickly to postmodernity that which I consider to be thoroughly modernist.

Nycz's typologizing gesture is very thought-provoking: obviously, the realization and the need to recognize the existence of some kind of "third mode" are a consequence of postmodernism's theoretical achievement, critical approach, and suspicions about several modernist phenomena, about redefining notions, reevaluating categories, and changing focus. It also holds suspicions about changing sensibility, awareness and priorities (not only the scholarly

ones). Consequently, postmodernity can be seen as forging tools appropriate for conducting interpretations of modernist phenomena (both the marginal and mainstream ones). Such interpretations also fit the formula of "discovering modernity" and "becoming aware of the shift in perspective, a shift resulting from the phenomena and trends described as postmodern."[5]

A similar "revindicating" principle of reasoning allows me to propose a model of "affective criticism" – one inspired (to various degrees) by the modern, postmodern, and the post-postmodern methodologies and reading methods including deconstruction, feminist criticism, reception research, the so called "affective" and "affirmative" turns, and other methods. Setting aside for now the old argument about the status of meaning extracted from or read into the interpreted work, the most productive approach here seems to incorporate both the modern and postmodern tools useful in an "affective" analysis of the "third mode" which manifested itself (not only in the background) and realized itself (not only partially) in modernity. In this context, I believe Nycz's intuitions, expressed *en passant*, to be highly inspiring as they have so far found no precedence in the humanities on avant-gardism. What he describes as modernism's "margin" will become the center of the following analysis while the "lining" of the avant-garde will be treated, at least for the time being, as its outer shell, in order to reveal the "twofold" character of avant-garde postulates and works.

Double-winged Modernity

In his detailed study of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and Individual Talent," Michał Paweł Markowski recapitulates the poet's argumentation in the following words:

> emotions are meaningful only when they are represented, in other words, made objective by the mind and the work of art. Emotions which evade presentation, which create the lining, the substratum of our existence, must be eradicated not only from the sphere of art but also from life as it is. This is the founding gesture of the modern sensibility whose one wing – let us call it the male, cool and anxious one – includes T.S. Eliot. The other wing – female, fervent and bold – is represented by Virginia Woolf. But the tale of the other wing must be left for another occasion.[6]

5 Ryszard Nycz, "Słowo wstępne," in *Odkrywanie modernizmu*, 6-7.

6 Michał Paweł Markowski, „Literatura i uczucia. T.S. Eliot i wrażliwość nowoczesna," in *Dzieła, języki, tradycje*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2006), 240.

Also in this case (although following a different principle) the nature of argumentation begins to resemble the object of description: the sharpness of Eliot's distinctions is reflected by Markowski's essay, as evidenced by his binary, double-winged typology of the modernist phenomena. There is no space here for the intermediary forms, hybrids, and phenomena escaping clear systematization. There is no space for the doubt which may result from the conducted (and somewhat controversial) division into the male and female streams in art. One could also wonder about the absence of other tendencies, for instance, the strong, modern currents of realist or popular art. However, Markowski's interpretation is interesting for at least three reasons: firstly, he argues "fervently" and methodically for the priorities of Eliot's manifesto which in fact do not include tradition, canon, and the individual talent, but precisely the crucial intellectual work performed on the writerly emotional states. Secondly, Markowski distinguishes within modernity two avant-garde currents, both artistically valuable, and positions them opposite of that which is a f f e c t i v e. Finally, and importantly, Markowski is "bold" in stating directly that emotions remain emotions even in Eliot who persistently seeks to escape them (and advises others to do the same).

The Avant-garde "Conspiracy Against Chaos"[7]

This is how Thomas Stearns Eliot justifies the need for creative depersonalization:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.[8]

Understanding Eliot's "depersonalized" theory of poetry (requiring the artist to "catalyze" personal emotions, treated as a creative material, "combine" them into new compounds and rework them into new literary values) is crucial for an understanding of the modernist sensibility. New art is not to

7 Karol Irzykowski, *Czyn i słowo oraz Fryderyk Hebbel jako poeta konieczności, Lemiesz i szpada przed sądem publicznym. Prolegomena do charakterologii* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980), 475-476.

8 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921; New York: Bartleby.com, 2000), accessed May 18, 2017, http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html/.

be devoid of individual or emotional content. Quite on the contrary, the question of the work's affective qualities is central to Eliot's reflection. Unlike his predecessors who limited themselves to "poetic meditations" on the subject of emotions, the modern poet should intensify work on emotions in order to transform the sensory-affective experiences into categories of the mind and find the most adequate "verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling."[9] Consequently, the creative process is not an escape from emotion, but is founded on a directly affective-emotional amalgam: "what you start from is nothing so definite as an emotion, in any ordinary sense, it is still more certainly not an idea."[10] What is crucial then is the act of mediation between the spheres of "feeling" and "understanding," between the emotion and the idea. But the cited passage from "Tradition and Individual Talent" speaks directly about an "escape" from emotion and personality. What kind of escape does the author have in mind?

It is hard to resist the impression of a strong resentment resounding through Eliot's reflection, noticeable especially in the following statement: "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things." This remark seems to allude to an undefined unity of "those who have personality and emotions," perhaps also those who have made traumatic experiences or feel more than they actually reveal, and for some reason try to distance themselves from those experiences, precisely through the mediation of art.

Dispersed hints of such an "escapist" dimension of artistic activity can be found also in the essays, diaries and criticism by [Polish] avant-garde artists, for instance Adam Ważyk:

> The hyperbolic voracity of the futurists had obvious causes. The time of war overlapped with their days of youth, the onset of their puberty. They starved. The days of futurism were hungry too. Hunger was the basic category of social classification. People were divided into the satiate ones and the others. "But I am forever hungry" Wat wrote, in an act of solidarity with those others. Stern ostensibly absolved from guilt all who were threatened by hunger, prostitutes, and thieves. The fear of hunger, the only theme resulting from experience, became

9 Thomas Stearns Eliot, review of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon Press) first published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 (1921), accessed May 17, 2017, http://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/eliot_metaphysical_poets.htm/.

10 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 107.

> a decalogue of the stomach in the later long poem, *Europa*. It was in the times of futurism that Jasieński wrote *Pieśń o głodzie* [*The Song of Hunger*] … The trauma of hunger did not always involve everyone, but a certain oral hypersensitivity and a passion to devour everything characterized them all.[11]

One could criticize Ważyk for the anecdotal character of his account, for dallying with the readers by jesting about the premises of past artistic endeavors and for ultimately trivializing the value of contemporary art. But the playful tone is only a ruse, and his reminiscence an act of courageous disclosure rather than of thoughtlessness or bad faith. Ważyk not so much mocks his older colleagues as reveals the motivations for forming the avant-garde (including his own). He verbalizes a pattern which seemingly did not conform to the avant-garde tactic, explaining formal choices with the "decalogue of the stomach," sharpness of expression with basic physiological needs, and innovation with intensity and severity of experiencing the war, undermining the myth of "impersonality" and "autonomy" of modern art. Importantly, Ważyk's frankness with regard to the causes of the psychosomatic trauma is not restricted to simply registering the basic deficits of the period. Also his language reveals a conviction in an affective undercurrent in futurist work: the poet talks about "experience," "hypersensitivity," "passion" and "fear" which determined creative work and which he attributes to the most original modern artists, including Witkacy:

> Witkacy's prophetism, as any emotional prophetism, did not come from the ability to prophesize but from fear, from the shock caused by the experienced events. The sensitivity of young age was traumatized.[12]

The shock results mainly from the extreme experiences of the war period,[13] which according to Ważyk, changed the fate of the interwar (as well as postwar) art. But he goes beyond obvious statements on the consequences of experienced trauma, exhaustion of contemporary art, inability to forget, or the ethical and aesthetic crisis. First and foremost, Ważyk's language exposes

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11 Adam Ważyk, *Dziwna historia awangardy* [*Unusual History of the Avant-garde*] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976), 46.

12 Ważyk, *Dziwna,* 44.

13 Of course, the experience of war was just one of the causes which included also the dynamics and scale of global modernization, growing medical knowledge, the impact of the twentieth-century scientific achievements, technological-civilizational progress and the great influence of (mostly Freudian) psychoanalytic theory.

(as do several other commentators of the period[14]) a shift in the way of experiencing emotions:

> The fact that the same sensitization manifested simultaneously in several poets supports the proposal that we are dealing with a historical moment: a jump from the centrifugal principle to the centripetal principle, one sweeping over all centers of absorption, over all senses.[15]

The Romantic and neo-Romantic "centrifugal" release of emotions (and the belief that the creative process is an eruption of authentic, explicable and expressible feelings) gave way to the "centripetal" method based on the "accumulation" and intellectual "reworking" of affective-sensory experiences. The change was dictated, firstly, by the shock of new experiences, secondly, by the need for expression, and finally, by the conviction that there is a discrepancy between contemporary forms of expression and those experiences. As such, artistic inquiries of the avant-gardists were also (auto)therapeutic: it is no coincidence that in his discussion of "techniques" Viktor Shklovsky notes that art should return to man – not just to the audience, but also to the artists themselves – the capacity to sense the world.[16] Jan Brzękowski states directly that "poets who lived through the war and came to know all its horrors… could not continue writing poetry of their predecessors who existed in more ordinary conditions."[17] Ważyk spoke of the specificity of the formation of "people mentally beset, wounded by history, gifted – if one may call it a gift – with a traumatic sensibility."[18]

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14 An interesting commentary on those changes can be found in the writing by Umberto Eco: "Our universe is in full crisis. The order of words no longer corresponds to the order of things: whereas the former still insists on following a traditional system, the latter seems to be mostly characterized by disorder and discontinuity, or so science tells us. Our feelings and emotions have been frozen into stereotypical expressions that have nothing to do with our reality… Though it is commonly believed that avant-garde artists are out of touch with the human community in which they live, and that traditional art remains in close contact with it, the opposite is true. In fact, only avant-garde artists are capable of establishing a meaningful relationship with the world in which they live." Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) 141-142.

15 Ważyk, *Dziwna*, 47.

16 Wiktor Szkłowski (V. Shklovsky), "Wskrzeszenie słowa," in *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki. Wybór tekstów*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni (Warszawa: PWN, 1970), 61.

17 Jan Brzękowski, *Szkice literackie i artystyczne 1925-1970*, ed. Andrzej Waśkiewicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1978), 61.

18 Ważyk, *Dziwna*, 101.

The creative act became here, to quote from Nycz, an act of "exorcising chaos" which revealed itself when the image of a stable reality had disintegrated.[19] Of emotional-mental chaos in particular, one might add:

> The dualism of body and soul was under attack or abolished, the metaphysical ambitions restricted or abandoned, moralism disappeared while moral criteria moved to the sphere of social relations. Sensitization to the values of life pervaded the complementary spirit of youthful enthusiasm and despair caused by life being not what it should be. Just after the war, poets of various formations shared in the civilizational anxiety spawning visions of European or global destruction, colorful, ingenious and unreasonable… All of that distinguished the new Polish poetry from the older one… including [among others – A.D.] the Skamander group.[20]

Once again avant-gardism reveals itself, to use Greenberg's formulation, not as a program or style but as an attitude[21] or, as Brzękowski puts it, "not as much a literary direction but as a spiritual condition."[22] A condition which did not fit the old framework of experience and feeling, a condition which at the same time could not be "contained," which "ruptured" the formulas of traditional art. Consequently, Przyboś notes, modern art overcame the boundaries which aesthetic repeatedly imposed on the human emotion.[23] This is why – analogically to Adorno's thesis that the avant-garde work is the only possible expression given the contemporary state of the world – avant-garde was the only possible way to not so much present feelings or repress them (as Krauss would argue[24]), but to construct emotions and become aware of the importance of affect precisely t h r o u g h creation. The creative act is viewed here as a simultaneous process of sensory experience, registering and conceptualizing or mediating between the orders of the body, consciousness, affect and the artistic artifact (which are usually separated in discourse).[25]

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19 Nycz, *Literatura jako trop,* 48.

20 Ważyk, *Dziwna,* 31-32.

21 Greenberg, *Obrona*, 57.

22 Brzękowski, *Szkice*, 29.

23 Julian Przyboś, *Linia i gwar,* vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959), 75.

24 Rosalind Krauss, *Oryginalność awangardy i inne mity modernistyczne,* trans. Monika Szuba (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2011), 17-30.

25 Compare also the Deleuze-based concept of art co-responding with the receiver and the aesthetic experience seen as a constant mediation between the work, the environment

Consequently, the new art, rather than registering some pre-existent emotions, "creates" and reveals them in a concrete form, removing the Romantic dualism of feeling and word/image,[26] establishing new emotional connections.[27] Thus, artistic practice does not just produce art, but also a lesson in experience, something Brzękowski paid special attention to:

> New poets and writers are incomprehensible. Or rather – they are hard to comprehend. Indeed… one of the causes lies in the reading audience. Each novelty shocks, intrigues, blurs judgment. This is accompanied by another attribute: it is difficult. Difficult not because of some inherent reasons but rather because we must create new categories of feelings and responses in order to evaluate it. This is also why novelty requires mental work – it is tiring… I hope that my remarks may contribute to understanding the goals and methods of the New Art, that the reading audience will look differently at the modern artists and try to feel them.[28]

Beliefs such as this one are not very different from Irzykowski's notion of "incomprehensibility" which assumes that each valuable work must contain an element of incomprehensibility and pose "difficulties either in one's mind, when the matter concerns accepting new ideas, or in one's heart, when we are talking about a new way of feeling things."[29] The challenges that avant-garde posed to perception and interpretation were probably responsible for the claims of its "incomprehensibility," "intellectualism," "impersonality" and a certain "emotionlessness." One should add to this list the sensation of "novelty" which Greenberg described as a feeling of surprise experienced by the audience encountering an avant-garde work which refuses to fit the system of internal expectations and habits.[30] This effect was probably responsible for the sense of aesthetic inaccessibility evoked by the new art. Meanwhile, contradicting the stereotypical assumptions of avant-garde's elitism, one may find hope in Brzękowski's wishful argument that the audiences can make the effort not even to understand but to "feel" the modern artistic

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and the impression of the receiver, Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

26 Przyboś, *Linia i gwar*, 74.

27 Irzykowski, *Czyn i słowo*, 412.

28 Brzękowski, *Szkice literackie*, 71.

29 Irzykowski, *Czyn i słowo*, 477.

30 Greenberg, *Obrona modernizmu*, 128.

activity. What is meant here is more than the simple mechanism of empathic identification adequate for the popular art (which Brzękowski positions at the opposite end[31]) we are rather talking about experimental testing and perhaps shaping of a formative aesthetic sensibility:

> They [the new artists – A.D.] play the role of an experimental laboratory and a scientific workshop. Once new values are discovered, they become popularized and applied (the utilitarian moment) by hundreds of mediocre artists in cheap imagery, advertising, interior design, clothing etc. … Pure, abstract, innovative art is like mathematics or logic: it teaches to think according to the artistic principles of creating and solving one's own tasks. It makes artists aware of themselves.[32]

Discrepant orders of the "modern," "creative" and the popular, "derivative," unoriginal art which Brzękowski describes elsewhere as "applied" and "utilitarian," correspond to the two already distinguished modes: the intellectual and the realist. But the traditionally defined "abstractness" begins to acquire a new meaning: it is meant to result in new principles and tools aimed at understanding, "becoming aware" and conceptualizing the surrounding reality. This is why, Umberto Eco suggests, avant-garde art resembles a scientific revolution – every work of modern art creates new laws, imposes a new paradigm, a new way of looking at the world.[33] As he did in Eliot, the artist fulfills the role of a "catalyst," transforming impressions physically, sensorially, affectively and intellectually into the tissue of art. The scientific–experimental metaphor does not appear here without a reason.

Artists function in this system as an "experimental laboratory and a scientific workshop" which corresponds with the avant-garde rhetoric of progress, inventiveness, and science reflected emblematically in Pound's postulate to "make it new." Nycz's "imperative of inventiveness which is of key importance to modernism; the imperative to create/discover the new"[34] is more than a linguistic construct: certain analogies between science and modern art reach much further, as Greenberg points out when he speaks of modern art belonging to the same specific cultural tendency

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31 Compare also Berleant's claim that every type of art is at least to some extent emphatic since art involves several senses, A. Berleant, *Prze-myśleć estetykę*, 101-106.

32 Brzękowski, *Szkice literackie i artystyczne*, 74.

33 Umberto Eco, "Innowacja i powtórzenie: pomiędzy modernistyczną i postmodernistyczną estetyką," trans. to Polish by T. Rutkowska, in *Przekazy i opinie* 1-2 (1990): 13.

34 Nycz, "Słowo wstępne," in *Odkrywanie modernizmu*, 17.

as modern science.[35] In the traditional, positivist perspective the disparity of the two disciplines excludes any convergences and mutual inspirations, as is exemplified in Michał Sobeski's conservative argument making a clear distinction between the aesthetic and scientific principle:

> Art is about a proper recreation of mental experiences, one's own and others'. Science, on the other hand, elucidates those experiences by discovering their mutual relationships and dependencies, in other words, by proving their underlying principles.[36]

In the modern configuration, art breaks the commandment of "proper" recreation and usurps the tasks of science, which itself is a part of a broader modernist concept of creating an objective theory and a disciplined, autonomous art whose language, as Peiper hoped, would "originate in the scientific movements of the last decades."[37]

The scientist longings of the avant-gardists took various forms. What lied at their core was the same imperative of creative formal innovativeness, confirming Astradur Eysteinsson's observation that the avant-garde (distinguished from the broader phenomenon of modernism) denoted in fact contemporary experimental activity.[38] In the plastic arts, innovativeness manifested mainly through increasing abstractness, deformation, ambiguity and untypical presentations of artistic artifacts. In literature, it extended from the level of the individual word through the manipulation of increasingly complex syntactic structures[39] to the author's self-declared attitude to the work and a form of (auto) presentation. Seen from this perspective, the most outstanding techniques of the first half of the twentieth century found in the writings of Joyce, Mann, Canetti, and Woolf – and in Poland, in Schulz, Choromański, or Gombrowicz – such as internal monologue, stream of consciousness, self-reflexivity, psychologism, deformations of perspective, or certain figurations of affects can be described as tools which complicate the simplicity of the message. They erase the human factor on the one hand, but

35 Greenberg, *Obrona modernizmu*, 53.

36 Michał Sobeski, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, ed. Sław Krzemień-Ojak (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 96.

37 Peiper's remarks from 1935 quoted in Ważyk, *Dziwna historia*, 97.

38 Eysteinsson, "Awangarda jako/czy modernizm?," 65.

39 Compare Brzękowski: „The new experimental wave in Poland focused on the word itself in an attempt to first break it down and then create new combinations from the resulting segments, or to explore their potential." Brzękowski, *Szkice literackie*, 133.

on the other, continue to express the personal or affective content in a new, "deformed" or "strange" form. For the sake of the argument presented in this essay, I am going to propose an affective critique of a few artistic realizations, which should allow me to distinguish typical organizational methods of the choromaniacs [from the name of M. Choromański – A.W.] and of Giacometti's sculpture, among others.

Grotesque Creations of the Avant-garde

The ambivalence of the avant-garde artists to the emotional expression, on the level of rhetoric, revealed itself, on the one hand, in the calls for emotional reticence (*vide* Peiper's metaphor of reluctant emotion) or restraint ("Poets – restrain your emotions!" – Jalu Kurek[40]) but on the other hand, in a conviction of the utopian character of the affective "break" and the desire to shape a new sensibility in the audience, "to renew the freshness and sharpness of cognitive and emotional reactions,"[41] turning art into a factory of feelings which "animate, invigorate or cleanse" and allow art to "nobly compete with the factory of ventilators, medicine and soaps."[42] The discrepancies of their theoretical postulates were reflected in the artistic practice which for some reason became unanimously viewed as an actual expression of avant-garde "restraint." It may indeed s e e m restrained, especially when seen from the perspective of the declarations, commentaries and manifestos of the avant-gardists themselves.

But the issue is far from simple and in order to notice the affective potential of avant-gardism it is enough to abandon the traditional understanding of the relations between affect and literature/art (for instance, viewing them as a vassalization of literature by emotion – "poetry as a language of feelings") requiring an appropriate "thematic" reading. Consequently, one can distinguish for instance the following property – literature of the choromaniacs unkindly described by Ignacy Fik as a manifestation of disrespect for the "historical achievement of the human psyche: the creative and active consciousness put in the service of unconscious tremors, outbursts and impulses related via

40 See also Jalu Kurek's other aesthetic postulates "Abandon the personal and individual lyric. Poetry is a function, a service, a social craft and you can smuggle in it only inasmuch of the so-called individuality as an average tailor does when he sews new clothing. You must create the world, not recreate your own heart. Who cares about that?" Quted in Artur Hutnikiewicz *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo TNT, 1967), 227.

41 Tadeusz Pawłowski, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, ed. Grzegorz Sztabiński (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 282.

42 Tadeusz Peiper, "Także inaczej," *Zwrotnica* 7 (1926): 198.

accidental appearance in mental time."[43] In other words, such literature "sniffed" and "probed the ulcers, shameful spots, and dirty nooks,"[44] penetrated "mental exoticness,"[45] while multiplying "clinical specimens" and "physiological–metaphysical creations."[46] Fik's interpretative perceptiveness and surprising astuteness reveal what was later frequently marginalized or misunderstood about these works: an obsessive fixation on the emotional which took the most extreme forms and seemed to directly stimulate formal innovativeness.

Clinical Literature

This can be seen in the work of Michał Choromański himself, for instance in his flagship *Zazdrość i medycyna* [*Envy and Medicine*], a novel whose title speaks for itself and which reveals in full force the longings and dilemmas of the avant-garde formation. In this case the method involves a clinical analysis of a single affect: envy. Affect is treated as a living organism subjected to a series of trials and experiments. The formal technique involves an experimental act of vivisection – the narrative is in fact reduced to revealing subsequent steps of a scientific, medical study. The analytical method of the affective state is simultaneous to the presentations of bodily vivisections illustrated by detailed descriptions of surgical procedures. However, a clinical separation of the private, homely space and the hospital one becomes impossible; the protagonists perform constant exchanges and shifts, "infecting" the antiseptic conditions. As in Latour's reflection on Pasteur's workplace, the boundaries of the laboratory are not impermeable and the dichotomy of the inside and the outside is abolished. In fact, Latour claims that "the very difference between the *inside* and the *outside*, and the difference of scale between *micro* and *macro* levels, is precisely what laboratories are built to destabilize or undo," [47] in order to make phenomena visible, observable and known.[48] An identical process takes place in Choromański's

43 Ignacy Fik, *Wybór pism krytycznych*, ed. Andrzej Chruszczyński (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1961), 130.

44 Ibid., 127.

45 Ibid., 126.

46 Ibid., 127.

47 Bruno Latour, "Give Me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World," in *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay (London: Sage, 1983) 143.

48 Ibid., 168.

textual laboratory. The writer turns a small space of the Zakopane resort, somewhat isolated (for instance, geographically) into an experimental space where the irrational and rational clash against each other. To reveal all details of the mechanism he is interested in, Choromański "ignores" the "complexity" – or the "amalgam character" – of the feeling sphere (the macroscale) and selects one affect (the microscale) which he then "materializes" to perform a series of operations. The author conceptualizes what is seemingly "inexpressible," but does it very factually and "coldly," in a "disciplined," "restrained" manner. The result resembles the analogous revealing of Pasteur's microbes which Latour names "invisible actors" who, in the process of analysis, "show their moves and development in pictures so clear that… the invisible becomes visible and the 'thing' becomes a written trace they can read at will as if it were a text."[49] Choromański experimentally textualizes an emotion and dissects it, revealing its mechanisms and by doing so, realizes a primary postulate – his art fulfills the role of logic of "making the artist aware of himself."

Creation as a "Mental Cardiac Death"

Gombrowicz's early stories constitute a very interesting case. Putting it simply (and ignoring, for now, the multitude of alternative interpretations), almost each of his stories can be read as an intriguing study of affective states: from the thorough revulsion of *The Memoirs of Stefan Czarniecki* through the shame of *Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer* to the timidity and fear in *On the Kitchen Steps*. However, *A Premeditated Crime* seems particularly interesting in the context of the argument presented in this article, a text I would not hesitate to describe as a programmatic, self-reflective manifesto commenting on the clash of contemporary artistic tendencies and revealing Gombrowicz's attempts to create his own writerly strategy.

It is by no accident that the space of the "closely sealed" household resembles a "theatrical stage." The plot is founded on the process of dialogue between opposites. If Gombrowicz's "artificial protagonists" are to be treated as different sides of an aesthetic argument, we shall discover that the isolated house is not a metaphor for the theatre, but the (macroscopic) social sphere or the writer's (microscopic) individual struggle with artistic convention. It is hard to resist the impression that the characters playing parts in the aesthetic debate directly present their programs. The widow represents the order of realist–empathetic art:

49 Ibid., 163.

> "In the night," she said dazedly, "Last night… I got up this morning… I went in… I called – Ignaś, Ignaś – but there was no response; he was lying there… I fainted… I fainted… And from that moment my hands have not stopped trembling – see for yourself!"[50]
>
> She stood fanatically, silent, with staring eyes, like Niobe, her gaze fixed on her memories, crumpled, disheveled; and a tiny droplet appeared at the tip of her nose and dangled there, and dangled… like the sword of Damocles – and the candles smoked. (Gombrowicz, 44)

In this short passage, Gombrowicz presents an entire array of trespasses of Romantic and neo-Romantic literature: its sentimentality and nostalgia ("her gaze fixed on her memories"), the imperative to empathize ("see for yourself"), literalness and exhibitionism (I got up this morning… I went in… I called… I fainted"), circumlocution and exaltation ("Ignaś, Ignaś… I fainted… I fainted."), irritating mood building techniques ("and the candles smoked"), lack of formal discipline ("crumpled, disheveled"), finally – over-individualization and primitivism ("and a tiny droplet appeared at the tip of her nose and dangled there, and dangled"). In turn, the spirit of modern art is revealed in the figuration of the son, reacting sharply to his mother's affectation:

> "What's the point, Mama?"… No one is… No one will be… it makes no difference. It's embarrassing!" he burst out violently and suddenly turned his back and walked away. "Antoś!" his mother called in fright […]. "A blow, an awful blow… The children said nothing. They're proud, difficult, reserved, they won't just allow anyone into their hearts, but rather prefer to worry on their own… Antoś is tough, stubborn, he won't even let his hands twitch." (43)

The protagonist who "restrains" his feelings, embarrassed by the mother's emotionality, represents the new, avant-garde generation of artists who view art as "a function, a service, a craft."[51] He fervently fights to eradicate all manifestations of the old order and subjects himself to the discipline of the form, carefully selecting his words and distancing himself from the pain: "Apparently this morning you visited my father or rather,

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50 Witold Gombrowicz, "A Premeditated Crime," in *Bacacay*, trans. Bill Johnston (New York: Archipelago Books, 2006), 41.

51 Jalu Kurek quoted in Hutnikiewicz, *Od czystej formy*, 227.

pardon me, his body" (57). He would rather remain silent than to admit strong affect.

> "Did you love your father very much?" I asked… The auestion clearly took him by surprise. No, he was not prepared for it; he bowed his head, looked to the side, swallowed and muttered with inexpressible constraint, almost with repugnance: "I suppose." (57)

Interestingly, in his portrayal of modern artistic tendencies, Gombrowicz reveals also their (and also his own) formal techniques:

> That was…. it was irony… You understand?… The opposite… on purpose" – "Being ironic about your father's death?"… "Surely there's nothing embarrassing about one's father's death" … Or perhaps you're embarrassed because you loved him? He stammered with difficulty with abhorrence with despair: "Very well. If you absolutely … then yes, so be it… I loved him." And throwing something on the table, he cried: "Here! This is his hair!" (69)

The mention of irony, expressions such as "opposite," "on purpose," and the symbolic strand of hair are synonymous to the avant-gardists' rich repertoire of means to create distance: from embarrassment, the grotesque, to masking, deformation, and ellipsis. What is interesting in the story is also the status of the intruder, the investigator who could be seen as the protagonist's *porte-parole*. On the one hand, he clearly distances himself from all emphatic displays (such as the "odor of family affection") and the principles of the old art, tradition, and canon:

> They make people pay homage to them – kiss their hands! They demand sentiments from me! Sentiments! They demand to be humored! And I, let's say, I hate that. And let's say, I hate it when they have me tremble to make me kiss their hands, when they compel me to mumble prayers, to kneel, to produce false, sentimental noises – and above all I hate tears, sighs, and droplets at the tips of their noses; whereas I like cleanliness and order. (45-46)

Thus, the investigator-artist surely appears closer to the modern concept of art represented by the son: "I had a wish to confess to… big brother my mistake and the trouble I had caused. It seemed to me that he would understand… and surely he wouldn't refuse me" (74). But on the other hand, Gombrowicz's protagonist remains undoubtedly separate, distant, vigilant,

and suspicious; he constantly oscillates between two models: the realist one, where death is seen as a natural and biological act, and the intellectual one, where it is the consequence of a crime constituting a certain "interference" or "construct." As a result, in the process of the investigation, several spectacular discoveries are made, for instance that of "the terrible duality" of each and every feeling (72) – a duality which is probably a testimony to the complex "rational–emotional" nature of all affect. The investigator also becomes convinced of the risk involved or perhaps the utopian character of the declared, avant-garde restraint: "Here again I lowered my voice and whispered in his ear: «You loved him… but why was there so much shame, so much scorn in that love?… Why do you conceal it like a criminal concealing a crime? You don't answer? You don't know? Perhaps I will know for you»" (70). With these words Gombrowicz makes an aesthetic declaration: aware of the limitations and traps of the two clashing tendencies, he proposes a new path of investigation, approaching the model which could be for now referred to as the "third mode." It would focus on problematizing the tensions between the rational and the affective, the intellectual and the realist, which is precisely what constitutes the "content" of the story. Here, the corpse of the father becomes a metaphor of the work of art, whose status depends on creative (and interpretative) profiling. As we know, Gombrowicz ultimately chooses the "third option" – the deceased do not "die" of natural causes, nor is he a victim of mental "cardiac death." But the work can no longer be taken to be a faithful representation of experiences and emotions, and by Gombrowicz's choice, it is also not meant to become the language of discipline and form, which are nothing more than a trick, "a vicious circle" clearly returning art to the recently cursed reality.[52] Hence the solution: the body and the work fall victim to a conscious "premeditated crime" problematizing the status of the criminal/investigator/artist and the artifact itself – a crime "squared," performed in plain sight and requiring premeditation. Gombrowicz's verdict is clear: the avant-garde work which fails to conceptualize its status and function means nothing, it is an escape "a sign of the timidity of feelings which retreat and contract at the cold touch of a stranger" (60); consequently it fails to reveal the artistic gesture, leaves "not the slightest marks of asphyxiation on [the] body" (60). The work of the investigator, the artist of the "third mode," requires clear authorial signature, a trace of the artist's touch, a "clear imprint of all ten fingers" on the "dead man's neck" (75).

52 Stanisław Machniewicz, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, ed. Sław Krzemień-Ojak (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 84.

A Machine for the Production of Meanings

In the attempt to describe precisely the specificity of art's "third mode," one should consider also non-literary examples (which largely confirm the validity of the proposed investigations), for instance, the works created by the group connected to the French journal *Documents*: the conceptualizations of Georges Bataille, Eli Lotar, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and Hans Bellmer which disturb, hypnotize, and seduce perhaps with their ambiguity precisely as a result of the tension between the affective and the conceptual.

Several sculptures by Alberto Giacometti can also be considered as model examples of the artistic mode discussed in this essay, among them *Suspended Ball*, an intriguing installation from 1930 (which started among the Surrealists the trend of producing sexually charged works). Giacometti's erotic machine, consisting of a movable, suspended ball made of stone and plowed from below by a long, moon-shaped wedge, placed within a metal, cage-like frame provoked mixed reactions, and not without a reason. Critics compared them to "strong but undefined sexual emotions related to unconscious desires,"[53] adding that "the emotions did not arouse satisfaction of any kind" but rather "an irritating anxiety."[54] Rosalind Krauss locates the work's source of power in the connection it makes between the supposedly opposite orders – love and violence, as well as between the sexes – while employing simple modest means. But the force of impact of *Suspended Ball* could have several other, quite diverse explanations.[55]

Giacometti's "machine for the production of meanings" may be read as a consequence of the artist's ethnographic fascination with primitivism, for instance, figures alluding to an ancient Mexican game where a stone wedge functioned as a ball. Hitting with it selected body parts (especially knees and buttocks) was meant to symbolize a combination of cruelty and vitality. In another related interpretation, *Suspended Ball* in form may have been inspired by Bataille's *History of the Eye*, and particularly by the ambiguous status of the eyeball (also connected to other spherical objects such as the sun, the egg, etc.).

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53 Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du surréalisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1945), 176 (quoted in Krauss, *Oryginalność awangardy*, 63-64).

54 Krauss, *Oryginalność awangardy*, 63-64.

55 Giacometti's sculpture reveals itself, in fact, as a classical open work as defined by Umberto Eco, one which encourages the audience's active participation because "the form itself is so constructed as to appear ambiguous and to assume different shapes depending on the angle from which it is viewed" (and this certainly means more than just the physical angle of observation), Eco, *The Open Work*, 85.

Considering the elements the sculpture consists of, its composition suggests that the elements' potential mobility, the audience's perception and verdict tend to frame them firstly as a figuration of the constant, perhaps inevitable interaction of bodies and sexes: the furrowed ball may symbolize femininity and the wedge could stand for the "plowing" male activity. In this way, the sculpture materializes the sexual potentiality of action and physical integration. The swaying movement and the "grinding" of the two elements also point to another interpretative possibility, suggesting, for instance, a play of meanings between that which is static (the wedge), but not passive as it carves the other element, and the ball which is mobile, but lacking actual agency, as it is subjected to the process of "carving." Critics also saw in it an act of primordial violence resembling the famous slicing of the eyeball with a razor in Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog*. Finally, Giacometti's installation can be read also as an expression of castration anxiety, of the fear of dominance and appropriation in general.

However, Giacometti's sculpture becomes as ambiguous as the eroticism of Bataille's eye is transgressive. If the eye is to symbolize the gaze-centric order, usually identified in the modern tradition with the rational, male element, then the ball itself could be read as a hollistic, "round phallicness" opposed to the moon-shaped wedge.[56] The sculpture, moreover, can be viewed from yet a different angle (one that for several reasons is more attractive): we could read the signifying ambiguity of *Suspended Ball* and the "dissolution of difference" between femininity and masculinity – passivity and activity – as an intended gesture suggesting the need of going beyond the binary divisions and negating both sexual and erotic dualism.

Additionally, the blurring of boundaries and the dissolution of divisions could be an attempt at leaving behind the traditional distinction of the intellectual/spiritual and the physical spheres, as well as the rational and instinctual ones. The metal frame where the ball and the wedge are placed would then become a kind of cage, a designed, separated space, an artistic laboratory revealing actual relations of supposedly radically different potentialities. The "design" does not necessarily imply the "artificiality" of the presented mechanism, but rather reveals the need to find an appropriate scale allowing to show clearly the nature of the affective-somatic and intellectual processes. Similar interpretative intuitions can be found in the somewhat enigmatic remarks by Michel Leiris, awed by the innovativeness, intensity, and the ability to "express emotional ambivalence" found in Giacometti's sculpture:

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56 For more on the tradition of relating the lunar metaphors to femininity see, for instance, Kazimiera Szczuka, "Prządki, tkaczki, pająki," *Biuletyn OŚKi* 3(8), (1990): 46-51.

> Among the works of art one finds few objects (paintings or sculptures) capable of at least meeting the basic requirements of that true fetishism, in other words, love… revealing itself under a hard shell, enclosing it within the range of a tangible thing, placed like a piece of furniture, in this vast, strange house known as space… There are moments which could be referred to as moments of crisis and only those matter in life. Moments when suddenly that which is external begins to meet the demands signaled by our interior, moments when the outside world opens itself to allow a connection with our hearts… I like Giacometti's sculpture because everything he does seems to preserve a crisis of this kind in stone, and it is marked with the intensity of a sudden incident, immediately captured and frozen… and yet nothing in the sculpture is dead, on the contrary, everything can be worshipped like in true fetishes…[57]

The sculpture becomes a "piece of furniture," that is, a material artifact serving as a handy (and otherwise inexpressible) figuration of a certain affect. However, Giacometti's work is also a "protective armor," which could be understood not only as a "shield" for something, but also an anatomical metaphor. It is a hard cover for defensive and representative purposes, but first and foremost (as in the case of insects) an "exoskeleton" – an indispensible and basic construction element. As such, the "shell" is located neither on the outside, nor on the inside, thus annulling the binary distinction between the external and the internal. The sculpture, similarly, is not a "container for meanings," a representation of some previously experienced state transcribed into a work of art. Giacometti's work i s i t s e l f this affective state, becoming its own fetish or embodiment, which Leiris believes should be "worshipped," or perceived as the act of perception activates the affective–signifying potential. The "emotional ambivalence" experienced in a confrontation with the sculpture is precisely a recreation (though one following a new set of rules) of a specific fusion, a mediation between the artist and the external world which happens in "moments of crisis."

This equally physical, instinctual, and mental opportunity for actions and experience thus becomes the actual object of interest here because, firstly, the movement it suggests takes place on several levels of the artist's integration with the environment, when "that which is external begins to meet the demands signaled by our interior" and, secondly, the opportunities to act, and their very potentiality, could be posited as the founding principle of the concept of *Suspended Ball* where the movement smoothly turns into rest, activity into passivity, aggression into submission, masculinity into feminity,

57 Michel Leiris, „Alberto Giacometti," trans. M. Kędzierski, *Konteksty* 3-4 (2007): 163.

and so forth; and where it is difficult to distinguish between the supposedly opposite orders. Finally, a confrontation with Giacometti's work could be revealed as essential, one where the sculpture "emanates" with meanings, activating its affective agency and the model viewer (in this case Leiris) is "drawn into a vast dark vortex, those uncanny trance-inducing moments"[58] and later, on the basis of his aesthetic experience, perceives the sculpture as a reservoir of meanings, including his own emotions and affects: "those beautiful objects which I can see and touch are the nucleus of my many memories."[59]

Analyzing the mechanisms of *Suspended Ball* from this angle and considering the wealth of its readings and the force of its impact, one may risk yet another interpretative trope: namely that the sculpture implies and problematizes the work of drives, desires, and affects, blocked and rationalized, and yet evading the domination of the mind. In this reading, Giacometti's cage would be no longer an agonal space where the masculine and the feminine clash, but a metaphor of the human psychosomatic order where the mind, the unconscious, and the body continuously converse.

On the Originality of the Avant-garde Feeling

The aim of artistic works eluding the known aesthetic categories of modernism would be to embody or figure or materialize the artistic impasse resulting from the difficulty of choice between two paradigms of presentation. At the same time, those realizations would move beyond the dualist reasoning and the split between the spiritual and material dimensions. In such cases, the avant-garde artists would draw inspiration precisely from the tensions between the various orders. A direct stimulus to initiate the creative processes would come from the sphere located at the point of contact between the traditionally understood spheres of reason and physicality, spirituality and materiality. What I have in mind here is precisely the sphere of affect which I believe to be of key importance in order to understand the more general regularity which is the source of avant-garde's actual originality.

Consequently, the proposed "alternative" artistic model would be inspired by the techniques of intellectual art, but at the same time it would express and problematize issues resisting rationalization, presented and described so far through the categories of suppression, repression, division, and breakdown. Speaking generally, the engine of such artistic investigations would be fueled not so much by the fissure between soul and matter, mind and body,

58 Ibid., 163.

59 Ibid., 163.

or *sacrum* and *profanum*, but rather by the intuition of a kinship and osmosis between these orders. We are no longer talking about the ideal of mirroring reality or expressing authentic emotions (as in the more traditional paradigms of understanding art), but about repeated attempts to conceptualize the complexity and ambiguity of the experiential–affective sphere – both in the existential dimension, experienced by the individual trying to determine their attitude to their chaotic, unpredictable, and encompassing reality, and in the aesthetic one, that is, the affect of the artist toward the created work which may precisely be a fear of being fortunate enough to find artistic solutions. This is why the specificity of this modernist mode would rely on an anxious ambivalence – an uneasiness created by the object of presentation, which somehow "demands" a description, and by the responsibility of making formal choices. Consequently, in the third mode of experience, emotion and affect become the proper object of the avant-garde play with audience sensibility, conventions, canons, and perception models, but also (as stimuli for creative processes) with the invention of the artists themselves. The affective amalgam would thus function as a special "invisible object,"[60] responsible for the initiation of the artistic gesture, but also subjected to a necessary processing that ultimately complicates an unequivocal decoding.

Translation: Anna Warso

60 I am alluding here to Giacometti's intriguing 1934 sculpture, *Invisible Object*.

Przemysław Czapliński

A War of Shames

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October 25, 2015, just after the early results of that day's parliamentary elections were announced, the leader of the victorious Law and Justice (PiS) party stated: "[…] never again will we have to be ashamed […]."[1]

Less than two months later, Polish President Andrzej Duda stated at the official ceremonies marking the 45th anniversary of the events of December 1970: "[…] we are ashamed of the Third Republic of Poland for its inability to prosecute after 1989 the perpetrators of these crimes. We are simply ashamed, nothing less. I think I speak for

1 MK, "Prezes PiS: Panie Prezydencie, melduję wykonanie zadania!," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 25, 2015, accessed March 15, 2016, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,147565,19085077,wybory-parlamentarne-2015-relacja-live-ze-sztabow-wyborczych.html/. "Let me be clear: the law will be enforced. We will pursue the truth. But there will be no revenge, no negative emotions, no personal politics, no retribution, no kicking people while they're down, even if it's their own fault and they deserved to fall. […] We have to show everyone that public life in Poland can be different, that it can be something to be proud of. That we'll never have to be ashamed in front of those young people sitting in the Sejm gallery, witnessing what's going on down there. And we've been ashamed on more than one occasion, through no fault of our own."

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everyone gathered here today. […] We are ashamed for this Third Republic, in which communist criminals (and some of them were criminals) were lauded as heroes. […] We are ashamed for this Third Republic, in which most of those responsible for 1970 were accorded state funerals with full military honors. Shame. It is no less than shameful."[2]

The president also promised that history would be restarted, and that the year 2015 would be a new 1989, done properly this time. Yet the more the two speakers emphasized the difference between the "former" and "future" Poland, the more apparent it became that their statements were crypto-manifestos for moral constructivism. Both politicians made it clear that shame was something that could be learned and unlearned, that the process of acquiring and relinquishing shame involved political spectacles, and that shame, like language or symbols, was a necessary tool of government.

It is possible that neither the chairman of the victorious political party nor the president of the country realized that they were confirming a thesis proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who observed that "transformational shame is performance."[3] According to this concept, both politicians appeared as performers. And while their rigid postures, monotonous gestures, uncoordinated with their words, and dull facial expressions made the performances underwhelming, the verbal layer itself was clear: there is no such thing as inborn shame or the moral autonomy of the individual. Poles had acquired the wrong kind of shame and had developed warped consciences in the years leading up to 2015. Consequently, a change was now in order, and carrying it out called for social conscience engineers, directors of the collective emotion, and affective resource managers.

All of this allows me to formulate my initial theses. I believe, namely, that shaming (or the practical teaching of shame) is a historically variable spectacle entangled in power relations (e.g. parenting, school, work, social groups, politics). The fundamental purpose served by this spectacle is inclusive rejection. Shaming excludes an individual from a given community (family, class at school, social group, nation, religious community) so that the individual will want to belong to it. In order for the excluded to

2 Artur Bartkiewicz, "Prezydent Duda w Gdyni: Wstyd za III RP", *rp.pl*, December 17, 2015, accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.rp.pl/Historia/151219439-Prezydent-Duda-w-Gdyni-Wstyd-za-III-RP.html#ap-1/.

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 38: "I mean theatrical performance. Performance interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things."

be reincluded, the individual must achieve a particular dependent autonomy, that is, the ability to self-correct their own actions and the actions of others according to the rules of the community. This understanding of shame as bond-forming emotions and tools,[4] is acquired in social spectacles of agency through which we are equipped with moral definitions and reflexes. The dual manner in which shame operates – affecting the body and the consciousness – means that understanding how shame works is not the same as being able to relinquish it. We can blush with shame and be angry at ourselves for blushing. It is possible to know that shame is a cultural practice and still succumb to its impulses. Conversely, we can know the reason for shame and not feel ashamed, contrary to what Socrates believed. Shame only works when it effectively puts on the path of being excluded.

There is no social institution that can survive without shame, and there is no society that could eliminate shame.[5] Yet the social construction of shame has empirical consequences in the form of multiple and contradictory shaming mechanisms or systems. Individual families, regions, and social groups have different processes of socialization involving the practical teaching of shame (shame is the experience of losing the acceptance of those whom we love, admire, and respect). Such shame – multiplied and operating in the form of contradictory or separate microsystems – would be of little use to the government, which would be unable to co-opt it for the purposes of governing. Yet the statements made by the chairman of the triumphant political party and the president of the country clearly signaled that the government needed shame. Therefore, there must exist some overriding form of shame that integrates all the remaining forms of shame, so that the latter may be employed by the government. This overriding sense of shame may be described as legitimate or sanctioned, the kind that owes its performative efficacy to its belonging to the sanctioned culture.[6]

Such sanctioned shame, which serves as the justification for all ethical judgment, sanctions itself and is thus unquestionable, sharing its power with

4 See for example Joseph Nicolosi, *Shame and Attachment Loss: The Practical Work of Reparative Therapy* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009), and Serge Tisseron, *La honte: Psychanalyse d'un lien social* (Paris: Dunod, 1992).

5 Donald Nathanson, "Shaming Systems in Couples, Families and Institutions," in *Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald Nathanson (New York: Guildford Press, 1987).

6 The sanctioned culture dictates a lifestyle that – while itself immune to questioning (as it generates mechanisms preventing the examination of its foundations) – permits the judging of all lifestyles. I refer to the concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu: see Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

no one. It is a moral doxa that binds all social life with a web of convictions. It makes clear what is expected of us and what we have the right to expect of others. Yet shame operates in a mode of asymmetrical symmetry: it allows us to admonish others based on the premise that we, too, are subject to its disciplinary power, but at the same time, the act of shaming someone in compliance with the requirements of sanctioned shame exempts us from having to prove that we ourselves meet the same standards. To put it bluntly: we shame others not just so that they will realign their behavior with the postulated norms, but also to prevent others from shaming us. The act of shaming someone grants our dignity temporary immunity, shielding us from a symmetrical response on the part of the shamed.

On occasion, someone will respond to sanctioned shaming by referring to another sanctioned form of shame, that is, alternative rules that bind the same community together with different values. This is currently taking place in Polish (and central European) culture.[7] The unprecedented situation we are now witnessing involves the teaching our bodies and consciences a new form of sanctioned shame.

Shame and Modernity

I do not claim that modernity invented shame, as that would run contrary to evidence reaching back deep into antiquity. Greek and Roman mythology as well as Jewish and Christian ethics had numerous rules that used shame to include the individual in society. Shame – I will leave it at that – appears wherever the collective agrees upon a set of rules to govern its members' coexistence.[8]

I believe, however, that modernity has bestowed a particular role on shame by turning it into a means of progress. It is impossible to call for an overall change of the world without stigmatizing the attitudes that must be eliminated. The social energy needed to achieve a unity of goals requires something

7 In his book *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), Dominique Moïsi compiles an affective map of the world. He claims that public moods are representative of cultural tendencies that are typical of specific regions and communities, and that collective emotions influence political conflicts. Based on this assertion, Moïsi divides the world into three areas: Hope (Asia), Humiliation (the Middle East), and Fear (Europe and the United States).

8 See for example Douglas L. Cairns, *Aidos. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Małgorzata Budzowska, "Czy wstyd to «bóg bezczynny»? Ambiwalentny charakter wstydu Fedry," in *Spojrzenie – Spektakl – Wstyd*, ed. Jan Potkański and Robert Pruszczyński (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2011).

more than just arguments: it requires emotions. That is why liberty, equality, and solidarity have been established, since the beginnings of modernity, with the help of narratives that sway society from ecstasy to shame.

This particular connection between solemnity and shaming can be observed in Immanuel Kant's *Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, a fundamental text of modernity. Kant's essay expresses a strong connection between the rational praise of reason as the legislator of a total order and the rhetoric of shame that discourages us from using other human capabilities. Read from the rhetorical and affective perspective, the text reveals its true nature as a condescending sermon. In the opening paragraphs, the invectives "laziness and cowardice" play an equally important role as the call to use one's "own understanding":

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its causes lie not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. D a r e t o k n o w! (*Sapere aude*.) "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is therefore the motto of the enlightenment. Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large part of mankind gladly remain minors all their lives, long after nature has freed them from external guidance. They are the reasons why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as guardians. It is so comfortable to be a minor. If I have a book that thinks for me, a pastor who acts as my conscience, a physician who prescribes my diet, and so on – then I have no need to exert myself. I have no need to think, if only I can pay; others will take care of that disagreeable business for me. Those guardians who have kindly taken supervision upon themselves see to it that the overwhelming majority of mankind – among them the entire fair sex – should consider the step to maturity, not only as hard, but as extremely dangerous.[9]

Kant thus urged us to use our own reason boldly, warning us against mental dependence. A person who allows a wise man to think for him, a priest to resolve his moral dilemmas, and a doctor to manage his body does not simply "lack understanding," but is actually a slave to his own caretakers. In order to begin defining the order of the individual and collective world on the grounds of reason, it was first necessary to feel shame for one's dependence, cowardice, and laziness.

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9 Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," trans. Peter Gay, in *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 2:1071–1072.

Three decades earlier, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, debating the Polish King Jan Leszczyński on the subject of equality, wrote that "the first source of evil is inequality."[10] Later, in his *Discourse on Inequality*, he described property as the source of all inequality, contrasting it with the virtue of pity: "[…] for all their morality, men would never have been anything but monsters if Nature had not given them pity in support of reason […];" "While Socrates and minds of his stamp may be able to acquire virtue through reason, mankind would long ago have ceased to be if its preservation had depended solely on the reasonings of those who make it up."[11] The concept of pity as an inborn virtue and moral order as a derivative of that virtue activates the story of another kind of shame. While Kantian rhetoric stigmatized submission to authorities, saying "Shame on you for being dependent," Rousseau adjudicated: "Shame on you for being indifferent." In his letter to the king, the *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), and *The Social Contract* (1762), he argues for the establishment of an order founded on compassionate socialization. The readers of Rousseau's letter (and his other writings) could no longer hold that all inequality was natural and/or beneficial, just as they could no longer hold that the identification of inequality through reason was a fulfillment of man's duty. Reason was not everything: the call for rational understanding was to be reinforced with compassion, active cooperation on a new social contract, and the abolishment of conditions that dampened the natural virtue of pity.

There are other legislators of modernity who could appear alongside Kant and Rousseau.[12] What they have in common is that instead of resorting to judgment and punishment as consequences for violating the social order, they use the shield of shame to protect the values they have introduced. Let him be ashamed who cannot gather the courage to use reason, who is incapable of pitying his neighbor, who lacks goodwill towards others… The history of modernity can be told as the story of shame, because modernity owes its dynamic to various concepts of shame and the different methods in which

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10 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Observations by Jean-Jacques Rousseau of Geneva on the Reply Made to his Discourse," trans. Judith Bush, in *On Philosophy, Morality, and Religion*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2007), 12.

11 Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality Among Men," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1:153–154.

12 These include Edmund Burke, who, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), wrote that social and political order are guaranteed by the habits and sympathies of the people; and Joseph de Maistre, who advocated absolutism, arguing that it was the only system that could achieve maximum social respect, thus guaranteeing order, and added that the ruler was as obligated to respect the law as were his subjects.

this shame was instituted. Two different and potentially conflicting forms of shame are most prominent in this regard: the first falls upon modern people who are insufficiently independent in their use of reason, while the second falls upon those who are insufficiently socialized and engaged in the liberation of their neighbors from the shackles of inequality. The former shaming contributes to the rational ordering of the world, while the latter contributes to a world bound by solidarity. The likelihood that the two might come into conflict results from the fact that society can only be convinced to accept the autonomy of reason when we shame the inclinations of the heart. Meanwhile, society can only be convinced to assume a stance of solidarity when we shame the human predisposition for excluding morality and empathy from legislation. Proponents of either concept must appeal to disparate emotions in order to make the future world a better place. Yet there is no certainty that they have the same world in mind. The contradiction between the shame of cowardly irrationality and that of antisocial indifference is not inevitable, however. It can be avoided by a society that foresees the impending clash and establishes an order that combines the search for truth with the pursuit of solidarity.

Jürgen Habermas made the same observation when, with his usual perspicacity, he referred to Kant in the famous speech titled *Modernity: An Unfinished Project* (1980):

> With the definitive segregation of science, morality and art into autonomous spheres split off from the lifeworld and administered by specialists, all that remains of cultural modernity is what is left after renouncing the project of modernity itself. The resulting space is to be filled by traditions which are to be spared all demands for justification [...].[13]

Habermas called for loyalty to a legitimation that would establish the lost connection between pure reason, practical reason, and the power of judgment. The rhetoric of shame is less pronounced here, but it returns in a milder form when the author reiterates Kant's admonition against mindless acquiescence to "tradition," which is absolved by the power of its eternal nature from the need to justify its foundations and substantiate its claims.

Let me repeat: modernity did not invent shame. What it did was give it a radical form that extracted from it the energy needed to abandon our former rules of life and embark on the creation of a new order. Modernity entangled

13 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," trans. Nicholas Walker, in *Habermas And the Unfinished Project of Modernity. Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 54.

shame into the mechanisms of power and the practices of creating a total social order. In establishing a new anthropology of shame, modernity promised the ecstasy of liberation through reason and social integration. When that source of collective ecstasy ran dry, modernity entered into a period of decline. Postmodernism turned out to be Modernism without solidarity or equality.

It is possible to determine the approximate moment in which collective ecstasy – the reward for avoiding peculiarly modern forms of shame – disappeared from the narratives that design society. It was the mid 1980s. In 1986, Jean-François Lyotard published the essay *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?*:

> The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.[14]

Lyotard's aesthetic concept was a reference to Kant and a direct response to Habermas. He perceived in the pursuit of unity the threat of the nationalization and socialization of violence. Lyotard's essay concludes the reflections initiated by Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which posited that Enlightenment universalism inevitably led to the creation of the death camps. In this modified historical and political context, the definition of postmodernism blazed a new trail, one that led from shame over insufficient social integration to shame over excessive interference into the lives of others. The French philosopher's pathos stood guard over the fundamental commandment of the new era: Thou shalt leave the Other alone.

Founding Shame

The idea of difference breathed life into Polish culture in the mid 1980s. Literature pursued this idea by borrowing from various sources and making references to different historical eras, thus inventing a new society, one that

14 Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?," trans. Régis Durand, in *Philosophers on Art From Kant to the Postmodernists: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christopher Want (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 248–249.

was internally diverse and cognizant of the complexity of those differences, and whose memory reached back to the Second Polish Republic; a society that wistfully pondered the loss of that multitude, painstakingly recreating the traces of annihilated communities and remorsefully identifying the layers of the post-war world under which those traces were hidden.

The most important books of that period – admittedly an extraordinarily rich one, full of concealed tensions and ideas for their resolution – depicted a world that was inhabited by spirits and specters of the past: *Sublokatorka* [*The Subtenant*] by Hanna Krall, *Początek* [*The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*] by Andrzej Szczypiorski, *Bohiń* by Taduesz Konwicki, *Stan po zapaści* [*After the Collapse*] by Jacek Bocheński, *Weiser* [*Who Was David Weiser*] by Paweł Huelle, *Zagłada* [*Annihilation*] by Piotr Szewc, *Umschlagplatz* [*The Final Station. Umschlagplatz*] by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Cesarski walc* [*The Imperial Waltz*], *Ocaleni* [*The Survivors*] and *Strażnik świąt* [*The Guardian of the Holy Days*] by Stanisław Benski, *Kadysz* [*California Kaddish*] by Henryk Grynberg, *Skrawek czasu* [*A Scrap of Time*] by Ida Fink, and *Teatr zawsze grany* [*The Theater That is Always Playing*] by Adolf Rudnicki are just a modest selection of books published in the years 1985–1988. Add to that *Echo* [*Echo*] by Julian Stryjkowski, a sequel to *Głosy w ciemności* [*Voices in the Darkness*], and the same author's debut book titled *Milczenie* [*Silence*], and we begin to understand the particular reconfiguration affecting cultural shame during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Cultural shame was retroactively cast upon those who once acted with indifference to the tragedy experienced by the Jews, Lemkos, and Kashubians. It was cast upon those who forced sexual minorities to live a life of silence and upon those who excised women from the pages of shared history. It tainted contemporary Poles with shame over their stalled emancipation. Many narratives paint an image of Polish modernity as the incomplete process of empowering Others, a process that demands to be finalized.

The great debt owed to the Other, a debt that continued to mount due to forced assimilation and acts of discrimination, demanded immediate repayment. The problem was that the guilt for that incomplete emancipation lay primarily on the old ideas of social unity, which inevitably led to violence against minorities. The reckoning over those ideas – a reckoning rooted in emancipatory traditions – contributed to the deconstruction of normative unities. The consequence of this lack of narrative about some shared history, shared social goals, or at least shared goals other than that of protecting individuality from shared goals, was precisely the one Habermas feared: the segregation of science, morality, and art. A lone subject remained on the stage of history, one free and ready to enter the deconstructive games played with collective identities and perceiving his individuality as a source

of melancholic ecstasy. A new form of shame known as intolerance stood guard over his freedom. The term would be used against anyone who attempted in the 1990s to impose on the Other a homogeneous – particularly national or Catholic – lifestyle or form of identity, anyone who would reject the Other's right to otherness, anyone who would demand that the Other once again feel ashamed for transgressing the general norm.

The problem was that this newly emancipated subject would have to consider a new shame that would inevitably befall him: the shame of dependence. This was not dependence in the Kantian sense, the kind that resulted from mental laziness, but rather its derivative, a dependence adapted to the conditions in the fledgling capitalist state. It was a lack of independence in life (financial, personal, professional) that would now encumber the individual person. Now that he had been given his freedom, he would have to take full responsibility for his life. Any joy in his family life, professional success, and minor and greater public triumphs would all be added to his account. Yet the same was true of emotional failures, professional missteps, and public humiliations. His previous shame over his insufficient solidarity with his neighbor turned into shame over insufficient tolerance, which in turn became a negative form of freedom from his neighbor.

The area in which this conversion could occur was the history of collective life. This is where the critical stories of intolerance against minorities met with the neoliberal narrative about the necessity of individualizing one's participation in history. In order for this conversion to occur, it was necessary to imagine collective history as a reservoir from which one must draw maximum shame and minimum pride. According to this logic, the memory of past crimes, which were driven by collective xenophobia and intolerance, began to be used to shame contemporary collective subjects. Instances of the heroic defense of Others become the sole justified source of pride. The tragic histories of minorities – represented by Eliasz Szyra (Konwicki's *Bohiń*), David Weiser (Huelle), Irma Seidenman (Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*), the Jews of Zamość in the novel by Piotr Szewc, the Gypsies recalled by Jerzy Ficowski, the Masurians depicted in Erwin Kruk's *Kronika z Mazur* [*A Masurian Chronicle*] – were to give rise to a society pluralistically bound by the principle of concern for their neighbors. In the 1990s this society was harnessed into a narrative that presented violence against the Other as something that was avoidable only by limiting assistance to the Other.

More than just Shame

The emancipation of the discriminated Others was made possible by according them equal rights, thus relieving the assimilatory pressure exerted by the

collective identity. That same relaxation of social bonds facilitated the systemic transformation of the country and the neoliberal deregulation of collective subjects such as social classes, religious communities, and the nation. The neoliberal discourse gradually monopolized the concept of freedom, absolving the state of its responsibility to ensure equality.

Under these circumstances, the position of people who happened to win approval precisely from their standing in their families, social classes, or national or religious communities became precarious. They were soon stripped of any vestiges of symbolic prestige. Those who required help rather than emancipation found themselves in a similar predicament. Not only were they forced to reach out for that help, they also had to swallow an ever growing dose of shame.

The art of the opening decade of the twenty-first century – by which I mean drama, prose, film, and the visual arts – was focused precisely on identifying the changing rules that governed social life, that is, desolidarization, the gradual disappearance of equality from the field of vision, the accumulation of old and new rules of discrimination, and the acquisition of new freedoms and the loss of others. The deconstruction of the politics of affect, particularly the new distribution of shame and approval, began to play a crucial role in the critical action of art.

Among these deconstructive operations, there are three fundamental ones that can be discerned. These involved, in succession, the depiction of the process of implementing shame, its consequences, and how it could be prevented.

Scene one involved a new pedagogy of shame, coordinated by no one and carried out chiefly in the areas of economic and cultural advancement, where it demanded an increasing degree of submission. A model example of this can be found in the plays of Paweł Demirski. In his later work – which includes the plays *From Poland With Love* (2006), *Kiedy przyjdą podpalić dom, to się nie zdziw* [*Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down*, 2006], *Śmierć podatnika* [*Death of a Taxpayer*, 2007], *Diamenty to węgiel, który wziął się do roboty* [*Diamonds are Coal That Got Down To Business*, 2008], *Opera gospodarcza dla ładnych pań i zamożnych panów* [*An Economic Opera for Nice Ladies and Wealthy Lords*, 2008], and *W imię Jakuba S.* [*In the Name of Jakub S.*, 2011] – we witness the playwright's transformation from a critic of capitalism who exposes the hidden mechanism of the market, to a critic of the liberal discourse, that is, an artist who deconstructs the validity of the new rules.

In the early play *Don't Be Surprised…*, Demirski echoes the work of left-leaning pre-World War II artists by presenting the ruthless battle waged by capital against the worker; beginning with *Death of a Taxpayer*, he shows how neoliberalism wins the battle using ideology rather than by the power of sheer money. Thus the author creates characters who not only suffer defeat

in their confrontation with this new world, but who must also articulate their defeat in a new language. They are to be humiliated, not just defeated. They are forced to admit that their downfall was well deserved, that they turned out to be weaker in a fair fight. The language of neoliberalism thus equates the defeated and the excluded, leaving one and the other to fend for themselves. In *Diamonds…* Sonia recites the following lesson about Uncle: "His archaic habits of all-too-obvious origin… hindered him from understanding what was good for him. As a result, he lost out, and there's nothing better in store for him anymore."[15]

Demirski additionally writes into his plays officials of the new discourse, that is, people whose job it is to teach these lessons in humiliation to the defeated characters. Thus Sonia directs this straightforward explanation to Uncle: "Exactly – this play is about a hundred-year-old, Uncle – for a hundred years now, there've been uncles like you, and there's nothing anyone can do about it – just like there's nothing anyone can do about poverty and social exclusion, which is the cost you have to pay for transformation and our neoliberal economy; and your character, Uncle, has precisely this educational tenor."[16] It is apparent that Sonia's cynicism affects Wojnicki, but it also educates the audience; we begin to understand that success narratives and the vocabulary of systemic transformation have become agents of economic processes and accomplices in the overhaul of our way of thinking. The transformation of affects strengthened the economy, turning peoples' various, ordinary market missteps into a sense of shame for their lack of self-sufficiency.

Yet neoliberalism constructed a new sense of shame not when it created the poor, but when it popularized the notion that the losers were themselves at fault. In the final monologue, addressed not so much to the characters as much as it is to the audience, Wojnicki remarks: "The worst thing about this story is that / I'm no good. / That I was told that I was no good. / And I know that I'm no good. / That I'm not up to dealing with all of this somehow. / That I couldn't find myself. / And I know that, but it doesn't change a thing for me, / knowing / that there are people who are up to it."[17] Discourse locks the losers up in a world of necessity, but it does not throw away the key; like any other shame, the one that affects the losers simultaneously excludes and includes

15 Paweł Demirski, "Diamonds are Coal that Got Down to Business," in *(A)pollonia: Twenty-first Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, ed. Krystyna Duniec et al. (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 476.

16 Demirski, *Diamonds*, 502.

17 Demirski, *Diamonds*, 525.

them, giving everyone the opportunity to return to the sphere of approval under the condition that they accept their circumstances as shameful.[18]

How did the ethics of the Other – espoused in the past – come to be conflated with the newer pragmatics of individualism? *Dziady. Ekshumacja* (*Forefathers' Eve. Exhumation*) and *An Economic Opera…* – a paraphrase of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, itself a paraphrase of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* – is an abridged staging of the birth of the Polish free market which explains the downfall of solidarity and the rise of the new shame. In Demirski's depiction, each stage of Poland's struggle for independence – from the period of partitions to 1989 – was sold out by the victors in the process of transformation. As we watch the characters on stage, we find ourselves at a loss for counter-arguments. The division into winners and losers proves that while the twenty-year battle might have been fought over freedom, it was the free market that won in the end. If so, then those who helped build capitalism in its infancy are the most deserving of approval, while those who are able to convert their merits of yesterday into the privileges of today are the most deserving of freedom. Consequently, Mickiewicz's Konrad combines with Brecht's Mack the Knife, while Andrzej Wajda, portrayed in the drama *Był sobie Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej, and Andrzej],* [*There Was Andrzej, Andrzej, Andrzej and Andrzej*], merges with Jan Kulczyk.

Peachum, the main character of *An Economic Opera…*, appears to be a bastardly synthesis of such different fathers. In the time of the Polish People's Republic he was "persecuted" by the state for being a private entrepreneur. Now, as a veteran, he transforms his dubious involvement in the anti-communist resistance into profit. He is a member of the elite Association of Former Prisoners for Prosperity, which works to strengthen the ties between economic and political power. His organization is a Polish transplant of the WASP agenda in mafia form: "The people in our association are normal / rich / white / conservatively liberal."[19] Together, they form the most hermetic club of managers in the country, one that professes an astonishingly straightforward ideology: freedom is the liberty to accumulate capital. Get rich if you can, and if you can't, then you can just fuck off.[20]

The unification of cultural capital with capitalism and freedom with the free market meant that the national uprisings of the nineteenth century, the

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18 See Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity," 37: "[…] Shame both derives from and aims toward sociability."

19 Demirski, „Opera gospodarcza dla ładnych pań i zamożnych panów," in *Parafrazy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 285.

20 See the song "Spierdalaj" for two sopranos, violin, bass guitar, and drums: Demirski, *Opera,* 296.

resistance, Siberian exile, and finally the social upheavals witnessed in the Polish People's Republic were nothing more than the struggle for the right to get rich, to be selfish, and to transform the state into a service sector. "It's my way or the highway," Peachum says. Still, the class he belongs to does not want to appear selfish. The Peachums of our times still experience a modicum of shame over their lack of solidarity, yet the shame caused by dependence legitimizes greediness, and thus they take economic considerations into account in their generosity towards the poor. They turn solidarity into philanthropy, they convert philanthropy into prestige, and prestige in turn ushers them into the cultural elite, making them socially trusted figures to whom serious contracts can be awarded. This whole series concludes with a trap that ensnares the "shamed losers" – not only does the act of sanctioned philanthropy curtail the duties of the state in combating inequality, it furthermore turns inequality into a problem to be resolved not through legislative means, but in the realm of private charity. Thus the shame over the lack of solidarity, which Rousseau would have placed at the foundations upon which the order of the republic is to be built, winds up outside the social contract as an optional factor. It places shame exclusively upon the shoulders of the "losers."

In depicting these exercises in shaming, Demirski naturally casts a spotlight on those who participated in such exercises, that is, members of the elite. In this regard, Demirski's plays became a continuation of the type of prose prevalent in the 1990s, in which a single character was quickly identified and molested by symbolic means. He was the first winner of the free-market race: the petty hustler, the smalltime Polish capitalist who hastily and sloppily covered up his plebeian background as he assumed a business class guise. His garb, appearance, behavior, manners, and taste became culturally stigmatized, while he himself earned the dubious name of *homo polonicus*. He crops up in the writing of many authors: Marek Nowakowski (*Homo polonicus*, 1992; *Skandal w motelu „George"* [*Scandal at Motel George*], 1997; *Prawo prerii* [*The Law of the Prairie*], 1999), Tadeusz Konwicki (*Czytadło* [*Airport Novel*], 1992), Piotr Wojciechowski (*Szkoła wdzięku i przetrwania* [*The School of Charm and Survival*], 1995), Krzysztof Maria Załuski (*Hotel Polonia*, 1999), Włodzimierz Kowalewski (the short story *Rude włosy nocą* [*Red Hair in the Night*], published in *Powrót do Breitenheide* [*Return to Breitenheide*], 1997). In later years, this petty hustler would either lose, or – in the case of Demirski's plays – accumulate economic capital and amass political influence. The difference between the prose writers and Demirski is that while the former attempted to shame the nouveau riche and guide them onto the path of righteousness, the playwright gave the members of the elite the opportunity to explain how they exploit shame to maintain their positions. Ushered

onto the stage, the beneficiaries of the systemic transformation assert with disarming cynicism that they owe their success to no one but themselves, and that everyone else ought to exercise self-sufficiency as well. Thus, sanctioned shame began to protect the victors.

Demirski's plays depict the assorted practices through which shame is implemented, often through the use of scenes that are rife with humiliation. If that was the first scene, then the next one played out in the dramas by Dorota Masłowska, who brought out characters that had already been trained to react differently. The shift in perspective seems crucial in this regard: in the novels *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [*Snow White and Russian Red*] and *Paw królowej* [*The Queen's Peacock*], the author exposes to public view and humiliates pathetic Polish manifestations of misogyny. The books cast a pall of shame over the local figure of the Polish macho who expects approval for simply being a Pole, a man, and a sexist. Meanwhile, the plays *Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku* [*A Couple of Poor, Polish-Speaking Romanians*, 2006] and *Między nami dobrze jest* [*No Matter How Hard We Tried*, 2008] feature female characters who behave as if they had been too diligent in their lessons and had internalized the social engineering technique that is loser's guilt.

The immune systems shielding their morals and personalities gradually break down under the pressure of liberal and free-market pedagogy. If they choose not to heed these lesson, then they must pretend to be someone they are not. After all, if Poland is in fact "worse than Romania,"[21] then another identity has to be forged: "I've long since made up my mind that I'm not Polish, just European, and I learned the language from records and tapes left behind by the Polish cleaning lady. We're no Poles, we're just Europeans, normal people."[22] If, on the other hand, they decide that they are who they are and that "we're all good," then they have to assemble a language that would justify their present circumstances. This language would have to express an idea that stands in contradiction to what is eye-witnessed: that the excluded could be even more excluded; and if they're not, then that means they still stand a chance of succeeding in the market:

> Halina: "The primroses are in flower, and spring is well upon us […]. You're more inclined not to go on invigorating walks; it's time not to break out that bicycle you don't own. […] It's not back on the hanger with those grays, browns, bulky tights, thick sweaters, coats and jackets. Dare not to

21 Dorota Masłowska, „Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku," in *Dwa dramaty zebrane* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2010), 40.

22 Masłowska, "No Matter How Hard We Tried," in *(A)pollonia*, 457–458.

> wear those breezy dresses you don't own and the fine tights you don't own either. Most likely you don't have any lighter jackets, but the one you do have certainly won't fit your fat frame. Not to worry. We have last year's tips to keep you from landing squarely on the sidelines with your finger on the sphincter of springtime trends."[23]

The multiple negations drive the language into a state of functional contradiction: it at once conceals and reveals, at once mystifies and discredits. It allows the lack of options to be presented as a series of negative choices ("I keep thinking about the holiday I won't be having. I've been reading up on it, and I've finally decided: No way, we're not going on holiday again this year."[24]), while discrediting helpless efforts to conceal this lack of options; it reveals the misery of her hopes and denounces the source of that misery.

Masłowska thus catches shame red-handed as it attempts to mask itself. Shame is the master of disguise[25] and is not easy to expose. The writer reveals how shame hides beneath rationalized and naturalized human behaviors as a regulating principle. It determines one's self esteem and readiness to stand up for oneself. People who know that they might be shamed will withdraw from the world and choose a place that will limit their exposure to unpleasant experiences, even though that withdrawal hinders the very actions that could help them unshackle themselves from shame. In other words, shame is the cause of actions undertaken in order to prevent action.

Not Quite Resistance

In the same decade in which Demirski and Masłowska deconstructed shaming methods and their social consequences, there appeared works of literature that explored characteristic self-defense tactics. The first, as ineffective as it was obvious, involved submitting to shame in public and revealing one's own emotions in private. Yet in this case the family or social circles are not used by the characters as laboratories in which to exercise their powers of resistance or develop alternate stances. Rather, they are spaces for emotional release. The characters thus live in two alternating worlds of suffered humiliation and helplessly shouted profanities.

Like the masses of millions in whose name they had been summoned into literature, they suffered the experience of unemployment and humiliating

23 Ibid., 428.

24 Ibid., 433.

25 See Jane Middelton-Moz, *Shame and Guilt: Masters of Disguise* (London: HCI, 1991).

job interviews. While Demirski lent a voice to the elite and allowed them to speak in the language of shame, full of condescension, contempt, and cynicism, these authors equipped their characters with the awareness of the goal that this shame was intended to achieve. They know which slogans to use to land a job, and they know that the use of these slogans is a sign of submission that is expected by the employer. Hence their language is grotesquely servile and repulsively honest:[26]

> […] I hereby consent to the processing of my personal data and internal organs for the purposes of food preparation and packaging. I consent to extensive penetration and interference.[27]

> Please find attached the intriguing résumé of a graduate with a degree in an interesting yet dead-end major. I have a hundred years' experience in everything, I've given more hummers to CEOs than General Motors, and I can operate any device, from iPhones to photocopiers to lawnmowers. I'm fluent in ten languages, with a particular emphasis on hate speech.[28]

This incohesive yet essential combination of significant competence (ten languages) with pent-up negative emotions (hatred) signaled the alarming increase in the disproportion between sources of approval and sources of defeat. A growing number of experiences, types of biographies, behaviors, and aesthetics were becoming shameful in nature: a small-town or rural background (M. Olszewski, M. Pilot, M. Szarejko), a mediocre fortune amassed under communism thanks to connections and fraud (M. Nowakowski), big money earned under communism thanks to membership in the state apparatus (G. Mérétik, *Kryptonim Luksemburg* [*Code-Name Luxembourg*]), and minor and major fortunes acquired under capitalism (Nowakowski, Wojciechowski, Łoziński). From this jumble of characters and their actions emerged an increasingly expansive network that began to encompass all of reality.[29]

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26 In the version that more closely resembles reportage, the language is stripped of this directly-expressed awareness of one's own humiliation. See for example: "Czarek was going on forty. His baseball cap read: How may I help you?" – Marcin Kołodziejczyk, *B. Opowieści z planety prowincja* (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2013), 92.

27 Sławomir Shuty, *Zwał* (Warszawa: WAB, 2004), 100.

28 Patrycja Pustkowiak, *Nocne zwierzęta* (Warszawa: WAB, 2013), 86–87.

29 Marek Ziółkowski, "O imitacyjnej modernizacji społeczeństwa polskiego," in *Imponderabilia wielkiej zmiany. Mentalność, wartości i więzi społeczne czasów transformacji*, ed. Piotr

What was of course unprecedented was the systemic transformation itself, that is, the shift from a centrally-planned economy to a free-market one, from an anti-communist identity that concealed diversity in society to multiple identities whose foundations had not yet fully formed, and from ritualized elections to a democratic election process. Under such circumstances – perhaps understandably and less reprehensibly – everyone attempted to shame everyone else, for various reasons and from various positions: the poor shamed the rich, the elite shamed the commoners, those who demonstrated solidarity shamed those who were selfish, the nationalists shamed the post-communists, and the post-communists shamed the liberals. This was brought about by the gradual crystallization of sanctioned shame. Yet the results were grotesque. By the time the country was done carpet-bombing itself with shame, the only Pole who could avoid shame turned out to be one deeply-rooted in the local tradition, namely, the ghost-Pole: a phantom who marched into this new reality with no connections, money, or education, who came from nowhere, and who relied on his street smarts rather than market skills to earn a living.

Piotr Siemion's novel *Niskie Łąki* [*Low Meadows*, 2000], provided a perfect illustration of this apparition. It told the story of a group of young people who formed the avant-garde of the Orange Alternative: unemployed and unenrolled in university, they make a living by committing minor acts of theft, but only when necessary; they paint slogans on walls during martial law, but they never formally join the underground Solidarity movement; they move to the United States in the final years of the Polish People's Republic, but return with no cash at the turn of the decade. They set up a radio station, even though they have no money, insufficient professional experience, and no connections. Siemion thus depicts an idealized version of the birth of the middle class, a class of self-made men who do not owe anything to anyone. Tasked with overseeing the station's social mission, they remain pure not just in the professional sense, but especially in terms of their biographies: their life stories in the years leading up to the Third Polish Republic are one long improvisation during which they put down no permanent roots. With no connections or origin, no money or skills, demonstrating solidarity in a free-market world, socially

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Sztompka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), 55–56. "The reality (or, rather, hyperreality) depicted in Western, mainly American, films and cartoons is – particularly for the younger generation – becoming a point of comparative reference, or even increasingly a point of normative reference against which to judge everyday life in Poland. Krzysztofek [...] goes as far as to refer to signs of the «cultural shaming of Poles», expressed in their contempt for their native culture and language, and their fascination with the mass-produced culture that flows in from foreign, mainly American, media outlets."

conscious in his commercial ventures: these are the qualities of the phantom Pole who might avoid being shamed in this new world.

It was a logical response to the spread and instrumentalization of shame. Its spread proved, after all, that systemic transformation was dependent on a mental and affective transformation. The aforementioned shame that was cast upon crude flea-market capitalism was intended as an encouragement to imitate Western-style capitalism. Complementary to it was the concurrent sense of shame over the Polish People's Republic.[30] Its disciplining metaphor was proposed by Józef Tischner in the seminal essay *Homo sovieticus* (1991), in which he defined *Homo sovieticus* as "a client of communism, enslaved by the system"; the "client" was responsible for the collapse of the former system, but now "demands that capitalists satisfy those needs that the communists failed to satisfy. He is like a slave who, having liberated himself from one form of bondage, immediately sets out in search of a new one."[31] In keeping with his own Hegelian outlook, Tischner denounced the slave mindset that emerged in circumstances that (allegedly) enabled anyone to become his own master. His conclusion sounded cruel, but not inconsistent in this regard: "[…] let me be clear: even those who experience great suffering are not permitted to do whatever they please. Those who suffer also bear responsibility for their actions and are subject to criticism. We cannot, after all, treat them as children. While this may strike some as degrading the dignity of sufferers, it is in fact the restitution of their dignity."[32] This line of reasoning justified the withholding of respect for adults orphaned by the communist system, adults who were now expected to acknowledge their own responsibility for their present circumstances. Ewa Borzęcka upholds this disciplinary perspective in her painfully colonialist documentary *Arizona* (1997), which depicts life in a village where the state agricultural farm has been shut down and the local peasants, abandoned by their master, can do nothing but drink themselves blind.

Thus the self-taught capitalist was shamed into broadening and modernizing the flow of capital, while the post-communist client, with his demands against his new masters, was encouraged to become more enterprising and economically independent. Both became synonymous with the "typical Pole," a figure that manifested as an intolerant person who thought about society in terms of unity rather than diversity, an obstinate and narrow-minded

30 See *Wstyd za PRL i nie tylko*, ed. Katarzyna Łozowska (Szczecin: Przedsiębiorstwo Produkcyjno-Handlowe Zapol Dmochowski-Sobczyk, 2010).

31 Józef Tischner, "Homo sovieticus," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 12, 1991, 5.

32 Ibid.

conservative who regarded pluralism as the cause of various misfortunes. He carried within him frustration rather than views and rational arguments. His Catholicism was small-minded, his patriotism filled with hatred to bogus foreigners, and his own horizons were circumscribed by his convictions on the biological nature of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. He considered all forms of otherness immoral and unnatural. The shaming of his backwardness, the mental backwater he inhabited, and the parochial Polishness he represented served to broaden and Europeanize the Polish identity.

It was precisely this creation of "shameful" characters by literature and the media that threatened to shame everything considered "normal" in post-transformational Poland. This shaming resulted in the social marginalization of a broad range of experiences together with the ways of life from which they stemmed: the period of the Polish People's Republic, the dawn of capitalism, and the traditionalist collective identity. If they could be kept silent, it would mean that the society involved in the reality of capitalism lacked any characteristic aesthetic through which to depict homespun capitalism, that the collective biography steeped in the Polish People's Republic could not be voided, under penalty of loss of approval, and that there existed no reputable means of communication through which traditional mores could be expressed.

It was a matter of historical and cultural coincidence (and non-coincidence) that two novels were published the same year (2007): the first, *Nagrobek z lastryko* [*Terrazzo Gravestone*] by Krzysztof Varga, depicts a character who has absorbed not only the full range of post-transformational shames, but also the colonial principle "minimum shame, maximum pride," meaning that one cannot draw upon any positive content in the history of one's own community; Poland's history as a source of suffering drives the main character of *Nagrobek z lastryko* into deep frustration (and, in turn, to murder and suicide). The other novel was *Barbara Radziwiłłówna z Jaworzna-Szczakowej* [*Barbara Radziwiłłówna of Jaworzno-Szczakowa*, 2007] by Michał Witkowski. Emblematic to the point of relevance, the book introduces a character who carries within him – and on him – all of the founding shames of the new Poland: he succeeded in earning a meager fortune through various shady dealings in the twilight years of the Polish People's Republic; in the Third Polish Republic, he owns a pawn shop (where the poor hock their family treasures), lends money, and works in debt collection; his lifestyle (the gym, a pair of Ukrainian bodyguards on either side, bodybuilding supplements) is the epitome of macho tackiness, while his moral code (violence on weekdays, church on holidays) sets the average for hypocrisy in society.

Witkowski uses all of this to achieve something crucial: he transforms post-transformational shames into tackiness. He replaces behaviors that were

submitted to moral judgment with choices that were subject to aesthetic criticism, while ennobling the attitudes and objects that had been shifted into the realm of tackiness.

It is precisely for these reasons that the novel can be regarded as emblematic. The author placed in stark relief the process that was under way throughout the country's social life, and three important questions regarding people's collective experiences (What do we owe to the People's Republic of Poland? How did we create capitalism? What system of morality do we represent?) were at risk of being denigrated to a secret, lower, more shameful level of expression. Witkowski preserved and enhanced this *worseness* (i.e. tackiness) of the post-communist society's roots in the former system, the pawn shop origins of Polish capitalism, and the people's xenophobic mentality, reinforced by its colonial longings. By exhibiting and theatricalizing worseness, Witkowski proved that the plebeian lifestyle was an offshoot of a system of communication that encompassed myriad forms of approval which members of society granted each other. In other words, *Barbara Radziwiłłówna…* demonstrated the self-sufficiency of the way of life that was put to shame in the transformation process. If sanctioned culture shamed Poles into renouncing the Polish People's Republic, into becoming more independent, more European, and religiously tolerant, then Witkowski's novel proved that the modernization process had run its course. *Barbara Radziwiłłówna…* signaled the depletion of the energy that was being drawn from shame to fuel the transformation.

Thus we hit the wall of modernization. The shame that was intended to help create a more pluralistic and solidary society instead sanctioned the policy of granting freedom to those who could take advantage of it; the shame that was intended to encourage modern mobility instead pushed a significant portion of society into opting for defensive immobilization; the shame cast upon traditional mores in hopes of provoking Europeanization instead evoked a sense of worseness, which the majority turned into frustration and some translated into aggression. If I previously defined shame as inclusive rejection, then there was no cohesive "us" to which one could belong in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Sanctioned shame was crumbling into conflicted strands – emancipatory, liberal, conservative – exposing the vestigial nature of the sanctioned culture in which it was purportedly rooted.

Inclusion

The affective history of Polish culture over the past quarter century outlined in this essay allows us to understand the "community turn" witnessed

in Polish art in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was not – or at least not initially – part of an attempt to introduce yet another system of shame, this time one embedded in nationalism. Rather, it seems to me that it was an effort to reinstate the prosocial properties of shame. The goal was to reclaim its inclusive power. This, however, required a shift towards the independent distribution of approval.

Shame over the lack of solidarity was also intended to have a prosocial effect at the dawn of modernity. It was converted in the period of systemic transformation, however, into shame over belonging to collective entities: those who made demands were shamed for their dependence on others, while those who were xenophobic were shamed for their irrationality. It was for this reason that shaming spectacles had an individualizing effect.

The opposite was true in the case of the art associated with the community turn. It comprises works belonging to various disciplines, and so while I will discuss only a handful of plays and novels, I am aware of the existence of many others.[33] The first example that ought to be mentioned is that of the television drama, as this medium was the first to implement a radical change in the poetics of representation. While produced with the intellectual in mind, it served to foster a classless audience, and was comparable to British theater in terms of its accomplishments and breadth. The plays presented in this format featured new thematic choices and axiological solutions. The titles included: *Śmierć rotmistrza Pileckiego* [*The Death of Captain Pilecki*, 2006] about a Polish resistance fighter in World War II who was arrested, tortured, and murdered in a communist prison; *Norymberga* (*Nuremberg*, 2006) about a counterintelligence officer who, in the times of the Third Polish Republic, attempts to bring about a "Nuremberg trial," that is, a public tribunal to prosecute the crimes of communism, even at the risk of being convicted himself; *Inka* (2007), about Danuta Siedzikówna, a military courier and nurse in the post-war resistance movement, imprisoned and tortured under communism; *Rozmowy z katem* [*Conversations with an Executioner*, 2007] about Kazimierz Moczarski, a member of the Home Army whom the communists placed in a cell with the commander of the German units tasked with suppressing the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; *Stygmatyczka* [*The Stigmatist*, 2008] about the torment of sister Wanda Broniszewka in communist prisons; *Kryptonim Gracz* [*Codename: Player*,

33 These include films like *Rysa* [*Scratch*, 2008], by Michał Rosa, *Generał Nil* [*General Nil*, dir. Ryszard Bugajski, 2009], *Popiełuszko – wolność jest w nas* [*Popiełuszko: Freedom is Within Us*, dir. Rafał Wieczyński, 2009], *Róża* [*Rose*, 2001] by Wojciech Smarzowski, *Obława* [*Manhunt*, 2012] by Marcin Krzyształowicz, and *Pilecki* (2015) by Mirosław Krszyszkowski. Another possible addition to this is the television series *Czas honoru* [*Days of Honor*, six seasons, broadcast 2008–2014].

2008], about a world-famous fencer and a double agent for the Polish Security Service and the CIA; *Ziarno zroszone krwią* [*Grain Drenched in Blood*, 2008], about the tragic fate of the fighters in the Home Army, the list could go on.

These plays were not about ideological arguments between opposing worldviews. The government officials portrayed in these dramas have plenty of speaking parts, yet they have nothing to say; they ask many questions, yet they do not seem to be actually interested in learning anything. Their sole purpose is to humiliate, destroy, demean, and torture. The opposite is true of the main characters: they respond to questions curtly, if at all, refusing to give testimony or justify their actions. It is a gallery of lay martyrs whose communication with the communists is exemplary in that they refuse to communicate with them at all. Viewers would be forgiven for thinking that the characters were portrayed not for their diverse life stories, but for their grandiose deaths at the hands of their killers.

The narrative model developed in these plays, based on the juxtaposition of innocent protagonists and immoral oppressors, can also be found in the outdoor theater production *Hamlet 44* (directed by Paweł Passini), the radio play *39/89: zrozumieć Polskę* ([*39/89: Understanding Poland*], directed by Łukasz Rostkowski), and the layout of the Warsaw Uprising Museum.

The exhibitions, dramas, and radio plays mentioned (and omitted) above share several distinct ideological assumptions. The first involves history, which is perceived in this instance as a grand theater of events in which geopolitics directs the cast from behind the scenes and politicians play the lead roles, while all the extras are given the choice of assuming either a conformist or heroic stance. From this conviction stems another belief which states that the clash of values is the fullest manifestation of historical processes. Rather than portraying everyday life, these works depict powerful events – the outbreak of World War II, the Warsaw Uprising, political assassinations and trials – or pivotal moments in history, providing a chronological framing for the narratives, which in turn enables the illusion of realism. This peculiar game of make believe, one played not just in the cinema and the theater, but also in museums (authentic prison cells, an actual section of wall), serves to contemporize the past. This facilitates compliance between modern-day notions of history – the ones shaped by today's media – and its representation. Lending credence to this tactic is its reliance on the struggle between defenders and attackers: all of the works discussed above depict a world in which the set of historical and moral roles is limited, and thus painfully obvious. One can either be the oppressor or the victim – either beat or be beaten.

The insertion of history into the present is also a way of renewing community by repeating a communal ritual. In this act, we witness a person sacrificing himself in order to secure a future community that will owe its social

cohesion to the dead heroes. If someone has given his life so that we may be free, then our free lives are burdened with a debt that we may pay by honoring the memory of the fallen and cultivating the values for which they gave their lives.

Therein lay the prosocial power of the turn to community. The works it encompassed not only reminded people of their patriotic duty, but also defined the collective subject in performative terms. It was to be a community that accepted a distinct and limited set of criteria regarding guilt, shame, and pride: guilt defined the oppressors, pride belonged to those who perished, and shame fell upon those who failed to commemorate the heroes, regardless of what those heroes had done in their lives besides dying for their country. The central role of martyred figures in this spectacle challenged the existing pedagogy of shame, as it gave the modern-day depositaries of martyrological truth the right to treat any attempt to shame the nation as an attack on sacred values – an attack that must be repelled. The former slogan – "If you want to be European, you must let yourself be shamed" – was replaced with "If you want to be Polish, you can't let yourself be shamed." A radical change was thus occurring in the approach to the affective economy: while we witnessed a surplus of shame in the 1990s, the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century marked our entrance into the phase of surplus pride.

The shift in attitude necessitated a different perspective on the present. The solutions discussed earlier demanded that the amount of pride inherited be minimized, and further imposed upon the fictional characters the moral duty of remembering collective manifestations of discrimination. Consequently, present-day forms of covert violence such as misogyny, homophobia, antisemitism, and mobbing came to be perceived as extensions of historical forms of violence that had persisted precisely because they had not been subjected to criticism. In the case of art associated with the community turn, on the other hand, artists depicted the flaws of the new system as the result of the disruption of the continuity of patriotism. From this point of view, the foundations of Polish democracy and capitalism after 1989 were perceived as corroded, while the corrosion permeating all aspects of life in Poland had resulted from its buckling under the pressure of shame and the blurring of the country's Catholic and heteronormative national identity. To restore order to the country and its social life, this identity would need to be sanctioned once again. This, in turn, meant that any disassembly of the community would need to be put on trial. Thus criticism of the new face of Poland merged with postulations calling for the restitution of collective subjects.

As was the case with the series of television dramas, the apogee once again occurred in the middle of the first decade of the new century. In his

meaningfully titled novel *Nic* [*Nothing*, 2005], Dawid Bieńkowski depicted the rampage of capitalism and its immoral principles as having been caused by disregard for patriotic traditions; their abandonment leads to the loss of both human dignity and national sovereignty, and thus their restoration would help reclaim control over international capital. In contrast to Bieńkowski's perception of the market as the source of the country's crisis of autonomy, in *Żywina* [*MP Żywina*, 2008] Rafał Ziemkiewicz associated demoralization (at the local government level) with the blackmail tactics used by former members of the communist regime against their erstwhile collaborators. Bronisław Wildstein was of a similar mind: in the novel *Dolina nicości* [*The Valley of Nothingness*, 2008], he presented the delay in "lustration," or the purging of former regime holdovers from political life – which he considered a prerequisite for the rebuilding of the moral code – as a consequence of the long-standing collaboration between the intellectual elites and the communist security services; under the Polish People's Republic, officers would protect their informers, and the secrets thus gained would later guarantee them immunity. In the novel *Ukryty* [*Hidden*, 2012], the same writer depicts public attitudes toward the Smolensk disaster and the cross erected on Krakowskie Przedmieście, exposing the demoralizing consequences of the "laughter treatment" employed by various relativists. A community that is incapable of being serious, that is eager to mock national and Catholic values, and that listens to the words of a "shadow" teacher: "We must emerge from under the shadow of the cross. We must emerge into the light of day, where there will be nothing to limit us or show us the way; into open, unlimited space,"[34] turns out to be a product of – and a factor in – moral depravity. The image of a crowd jeering at the people praying at the foot of the "Smolensk cross" leads one of the protagonists to conclude the following: "If this unruly mob can humiliate with impunity people who have just come to pray […]," "[if one is allowed to] destroy something that gives ordinary people a sense of dignity, something that brings them together, that strengthens this nation, then it's no wonder that this country and, by extension, the police operate the way they do."[35] Thus the breakdown of the overall order begins with a single person, one who is not afraid to violate inviolable values. His laughter demoralizes the ones who laugh and humiliates those being laughed at. For this reason, in order to rebuild the country, "ordinary people" must be shielded from the laughter and shaming of others.

34 Bronisław Wildstein, *Ukryty* (Poznań: Zysk i Spółka, 2012), 78.

35 Ibid., 190.

Pseudomorphosis

The pieces of this new puzzle gradually began to connect: the gaps in the alternative sanctioned shame were filled in with museums, movies, novels, and political initiatives. It relied on the reversal of the existing affective economy for leverage. In its efforts to build a pluralistic and solidary society, Polish culture persuaded Poles in the 1980s and 1990s to assume an inconvenient yet heroic stance: "Be proud if you're able to feel shame"; this meant that their pride was to be founded upon the experience of shame when witnessing those who discriminated against the Other, resulting, it was hoped, in a readiness to stand up for the Other today as well. This stance was used at the turn of the century as justification for the disassembly of collective identities, as it was these collective subjects – the nation, single-sex communities, religious communities – that were most frequently responsible for persecuting minorities; this only exacerbated the isolation of individuals, who then had to redefine their own identities and accept the existence of fluid communities assembled for the purpose of solving immediate problems and dissolved soon thereafter. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, and certainly with greater vigor in the wake of the Smolensk disaster, art and politics offered a new collective identity, one that was static and maintained its right to draw pride from history, free of shame for the wrongdoings of its ancestors. This transmutation was accompanied by a new slogan: "Shame on you for not being proud!"

This new sanctioned shame, however, fails to patch the leaks in the sanctioned culture with a new set of reinforcements, and is thus the result of pseudomorphosis rather than metamorphosis, filling in the partial void left by previous articulations of nationalism. Crucially, the program for rebuilding the (patriotic, national, male-centric) community does not abandon the principle of shame itself. In this sense, Jarosław Kaczyński's claim that Poles will never have to be ashamed again is false. The purpose of the new yet anachronistic project is not to dispense with shame but to have it meted out by a different authority and to change its proportions relative to the remaining primary affects. The previous principle of "Minimum pride, maximum shame," is replaced with a new proportion: "Maximum pride, minimum shame."

This reversal was a result of the fact that the economic transformation hijacked the project of pluralism – founded on un-solidarity – and overinvested shame, turning it into the primary source of energy for development. Meanwhile, the affective economy tells us that people strive to minimize their sense of shame. This simple conviction can be found in the key moment of the affective surge, which occured in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the novel *Lód* [*Ice*, 2007], which demythologizes the Polish narratives about Siberian exile, Jacek Dukaj permits the protagonist to state:

> If […] there exists a single principle that governs the behavior of all people, it is the Principle of Lesser Shame. We're capable of consciously striving to cause our own suffering, even our own deaths, but no one strives to cause himself greater shame. Just as water flows down an uneven surface to reach its lowest point, and just as heat escapes a body, so do people pursue the lesser shame in all situations.[36]

Dukaj does not touch upon the events of the first decade of the twenty-first century in Poland in this monumental work, yet one cannot resist the impression that a bit of the mood of those years had seeped into the novel, compelling it to offer markedly serious commentary on a trivial situation. The resulting question – How can we minimize shame? – was answered with two intricately linked measures: the delegitimization (and later delegalization) of the foundations of emancipatory ethics and the increased exploitation of pride.

The first step involved exposing and emphasizing the social engineering nature of shaming. Rather than applying to a single feature, shame affects a person as a whole. As Ruth Leys writes, "Shame […] is held to concern not your actions but who you are, that is, your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person […]."[37] It was enough to point out that the past instances of shaming over insufficient emancipation had been an attempt to manipulate Polish society into adopting a penitent stance. As the ethics of the Other were exploited gradually – through a chain of equivalence – by neoliberal politics to create a society of isolated individuals, so the idea of the community reversed this line of reasoning, combining all the aspects of the earlier form of shaming into a uniform pedagogy of shame. In other words, the reversal of the emancipatory ethics of the Other equips society with a new immune system that – as paradoxical as it may sound – attacks the very foreign bodies it itself produces. However, this paradox explains how, upon its return, the "national community" was able to tap an unlimited reservoir of pride. As it turns out, the source of this pride lay not in specific accomplishments as much as in the discovery, made by critical art, that shaming could be used to coerce individuals and groups into submitting to the sanctioned culture. In light of this discovery, the earlier accusations leveled at the nation, accusations regarding violence against the Other, could be dismissed as social engineering. The perversion of this reversal meant that where the emancipatory project placed

36 Jacek Dukaj, *Lód* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007), 103.

37 Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 11–12.

warning signs, the community ethics project saw clues leading to national treasures.

To summarize the paradoxes of Poland's history of shame: first, a noble lesson in the ethics of the Other – a lesson that was supposed to lay the foundations for pride in tolerance exhibited by the nation – deconstructed national pride and revealed a bundle of aggressive xenophobic discourses in Poland's collective identity; in the following decade, critical artworks demystified the hijacking of the project of pluralism by neoliberal politics and revealed the importance of shame in efficiently installing a neoliberal economy. The first stage was intended to elevate the importance of shame, while the second aimed to boost the audience's immune system to the point where they could defend themselves against shame. These two stages could have been synthesized into social solidarity that would accommodate the needs of people deprived of respect and excluded by the market. What resulted instead was a perverse synthesis in which the acquired immunity to market-induced shame was used to reclaim national pride.

For this reason Polish culture is now involved in a war of two sanctioned forms of shame. The first – fragmented, internally inconsistent – emerges from a foundation of ethical concern for the rights of minorities; the second – narrow-minded and hostile towards differences of any kind – appeals to the ethics of majority rights; the former was unable to satisfy the popular need for respect, while the latter exclusively dispenses approval to "its own." The former proposed the Christian principle "Be proud if you're able to feel shame," while the latter hypes the tribal dictum "Shame on you for not being proud!" It appears that as long as the war between these two affective politics rages on, we are doomed to a shortage of respect on the one hand, and a dearth of tolerance on the other.

Perhaps it is therefore worth considering yet another solution, one that could have the motto: "Be proud if you're able to not shame others." Finding a cultural tradition that would foster this stance seems to be an acutely pressing task.

Translation: Arthur Barys

Tomasz Rakowski

Ethnographic Experiments and Art in Rural Poland: Beyond the Culture of Shaming – Coevalness, the Inward Turn, and Proto-Sociology

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Debate on the genealogy of Polish society appeared quite suddenly and in several places at once. As early as the 1980s, sociologist Jacek Wasilewski wrote in *Społeczeństwo polskie, społeczeństwo chłopskie* [*The Polish Society: Peasant Society*],[1] and recently reiterated in the *Znak* monthly,[2] that the rural, peasant identity of the nation at the time of the Polish People's Republic was associated with subordination and the recollection of poverty and deprivation, and hence with tendencies to meticulously accumulate material goods, to inbreed and turn to "familism," and to feeling uncertain and dependent on fate. Despite the stigma of being rustic and migrating to a new urban environment, as well as the shame of rural roots resulting from the far-reaching social

1 Jacek Wasilewski, "Społeczeństwo polskie, społeczeństwo chłopskie," *Studia Socjologiczne* 3 (1986): 40-56.

2 "Jesteśmy potomkami chłopów," an interview with prof. Jacek Wasilewski, conducted by Marta Duch-Dyngosz, *Znak* 684 (2012), accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6842012z-prof-jackiem-wasilewskim-o-genealogii-polskiego-spoleczenstwa-rozmawia-marta-duch-dyngoszjestesmy-potomkami-chlopow/.

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upheaval that came with communist-era modernization, it is evident from a certain perspective that the discovery of peasant genealogies entails justification of a certain "defect" inherent in the emerging society in the communist era. Once again, the core of shame in Polish identity is disclosed in this way, fulfilling the fate of a society undergoing an intense rebuilding period. The problem, however, is that not only is it a real social process that one can investigate and describe, but, above all, it is a field in which the most sensitive points of contemporary Polish societal relations and relation with others may be drawn up and outlined. Thus, the hidden cultures of shaming are the place of constant intercultural encounter, in which a certain attitude towards "one's own otherness" develops. It is a kind of laboratory of social co-existence, opening and closing on experiences of diversity and change, on paving one's own way in relation to cultural classifications. Thus, our contemporary means of coexisting with others and, consequently, with ourselves, is played out in Poland in light of the stigma attached to "village people."

Shame is a very powerful mechanism of "I"; it has an embodied character and can include the whole of a momentary individual experience – it can "question our whole being." It is associated with the sense of social inadequacy, exposing deviations from the ideal "I." It is a form of reaction to exposure, to the lifting of the "veil." Shame is originally associated with a public, social situation. The root meaning of the word "shame," as Ernest Kurtz writes, "implies this process to uncover, to expose, to wound."[3] Shame is therefore an "ostensible" activity; it indicates a defect, an inadequacy, and may take a more explicit, public form, which may be at the same time "open and undifferentiated," as Helen Lewis wrote.[4] It is a form of cultural regulation, a situation of public communion or indication related to a direct hierarchical social relationship, as Norbert Elias has shown in his studies on customs in ancient Europe, that is about the training of embarrassment in being naked or, in general, the physiological transparency of "the high-born."[5] Only gradually, in the successive centuries of modern Europe, did all that was social begin to wander inward, to internalize itself, "burn with shame" in the imagined relationship towards others. In this way, writes Giddens, shame reaches the "archaic environment," "undercuts the roots of trust," in which an individual distinguishes his or her own identity

3 Ernest Kurtz, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: iUniverse 2007), 28.

4 Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt* in *Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971); see also Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 66-68.

5 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

(against others); it is "the negative side of the motivational system of the acting person."[6] This transition from a public situation to a more intrinsic one is crucial here, as it is still a social relationship that then goes beyond the whole identity. It can cause aggression directed towards oneself together with a deeply internalised sense of inadequacy. In this way, something that Helen Lewis calls "stifled" shame appears, a kind of shame that Anthony Giddens directly describes as a form of unconscious fear of one's own adequacy, directly related to the sense of fearing for one's ontological security.[7]

Acting and thinking according to the rules and imaginings prevailing in the rural world can dangerously open this path to "stifled" shaming. This is the case when subsequent stages of modernization discourse appear, revealing and diagnosing the problems of development and social change in post-socialist Poland. It is this "mental apparatus" of the village that many authors represent as a fatal feature of a society rebuilding itself. There is a very forceful discourse in which all that is rural is perceived as something afflicted by embarrassing "retardation," which negates desired cultural trends. It is synonymous with what one should get rid of and rebuild as quickly as possible. Such diagnoses appear in an exaggerated form in many public statements by scholars, such as Janusz Majcherek, who identify villagers as a group causing "a break in modernization."[8] The rural environment is also often depicted with images of mediocrity and mundane everyday life. The documentary *Czekając na sobotę* [*Waiting for Saturday*],[9] in which rural youth occupy themselves with boring, pointless activities, can serve as a particularly striking example here. Young villagers do not work, do not have any interests – in one shot young people are incessantly browsing the screens of their mobile phones, in another one they demolish an old, disintegrating vehicle, in yet another they idly occupy a shabby bus stop; all this is juxtaposed against erotic shows in rural clubs and discos on Saturdays, portrayed as embarrassing, distasteful entertainment.

In thinking about the profound presence of the world of villages in contemporary Poland with the latter's transformations and social experiences, there is always a disturbing (and embarrassing) presence of some "difficult" intra-social contact. In this connection, the world of social elites – publishers,

6 Giddens, *Modernity*, 67-68.

7 Ibid.

8 Janusz Majcherek, "Hamulcowi modernizacji," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 8, 2012; see also „Chłop to nie obywatel," an interview with Maria Halamska, conducted by Łukasz Pawłowski, *Kultura Liberalna* 2 (2015).

9 *Czekając na sobotę*, directed by Irena Morawska and Jerzy Morawski (Poland, 2010).

film productions, and social debates – retains the upper hand culturally. Thus it turns out that to a large extent we are indeed dealing with a generalized interpretation of the village as "incomplete" in terms of social life. This is a strategy in which village dwellers are not only identified or criticized, but become more imaginary, a "zero-state,"[10] so as to be able to think of a proper, desirable form of social development, so as to understand what is social. Put it another way, they become figures "useful for thinking." It is does not even concern the fact that there is dispute over knowledge of the countryside, in which, on the one hand, the well-known literary black and white stereotypes – of the village as paradise and the village as hell – clash with one another (as depicted by Ewa Korulska, who describes these typical literary images as "created by the Polish intelligentsia"),[11] but the fact that we are entering the field of encounter, conflict, and continual transformation marking the forms of different backgrounds concurrent in society. On the one hand, we are using the very specific language of village life, while on the other, symbolically subjugating and orientalising the village for our own heuristic purposes.

Such license to reflect on and rework the sources of shame that appears when discovering rural identity is thus accompanied by an image of a very strong, dominating narrative, stemming from the milieu of metropolitan elites, sociologists, historians, and people of culture – that is, the mythmakers[12] in possession of dominant, intellectual capital, whose aim has been "to change, to improve, to develop" and to defend the society from "flimsiness, trash, tackiness."[13] Thus there emerges a process of interpreting social life, including the social and political life of the country, which introduces, to use Michael Foucault's words, also invoked by invoked by Leela Gandhi,[14] "double suppression: in terms of those excluded from the process and in terms of the model and standard it imposes on those who receive this knowledge."[15] Thus there appears a sort of internal colonization or orientalisation of the

10 Olga Kwiatkowska "Lucim czyli konsekwencje pewnego projektu," in *Zaangażowanie czy izolacja? Współczesne strategie egzystencji humanistów,* ed. Jacek Kowalewski, Wojciech Piasek and Marta Śliwa (Olsztyn: Colloquia Humaniorum, 2007).

11 Ewa Korulska, "O chłopie – bez tytułu," *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 1-2 (1994).

12 *The Mythmakers. Intellectuals and the Intelligentsia*, ed. Raj P. Mohan (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

13 Teresa Bogucka, "Obrona mniejszości," *Gazeta Wyborcza. Magazyn*, April 5, 2001.

14 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

15 Ibid.

countryside and periphery Orientalism *à la polonaise*, as Michał Buchowski wrote[16]. But it is also the situation in which these actors themselves, the rural circles, begin to subordinate their voices to the discourse of the centre, suppressing with embarrassment their own languages and experiences. They subsequently perform an internalised self-colonization or alternatively, in the words of Ewa Klekot (more in the context of folklore and regional studies),[17] self-folklorisation. On the boundaries of this process, the boundaries of intersecting expressions and discourses, in the postcolonial "contact zones" that Mary Louise Pratt has written about, there appears a moment of embarrassment, an awareness of inclusion and exclusion from the legitimate description of social reality, or from constructing the descriptive language of one's own situation, albeit in terms of some hegemonic description.

In this article, I am going to reverse the perspective yet again and demonstrate that there are ways out of this catch-22 and ways to include the experiences of people living in rural areas, so that the perspective of suppressing and orientalising the rural experience would be at least subject to significant dissolution. It is not just about decolonizing the description as such or disclosing the elements of "one's own" voice/rural experience (though it will be the starting point), but about the identification of such perspectives and actions which promise a new encounter, a conciliation with the rural world, an understanding that balances on the verge of shame and, perhaps, crosses this boundary. I shall refer to the world of rural skills and foundations of social subjectivity of village people encountered in experimental artistic and ethnographic projects related to the situation of "coevalness" of both sides of the encounter (J. Fabian), the conditions of interdependence and the possibility of making "the inward turn inward" (N. Rapport) and the possibility of constructing an alternative, protosociological, social knowledge. In this space, artists' projects in subsequent sections will merge with what is ethnographic and up-to-date; with contemporary rebellions and strategies for agricultural cooperation, and even bottom-up expressions of agricultural work; with other "separate" village-specific materiality and technical imagery; and finally with other alternative social histories produced by these communities. I would say that each of these activities may be treated as a way leading to the abandonment of the postcolonial "contact zone," where shame comes to the fore, is reinforced, and (as in the

16 Michał Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism In Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother," *Anthropological Quarterly* 3 (2006): 463–482.

17 Ewa Klekot, "Samofolkloryzacja: współczesna sztuka ludowa z perspektywy krytyki postkolonialnej," *Kultura Współczesna* 1 (2014): 86-99.

characters of Rushdie's novel)[18] from a complex architecture of socially created barriers can turn into a totalizing, thoroughly penetrating "incarnation of disgrace" that subsequently lives its own, violent life.[19]

Coevalness: Rebellious Installations From The Village Of Kurówko

The problem is that while in Polish public discourse the village as the birthplace of social tensions has been around for a long time, its current problems and tensions often remain invisible and are difficult to fully grasp. The "peasant" genealogy of contemporary Polish society, closely associated with post-war migration and relocation of rural people to big city blocks and tenements, was rediscovered (rather painfully) in Poland a few years ago. From the beginning, many things could account for this, including strong social conflict born in the period of the Republic of Nobles and lasting until the last years of the Second Republic – it is a whole history of deepening social inequalities. At the same time, in subsequent studies and interpretations – from the work of Jan Sowa,[20] to Michał Łuczewski[21] and Andrzej Leder[22] – we find, on the one hand, analyses confirming the experience of profound economic subordination of the countryside and, on the other, elements of a resistance culture, a revolt against exploitation and even in the beginning of the nineteenth century, an opposition to assigning the word "noble" in designating the nation, not to mention a stubborn persistence for example in Galicia, in identifying onself as "we-imperial," that is the subordinates of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor.[23]

According to Andrzej Leder, social transformations resulted from the fact that right after the war and after the "post-war" period, there was a quiet revolution that the society "sleepwalked through."[24] Mansions, which were the centres of local authority, disappeared as did the bourgeois workshops

18 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Vintage, 1995).

19 See Marek Pacukiewicz, "Między wstydem a bezwstydem – eksperyment Salmana Rushdiego," *Napis* 18 (2012): 271-286.

20 Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011).

21 Michał Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród. Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2012).

22 Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013).

23 Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród.*

24 Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja.*

and commercial businesses of the Jews who were exterminated in the Holocaust. In his view, people migrating from predominantly poor and overcrowded villages, descendants of peasants, gradually filled the vacuum. The profound transformation of the post-war era was thus "displaced" and "forgotten," and when the years of political transformation came, it turns out that this syndrome remained deep inside the Poles. From this perspective, Polish society and its growing middle class, which descended from rural migrants, are marked by a certain defect, even a certain unawareness, or even worse – immaturity. Resentment, memory of subordination, elements of envy, greed and tendency to accumulate goods, reluctance to care for the common good, all such defects and deficiencies were thus re-discovered not only in the inhabitants of rural areas but also among the inhabitants of cities – the emerging middle class – which was largely constituted by rural migrants.

What makes these interpretations take such forms? What makes us discern in the rural cultures the inertia and its overwhelming impact on our genealogy? I would claim that, despite a certain immense, liberating potential that these interpretations constantly bring, there is still the tendency for the countryside and all that is rural to become more of a "heuristic tool" than something to be understood. We are dealing here with the projection of the village and its problems into the realm of the past, not only in the sense prevailing in discussions about the abolition of serfdom 150 years ago, or about the Galician Slaughter, the peasant rebellions, and strikes during the interwar years, but also in the sense that the village is deeply suspended in the past, in the "extra-temporal" world. What does "extra-temporal" mean? It means that the debate about past experiences is at stake here and that we can discuss them at the level of facts related to social history, written data, documents, statistics, memories, and historical analyses. These sources of knowledge are complete and closed; thus the past itself is also distant, so it is not a point of contact from which "there is no escape." On the one hand, I am convinced that these efforts have opened the way for historians, cultural researchers, and many others, but on the other hand, it is worth noting here that we are dealing with a reality that has been shifted over time, so essentially "ready," "tamperproof," and secured for the interpreting historian. In other words, there is no longer any action in it – there is only ready material deposited in the texts, merely waiting for intense analysis.

For many reasons, I believe that an encounter with the world of Polish village people is also possible when genealogies cease to signify and mean what is rural and when the carriers of social experiences are encountered as real people, subjected to the pressures of different policies and dependencies. I believe that in this way we access rural worlds, which are first and foremost losing their "safe" historicity; it is not marginalized in time, but present

here and now, and moreover, as George Marcus once wrote, it simply implements the structures which are deeply disturbing both for "us" and "them."[25] The artistic and ethnographic projects and actions, that I shall present here briefly are clearly, opposed "thinking through history" and relying on "ready-to-interpret" historical sources. While engaged in their latest undertakings – "Monument to a Peasant" and "Village People: A Museum of Alternative Social History" – Daniel Rycharski and curator Szymon Maliborski from the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw did the opposite: they got involved in the most current events, fulfilling the job of artists-ethnographers. They joined the farmers protesting under the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. They listened to their stories about the purchase of land by the "money mules," about the fake buyers of tens of hectares of land, about the scourge of wild boars uprooting fields and pastures, and about extending the repayment of financial penalties for surplus milk. They collected narratives about Poland and Polishness, observed spontaneous symbols of national, identity-related emotions and "awkward discourses"[26] ("We are defending the last bastion of Polishness, Polish land and forests"). They would meet with members of Solidarity and other trade unions; they looked at the installations of peasant activist Gabriel Janowski, such as tree stumps wrapped in barbed wire, sacred figurines, whole installations fitted to trees on a green belt, a no man's land where, as farmers say, "they bother no one," or an array of meek wooden lambs, with bowed heads and strapped with a well-known logo: "Teraz Polska!" ("Time for Poland!").

In this way, the creators of "Monument to a Peasant" currently remain in the opposition, and they may even become, as Weronika Plińska[27] wrote, an allusion to a peasant "social revolt." Their project is a column set up on a farm trailer for spreading manure, and at its top is a wax figure of the "sorrowful"

25 George Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork," *Representations* 59 (1997): 85-108.

26 Anna Malewska-Szałygin, "Zmagania z nieporadnymi dyskursami w polityce. O pożytkach płynących z metody zastosowania etnograficznych badań terenowych," in *Humanistyka i dominacja. Oddolne doświadczenia społeczne w perspektywie zewnętrznych rozpoznań*, ed. Tomasz Rakowski and Anna Malewska-Szałygin (Olsztyn: Colloquia Humaniorum, 2011).

27 Weronika Plińska, "Wciąż obcy kontekst. Pomnik chłopa Daniela Rycharskiego," *Magazyn Szum* 11 (2015): 68. See also Waldemar Kuligowski, "Więźniowie ziemi i stereotypu. Chłopi polscy jako buntownicy," accessed January 12, 2016, http://magazynsztuki.eu/index.php/teksty/117-wiezniowie-ziemi-i-stereotypu-chlopi-polscy-jako-buntownicyhttp://magazynsztuki.eu/index.php/teksty/117-wiezniowie-ziemi-i-stereotypu-chlopi-polscy-jako-buntownicy/.

peasant, full of grief, Adam Pesta. The monument of the peasant, in this case the administrative head of Kurówko, which is Rycharski's home village, then moves a few hundred kilometres down country roads to Krakow, as a representation of the harm done to peasants, like its prototype, the monument sketched by Albrecht Dürer, which was never created and was supposed to commemorate the bloody suppressed wars and peasant revolts in sixteenth--century Europe. Likewise, the project "Museum" is a distinct representation of the village: it is a dismantled country cottage, with a collection of rural history-objects placed between its overturned walls. This documentation includes, among others, materials from meetings with the farmers protesting under the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, a crushed television screen resembling a gallon and filled with cheap wine, as well as a prominently displayed, bloody bandage of a worker who suffered from an accident during the assembly of the exhibition. The worker was from Kurówko and is a close relative of Rycharski – his grandfather.

This situation relates to what anthropologist Johannes Fabian described in his book (from the 1980s) *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*,[28] namely the complex temporal relationships of every cultural description. He demonstrated that marginalizing the described or experienced otherness outside the here and now, toward either non-present "history" (a corpus of sources subjected to re-evaluation, interpretation, and association in a causal continuum), or toward a non-present "ethnography" cast out of time (the description of supposedly unchangeable, extra-temporal habits, and ways of life of some "people") precludes a properly effective encounter of different human worlds. However, the real encounter of differences in perceiving the world is possible only when there is something that Fabian calls the coevalness of the encounter. The encounter, which is supposed to imply something happening in reality, he writes, is possible only if the involved parties share their time with one another.[29] One could say this is a situation where the experience and reality of other people are current and when people have the capacity, to act that is to shape and co-shape the interpretation of this world and the place in which we exist together.

This is almost straightforward. Although Rycharski, in one of his projects, built a gate–portal in front of a farmhouse to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom, the host of this place, village administrator of Kurówko, delivered and recorded a speech on all issues that currently

28 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

29 Ibid., 30.

bothered him, such as buying land, creating large-scale farms, the inevitable desertification of villages, and the future. When asked about serfdom, he did not really reply and admitted that this is not a clear, actual point of reference passionately discussed among neighbours. When I ran my ethnographic interviews in Kurówko, I found it hard to understand that a couple of middle-aged farmers, with a dozen-hectare farm and a gateway facing almost directly the gate–portal did not know exactly what it was commemorating and what was inscribed on it ("150 years of abolition of serfdom"). It is thus evident that tensions exist elsewhere; that the rural people of Northern Mazovia, where there are less and less farmers (and more and more agricultural corporations buying land) have their own complaints, their own lament. In this situation the "rusticity" itself is not so much aroused by its social, class, cultural, and therefore "stifled" mechanisms of embarrassment, but it rather becomes a real, disturbing contact with a new historical process that shapes the parties of the encounter. Such encounters are quite different from those encounters with the genealogy and peasant roots of Polish society. Rather than interpreting "genealogy," they are more like actions full of danger associated with coming into contact with one's own distinctness. "It is more like "sharing time" and remaining in contact, in a "dialogue situation," contrary to interpretative and embarrassing attributions to time, place, and social role; contrary to what Johannes Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness."[30]

The Inward Turn, Beyond Cultural Attributions: The Discovery Of Home-Made Artefacts

In this way the history of rural experience demands what one would call "actual decolonization." What does it mean? Postcolonial Polish studies have frequently pointed to the appropriation of history, always radiating from the centre of the Polish Republic, orientalizing and subordinating the experience of its eastern peripheries to the centre. I am inclined to believe, however, that the most fateful process of colonisation experienced by the whole society was the history of internalized subordination, the creation of the "discourse of embarrassment" of all that is rural. It is therefore, above all, a very current birth of social history, written from the point of view of very special interpreters, namely, social scientists. From this very perspective, the transformations of Polish society are the transformations of rural people together with their "mentality," familism, and non-citizenship. From the very beginning it is, therefore, more of a "burden," a "system residuum," whereas the strategies of rebellion and resistance, social movements, and good civic practices are

30 Ibid., 31.

perceived as arising primarily in cities (this is where, as some might say, the history of a "free society" is taking place).

People from the villages of Broniów and Ostałówek, among whom we conducted our artistic and ethnographic projects ("Prologue," "Ethnography / Animation / Art"),[31] have their own, very distinctive history of the past few decades. The history of the Polish People's Republic is often reminisced about with fascination – for example, years of going to schools and boarding houses in cities, years of vocational training. Conversations and experimental ethnographic studies reveal such activities in the village which are still unknown to researchers. It turns out anew how important such places as firehouses, local schools, and village halls are, but in the sense that all these buildings inspire specifically informal, bottom-up organizational activity, such as "community service," which we unambiguously associate with typical "socialist farce," but in the accounts I gathered in villages, they appear as something very important. Therefore, "community activities" are often recounted with enthusiasm as they are perceived as an experience of resistance and self-determination rather than socialist subordination.[32] In addition, the story behind this phenomenon is worth noting. The villagers – the people working on construction sites in cities and in factories, who completed building schools in the 1960s and 1970s – started to build walls and construct buildings on their own, using new techniques. They took advantage not only of the fact that they had access to the materials, but also that they had acquired the necessary skills (bricklayers from the vicinity of Broniów in their stories frequently mention spontaneous show-offs, contests, physical challenges, and work "for show"). Regardless of any shortage of materials and tools, they developed incredible abilities and technical creativity: in Broniów and neighbouring villages, there are self-constructed tractors, mowers with engines from washing machines, welding machines, in every household these self-made devices are still used, invented, and manufactured anew.[33]

The skill to reconstruct and constantly rebuild and repair is related to a completely distinct technical imagination. Devices are always stripped and reassembled, they are given a distinct function, perceived in a different way. For example, one of the inhabitants of Broniów explained to me that

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31 *Etnografia/animacja/sztuka. Nierozpoznane wymiary rozwoju kulturalnego*, ed. Tomasz Rakowski (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013).

32 Weronika Plińska, "Ochotnicza straż pożarna – klub kultury," in *Lokalnie: animacja kultury/community arts*, ed. Iwona Kurz (Warszawa: IKP UW, 2008); Tomasz Pisarzewski, "Wspólnota wiejska – przemiany," in *Lokalnie: animacja kultury*.

33 Łukasz Skąpski, "O urządzeniach z Broniowa i Ostałówka," in *Etnografia/animacja/sztuka*.

his self-constructed tractor is a great machine, because it has a built-in engine from a Fiat 126p, which can even "haul a ton" and "when it breaks down, I will throw it away and I will buy a new one for one hundred zloty and I will insert another one just the same." This statement comprises a typical way of thinking about devices, houses, and machines as entities that are subject to transformation, thus "fragile" and "breakable" by definition. This transformation as well as their wear and tear are their positive attributes, not their durability. One might suppose that the inhabitants of Broniów would prefer their devices to be solid, durable, and covered by a warranty. However, there arises the problem of discovering a completely different technical imagination and other ways of thinking – these devices are always "to be redone." When some young people from a neighbouring village bought a ready-made chainsaw, they instantly replaced its parts (e.g. spark plugs) with ones from older saws to make the new one "cut better." Nonetheless, an intimate sphere is revealed in this way in which these self-made machines may appear "clumsy" – it is difficult to talk about them at first as they are a source of embarrassment. Thus it is also a protected zone, an area of "cultural intimacy" to use the concept of Michael Herzfeld.[34]

In the beginning, accounts of "shaming," a certain kind of inadequacy, or simply anxiety, accompanied all our projects concerning self-made devices, which we carried out together with a group of artists and cultural activists. Artist and co-founder of the "Azorro" group Łukasz Skąpski documented the self-made devices, appliances, cars, tractors, and finally fitness equipment. He made photo shoots of young people in their gyms, in soft light, with props, weights in their hands. Such encounters were initially hesitant, shaky. The authors of these self-made devices and equipment might treat their works as something of their "own," something they were somewhat proud of, but facing the artist, they could see and did see that there was something that they felt a bit embarrassed about – something they feared. After all, these self-made machines are not registered; they exist beyond regulations. When we brought up the idea of preparing an exhibition of these devices in the centre of the village, people were hesitant till the last moment. Mechanic Andrzej Chylicki, especially, was not entirely sure whether his buggy should be exhibited. When we came to see him, it turned out that he had already cleaned the engine, filters, refuelled, and was making the throttle cable from the handbrake cord – he had decided to exhibit his vehicle. In my opinion, this is the very moment when something particularly important happened. The meeting took place in the sphere which had initially been embarrassing, but then

34 Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

both parties of the meeting for a moment seemed to exist anew, beyond their previous ways of being. This is a situation of "coevalness" in the sense that technical activity is no longer a cumulative, rural "cultural resource." A transformation is taking place here, in which the encountering entities are together, for a moment they become "other people, they give one another an oblique glance, not fully recognizing each other, but at the same time they re-discover themselves and their motives for action ("I'm born, so you could be born," to evoke the metaphorical language of Jerzy Grotowski).[35] Both parties thus undergo a change, leading to a shared, experimental creation of experience, towards something that is still to come, that is still to happen. It is therefore a situation in which the perspective of what is accumulated in culture has been trespassed, and so has the way towards what is just emerging, in the direction – as C. Gatt and T. Ingold write – of a new, "improvised" world.[36]

Another meeting took place a year later. Magdalena Lipska from MSN (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw) was preparing a project about a piano constructed by Wiesław Zielonka from Broniów. He is one of the extraordinary masters of Broniów. After elementary school, he joined the Voluntary Work Corps for the youngsters in Szczecin, where he learned bricklaying. Later, he passed his skills on to his younger cousins and colleagues from the Volunteer Fire Department, and nowadays, they constitute a whole clan of bricklayers who have gained recognition as professionals and go to work in Europe. They also constantly rebuild and improve the headquarters of the fire department in Broniów as part of their "voluntary work." However, Zielonka, and then others, started to experiment and build on their own. They not only build edifices, but also produce building materials such as cinder blocks (Zielonka made his own construction of a vibratory table on which he moulded the form for the units). He has also constructed many self-made devices, such as a tricycle from a motorbike, and a lawnmower from a pram and a vintage rotary washing machine. On the fence he welded oil lamps (from railway switches), which he got while working for the railway, and he lights them during the holidays. When Magdalena Lipska was preparing the project for MSN, she came up with an idea that the avant-garde experimental pianist Marcin Masecki could give a concert, variations based on Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*, on the instrument constructed by Wiesław Zielonka in the common room located in the village centre. The point was to make the work of Zielonka – that is, the piano he

35 Jerzy Grotowski, *Święto*, *Odra* 6 (1972).

36 Caroline Gatt and Tim Ingold, "From Description to Correspondence. Anthropology in Real Time," in *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*, ed. Wendy Gunn, Ton Otto and Rachel Charlotte-Smith (London: Smith Bloomsbury, 2013), 145.

had created, the concert and the encounter – "a social fact,"[37] to use the curator's words. A few years ago Zielonka got a broken, damaged instrument. He transported it to Broniów and began to add the walls of the piano, fitted in the strings, most of which he had to make himself from copper wire extracted from car tires, mainly from a Czech Skoda – according to him "they produce a good growling sound." He replaced several dozen missing keys and produced the new ones from a refrigerator door. When Lipska came to him with her idea, Wiesław Zielonka willingly agreed. He had previously participated in activities of the Field Collective, and in a parallel project led by Magda Lipska and Alicja Rogalska.

Zielonka was always very willing to cooperate. However, when a tuner hired by MSN came to his house and said that the piano was not suitable for playing, he became very agitated. He accused the tuner of having no idea about the instrument and stated that he would tune it himself, using an optical micrometer he had found when working for the railways. The concert nonetheless took place. Masecki, who came to the concert despite his busy schedule (right off the heels of a Latin American tour, he came by car), immediately liked the instrument, and said that it had a "Japanese sound." When Zielonka's piano was placed in the common room and Masecki gave a wonderful, improvised concert, everyone was very impressed, both the local community and the guests from big cities and galleries. Wiesław Zielonka, however, was performing at the Wedding Bands Competition in nearby Pawłów at the time and regretted very much that his schedule overlapped with the pianist's arrangements with the Museum. After the concert, we drove to Pawłowo, at Masecki's request, to meet Zielonka. Everything happened very quickly as Masecki had other scheduled commitments and had to be back in Warsaw soon. We found Wiesław Zielonka in Pawłowo, in a circle of musicians raising toasts to each other, behind the common room, where band auditions were being held. Masecki and Zielonka greeted each other cordially and then started talking. Zielonka was moved, saying that he wanted to be a musician, that it was his dream, but that his life turned out differently. Masecki listened to the constructor of the piano he had just been playing – experimenting with sounds – and talked about his fatherwho was a tuner, and how he learned to tune instruments as a child. In my opinion, it was a particularly important moment for Zielonka – it must have been a form of recognition for his work on a damaged instrument.

What exactly happened then? One might say that it was an extraordinary encounter of two creators from two different social backgrounds. The

37 See http://artmuseum.pl/pl/wydarzenia/marcin-masecki-fuga-na-dwa-pianina/ accessed February 12, 2016.

appearance of "social boundaries" in such social events is thus unwanted; everything is happening on the border of the metropolitan art world, of the perfect piano school, and at the same time of a rural culture of redoing things and creating home-made devices. Somewhere on either side, there are echoes of the culture of shame and a silent awareness of the difference between the two spheres of activity. This meeting, this project of breaking the logic of the culture of shame related to all that is "rural," to all that is "getting through" into the cities, accused, perhaps, of a certain "primitivist fantasy,"[38] as Hal Foster would put it," in which the Other blends in with the unconscious, spontaneous creative process, like in Lévi-Strauss's idea of bricolage. However, it must be noted that here these stereotypical roles are subject to transformation. The pianist is not the central figure here, who "used" the creator and the situation of the meeting. Instead, he follows the piano maker, looking for him in a nearby village, at a concert in Pawłów. Zielonka is moved by the meeting. He meets a partner in conversation, which is especially connected with the figure of the artist's father, the tuner, and talks with agitation about this kind of work. In this situation, both interlocutors "share time" and do not push each other into timelessness or the past – so there is no cultural or social typecasting. There is thus something I would call a "turn inwards," the moment of going beyond cultural categories, beyond any "local knowledge."

To do this, however, it is necessary to discover that perceiving the cultural apparatus as something that is exhaustive (a "mentality") is extremely problematic. It then becomes a form of captivity, it is something "indelible,"[39] it can become an "inadequacy" – it can be hidden, but you can never get rid of it. In this sense, the culture of the rural environment transforms into the culture of shaming and embarrassment, becoming a stigma, representing a permanent disposition (there is the Polish expression "there's a straw sticking out of your shoes," which can be translated to "country bumpkin"). If we take a closer look, we will see that this is the result of blurring the perception of people as actors capable of transcending their cultural forms of existence. However, I think that it is not only possible to transgress the culture of shaming, but that it is even necessary, following a theory that contrasts with definitive cultural assignations, that is the theory of "Anyone" created by Nigel Rapport. In a certain way, this is due to such encounters as the one that took place in Broniów, between ethnographers, Łukasz Skąpski, and creators

38 Hal Foster, *Artist as Ethnographer,* in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Chicago: MIT Press, 1996).

39 See Brigitta Helbig-Mischewski, "Kilka uwag o wstydzie w kulturze niemieckiej i polskiej na podstawie prac badaczy niemieckich," in *Wstyd za PRL i nie tylko,* ed. K. *Łozowska* (Szczecin, 2010).

of self-made devices, and similarly between Marcin Masecki and Wiesław Zielonka. However, this is not a simple "suspension" of cultures and cultural assignations, or the illusion of reconciliation, meeting on a "neutral" ground. It is rather the recognition of a certain potentiality beyond the "culture of shaming," the possibility of making the "inward turn." Nigel Rapport[40] made a kind of breakthrough in thinking about culture and about "cultural conditioning." While the aim of many advanced and classical anthropological studies is to interpret the actions of people while being submerged in the local worlds, in the worlds of "local knowledge" (Clifford Geertz's concept of culture, based on revealing subtle cultural forms), Rapport proposed a perspective of interpretation of individual's actions in its absolute, abstract sense. An individual extracted from culture thus becomes here the starting point for thinking. Hence the human being, the "Anyone," is equipped with the rights and the capacity to transcend any cultural forms.

This project – as Rapport clearly emphasises – is not only cognitive or descriptive, but also ethical. It is a search for a underaking which could be Kantian in essence, extracting an individual from cultural particularism. What is particularly important, this ability to transgress one's own (cultural) fate, to "live a thousand lives," is not so much connected with the belief that external, cultural or social determinants are a burden and that in the future they will be successfully overcome, but with the conviction that individuals have the ability to invalidate them, transform them, move away from them. Hence, the reality of cultural assignments, as well as social tensions, inequalities and entanglements, which also stand behind the "culture," does not lose in this perspective neither its presence nor its enormous impact on individuals' lives (as can be seen in the biography of Wiesław Zielonka and Marcin Masecki). Nevertheless, by building a figure of an individual as an actor, who is always capable of, and entitled to, cross the collectively created paths of action (or paths of understanding) and, consequently, by making a turn towards the individual, the situation of anthropological knowledge is as if reopened. Moreover, Rapport claims that the individual actor should first be recognized as endowed with the power and ability to be on the move precisely because the power of cultural patterns and particular forms of action is so significant and powerful that it can prevent the existence of an independent, moral position of the subject. The force of the "turn inwards" thus becomes, paradoxically,

40 Nigel Rapport, "Apprehending Anyone. The Non-Indexical, Post-Cultural and Cosmopolitan Human Actor," in *Colloquia Anthropologica*, ed. Michał Buchowski and Arkadiusz Bentkowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2013); Tomasz Rakowski, *The Unrelenting Ability to Act. Nigel Rapport's Anthropology of Freedom*, in *Colloquia Anthropologica*.

a guarantee of the moral perspective of the individual in the world of cultural equipment and socially created forms of adequacy; not only beyond cultural assignations but at the same time contrary to and due to them.

Proto-Sociology and Collaboration: Beyond the Culture of Shaming

One can thus say that it is all about breaking the invisible wall of the culture of shaming, that it is a move out of a certain socio-cultural trajectory. This disposition is difficult to recognize, but extremely important. It is the capacity to "be in motion," a state called "metanoia" by the Greeks, towards the liberated, moving mind, and thus to a certain "internal liminality" of the subject, that is a human, or as Rapport writes – an "any," an unassigned.[41] All this is paradoxical indeed. If it is at all possible to understand the encounter of the village with reality and, at the same time, to go beyond the paradigm of embarrassment (and shame), beyond a certain game of adequacy and class inadequacy, it will only be through discovering this fundamental, unlimited freedom, this freedom from culture, that is from something that people are furnished with in such a complicated way.

We can go a step further and follow yet another direction. I think that meetings can be designed in such a way as to involve the village as a present actor, engaged in very similar social thinking. This is the way that more and more often ethnographers write. People from the worlds under investigation are recognized as those who, along with the cultural researchers, anthropologists, and artists, anticipate and shape knowledge about what is to become known, what they a n t i c i p a t e as knowledge. Such situations occur when the force of social, aesthetic, and political imagination remains symmetrical on the side of people as creators and sources of social thought. This is what researchers call the para-site of fieldwork.[42] Together with a group of ethnographers, artists and community artists, we endeavored to create a social project which would be able to bring out these alternative encounters between worlds, and, above all, to build a site for such encounters and a certain closeness. Thus we prepared in Broniów, near Szydłowiec, an exhibition entitled *History of Broniów's Sociological Thought* – on white-covered cubes we placed red-lighted heads, formed of tape, and next to them we hung dashboards with a coherent lecture of social thought by five inhabitants of Broniów, "reflexive activists," with their own ideas). We created five

41 Rapport, *Apprehending Anyone.*

42 Douglas Holmes and George Marcus "Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Fieldwork Encounter," *Collaborative Anthropology* 1 (2008): 81-101.

stands with posters presenting the main slogans of individual thinkers from Broniów (on an illuminated platform we put two famous volumes of *History of Sociological Thought*[43] by Polish sociologist Jerzy Szacki, because we wanted to show that the exhibition inscribes itself into this classic work; that it was, moreover, an indispensable supplement). The catchwords of the exhibition were associations that form a sequence of connotations: "people," "guard," "common room," "building," "team," "land," "food," "village," "unity," "rhythm," "action," "cooperative," "community interest," "assert one's rights," "value of action," and "something that will remain after us." In the background, there was even a soundtrack composed of these keywords. It was not about the history of sociology as such, but it was first and foremost a situation in which, by experimenting, we tried to present how five people from Broniów think as a kind of rural, incessant activity, invisible, because grown into the current situation. This is the world of thought, which – quite like the world of "Warsaw residents" of *The Ethos of the Left* by Andrzej Mencwel[44] – is initially embedded in actions and activism, political endeavours, but which over time finds its way into life-long speculation, into a certain passionate, internal knowledge, absorbing people. It is knowledge in which the authors of "thoughts," who in the course of time were to some extent deprived of the possibility of acting, confronted with other violent ideas and policies, are at some point left "alone with the world."[45]

There were five unique representatives of rural social thought: 1) Elżbieta Szewczyk, a long-time councillor, dairywoman, creating images of land that is overgrown, of „bushiness" and desocialisation of the world, as well as creating images of benign, small agriculture; 2) Barbara Szparaga, a village administrator creating her vision of a rural "fight for one's rights"; 3) Zdzislaw Szparaga, a bricklayer and firefighter, perceiving action in the long-term; 4) Wojciech Zbroszczyk, a young mechanic, entrepreneur, councilor, and ideologist of the "concentric movement" in local politics; and last but not least 5) Zenon Szparaga, a farmer and retired serviceman, a former village administrator, rural activist, forming the ideas of quiet cooperation and unity. All these figures have been described in detail elsewhere,[46] and it is impossible to present in this

43 Jerzy Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej* (Warszawa: PWN, 2002).

44 Andrzej Mencwel, *Etos lewicy. Esej o narodzinach kulturalizmu polskiego* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009).

45 Roch Sulima, *Słowo i etos. Szkice o kulturze* (Kraków: Fundacja Artystyczna Związku Młodzieży Wiejskiej „Galicja", 1992), 31.

46 Tomasz Rakowski, "Alternatywne historie myśli socjologicznej. Działania, imaginacje, pragnienia," in *Etnografia/animacja/sztuka*.

text the full scope of this spontaneous sociological or para-ethnographic way of thought. I tried to demonstrate that it is possible to go beyond what is closed off in time, pushed back safely into the past, beyond what is cultural and attributed. Therefore, it was supposed to be a different form of encounter, it was more the creation of space for alternative forms of thinking in terms of "social knowledge," but directed towards the future. In an ethnographic sense, it was a certain co-creation of the field of knowledge, going "beyond the Malinowski concept,"[47] in which it is a priori assumed that researchers come to an isolated and closed world which is equipped with "culture."

I suppose that it is most crucial here to finally go beyond cultural assignations, fully aware of the activities of the subjects with which we cooperate, co-creating knowledge or, as in the described cases, co-creating social and artistic events. In this way, we also go beyond the framework of the situation of shame, linked to what is culturally and socially "assigned," to accumulated social tensions from which the fear of inadequacy arises. I am talking here about a meeting in which people we worked with begin to be recognized as constructing/arranging actors, like anthropologists, sociologists, or artists, for the scene itself, as they put their understanding of what is cultural, social, and political into action. "Our task," say Holmes and Marcus, is to fully initiate the capacity to analyse and recognise our interlocutors and co-workers in the process of defining what is important in our actions."[48] It is therefore an attempt to enter a situation of co-creation, where both parties in the encounter are the architects of the scene of social knowledge and where spontaneous local social knowledge appears. This is not so much proto-sociology, an intermediate stage which in itself does not yet contain any "sociology,"[49] but a proto-sociology which is an ability attributable to anyone of us, as Rapport would have put it. Rapport also refers here to the very significant statement by Victor Turner, which permanently puts an end to all that is "cultural" and what embarrasses (everything that brings down and elicits "disgrace" in the former, postcolonial world). "There were never," writes Turner, "any innocent, unconscious savages, living in a time of unreflective and instinctive harmony. We, human beings, are all and always sophisticated, conscious, capable of laughter at our own institutions."[50] This is quite opposite to the

47 Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, "Refunctioning Ethnography. The Challenge of an Anthropology of the Contemporary," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2005).

48 Holmes and Marcus, *Collaboration Today,* 86.

49 Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej,* 15.

50 See Rapport, *Apprehending Anyone,* 163-164.

deconstructive and postcolonial/critical measures that condone locality and cultural conditioning – traditional objects of cognition in anthropology. It reaches for a new theoretical perspective in a completely different way. Rapport claims that this moment was well put by Virginia Woolf, who wrote that "One begins letters «Dear Sir», ends them «yours faithfully»; one cannot despise these phrases, laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives, since they compel us to walk in step like civilized people [...] though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time."[51] It is rather a certain unlimited capacity for ironic and critical liminality. However, this passage is not primarily outside the individual, in an anthropological debunking or in socialized shows, but within the individual acts of "anyone" of us.

All this, therefore, reaches the reserves of extraordinary competence of emerging inter-societal encounters, in the context of the encounter with the experience of the village and with another, alternative social history. I think that if it is at all possible to decolonize the history of the village, where this decolonisation transforms it into a field in which all that is happening and how all these growing social experiences in Poland are to be understood, then such a process can be relied on to create such a scenario, such a situation where people meet coming from different experiences and backgrounds – rural, intelligent, mixed, and hybrid. In this way, the fundamental right of each and every one of us to be "somebody else" will be realised. This right to live "a thousand lives," to "look with irony" at one's own institutions, the right to discover one's own, unexpected ability to "go beyond" – beyond cultural assignation – towards all that the future will bring.

51 See ibid., 162.

Grzegorz Niziołek

Affective Censorship

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1.

My presentation is more or less a draft of a research project investigating Polish theater as a social institution shaped by affective censorship. As a medium, theater regulates – in a specific manner – the mechanism of such censorship, internalizes it, and instills in the audience an attitude of affirmation towards the means it employs.

As a result of a complex mixture of denial, resistance, and exclusion, theater in Poland created a model of the sublime audience, one which perceived itself as a representation of the national community. The individual experience of the viewer is affectively opened to the experience of communality, a concept that no longer necessarily means a group of spectators gathered to see a specific play.

2.

I would like to present a concept formulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick stipulating that the nineteenth-century homophobic split in the spectrum of male identity (which cleaved it into two mutually exclusive worlds

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– the homosexual and heterosexual one) became a reference point for every other binary opposition shaping the modern human consciousness as my other initial thesis.[1] What is nominally marginal should be central, Sedgwick posits. I would like to test how her hypothesis applies to Polish culture.

The split described by Sedgwick produces a highly effective form of censorship, and one with a highly pronounced capability to mask its own procedures, making it a censorship with low social visibility, one that the audience should not and does not want to see. This is facilitated by the contradiction, diagnosed by Sedgwick, between minority and universalist approaches to homosexuality. One entails radical exclusion and sharp delineations within the spectrum of sexual identity, while the other makes the delineations invisible and purges them of meaning. This, in turn, enables one to equate discrimination with tolerance.

To many a reader, Sedgwick's hypothesis seems risky and exaggerated, but the validity of the concept located at the heart of *Epistemology of the Closet* will be evident to anyone conscious of the fact that it is the homophobic split itself that outlines national identity in the broadest strokes or may even be – as claimed by Sarah Ahmed – the condition of its existence.

We tend to assume that the Jew is a radical figure of the Other in Polish culture. It is, however, a figure endowed with a considerable degree of social visibility. The public's attitudes towards Jewish people have been a subject of public discussion since the Enlightenment. Those attitudes have driven major social and cultural shifts, served as a foundation for attempts to create more open and tolerant societies, and established notions of nationhood based around ethnic Polishness; the historical process of Jewish assimilation has irrevocably changed the shape of Polish culture. All the while, anti-Semitism and the struggle against it divides society, produces overt social and ideological conflicts, and determines the dynamics of many a debate.

The opposite is true of the figure of the homosexual – in this instance, a much broader communal interest advocates its wholesale exclusion or expulsion from the community. Although, to quote Bożena Umińska, after the Jews were annihilated in the Holocaust, "only gays and lesbians remain genuine minorities in Poland."[2] A minority, we should quickly add, that has mastered the art of concealment and one that the majority of society considers to be a clinical and criminalized fringe. Krzysztof Tomasik writes

1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Berkeley University Press, 1990).

2 Bożena Umińska, "Wojna z lesbijkami i gejami," *Przegląd* 24 (2004), as quoted in Błażej Warkocki, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na homoseksualistów," in *Homofobia po polsku*, ed. Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2004), 168.

that "Polishness and homosexuality are mutually exclusive,"[3] while Bartosz Żurawiecki decided to title his essay on the situation of homosexuals in Poland "The Non-Existent Other."[4] The most overt dissection of that particular exclusion can be found in Witold Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantyk*. In the novel, the homosexual desire threatening the integrity of the Polish community is embodied by Gonzalo, a foreigner. Since 1981, the novel has been adapted for the stage twenty-seven times in Poland alone. However, the adaptations eventually deepened the homophobic split, colorfully playing the phantasmal figure of the homosexual foreigner and thus reinforcing social stereotypes and clichés with regard to the behavior of gay people. Rather than undermining the narrow-mindedness of communality so as to include the figure into Polish culture, these adaptations of *Trans-Atlantyk* affectively brought the communal emotions to a boil. The first step, however, has been made: the figure has been endowed with a degree of visibility on stage. Simultaneously, however, burgeoning social phobias associated with the spread of AIDS and police operations targeting gays such as Operation Hyacinth drastically reduced the social visibility of the Polish gay community in the 1980s.

It is difficult to even imagine Polish theater receiving the same treatment that the London and New York stages were subjected to in Nicolas de Jongh's *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*.[5] Twentieth-century British theater and British drama turned out to be very open to representations of homosexuality, despite the fact that Britain had laws criminalizing homosexual activity up until the 1960s. In turn, Poland, although boasting more relaxed moral laws, established much more efficient forms of censorship – affective, rather than governmental, which drastically reduced its permeability. Therefore the investigation of "homosexuality on stage" in our own backyard has required a wholly different set of tools.

3.

The term "affective censorship" implies that there exists an emotional component to the effort, making it somewhat similar to a "crime of passion," justifying it and absolving its enforcers. Is affective censorship a crime? We are not aware of all its victims, but there are definitely more of them than we

3 Krzysztof Tomasik, *Gejerel. Mniejszości seksualne w PRL-u* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012), 319.

4 Bartosz Żurawiecki, "O tym, którego nie ma," in *Homofobia po polsku*, 183-187.

5 Nicolas de Jongh, *Not in Front of the Audience. Homosexuality on Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

know of. Polish culture's lack of consent for the creation of positive models of homosexuality definitely had a devastating influence on the lives of many people. In the face of such violence, Polish theater found itself in a unique position. On the one hand, theater circles were commonly associated with an overabundance of gays and as such were considered a safe and tolerant space. On the other hand, any expression of homosexual desire on stage was conditional upon the artists' capability to universalize it. In this regard, examination of the performances of Henryk Tomaszewski and the stage presence of Erwin Nowiaszak, an actor with the Polish Theater in Wrocław,[6] would certainly yield interesting results. In the theater world, the violence of social homophobia was subject to complex mediation processes, producing something of a purloined letter effect – its foremost placement making it invisible. Although subject to affective censorship, the theater was simultaneously proof that its enforcement was not unconditional.

Sigmund Freud would say that censorship is always affective. It works precisely thanks to the work of affect, because affect can shift freely between different representations, supporting some while isolating others. However, censorship not only utilizes affect, it serves as the foundation of its eventual liberation. For Freud, affect is always primevally linked with a repressed representation. Accessing it, however, is never unmediated; the primal scene cannot be recalled; it has to be reconstructed. And the veracity of the resulting construct is verified only on the basis of the affective reaction it elicits. In Freud's writings, the primal scene is always marked by sexual violence – establishing a law and breaking it in the same instance. Therefore, censorship is linked with sexuality, and linked even closer with homosexuality; the relationship, however, does not entail censoring sexual notions. Rather, it is based around the fact that sexuality uncovers censorship and its enforcement, while homosexuality unmasks the reasons behind its covert nature.[7]

We may say that censorship is affective in nature. Borrowing the notion of censorship from politics, Freud then completely changed its

6 Erwin Nowiaszak (1932-1990), actor with with Polish Theater in Wrocław from 1963 to 1990. Played gay characters in a handful of movies, performed on stage in Henryk Tomaszewski's and Jerzy Grzegorzewski's plays. Often played strangers, foreigners, demonic characters, overtly transgender characters. Photographs are a much better testament to his specific stage presence than reviews: his facial expressions, make-up, costumes, gestures, and attitude towards fellow actors on stage, clearly demonstrate that elements of gay culture found their way into Polish public theater.

7 An exemplary model can be found in Freud's analysis of the "Wolf Man," wherein the homosexual variant of the Oedipal scenario becomes a hypothesis that is impossible to verify either empirically or psychologically. Sigmund Freud, *The Case of the Wolf-Man: From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (San Francisco: Arion Press, 1993).

understanding and implications. As explained by Michael G. Levine, censorship as understood by Freud cannot be placed in either time or space,[8] nor can it be captured *in statu nascendi* – it leaves behind nothing but traces of itself despite its tendency to fully conceal its own efforts. Affect has a similarly virtual nature.

When writing about censorship, Freud often invokes theater metaphors. Rather than portray censorship as a border guarded by vigilant sentries, he depicts censorship as a force that is repressive yet creative, a force that can drive the creation of new notions and set the stage. Censorship becomes staging.[9]

4.

Defined by Freud in theatrical categories, censorship reveals one other crucial characteristic: trans-historicity. In this particular instance, we are dealing with a protracted durational effect. The figures affiliated with the superego – the ones that hold sway over the stage that is consciousness – represent parents and caregivers, that is values that the ego treats with respect even though they may be considered anachronistic by society. Thus, the superego furnishes internalized intergenerational communications. "Our lives are never fully entrenched in just the present," concludes Freud. Therefore, employing the concept of "mass psychology" is valid only insofar as it is shaped by the structural similarity between superegos of individuals brought up within the same cultural circles.

In the context of Polish culture, the influence of censorship in the trans-historical sense is heavily linked with an opposition against modernization. Therefore, Sedgwick's concerns that no aspect of modernity can be comprehensively examined without a critical analysis of the sharp dichotomy between homo- and heterosexuality should be seriously considered by all scholars interested in investigating Polish culture.

The concept of affective censorship enables us to break the deadlock stemming from overexposure to historical determinants. In analyses drafted back in the Polish People's Republic, censorship was often equated with institutions of state control which, in turn, obfuscated the degree to which censorship carried out the wishes of the society in general and cooperated with other, ostensibly competing, centers of power, such as the Church or

8 Michael G. Levine, "Freud and the Scene of Censorship," in *The Administration of Aesthetics*, ed. Richard Burt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

9 Sigmund Freud, "Wykład XXIX. Rewizja marzenia sennego" and "Wykład XXXI. Rozszczepienie osobowości psychicznej," in *Wykłady ze wstępu do psychoanalizy. Nowy cykl*, trans. Robert Reszke (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2009), 7-24, 45-62.

opposition groups. In a 1976 report to Minister Kazimierz Kąkol, the state's religious affairs director, a representative of the Polish Church, Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, expressly stated that Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* is an "apotheosis of homosexuality" which threatens the welfare of the entire nation. The bishop's concerns were met with understanding and full agreement on the minister's part.[10] It took Polish theater scholars much longer to arrive at the conclusion that Grotowski's play gives voice to homosexual desires than it took the bishop (Agata Adamiecka-Sitek's excellent analysis of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* revealing that fact was published by *Didaskalia* only in 2012).[11]

After 1989, censorship became attached to the neoliberal system, thus obscuring the fact that neoliberal economic censorship simply supports desires espoused by the majority of society. The neoliberal system is not a particular proponent of censorship itself, but employs it whenever its economic interests are threatened. Criticism unfolding along these lines fails to consider the psychosocial dynamics of acts of censorship. Leftist analyses of censorship (Ewa Majewska's publications, for example)[12] are thus caught in a very specific aporia. The nature of this aporia is laid bare by the stature that Chantal Mouffe has in Polish left-leaning circles. The struggle against censorship targeting minorities cannot go against the emancipatory pursuits of the majority, the latter defined as a group mistreated by the neoliberal system. For example, the "Kissing Doesn't Kill" campaign, launched in New York City by the Gran Fury Collective in 1989 and aimed at subduing the panic surrounding the AIDS epidemic, Mouffe considered an example of "a strategy of the subversive re-appropriation of the dominant forms of communication"[13] in the struggle against neoliberal hegemony, thus completely obfuscating the real political objective of the campaign. Mouffe emphasizes that it is necessary for the left to employ populist slogans, she accepts the accommodation of nationalist and religious values, insofar as they are representative of the majority. This approach to leftist ideology is espoused by theater directors Monika Strzępka and Paweł Demirski, their work intent on unmasking those secret alliances between

10 Jakub Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku. Artyści, sztuka i polityka* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014), vol. 2:119-120.

11 Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, "Grotowski, kobiety i homoseksualiści. Na marginesach «dramatu człowieczego»," *Didaskalia* 112 (2012): 94-105.

12 Ewa Majewska, *Sztuka jako pozór? Cenzura i inne paradoksy upolitycznienia kultury* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!Art, 2013).

13 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 144.

all sorts of minorities and the neoliberal system, the latter always preying on the national majority; thus, their plays equate censorship and the principles of political correctness, imposed upon the national community of the "exploited" by the emancipatory pursuits of the minorities.

6.

The final aspect of my research project pertains to queer studies' methods of conceptualizing the so-called structural censorship, acting through affective enforcement of cultural norms rather than through specific political institution. I would like to tentatively outline three distinct models of said censorship.

The first, rather widely internalized in Poland, was put forward by Judith Butler.[14] Butler formulates an assumption that I consider crucial: censorship is a product of speech, rather than the silencing of speech. Accordingly, no text can be fully censored or uncensored. Butler's approach allows structural censorship to be countered by representatives of discriminated sexual minorities interfering with powerful performative uterrances constituting the normative majority. Her postulate, however, has two inherent weaknesses. Firstly, it deprives minorities of their own individual culture and language through overemphasis of strategies based around appropriation, repetition, paraphrase, and catachresis. Thus the drag queen is the central figure of her political program. Secondly, such a transgressive strategy requires the subject to possess considerable cultural and social capital and excludes many representatives of minorities from political activism.

The second model can be found in the work of Sara Ahmed.[15] Ahmed undermines Butler's transgressive ideas and incorporates into the body of queer behavior many attitudes that other queer theorists consider "insufficiently queer." She does not believe censorship to be a line separating the excluder and the excluded, but rather a circulation of affects that orient themselves towards certain objects, while avoiding others. She wonders what affective circulations facilitate the constitution of a nation – one encompassing such a large community – as the subject and object of emotions. Ahmed also points out that social norms are shaped not only by power, but also by emotion. The latter infuse these norms with a sheen of naturalness that establishes a relationship between the concepts of nation

14 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

15 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

and heteronormativity, a relationship founded upon the principle of biological and cultural reproduction. This is precisely why Ahmed does not advocate for the incorporation of queer subjects into the national community, the latter considered a specific form of affect circulation. Politically speaking, the struggle is not supposed to culminate in the integration of the minority into the community, but rather in the endowment of the minority with the right to the uninhibited expression of their desires and feelings in the public sphere. Ahmed criticizes American LGBT circles for their outspoken participation in nationwide mourning after 9/11 and their ignorance of the fact that their acceptance into the national community in this period was merely conditional and trauma induced. She claims instead that minorities need to obtain the right to mourn and that parties whose affective orientation runs counter to the orientation of the nation towards which they manifest fellowship are more or less pointless.

The third model is represented by Michael Warner[16] and his concept of the public and counterpublic. The contemporary perception of public space, Warner explains, quoting Benedict Anderson, was established through the circulation of texts that presume strangers to share the same values and norms, taking part in the production of normativity. The ideological appropriation of public space entails the imposition of community effects on circles of indefinite recipients. Thus, Warner provides us with a range of excellent tools with which to deconstruct the ideologeme of the Polish theater audience, seeing that Polish theater equates – linguistically, at least – t h e a u d i e n c e with p u b l i c, and t h e n of p u b l i c with t h e p u b l i c.

Different forms of counterpublic life are also very specific forms of public life, the former defined by Warner as overly embodied and sexualized, valuing performance over text and thus conflicting with the dominant public space. Although bearing all the characteristics of that which is public, the two differ in circulation range. "Speech that addresses any participant as queer will circulate up to a point, where it is certain to meet intense resistance." Whereas speech taking place in public space always presumes its own universality and erases the groups that resist it. Thus, Warner describes two sides of the same barrier restricting texts and performances which I termed "affective censorship." On one side, this is recognized and felt, while on the other, it remains invisible and imperceptible. The counterpublic, however, is not marginalized in public discourse; rather it sets up its stages in places it considers comfortable and, depending on the circumstances, either enjoys the privileges of invisibility or fights for visibility.

16 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

Ahmed's and Warner's concepts seem to me to be especially effective tools with which to deconstruct the ideological construct that the theater has become in Polish culture – as a national, public, or repertory institution. We will have to remember, however, that the presence of the counterpublic in Polish public theater – due to abovementioned reasons – will be detectable only in the traces that affective censorship has left behind.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

Interpretations

Marek Zaleski

Like the Blank Tile in Scrabble

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Affect does not submit to the rule of representation. This belief should be considered an axiom of the "affective turn" that has been the subject of interdisciplinary discussions over nearly two decades now. No longer fettered by the primacy of representation, affect invokes that which is impossible to represent. Simultaneously, it is perfectly material: it is a symptom, a bodily state, an image, a musical phrase, or a literary text. Therefore, even if it evades representation, the latter often mediates its existence, even though representation is merely an artistic or thematic elaboration of affect. This is what usually happens. Affect is wrapped in sensation that we share in, in an emotion or a mood that we experience. Representation, therefore, is the shadow that deprives its prime mover of existence. Accordingly, affect leads a secret, clandestine life – by evading representation, it evades meaning altogether. In its translation into meaning, it is a derivative of deceptive representation. Does that not resemble the life of literature itself? Like the affect, literature also proves to be paradoxical: an intensity of perversely constructed representations that defer their meanings. And is not literature, like the affect, something that situates us in the very center of our experience of the world?

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It is believed that affect is a manifestation of the intensity of existence (after all, inevitably always someone's), a passing from one threshold of intensity to another, something that drives the changeability of our existence. Literary text often makes us excited and is always a place of interaction (Tzvetan Todorov once jokingly remarked that literature is a picnic, with authors supplying the words and readers providing the meanings) – we can say, therefore, that it frequently serves as the proving ground of many a passions. More than once has the picnic slipped into tragedy, jumped in an instant from delight to massacre, funeral, and what have you. Feelings, emotions, experiences, and moods are all merely traces of affects that we – participants of the picnic – have already draped in words equipped with meanings, so the representations expressed in a more or less intelligible manner, thus somewhat petrified or even ossified. The perception of being agitated, aroused, and therefore affected, is only an effect of affect itself – it is our own interpretation of affect, a superficial one and, one might say, skin deep! Meanwhile, our real lives take place elsewhere, as proponents of the psychoanalytical theory of affect claim, placing the wilderness of tangled meanings in the abysmal ardor of the subconscious. Contrary to Spinoza, the father of contemporary affect theory, who claimed that true cognition revealed the origins of affects, the psychoanalysts declare that true cognition is out of our reach. To strive for it – they assert in tandem with contemporary philosophers – is to try and achieve the impossible: affect is essentially unknowable, as it is, according to philosophers, the transcendental condition of the existence of our reality and thus our cognition, too. Affect is an agitation, a purely virtual intensity: what is available of that cognitive excitation is its interpretation from the start. The life and the world around us are streams of affects – we affect and we are affected. *Cogito* is an illusion, because cognition is becoming. It is thought in motion. If we knew how all things relate to one another, the world could not keep secrets from us; it would become a unified whole (which it *de facto* is). According to the precepts of Deleuze's post-Spinozan philosophy, when I have knowledge of the balance of power between myself and the world, I am closest to my own fundamental essence, my "thisness," my *haecceitas* (my "essence," as Deleuze calls it – somewhat deceptively, given the fact that his differentialist inclination would make him rather reluctant to employ traditional essentialist notions).[1] In that particular moment, I also hold the most power over the intensity of my own existence. The essence is instantaneous (because it is defined by current excitations), and yet eternal, as it virtually participates in the unity of the world, in Spinoza's indivisible Substance. All things remain

1 See Gilles Deleuze, *Lecture on Spinoza's Concept of Affect*, http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/deleuze_spinoza_affect.pdf, accessed March 2, 2013.

somehow related to one another and specific essences are attributed to these relationships. Essences are eternal, but the objects in the relationships are mutable. Therefore, to further expound upon Deleuze, we are dealing with a specific paradox: essence exists beyond time, but its constituent components (its representations) are instantaneous. Eternity and instantaneity are the two sides of essence. They also constitute the modality of affect: each excitation is an experience of essence. Passion as affect is an excitation of essence. Eternity and spontaneity, intensifying and diminishing the force of existence, is a diapason we live in. This is the reason why affect should be considered a transcendental condition of our cognition, a way in which essence ultimately manifests itself. Essences transcend both the subjective state of the conceiving entity and the characteristics of the conceived object. They create "true unity: unity of an immaterial sign [e.g. the sign of a work of art – M.Z.] and of an entirely spiritual meaning."[2] To the question of what is an essence as revealed in the work of art, Deleuze says that it is "the absolute and ultimate Difference," (D, 27) a difference that constitutes being and what allows us to conceive being. Deleuze conflates difference with the figure of "diversity," (D, 27) and thus of virtuality and potentiality. This diversity would constitute the *haecceitas* of existence. Enigmatically, Deleuze declares that "it is something in a subject, something like the presence of a final quality at the heart of a subject" (D, 28). In an object, in turn, Deleuze identifies it in its representations, in "the way the world appears to us," preferably in works of art. Difference, therefore, is both an individual perspective and an emanation of eternity.

Is this not somewhat familiar? Is not language, in which meanings are established in a game of differences, a matrix of such cognition? Each use of language contributes to its systemic nature, but that nature manifests itself through its use. Not all of these uses, however, are equal. According to Deleuze, literature is an emanation of language wherein essences (and differences) manifest themselves most intensely through individual styles and he expounds upon the subjects in his book *Proust and Signs*. "If there were no such thing as art, [difference – M.Z.] would remain the eternal secret of each man" (D, 27). Art enables the manifestation of "viewpoints towards a world supposedly the same. […] Our only windows, our only doors are entirely spiritual; there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic one. […] Only by art can we emerge from ourselves, can we know what another sees of this universe that is not the same as ours" (D, 28). "Thanks to art, instead of seeing a single world,

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 27. All subsequent citations in the text will be marked with the letter D followed by the page number.

our own, we see it multiply, and as many original artists as there are, so many worlds will we have at our disposal" (D, 28); "style is essence itself" (D, 32). "A great novelist is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters," claims Deleuze, and then provides examples: "When Emily Brönte traces the bond between Heathcliff and Catherine, she invents a violent affect, like a kinship between two wolves, which above all should not be mistaken for love. When Proust seems to be describing jealousy in such minute detail, he is inventing an affect [...] jealousy being the meaning of signs – affect as semiology."[3] The becoming of the world thus becomes a field in which affects manifest themselves.

Deleuze's ideas and metaphors will be explored further in later parts of this essay, but now I would like to use them to examine the writings of Magdalena Tulli as employing the language of affect. Curiously, a lot of things in her writings are happening beyond the field of representation. The world portrayed in the narrative is just decoration for what is taking place behind the scenes and what manifests itself through the organization of representation itself, but eludes straightforward identification and designation. Tulli herself, reflecting on the actions of the narrator from the novel, declares:

> From the cracks in the narrative, the contradictions, the derailed logic of his argument, stares a somewhat understated statement. The author seems to be trying to communicate with the reader behind the narrator's back.[4]

This means that in the work of Tulli *diegesis* is much more important than *mimesis* and the rhetorical (and the affective) is more important than the referential. Contrary to most novelists, Tulli saddles her readers with a significant burden. The author eagerly engages in ironic parabases: she peeks out from behind the world as it is portrayed by the narrator, commenting on the unfolding of the events in the narrative and the decisions of the characters. It is then up to the reader to reconstruct the world concealed by the facade of decorations arranged in this particular manner. Tulli's non-fictional fictions are often read as parables, and her critics – as if unaware of the evolution that the novel has gone through over the course of the twentieth century – claim that her work is deficient in realism, engages in excessive metaphorization of fictional

3 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (Columbia University Press, 1994), 174-175.

4 Marek Zaleski, "Za plecami narratora. Z Magdaleną Tulli rozmawia Marek Zaleski," *Res Publica Nowa* 5-6 (1999): 81.

events, and treats characters in a pretextual manner, reducing them to mere puppets.[5] Even if that is true, then everything still unfolds according to the author's designs. The literary machinery that Tulli sets in motion toils to serve affect. How do we define affect here? Succinctly put, it is something that initiates the becoming of the novel's fictional world. What is it in this particular instance? Well, it is fairly hard to define because, as affects are prone to be, it is an event to which the law of noncontradiction does not apply. It is an upheaval of the semantic structure, something that gets lost when rendered not only into meanings, but also into emotions and feelings. It is an imposing intensity out of which representations and their meanings arise. It is virtually the blank tile in Scrabble: without it, meaning would fail to constitute itself, but the tile itself is only a medium for what can just as well be another, different meaning.[6] In that particular sense, affect is semantically blank (referencing Deleuze, Mieke Bal describes it as a "semantically void intensity": it can be experienced and diagnosed only in consequence of our emotional reaction to it).[7] It exists through representation (although simultaneously it exists beyond it). It is our subjectivity, emanating as receptiveness towards the world affecting us, and a readiness to embrace meanings, pulling meanings into existence. Therefore meanings and emotions always belong to someone, and are rarely final, often disorienting. Were they final, rather than fleeting and mutable, they would have had no capacity to nurture life (which, as we may recall, is a stream of affects) and would situate themselves in the sphere of entropy and death, in the world of definite identity.

What then is Tulli's fictional world based upon? The feeling of lack,[8] the uncertainty as to how to interpret the desires of the Other which, as we know, breed fear, a primary affect according to Lacan. This lack then emerges as the ontological foundation of the subject's world. Thus, fear becomes a ubiquitous

5 Only her most recent collection of short stories, *Włoskie szpilki* [*Italian Pins*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nisza, 2011), containing strong autobiographical references, breaks – although not fully – with her prior methods of constructing the world portrayed in the narrative.

6 The problem is that, in light of the affect theory, in the game that the world plays with us all the tiles we are dealt are originally blank.

7 Mieke Bal, *Affect as Cultural Force*, 2 (text submitted to the seminar of the Culture and Literature of Late Modernity Research Group held in Warsaw, October 15, 2013).

8 Tulli explains the reasons for her writing thusly: "The world is choking with a sense of lack. The experience of lack is maybe the only thing that touches the poor and rich, the tormentor and the tormented, equally. Lack stimulates desire. Quenching one's desires never really brings satisfaction, a new lack always surfaces, thus the ever-present suffering. Stories of lack play a leading role in *In Red* [*W czerwieni*]." Zaleski, "Za plecami," 81.

affect, one that trails our every effort and endeavor like a shadow. In Tulli's writing, this lack takes many forms. It is the oppressive strangeness of the world and the pervasive desire for it to make sense. In turn, the desires of the subject can also be understood negatively, as a sort of lack, if we were to adhere to Freud's suggestion that desire stems from the unconscious, a drive which itself is a function of need. Therefore quenching a desire has to entail abolishing some lack. The desire to eliminate a lack of meaning is the hardest to quench: according to Lacan's known precept, in the signifying chain, the signified continually slides beneath the signifier. *Dreams and Stones*, Tulli's story about the rise and fall of a world–city concludes with a somber hymn to the "void," "a steadfast endurance free of any name."[9] In this narrative illustrating the fate of a gnostic desire to build a perfect world, as soon as something is no longer free of a name, it becomes immediately lost in the unceasing scramble for meaning. The reality of *Sny i kamienie* [*Dreams and Stones*] incorporates a specific nominalism: it is not bound by the laws of physics or other laws. The incredible feats of engineering and urban planning on display are merely a hoax, and in the end, rhetoric is revealed to be the only undisputed field of expertise, the world portrayed in the book demarcated only by the limits of language. Language manufactures artificial nature, either friendly or not. The existence of everything is mediated through words, claims the narrator, and the "soul" of every word is elusive in the differences of meanings, as each meaning has a counter-meaning (in the universe of *Dreams and Stones*, the template can be found, for example, in the tree of life and the "anti-tree," and the city and "counter-city"). In the "everlasting, nameless constancy" affirmed by the narrator, there is an undertone of relief, a relief with which the narrator casts aside dreams about a world of final shapes and meanings. She conflates the world with constancy, which is neither apathy nor surrender.

Fear and desire are two sides of the same coin, namely, lack. Lack stimulates desire, which in this case are the dreams of the denizens and their wish to create a new, perfect world. The eponymous stones – figures of perfection and the unambiguity of existence, things in and of themselves – are beyond our reach. In the end, the once wonderful structure is corroded by the dreams of the denizens themselves, by *loci* of disorder, carriers of doubt, phantasms of uncontrollable yearning: the city will slowly turn to ruin, collapse under the unceasing onslaught of the counter-city and antinomies forces of chaos, corrupting everything in their path. Let us reject the desire for perfection, Tulli seems to say. Let us approach life as a compromise, as a clash of forces

9 See Magdalena Tulli, *Dreams and Stones* [*Sny i kamienie*, 1999], trans. Bill Johnson (New York: Archipelago Books, 2004), 110. This essay may feature fragments of my prior reviews of Tulli's novels.

traveling along infinitely different vectors. Let us no longer dream of perfect creation, let us trust, instead, in constancy – only then will we avert a new Deluge "bring everyone, including those already on the bottom, safely back home," says the narrator. However, contrary to the assumptions inscribed in this prose, it also seems to paradoxically imply the following: let us abandon fear, because as living humans we are affected , and given that affect is essence, then we always participate in our own essence – we are always a part of the world. And we always get only as much essence as we are entitled to. We never lack for anything![10] The eponymous stones, embodiments of perfection and the unambiguity of existence, and the monumental Socialist Realist reliefs on the Palace of Culture and Science (to which the author alludes to) are a parody of our contemporary notions of the ultimate. What we are dealing with here is also a parody of Le Corbusier's vision of the city as the ultimate "machine for living," with a disavowal of the utopia offered by socialist mythology. Tulli seems to be ridiculing the dreams of philosophers and politicians. In accordance with the engineers behind the *perpetuum mobile*, the world of *Dreams and Stones* is virtually a bodily organism and machine, whereas affect is a manifestation of vitality (and freedom). The experience of one's life is involuntary and recorded in one's body. Our bodies are smarter than us and know what facilitates our self-preservation. In the philosophy of affects, the body is understood much more broadly than just in the literal sense: this philosophy presumes the multiplicity of polymorphic elements constituting the Being, that is, the Spinozan substance which is an ontological *continuum* that entails the irresolvability of immanence and transcendence, and a lack of distinction between the physical and the mental, the vital and the superhuman or metaphysical. In their writings, philosophers involved with diagnosing the postmodern condition often describe the world as both a biological subject – as pure life, a living organism governed by the economy of desires – and a social subject transcending biological determinants – a construct produced by culture, a machine regulating our behaviors and steering our desires. "Contrary to normal self-regulation (rule of self-preservation), society is "both machine and organism," that is, both the subject of social regulation (culture) as well as its object – it is this wish to become a machine [a self-regulating mechanism – M.Z.] that likens it to a bodily organism."[11] Thus, the affective economy, perceptible in the approach to the social dimension that transcends the individual – the dimension in which the unconscious is entangled – becomes extremely significant. The city from *Dreams and Stones*,

10 That is the interpretation Deleuze uses in his lectures on Spinoza's concept of affect.

11 Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathologic* (New York: Zone Book, 1991), 252.

filled with desire, resembles a Deleuzian "desiring-megamachine," a factory of the unconscious. In *Anti-Œdipus*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of a more "machine-like" character of the unconscious.[12] The machinism present in the production of desires – in the production of dreams and phantasms; the world as a factory of desires, as a device regulating the stealthy passage of desire, is something that is very evident in Tulli's writing. As is the diagnosis that the social and political are the territory of desire. The diagnosis, expressed somewhat metaphorically in her first book, will be brought fully into the open in her novel *Włoskie szpilki* [*Italian Stilettos*], fiercely evident in the clearly autobiographical order. In that book, school is a totalitarian institution and a metaphor for the lives of Poles in the Cold War era, but even more than that, it is a landscape in which to work through grief for the childhood of which the author was deprived. In *Dreams and Stones*, the city is a grand infrastructure of the desires of its denizens. In Tulli's novel *In Red* [*W czerwieni*], the flow of desires is regulated by the "flow of desires and liabilities."[13] This particular novel (and the author's subsequent efforts) can be examined perfectly well by instruments put forth by Eva Illouz in her analyses of emotional life under capitalism.[14] In *In Red*, the puppet-like nature of the characters is fully intentional: for someone deprived of access to the Self, and as such cut off from one's own feelings, others – even loved ones – become social figures, symbolic signs, rather than something real. These suppressed emotions finally surface and when they do, they do so as destructive forces. Is it because desire stands in opposition to the social order and is revolutionary in nature? In the novel, the phantasmal and the material propel and drive each other: trapped by matter as products to be consumed, the desires of the denizens of the phantasmal Ściegi [Stitchings], a seaside city under Swedish control, turn into fetishes. Fantasy becomes the medium for the experience of pleasure and for emotions institutionalized in the violent practices of manufacturers and consumers, the rituals that alienate us from life and lead us towards catastrophe: the suppressed eventually returns and demands redress. On the other hand, *Skaza* [*Flaw*] may be read as a story about the rise of an authoritarian society as a "desiring machine." Here is a city somewhere in Europe and a handful of its citizens – the realities are just a sham, a piece of stage decoration. Life

12 See Michał Herer, *Gilles Deleuze. Struktury – maszyny – kreacje* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 101.

13 Magdalena Tulli, *In Red* [*W czerwieni*, 1998], trans. Bill Johnson (New York: Archipelago Books, 2011), 11.

14 Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2007).

goes on as normal until one day a crane cable snaps and sends a heavy, fireproof safe tumbling down to the ground, causing catastrophic consequences: first, a stock market crash, then an armed coup which caused an outburst of revolutionary fervor, and finally the establishment of a dictatorship. Obviously, all the contents of the safe – valuables, securities, bonds – disappear in the turmoil. Everything that seemed durable, indestructible, vanishes into thin air. City squares begin to fill with refugees who are victims of forced resettlements stemming from the ever-deepening political crisis. It is not difficult to surmise that they will turn out to be the real victims of the fracas. Tulli dramatizes the narrative, while retaining its laconic character, perfectly portraying the mood that accompanies the spread and escalation of violence, itself always courting the strongest actor. It portrays the degree of egoism that always drives the self-serving defense of one's possessions, the mechanisms of servile cynicism, the stigmatization of scapegoats, and the establishment of a new order of ranks and relationships across a world sliding into barbarianism which still feverishly keeps up appearances of order and the rule of law. Her narrative also reveals the frailty of bodies not wearing uniforms and bereft of other respect-commanding garbs. Her novel joins the ranks of many books dealing with the rise of fascism. The novel's narrator confesses a deep, sympathetic kinship with a world that time and time again slips from her control, a world that exists as a *continuum*, a world in which the line between fiction and reality is arbitrary – both are simply different attributes of one matter. The narrator of *Flaw* states:

> From a certain point of view there are no made-up stories. Towards the end, all appearances to the contrary, each one turns out to be true and inevitable. Each one is a matter of life and death. Anyone who spends time in its unseen back area has to accept all the shared and ownerless pain it contains, spilling this way and that – because the channels through which it flows are all connected.[15]

The ambiguous and sometimes sinister effortlessness of creating worlds puts the heaviest of burdens on the writer's shoulders: she has to take responsibility for her own actions, as well as for her point of view and the style in which she manifests herself. The narrator's compassion and empathy for the victims are an expression of sympathy for those who – as we keenly believe – have brought this all on themselves, those without whom "the world will be better off." In any case, in the fictional world (and the non-fictional, too), compassion is exposed to the dialectic of chance and necessity (more on that in a moment)

15 Magdalena Tulli, *Flaw*, trans. Bill Johnson (New York: Archipelago Books, 2007), 160-161.

fraught with consequences for those living inside the narrative. That is why the ending will read: "Happy endings are never happier than possible."

We often read that Deleuze and Guattari juxtapose Freud's concept of the "theater of the unconscious" with their own, which perceives the unconscious as a machine, a factory of the impersonal, the universal, that which is exposed to the violence of signs unrestrained by the ostensibly self-transparent subject. Tulli's work employs both of these approaches. In *Moving Parts*, she extensively uses circus metaphors, whereas in *Flaw*, the narrative starts backstage in a theater, a factory of reality tainted by the provisionality and mediocrity of the entities that exist within it. This is a world of appearances and charades: there is no "depth" to it. All depth is "pure illusion – paint and plywood, nothing more." In this world, all power is usurpation, rooted in partial and substitute desires, masking only lack, the feeling of emptiness burrowed in the "marshalling yards," always available and always scornfully indifferent toward our concerns. The narrator is no longer the grandiose director. Instead, the role of demiurge is now delegated to the eternally dissatisfied "contractors," maintenance personnel for the main installations and the rest of the equipment that a functioning stage requires, the "fallen angels of the back areas": "the denim-clad workers," stage hands, backstage interns, and the tailor (the entire story starts with a paean to the "art of the dressing room" which quickly devolves into a resigned apologia for people working "the invisible back area"). All these people have true, although cynical, knowledge of the world. What they do not have, however, is the full extent of power. "The true nature of the highest authority is permanent absence," we read in the end of *Flaw*. Power is held by the impersonal (the resultant of desire) which manifests itself in clashing narratives, constantly shifting from one to the other and slipping from the narrator's control. What is the ubiquity of narrative? In *Moving Parts*, her earlier novel, Tulli has already disclosed the driving force that propels the machinery of the world of the novel. The world is neither meaningful, nor absurd. It simply is – that is all. And such as it is, it amazes, delights, bores, and frightens us. But whenever we try to understand it, it escapes our grasp, leaving only decorations where reality once was. Why? Because it appears to us in the form of a narrative, along with its need for rationality, for cause and effect, a narrative making use of the symbols that make the world our home. This particular narrative perspective has had great success in the humanities. Emil Cioran once wrote that nowadays we are, all of us, potential writers, just like everyone was a potential theologian in the Middle Ages. The author of *Moving Parts* makes the world unfamiliar rather than familiar. She demonstrates the sort of misunderstandings that may stem when "a tale someone has nonchalantly conjured up must suffice for the entire substance of somebody's existence," a tale "hungry for subjects and predicates, lodged

in their tissue like a rare species of rapacious parasite."[16] She displays how words become the suffering flesh, how a trivial story that starts to control the lives of fictional characters "confined by the circus metaphor in which their fates are enclosed" suddenly transforms into reality, with all its sinister consequences – that is into history.

Who is the narrator in this story? The novel's "Narrator," who becomes a character in *Moving Parts* – "a short tale of betrayal" – is merely a ridiculed figurehead, entitled to nothing more than a "scrap of existence." History unfolds , "behind his back," "between the lines, in the dark corners behind the paragraphs." And we also do not know anything about someone who called the narrator into being, he/she remains impersonal, devoid of psychology or any semblance of an inner life (like the other characters). He/she is – that is all. He/she can only speak, reveal new complications, peek into "expanses of possibilities that will never be fully explored." He is no supreme authority. He is also the void, filled by the "volatile essence of longing" for representation, the rampant element of the novel. The narrator struggles with a trivial story of marital infidelity, but the story is a treatise on the world's lack of transparency, where narrative is the highest and most unreliable instance of truth, because in this case the eponymous "moving parts" are the true driving force, as is the language with all its endowments, in which figures of speech, akin to railroad switches, unexpectedly shift the direction in which the narrative is heading, up until the very end, when the circus metaphor invalidates all the efforts of the narrator who struggles to rescue the fictional world. We can even go so far as to say that Tulli's text is a Deleuzian "literary machine"[17] that subjects the reader to the violence of signs. A lack-driven affective machine that produces literary effects.

By competing with each other, tales or "simple stories" – as the author herself ironically calls them – transform our lives into either a series of charming events or a spectacle of pain and misery. This fluctuation and ambivalence serves as a guarantee of the world's wonder, but is also a source of its inherent flaw. The stoicism ingrained in such a vision of the world strongly resembles Spinoza's mechanism which,

> is based on the belief that no things or events have objective moral and aesthetic values, that no thing is good or evil, beautiful or ugly, in and of itself. We can call something good or bad only in view of man, whose needs are the only source of moral judgement. […] We are to

16 Magdalena Tulli, *Moving Parts*, trans. Bill Johnson (New York: Archipelago Books), 8.

17 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 67.

consider good and evil all things that either facilitate or hamper our cognition, respectively.[18]

Good affects empower the agency of our existence, bad affects disempower it. Thus, in the words of Samuel Johnson, "the only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it." Each of us, however, has an individual threshold of intensity, as do all the things around us, and it is through intensity that our relationship with the world and its essences manifests itself. In *Flaw*, Tulli's narrative unfolds from the perspectives of individual characters. We hear the repetitive choruses of: "If I am a student…," "a notary," "a servant," "a policeman," "a newspaperman," "a tram driver," "a tenant gazing from behind the curtain," "a denim-clad man," "a prematurely born baby," "And if this is my story, then…," etc. Does that not affirm the "individuating viewpoint superior to the individuals themselves" (D, 105) which – if we were to believe the philosopher – is equal to essence itself? Each individual essence is an intensive quality and each object, including each and every one of us, comprises a conglomerate of a range of different intensities which constitute the essence. According to Deleuze, each representation essentially drives towards the epiphany of said intensities. "Combray is the essence," writes Deleuze. It is the "individuating viewpoint," it [the essence – M.Z.] "has the power […] to remind us, however intensely, of the self" and "every 'explication' of something in this sense is the resurrection of a self" (D, 120). In a somewhat similar manner, Joyce portrayed literary work as an epiphany-producing machine. Deleuze references the author of *Ulysses* in his book, too (D, 123). How does this manifest itself in Tulli's work and what aims does it serve? I will start with an attempt to answer the second part of the question. It serves to remind us of the importance of the discovery that narrative – the "trivial story" – assists us as a structure through which to understand the world and a script for our actions, that it provides us with a place where we can manifest ideas we hold dear. Each fact, even facts of nature, is available to us only through someone else's narrative that describes it. Thereby, it implies patterns of fictionalization – explication and placement within the context of other facts. By obscuring with words, the "trivial story" steers our understanding and interpretations of the world. And given that there are no pure occurrences, just someone else's interpretation of them, all of our declarations about the world are only a fragment of our autobiography – if so, then the question of our responsibility for our ideas and the "stories" we produce comes back to haunt us. In the meantime, the squares keep filling with refugees

18 Leszek Kołakowski, introduction to *Etyka*, by Baruch Spinoza (Warszawa: PWN, 1954), XXXVIII.

and "the plots they bring with them." The back areas – invisible yet never silent – are the "marshalling yards" of the stage on which everything seems to take place, is a storeroom for set decorations, narrative clichés and metaphors that exert a great deal of influence over what is happening on the stage. There is a little bit of Lacan's "Big Other" in the " back area"; a desiring machine over the desires of which we have absolutely no control. On the contrary, we are subject to its incomprehensible mechanics – thus our anxiety; being free from our fear means being free from being dependent on someone else's desire. The latter disturbs us, as it has to do with the presence of the Real which frightens us. And rightly so: we read that "back area has no room for pity or compassion." Installed by accident in the back area of the fictional world, fragments of old decorations for stories about the "difficulties of life under the oppressive regime" begin to steer reality and decide the fates of refugees.

Tulli's books deal with the anguish of existence. Explaining the decision of the Gryfia Prize jury, Inga Iwasiów stated: "We award the Gryfia Prize to Magdalena Tulli, because *Włoskie szpilki* is a painful experience."[19] That is true, it is painful because the book deals with the ghosts of childhood. Our childhood, which gilds our memories, often seems to us a land of lost happiness. But that is rarely true in Tulli's novels. Here, childhood is a menace. The narrator of Tulli's stories shares the fate of those who are also children of Holocaust survivors. Her life resembles the life of the narrator of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* – like him, just like he was an inadvertent victim of his father, a Holocaust survivor, she is the victim of her mother, a former Auschwitz inmate. The cold, elegant prose of *Włoskie szpilki* is a way for the author to work through the grief of losing her mother and, to an even greater degree, the grief of being deprived of her childhood. The book is an attempt at coping with inherited trauma, with fears that morph into new idiosyncrasies. In this particular case, irony seems to be a medicine one swallows to cross the minefield of one's own wounded memory without incident. The narrator, a mother to two adolescent sons, is held hostage by that little girl. She feels a kinship with the child, but helping her – unlike helping herself – is simply beyond her means. Once again we are dealing here with the true claim that the child is the parent to the adult. Therefore, if it is plausible to say that we are dealing with affects in the case of Tulli, then it is due to the way she constructs the narrative, that is, on account of her specific style. What, then, is its secret? Well, it lies with its affective qualities: " a tale someone has nonchalantly conjured up must suffice for the entire substance of his existence." But the emotional affect is a product of using the rule as it is visible at the level of a sentence, a paragraph, finally the entire text: it is in the transition, the transfer of meanings

19 See http://www.instytutksiazki.pl/pl,ik,site,6,4,27518.php, accessed March 3, 2013.

(and the resulting transfer of emotions) specific to the affect inside the body of the text, the juxtaposition combining the irreconcilable or contradictory in terms of type and content. The text is imbued with "affective syntax."[20] The narrator of *Moving Parts*, "in a foolish pursuit of runaway story," struggles with the narrative. From behind her back peeks the anonymous author, to tell us about the exploits of the narrator and her character traits. This ironic paralysis communicates to the reader that we are all playthings of fate. The reader also shares in the desperation of the narrator. Like him, the reader "begins to question, whether a circus farce can bear the weight of what was to be conveyed here." What the narrative manages to say, however, forms a profound diagnosis of the narrator's – and the reader's – condition, and the truth of this condition is experienced in the reading about the adventures of the puppet-like characters:

> While they remain at the table they look happy; a thoroughly secure future extends before them: in the morning coffee and rolls, in the evening somersaults over the abyss, and so on for all eternity. Is this enough to make them feel confined by the circus metaphor in which their fate is enclosed? And even if so, do they have any course of action other than to take up the life that has been assigned them in this tale? Perhaps it would be better for them to remain forever at the table set for breakfast, she with a cigarette, he with coffee cup in hand, and between them on the white tablecloth, let's say, a green apple, which somehow neither of them feels like eating. They'd sit like that endlessly, sprawling on padded chairs whose softness comes from the pink stuffing hidden under the upholstery. It isn't difficult to imagine what hardships, mortifications, and disappointments these two would be spared. But no one wishes to remain forever in an inconsequential moment. Thoughts flee from it in reverse gear toward accomplished facts, while desires, having nothing to look for in the past, rush forward at breakneck speed. Only the second hand of a watch trashes about in the present tense, trembling nervously. All alone, over and again it passes by the two broader hands as they turn unhurriedly in their matching orbits, evidently connected with them only mechanically. The rhythm of its feverish twitching is foreign to them. To the body though it is only too familiar – the delicate body, warm with desires, which, surging toward the future, at that very moment collapses into the past, sinking helplessly into it, enmired. And while the moment called the present still continues, its existence is felt merely as un uncontrolled turmoil of heart

20 This term was used by Mieke Bal in the above-mentioned lecture, to describe the way in which exhibits in art galleries are designed nowadays.

> and mind, a chaos from which one tries to flee as far as possible. And so the dining room will soon empty and the pair finishing their breakfast will eventually vacate their chairs, abandoning green apple peelings and the crumbs scattered over the tablecloth. (Tulli, *Moving Parts*, 12-13)

This excerpt encapsulates the event-production of existence. In the now of the present moment, we are situated between expectation and fulfilment. Each moment is a maelstrom of what is, an explosion in which something happens but quickly fizzles out, leaving behind only traces of what it was; and given that we live within the horizon of expectation, this something also conceives of what will be. And in the meantime, something completely different finally takes place! The long quote is also a fine illustration of how predicates operate in Tulli's writing. The dynamics of the narrative, driven here by something more than just the need to put one sentence after another, make the world portrayed in *Moving Parts* a rowdy adventure, where the course of events is determined by the rhythm of the rhetoric *perpetual mobile* toiling in the service of unbridled imagination:

> Let's say that it is still raining. Let lights be reflected in the wet asphalt as if it were a mirror; let clouds pass across the puddles, and in the aquaria of the shop windows let umbrellas rise, weightless as jellyfish. The raindrops have already added a spotted design to the plain fabric of the man's jacket. Let's say that his overcoat was stolen at the airport. Did he also lose his wallet, tucked into the inside pocket? The wet sidewalk reflected the lights of the hotel, while the semitransparent image of the bronze rider shook slightly in the glass of the revolving door and spun on his horse as if on a merry-go-round when the new character entered the lobby. Across the mirrors drifted the aforementioned jacket, an immaculate white shirt collar and a necktie that is rather ironic, but also rather flashy – of course, within the limits , of what's permissible in places where the only salvation is to reconcile freedom with servitude. (*Moving Parts*, 16-17)

In *Flaw*, we read: "up until now, no story has managed to be played out properly to its conclusion": the story, "derailed from its course," falls into the inevitable "track of the world, always ready to give direction to whatever is moving without a purpose or destnation" – is not such a direction of the narrative alienating? At best, it releases a very anxious curiosity. But Tulli's stories require something more from the reader. Ever since the events atop Mount Moriah, the human condition has been one of victimhood, but the twentieth century has made that metaphor more or less universal. Tulli's stories appeal

to the solidarity we feel towards the victims – they are the ones symbolizing the naked truth of life in this instance:

> an existence that serves no worthwhile purpose but merely pays homage to the chaos of the transformations of material, the perpetual circulation of hope and despair, and in no respect, either figurative or literal, fulfills the requirements of orderliness.[21]

The affective in representation, according to Deleuze or Massumi, stems from the rift between the meaning sealed into it and the effect it produces. Affect, or intensity, is the lack of a relationship between content and effect. It does not depend on the signified. Intensity belongs to the unconscious, it is its vestige in the representation. It exists outside discourse, between expectation and fulfillment – narratively without place. Emotional qualification is a symbolic rendering of intensity, reducing it to only one of many forms of expression. Intensity releases the swell of the narrative sequence, its flows regulate the course of the narrative – like they do in the "blooming" progression of affective syntax in Tulli's writing. Here is Stefania, killing time with cross-stitching after being dumped by her fiancé:

> The dark red blossomed upon the tambour and brought sudden confusion among the lilies. The design looked as if it had been stained. Stefania was frightened by the rose, which had escaped from under her dexterous fingers. Her cheeks burning feverishly, she unpicked the silk threads. Gusts of air swept them up and carried them all over the world. Obedient to electrostatic forces, the threads settled on the roofs of military trains and on uniforms. Every man on whom a scrap of red silk thread came to

21 Magdalena Tulli, *Flaw,* 156. Tulli never locates her metaphors in a final, specific place in history: the denizens of her city believe "rumors about (...) landing by the allies to bring liberation; now it was Kolchak's forces, which somewhere out in the world would occupy the capital before suppertime and reinstate the legitimate government; now it was a band of partisans, armed to the teeth and promising to save the country from anarchy; now an international peacekeeping force was going to intervene and persuade the dictatorship to step down; now it was the arrival of Huns, after whose passage not one stone would be left upon a stone." (ibid., 128) Victims of the coup may be either Kurds or Kosovar Albanians: it is about purging the "other," forever relegated from mankind. The attitudes of the citizens towards these others, and numerous allusions in the text itself, suggest that they are to suffer the fate of the Jews, condemned to mass slaughter, although the word "Jew" is never once uttered in the entire novel. The author, however, leaves no room for doubt: "The details of this affair, the question of the unaccountable disappearance of so many people at once, baffled the minds of all those who attempted to fathom it" (ibid., 164).

> rest was struck by a bullet in the war. Before Stefania had finished the sachet adorned with lilies, Kazimierz returned on a train, free of cares, with a red thread tangled in his hair , in a long box fastened with nails. The casket was buried in the town cemetery in the sector containing the graves of army officers; the salute rang out and came back as an echo. And that was an end of it. In the meantime the roof over Colonel Ahlberg's quarters was still leaking, and after successive attempts at repair the wretched pail had to be emptied even more often than before.[22]

It may even be said that Tulli's writing, at the syntactic level of narrative events, resembles the work of Polish avant-garde poet of the twenties, Tadeusz Peiper, and his "blooming sentences,"[23] given the cuts that happen after each fictional episode. Each subsequent sequence or paragraph seems to be another small catastrophe, an excess, an unexpected turn of events, an interruption of the past's transformation into the future. An event that plays out along the expectation-fulfillment vector, and turns out to be a surprise. Thus my earlier claim, that it resembles a railroad crossing, with switches controlling the movement of meanings. This shift, resulting in a "transition" in our reading, a movement of constituting meanings, is what being affected by a text is like. The affect is the "passage", says Deleuze. It is a transfer of intensities, a becoming of emotions shared by the reader, emotions transmitted in textual representation.

The books that Tulli offers us (it is telling that each subsequent edition includes changes) pursue essences, pursue the *haecceitas* of frail configurations, the intensity of the stream of life, the latter a "fever of desires and disappointments" that unfolds ever onwards, aimless and directionless, always obscured by someone else's – although always victorious – narratives, conceived by minds trying to shape what is essentially suspended in perpetual motion (like the blank tile in "Scrabble"). Which is nothing else than a desperate attempt at finding an answer to the desires of the Other. Tulli's sentences document the transition from intensity of experience to its expression – a record of the troublesome burden of belonging to a world stretched between lack, pain, and desire.[24]

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

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22 Magdalena Tulli, *In Red*, 32.

23 "The blooming sentence produces in its course the alternations of different stages of crystallization of the same ingredient," Janusz Sławiński, *Koncepcja języka awangardy krakowskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 127.

24 As we can recall, "there are no fictional stories [...] If this is my story, I am forced to negotiate, to accede to humiliating compromises, to make concessions, without losing hope," Magdalena Tulli, *Flaw*, 160.

Adam Lipszyc

Peep Show: The Lamentations of Justyna Bargielska

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We had children, yet they were not children, but shoes for the day
I'm not leaving you, shoes, just moving on.
Justyna Bargielska, *Dwa fiaty* [*Two fiats*]

Do not read gediotayikh [thy kids] *but geviotayikh* [thy corpses]
Eichah (Lamentations) Rabbah

Melanie Klein taught us that the affect of mourning is fundamental in determining our relationship to the world. According to her theory, already a classic in the field, every individual occupies the paranoid–schizoid and depressive positions successively; the two positions being defined by the subject's relations with the primal object, that is, the mother's breast.[1] In the paranoid–schizoid position, the infant treats the breast that delivers satisfaction and the breast that brings frustration as two separate objects. The infant is subject to fantasies of omnipotence, which present the good breast as entirely obedient to them, and the bad one as something

1 See Melanie Klein "Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant," in *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Vintage, 1997), 61-93.

that can be wrecked at will. The young subject is, in fact, unable to differentiate himself from the external world, confusing internal representations of objects with external ones: manipulating representations is confused with the operations on the things themselves. The subsequent transition to the depressive position is accompanied by several fundamental changes in subject–world relations. The good and bad breasts are recognised as one and the same, which in addition shows itself to be external, and painfully so, as it is beyond the subject's control. Internal objects succumb to disintegration, and the subject wallows in mourning after the loss of that which is most precious, a loss he believes he has caused thorough his own aggressive behaviour towards the breast. The arduous, never-ending process of reparation engenders a provisional awareness of the existence of good objects and reconstructs their inner representations, which are now no longer confused with what they represent. According to Klein, the successful transition through this first and inevitable depression produces in us mechanisms that crucially come into play during subsequent experiences of loss defining human life. Hanna Segal, Klein's student and codifier of Klein's work, argues that the process of reparation, in fact, makes it possible for linguistic representation and proper thinking to emerge.[2] The thoughts and words found in the psyche's internal "container" symbolise external objects, yet retain within themselves mournful self-knowledge about our non-identity with these objects, and the fact that these objects are already in a way lost because of their very externality and independence from our will. There is no thought or speech without the affect of mourning.

This is a beautiful and evocative vision. At the same time, though, it is hard to escape the sense that it is dogged by serious limitations. One of these is that loss is conceived here in extremely narrow terms, and from only one, very specific perspective. If we stick to this theory, we are looking at loss from the angle of a fragile, dependent individual who must become independent and reconcile, albeit provisionally, with being separated from that which gives him a sense of bliss. Yet these tools in an unaltered form do not allow us to describe the loss experienced by the other side – the mother herself. This is all the more peculiar as the intellectual framework and images that orient Klein's conceptions sometimes seem to suggest the opposite approach to loss. In this respect, what might be particularly interesting is a specific circumstance related to Klein's spatial imagination. Although for her, the fundamental problem is the separation of the becoming subject from the caring and satisfying object whose presence perhaps reproduces an image of some primal, narcissistic fullness before birth; Klein by no means invokes images

2 See Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

of an external container that might symbolise the mother's womb, a blissful space in which the subject would place himself in his phantasies. The essential reference point here is in fact the breast, an object that is partly incorporated by the infant itself, filling it with milk, and represented and duplicated by an internal object which is located in the inner container of the psyche and initially confused with the external object. In other words, Klein and Segal's use of the image of the container and what it holds might suggest grasping loss from exactly the opposite perspective to that which the two theoreticians represent: the perspective of the mother, and not the child. However, they do not commit themselves to such a reversal which, after all, seems essential if we wish to achieve a fuller understanding of the affect of mourning, and is certainly essential for the primary aim of our deliberations, which is to interpret several of Justyna Bargielska's texts. This is why, while bearing in mind the key link established by Klein and Segal between thinking, language, and mourning and the evocative image of the internal "container," we must now leave behind their perspective and look elsewhere for help. For the sake of employing an interdisciplinary approach, I propose examining in turn two works from two quite different fields.

The first of these is the work by anthropologist Galit Hasan-Rokem entitled *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*.[3] The Israeli author analyses a set of Midrashim known as *Eichah Rabbah*, the collection of exegetic reflections and parables revolving around the Book of Lamentations. In an unpretentious and yet extremely productive way, her book embodies the idea of irreligiously appropriating, assimilating, and exploiting certain important fragments from the corpus of canonical writings of a religious tradition. The essential methodological idea of the book – one that I do not feel competent to judge – is as follows: as with other collections of Midrashim, *Eichah Rabbah* is full of material drawn not from the high culture of rabbinic academies, but folk culture: there are a number of parables also known from other cultures, a great deal of intentional and unintentional description of customs, numerous anecdotes, and riddles. Hasan-Rokem suggests that by including this material the editors of the text opened it to many intellectual elements originating from the layers of culture and society which are not usually recorded. The task of an anthropological reader would therefore be to extract these elements and lend them a voice, which often conflicts with the voice of rabbinical ideology that dominates the text.

Eichah Rabbah seems to be a particularly rewarding object of this kind of deconstructive analyses owing to the central topic that these Midrashim of the

3 Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*, trans. Batya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Hereafter WL, with the page number.

Book of Lamentations comment on: the destruction of the Temple and expulsion of the nation of Israel. The texts revolve around the most human issues of loss and grief, which is why the national and theological perspectives intertwine time and again, sometimes conflicting with a perspective that is quite personal and existential, and handled in a way that is not always in accordance with the rabbinical approach. In particular, Hasan-Rokem juxtaposes two takes on loss which clash in *Eichah Rabbah*. The first perspective, attributed to the rabbinical line, is related to theodicy and the idea of retribution: this point of view sees loss as an understandable retribution from a cruel yet just God for the sins that have been committed. The second perspective is concealed in the word *eichah* (how), the first word of the Book of Lamentations, which expresses the wonder and despair at utterly incomprehensible and inconceivable loss. The author writes:

> Folk narratives are a powerful instrument for offering a valid spiritual alternative to the doctrine of retribution as an interpretation of the historical plight of the times. Anonymity and the collective character of folk literature, together with its capacity to allow expression to "other," non-elitist groups, turn it into a convenient instrument for conveying feelings and opinions that are not necessarily compatible with ideological trends dominant in the textual establishment of rabbinic literature. (WL, 45)

Hasan-Rokem develops this juxtaposition by brilliantly combining it with an analysis of verbal forms of expression, thereby sketching a productive conception of the link between language and the affect of mourning. She notes that *Eichah Rabbah* contains a collection of riddles that are thematically only loosely connected to the main theme of the book. Her argument is that this should not be seen as an editorial error; rather, the very figure of the riddle, or mystery, is directly connected to the fundamental subject of these meditations and parables, that is to questions concerning unintelligible, mysterious loss that cannot be accounted for by calculations of retribution or even by the most sophisticated kind of theodicy. Incidentally, the author is not entirely consistent as she in fact proposes two different angles: on the one hand, she simply contrasts systems of retribution with the riddle; on the other hand, especially in the beautiful epilogue, she categorises the "riddle," conceived of as a verbal construction referring to a specific solution, as a type of calculation under the heading of retribution ideology, whereas the structure which resists such calculations is now identified as "enigma" devoid of any solution. In any case, the main idea is clear: the structure of theodicy and retribution is broken up by the mysterious and enigmatic nature of loss. As Hasan-Rokem writes,

> It is exactly the presence of riddle tales and other genres of folk literature that makes it impossible for rabbinic literature to barricade itself behind the safety of uniform and authoritative conventions, creating a pervasively skeptical subversion against a potentially totalitarian monotheism. (WL, 52)

And further:

> In the riddle tales in *Lamentations Rabbah*, the loss assumes form in pictures, images, and plots. The theme of loss fits the inner nature, I would even say, the logical nature, of the riddle. (WL, 65)

In the next part of this passage, Hasan-Rokem explains that the local, fragmentary nature of a riddle, as well as the fact that it has a solution in the end, brings some comfort. Yet, she also notes that the contrast with the insoluble riddle of loss remains all the greater – thus making "enigma" an even more appropriate expression. The entire matter is therefore summed up best by the following:

> The religious answer is engaged in an effort to breathe meaning into the loss, and to make it part of a vision of the world as an ordered entity that obeys certain laws, and can be predicted and justified. […] Yet *Lamentations Rabbah* is also a text in which loss becomes an independent existential entity that breaks free of logic, as the lasting enigma escapes the boundaries of the solved riddle. The poetic imagery allows loss, as it were, to speak in its own language. (WL, 62)

Hasan-Rokem makes this strife between the ideology of retribution and the enigma of loss relevant to the very structure of the written text. According to the kabbalistic conception, the text of the Torah is only a commentary, the "oral Torah" which is to expound the mystical "written Torah." Put in another way, we do not have the actual text of revelation, or, according to one of the more eccentric views, we can find it in the form of the empty spaces between the lines. Perhaps in referring to this image, and also artfully intercepting it, Hasan-Rokem seems to identify the written Torah with places of enigmatic logical breakdowns, places which create a space for expressing the most personal of sufferings: a splendid paradox would be that the true book of revelation would be found in elements drawn from oral culture, internally broken and breaking the structure of the written text. The author writes:

> *Eichah Rabbah* is an exegetic Midrash. Its order is thus dictated by the order of the verses in the Book of Lamentations. But the verses are like rungs

> in a ladder, and those who climb from rung to rung pause in the empty spaces between, which are flooded by turbulence, irrationality, and, at times, the unexpected. Between the verses, the Midrash is not committed to any law. (WL, 63)

The conflict between retributive calculations, the law, and the structure of the text, as well as moments of subversion expressing loss, is also connected to the conflict between the patriarchal perspective and that of women. Women would in fact be one of those non-elite groups that find voice in the folk elements of rabbinic literature, and *Eichah Rabbah* would be a notable text since the theme of loss and mourning naturally opens it to images of women lamenting their dead. Hasan-Rokem's schematic view portrays men from the text of *Eichah Rabbah* as tending towards retributive calculations, the ideology of martyrdom, aggression and an incapacity for lamentation, while portraying women as being able to cope with the enigmatic nature of loss as well as being able to grieve. According to the author, the following, truly singular tale told in *Eichah Rabbah* demonstrates several key elements in this comparison: 1) the subversive and dangerous power of excessive despair, which undermines the patriarchal order of retributive calculation; 2) the ability to lament, i.e. mourning for the dead without framing loss in the context of theodicy; and 3) the significant fact that invoking a female figure often shifts the text of the Midrash from the level of national and theological discourse to that of the most personal loss.

> A woman living in the neighborhood of R. Gamaliel had a son, a young man who died, and for whom she would weep at night. On hearing her, R. Gamaliel was reminded of the destruction of the Temple, and he wept until his lashes fell out. When his disciples noticed this, they removed her from his neighbourhood. (WL, 137)

What is most important for our consideration, however, is the fact that the inclusion of the female perspective, almost in passing, causes a fundamental shift in perspective within the problematic of loss and mourning – a move away from that of the infant to that of the mother – which I mentioned when referring to the limitations of Klein's and Segal's conceptual framework. If, in theological terms, the Kleinian perspective would be the perspective of a man abandoned by God and weaned off the great breast called the Temple, then in *Eichah Rabbah*, this vantage point is accompanied by the perspective of a parent grieving for a lost child. Specifically, the mourner is God himself. He appears here several times as an impetuous father, who in a fit of wrath has killed his son, and is now trying to mourn him. In one of the best-known

and most astonishing passages of the book (in which God in fact is not saddled with direct responsibility for a catastrophe that has befallen Israel), God asks the angels what an earthly king does when he grieves for someone – in other words, God is painstakingly learning the process of mourning from humans (WL, 136-137). However, if we are to follow Hasan-Rokem's argument and accept that lamentation is above all a hallmark of women, then God should really learn this craft from a queen rather than a king and, at least for a moment, become a woman. Indeed in *Eichah Rabbah*, this nearly (just nearly!) comes to pass, as it is in this book that for the first time, almost (just almost!) unequivocally, the traditional term of *Shekhinah* is used to refer to the personification of a female aspect of God – and it is in this sense that the term will go on to enjoy great success in the kabbalistic tradition. Here, then, is God himself well-nigh becoming Rachel weeping for her children (WL, 128).

Let us move now onto a book by another author analysing a different tradition entirely. What I have in mind is a relatively slim, but very rich book *Mothers in Mourning* by Nicole Loraux, the French student of ancient Greek culture.[4] Its main subject is the relationship between women's lamentational practices and the political order in democratic Athens; the central thesis is the assertion that there is an insoluble conflict between them. Like Hasan-Rokem, who asserts that the female moment of the enigmatic *eichah* (a lament that does not accept any calculations and mourns loss's insurmountable separation) was capable of questioning the patriarchal order of the rabbinical text, Loraux maintains that the Greek political order had to employ legal regulations to defend itself from mothers in mourning. "Passion in the city-state? *Páthos* affecting the citizens? Danger" (MM, 9). This is why mothers in mourning were not permitted to lament on the streets; they were to remain locked up in the private sphere.

Considering the relationship between female mourning and the democratic order of Athenian politics, Loraux points out that one can speak of a conflict between two types of memory. If the polis is a community commemorating its own laws, institutions and customs, and if (as in Pericles' famous funeral speech) in remembering its sons that have perished in heroic battle the city remembers itself above all, and maintains its continuity through the ages, then the distinct but equally persistent motherly memory of mourning continually tears this continuity apart and opposes the latter, not allowing itself to disappear into some order of generality, all the while moving inexorably towards grieving, unforgiving wrath, namely, *menis*. This first word of Homer's *Iliad* refers, of course, to the anger of Achilles. However, Loraux notes that the same

4 Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, trans. Corinne Pache (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998). Hereafter MM, with the page number.

"Achilles suggests the example of a mother as a model for Priam's paternal mourning, as if only a mother could really understand pain" (MM, 45). Following Laura Slatkin, she proposes the rather extravagant argument that his *menis* is a dislocated reinterpretation of the "wrath" of his mother, Thetis, and that "it is necessary to give back to Thetis what makes the *Iliad* Achilles' poem" (MM, 49). This is also why Loraux, writing about the concept of *menis*, speaks about "a female model of memory, which the cities try to confine within the anti- (or ante-) political sphere. And in fact, wrath in mourning, the principle of which is eternal repetition, willingly expresses itself with an *aei* [i.e. with an attribute of perpetuity, again and again, constantly, always], and the fascination with this tireless 'always' threatens to set it up as a powerful rival to the political *aei* that establishes the memory of institutions" (MM, 98).

As shown by the case of Demeter who, after losing her daughter, blocks nature's mechanisms of biological vegetation, this persistent, mournful wrath is directed at the cosmic order embodied and maintained by Zeus (MM, 44-45). This is also a state of self-exclusion from the community, of obstinate endurance, and imprisonment – emblematic in the figure of the petrified Niobe, or the "rock that weeps" (MM, 45). In the context of reversing Klein's perspective as proposed earlier, what is fascinating is Loraux's description of the timeless nature of women's mourning and mournful wrath, invoking the figure of Clytemnestra, the mother of Iphigenia who was sacrificed by her own father, Agamemnon. According to Loraux, the "unmanageable remnant" of the affect of mourning finds its place in theatre (MM, 10). This is also why she presents a series of observations pertaining to female mourning from the texts of Attic tragedy, including the figure of Clytemnestra. Loraux writes:

> Clytemnestra, in Aeschylus, claims that her hated husband has sacrificed "his child, my dear pain" (*philtáten emoi odina*). *Odis* describes the searing pangs of childbirth; designated as *odis* beyond death, the young daughter Iphigenia incarnates for her mother a life that has barely been detached from her own body and whose loss her mother feels all the more in an instant of sinister repetition of the wrenching of the ultimate separation – as if Clytemnestra could not stop giving birth in endless parturition as long as her daughter lived. (MM, 39)

It is also no surprise that Loraux sees Clytemnestra as the epitome of menis, and demands that she be regarded not so much as an adulteress but as a mother avenging the death of her daughter by killing "the husband who knew not how to be a father" (MM, 50).

For our further considerations, it is worth taking a look at one more issue. Against the backdrop of the relationship sketched between the grieving

woman, the patriarchal order of the polis, and mournful, threatening wrath, Loraux presents an extremely intriguing historical riddle, and proposes an equally intriguing solution. In the centre of Athens, right on the Agora, there once stood a temple to the mother goddess, the so-called Metroon. Furthermore, the same building was also probably home to the Bouleuterion for some time, where the Council of Athens was seated. Later, when a separate building was opened for the council, but still directly adjacent to the Metroon, the mother temple housed another important institution: the city archive. Thus the mother (at least according to one orator) watched over the whole recorded memory of Athenian democracy. If Loraux is right to point to the conflict between womanhood and Athenian politics, and particularly between the mournful anger of women's memory and memory constitutive of the polis, then there is no doubt that the key role of the mother temple as the site of the city archive and its physical location adjacent to the actual centre of political life demand an explanation. Loraux suggests the following perspective. She examines the Greek (and especially the Aristotelian) view of the mother's function in the process of procreation, in which the mother is a matrix, the wax on which the father, like a writer, impresses his seal; thus in the ideal case, sons should be the perfect reflections of their fathers, without inheriting any additional characteristics from the mother's side. According to Loraux, this particular conviction, along with the analogy connecting impregnation with the writing process, can enable us to solve the Metroon riddle. By placing the city archive – a collection of patriarchal writings and political memory based on the continuity of institutions – in the home of the mother, potentially the source rather of a different memory, of unforgiving, mournful wrath turning against political continuity with all its subversive power, Loraux argues that the Athenians were trying to domesticate the mother, making an imprint on her maternal matrix and, paradoxically, exploiting her wrathful power to protect the laws to which it is essentially opposed. This was how the machinery of justice inscribed in the city's laws was to operate. According to Loraux, however, the city fathers were also aware that the phantom of "another [form of] justice" (MM, 77), the one ascribed to the undomesticated power of wrathful mourning, never ceased to threaten the political order.

Taking this handful of ideas as a constellation of possible reference points, rather than as a theoretical construct to apply, I would like to explore certain elements of Justyna Bargielska's work.[5] I am interested in something

5 I focus here solely on Bargielska's first three volumes of poetry (*Dating Sessions*, *China Shipping* and *Dwa fiaty* [*Two Fiats*]), recently collected in one book: Justyna Bargielska, *Szybko przez wszystko* [*Quickly through Everything*] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2013); hereafter SW, with the page number; as well as her prose debut: Justyna Bargielska,

that (and I admit this is no great discovery) is one of the fundamental topics of her writing – the theme of loss, as well as what Bargielska does in and with the language to record this loss. A decent enough starting point might be the observation that at the level of images, Bargielska very often makes use of various figures of "containers." This poetry and prose is teeming with objects and spaces which either do contain something or have the capacity to do so but remain empty. Were someone to suggest that these containers are a kind of materialisation of the Kleinian–Segalian internal space for storing objects that are good and represent something which we have been separated from, which we have lost, there would be serious reservations in accepting this idea. For starters, Bargielska views loss rather from Hasan-Rokem's and Loraux's perspective, and not from Klein and Segal's, that is from the mother's point of view, not the child's. The original form of the container here is the female womb.

Sometimes, though relatively seldom, this is spoken of solely in the context of an erotic relationship between a woman and a man, without referencing the mother–foetus relationship. This opens up, however, the melancholy interplay between fullness and emptiness, containment and loss – a desolation that must be compensated for by another type of incorporation. In the poem *depresyjnie, prawie prozą* [*depressively, almost in prose*], for example (SW, 31):

> sesame seeds from caramel cake
> this morning you filled my belly
> but at noon I was empty of you[6]

When the image of the womb is referred to in the context of the mother–child relationship along with images of birth, images of death also generally appear, even when the subject is not explicitly miscarriages or stillbirths, which are overt themes in *Obsoletki* [*Stillbirthlets*] and in a number of poems in *Dwa fiaty*. In the doleful poem *pani jeżowa* [*mrs hedgehog*] (SW, 27), the connection between love, pregnancy birth, and death is an enigmatic constellation of images outlined by a man's tongue for a while, before it surrenders to the paleo-suffering of *odis*, unable to turn the poem into a space for happiness:

Obsoletki [*Stillbirthlets*] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2010); hereafter O, with the page number.

6 Translator's note: As only some of Justyna Bargielska's poems are so far available in English, unless otherwise indicated, all translations of her work quoted here are mine. A volume of her selected poems entitled *The Great Plan B* translated by Maria Jastrzębska is due for publication in autumn 2017.

my wife is crying. it was supposed to be different
our life in a poem. translucent little fists
tightening the belly. to bed dragging a stone
lion: I only touch it, and it threatens.
a mouse hangs itself on a watchstrap.

until they play our song: the hit of paleo-beaches, a quadrille
of contracting and relaxing, in which my tongue
embalmed in fossil resins and dull-bitch honeys
sucked out from my wife
happily stops trying to describe it.

In the moving, untitled poem with the incipit "the red one gave birth to kittens when dad was on business" (SW, 36), where a deceptive story of happiness is told with a tender touch of the tongue, and a fragment of amorous discourse is located within the memory of animal birth, the association between birth and death is now entirely clear:

the red one gave birth to kittens when dad was away on business
she licked their mottled skins surprised at how many suns
could burst forth and flow out of a cat it grew
late because of her the skins opened their eyes to the world
the red one's tongue told of it the milky ticking
in a rhythm of unhurried tensing and relaxing attending
enraptured with life they withered and fell away
the skins struggled dad returned to close their eyes
once opened blithely what I mean to say is
you lick the scraps of the darkness off me like dad
he left with a bag mum stroked in me
the memory of how to kill but I remember
how to die after all

Since the link between birth and death is so close in Bargielska's work, it is unsurprising that the image of the womb as a container for children borders with the image of the grave as a container for corpses, and sometimes even overlaps with it. Still without this superposition of images, the connection appears in the poem "moja!" ("mine!") (SW, 10), where the male fantasy of self-siring and emancipation from the ambivalent, oedipal relationship with the father is replaced by a fantasy of self-birth and -burial, which can be both an analogous dream of absolute autonomy and of ultimate self-evisceration, the final separation from oneself, of the peace and purity of death:

she decided to
bury herself regrets that she
could not give birth to herself more thoroughly
clean off the muck hollowed full of holes
at times she mistakes herself for an ocarina and opens
the door and windows throw her a ball of light silk scarf
she will think about what a tram can manage
with a penny what am I to her but
one to put on a coat half-turn
and return?

The poem *Let's kohelet* (SW, 102), with its last line of "Hey, your graves are in me and your dead are here," is a good example of the images of the womb and the tomb being superposed. In *Obsoletki*, such a superposition appears in a passage in which to the list of containers is added an eerie jar in which the remains of a dead foetus are placed – the narrator states fairly bluntly that "for a while I was a grave" (O, 28). It is not surprising that the narrator, commenting upon the title of the song *Road to Nowhere*, can say: "Death – it is not nowhere. I know that much. I can share that with you" (O, 41). No, not nowhere, but in a container.

Sometimes it is not explicitly the women's womb that is spoken about, but only the interior of the more or less corporeal "I." The images of death, however, do not vanish from view. In the poem *Jak sobie radziła bez M.* [*How She Coped without M.*] (SW, 19), the speaker wants to "get away from the body as if from a burning car / before it is / too late." In the poem *Międzyczasie* [*Meantime*] (SW, 105), the vision of a child being replaced with an animal becomes a figure of loss that is in a way even more terrifying than a direct reference to death; and all this within "you": "you return full of strollers, / passers-by and women whose babies in buggies / somebody has replaced with cats." In *Na przykład Abraham* [*For Example Abraham*] (SW, 47) the "I" becomes a container for the last illusion of life which would make possible a meaningful farewell:

and in the end are cartoons in Gothic font, proclaiming that in the fire
the driest woodchip takes on signs of life. Hence the custom
of burning corpses: so that they can still wave to us.
And so since they have been carting that wood, they have been carting
it in me.

To this image of filling the female body with inanimate objects, we can also add two grotesque visions from *Obsoletki*: the image of a bottle in the shape

of the Virgin Mary, which, taken to the swimming pool by the daughter of the narrator–protagonist is "fine until the moment when it lost its crown and water poured inside" (O, 33); a doll into which the narrator's brother inserts a sausage sandwich, having first removed from the toy its ersatz life – its "walking–talking mechanism" (O, 34).

The womb, the female body, and the grave are therefore containers for something that will inevitably be or already has been lost. Bargielska's texts abound with other objects, which – all inanimate – also function as containers for death. There is a black bag for the body of a woman killed in a car accident (O, 56). There is a green crate of a certain transport company that brings misfortune, which is why it is worth ordering the smaller version as part of the "homeopathy of misfortune" (O, 75). There is a box for the son's umbilical cord, already containing "the bread crust that mum ate while sitting by the dying grandfather" (O, 77). Finally – or "simply," as one is tempted to say – there is a hospital refrigerator overflowing with the remains of dead newborns (O, 78). This set of images is expanded by more ambiguous and thus perhaps more interesting images from poems. In *Czy mógłby mi pan pomóc pogasić światła* [*Could You Help Me Turn Out the Lights, Sir*] (SW, 58), a dream about the apocalyptic shattering of the home container evokes the image of a Mexican piñata smashed open with a stick:

> Twenty-seven years with a corpse under the floor
> may not exactly be fifty, but still, hey there, comet!
> you're here at last, now fuck up the shack,
> my mexican house with ant piñatas.

In *walc na cztery czwarte* [*waltz in four-four*] (SW, 30), the scraps of animal remains become locked houses full of corpses. And perhaps this is the way Bargielska thinks of all objects: "and how scared I am / when the neighbour's pounding pork chops (they won't open, they're dead)." Or finally, the image of a dead dog – neither person nor thing – which could be a suitable container for the remains of the whole world. In *Trauma o piesku* [*Trauma about a Little Dog*] (SW, 56):

> But it really scared me,
> the little dog's duel with a tram,
> when my husband said: don't look, and behind the hand's card
> the little dog got up; it was so huge
> and invited us all into its
> torn-open belly, in which a priest was waiting,
> bare trees and a city made of sand.

In this enumeration, however, I have left out one image of a container whose evocative power makes it seem worth singling out. It comes from the poem *Hale Faelbetu* (SW, 74):

> Or a peep show: how is it
> possible that in this booth the second
> and subsequent losses of everything are found? Could
> parallel worlds or clever use of
> mirrors explain it? And where do they go to work?

I do not think that this is just another image that can be placed on equal footing with others. A peep show, a strange booth, in which one can peek at all losses, of everything, captured in an unending trick of mirrors, seems to be a figure of another order: it is a self-referential model of Bargielska's own work referring not to the world of things, but to that of words, referring to a layer of language that tries to accommodate loss. What is decisive is that Bargielska also treats language itself like a container for loss. Along these lines I would read the final section of *Kukanie* [*Cuckoo*] (SW, 120), where the poem is asked to say something about an unnamed loss, and this request alone is enough to force it to speak, to accommodate the loss:

> Dear poem, say something,
> say how many children I have, which casts
> a deeper shadow, and how long I will live with this.

This is also how I would read the sarcastic passage from *Obsoletki* in which a common figure of speech allows a further container to enter the fray. The narrator says:

> I wrote better about things when I didn't know them because I wrote from my head. I wrote, for example, a beautiful poem about miscarriage, and only afterwards did I have a miscarriage. I wrote, for example, a number of sentences justifying why it's worth taking photos of dead babies, and only afterwards did I start taking such photos myself. (O, 65)

Writing "from one's head," that is using a container known as one's head, means writing beautifully and profusely, the language being filled with everything that is housed in the head. New writing demands the opposite operation. The gaping emptiness of physical loss now needs to be introduced into language; language itself must be eviscerated, becoming a booth for loss.

We might call this operation of transmitting loss to language a translation. The wonderful poem, in fact entitled *Przekład* [*Translation*] (SW, 127) has many levels, and activates a complicated dynamic between various types of containers, but in the final reckoning it seems to be talking about the fundamental operation of making space in language. The whole poem reads as follows:

> From the street I see through the window my mum standing at the sink
> in the burning house, herself burning for a while,
> there's not much left of her, in fact only the shape. Thirty years will pass
> and my daughter will look through the window from the street
> and see me burning in a burning house. I don't know
> whether she'll even know what she's looking at.
>
> I made room for death in my life,
> pulled back the quilt, my shirt, I opened my rib cage.
> I wouldn't have room for any of you if I hadn't made
> room for death. Until I made room for death
> I had no room for any of you – don't fool yourselves.
> I open a nut and find a mouse's ashes,
> my husband and children, my reward, my confirmation.

At the level of images, we have three containers: the house, the body, and a nutshell. "Those that are invisible can't be seen in others' windows," says the narrator of *Obsoletki* (O, 78). In *Translation* somebody (the mother of the speaker) is still visible in the container of her own house, but she is burning along with it. The imagined transformation of what is observed also depicts the speaker inside the burning home, observed by her daughter (perhaps this transposition is a kind of translation). The mothers burn, shut inside their homes. Is this because we are increasingly deprived of them, and we can only watch them fading away, no longer promising to return us to the narcissistic peace of earlier times, and today more akin to children? Alternatively, is it because they themselves inevitably lose something, gradually disappearing while giving up parts of themselves again and again in the unfinished process of giving birth, while we, without quite knowing what we are looking at, can only watch them from the outside as they dwindle, imprisoned in the houses of their bodies?

The answer is probably a bit of both. In any case, the speaker herself becomes a container and lets death inside her body. A strange container and a strange, unique thing is filling it: only when it is let in, is there room for other people. Only then can we open the next container, a nutshell hiding the reward – the whole family – but always next to the ashes of a mouse,

no doubt the same one that hanged itself from a watchstrap, accompanied by Mrs hedgehog's heart-rending weeping. So what about making room for death? In the simplest sense, perhaps this means that only by letting death into our lives, accepting loss, we stop filling our whole world with ourselves; only then can we make space for others. In the nutshell we would find only ourselves, and not our loved ones, if we did not also find the mouse's ashes. Perhaps. But that is not all: the poem is called *Translation*. The poem is itself the fourth container into which loss is translated – not from the head, but from the world. Perhaps only the translation of loss into language prevents loss itself from filling our whole lives with its dark mass: perhaps only making room for death in such a way leaves space for others, and the nutshell can only be opened in the poem.

I am not sure. However, this kind of translation is certainly taking place here. It is what causes the language to become pockmarked, but it is also only thanks to this translation that language regains its dignity time and again. Just as lamentation, which between the lines asks about the enigma of loss, creates a breach in the arithmetic of retribution and the excessively efficient mechanisms of theodicy (according to Galit Hasan-Rokem), and just as the mournful, unforgiving, ever returning wrath of mothers tears apart the continuity of legal–political discourse, bringing to the fray "another justice" that speaks up for the individuality of the lost (according to Nicole Loraux), Bargielska too, in making this translation of loss, pierces, punctures, and guts excessively compact language with irony, making it a container for loss, creating in it a place for non-erasable, wrathful memory, imbuing speech with mournful lament, which prevents it from being a frozen lump and makes it once again able, once again authorised, to resound. Only language that has made space within itself for loss can speak about what is not lost.

Let us look at three less obvious examples of such a translation in *Obsoletki*. The first passage from the book entitled "I'd like to tell you about the last time I gave birth"[7] is full of Anglicisms. For example, there is the line: "And that was the precise moment when I fell in love with him" (O, 8). (The original copies blindly the English phrase "the precise moment" which in Polish sounds highly awkward.) This can be interpreted as showing a middle-class woman – a Varsovian filled with memories from her grandmother's village – trying to describe her most intimate experiences using linguistic clichés and Anglicisms which, in their comic clumsiness, only serve to emphasise the non-transmissibility of her experience. These lame phrases, however, also seem to have another function. It is in fact their linguistic awkwardness that makes

7 This passage was translated by David French, available at http://www.bookinstitute.pl/ksiazki-detal,literatura-polska,6731,stillbirthlet.html/, accessed March 24, 2017.

them more susceptible to fissure and dialecticall transformation into a container for loss, into a peep show. Here is a particularly successful example of this mechanism: "We dropped off our child at the childminder's on the way" (O, 7). Nominally this is about the narrator and her husband going to give birth and therefore leaving their older child with the babysitter. However, Bargielska uses an ugly Anglicism in choosing the word *upuścić* as a direct translation of the English "drop off," thereby ironically opening the text to the horror of miscarriage and loss; and thus signposting the main subject of the book on its first page. This horror is confined to the linguistic level as nothing bad happens at the level of the story: the child is born healthy, and death – that is "dropping" – only appears in the last sentence of the passage, displaced: "Next time, I'd like to tell you about my cat Paweł's fatal fall from the balcony" (O, 8).

The second example in which the language is once again stretched to make space for loss is based not so much on a linguistic error, as on the flicker of a hackneyed phrase. The narrator–protagonist heads off to the cemetery, pushing her baby in a buggy, with her mother in tow, to "clean the graves." She asks her mother where she and father would like to be buried, and notes down the response of her mother who looks concerned. "«Are you writing a poem?» asked Mum. «I don't know how you can write those poems. Who you take after»." The narrator–protagonist says to herself: "Maybe Dad" (O, 13). And again, nominally, nothing special is happening here, except, perhaps, that something that was to be a poem is in fact a note on the possibility of "adding" one's parents to the graves of previously deceased family members. The poem is therefore literally replaced with a list of containers for dead bodies. In the words of the mother, though, and her daughter's unspoken answer, something else seems to resonate. Perhaps in the phrase "take after someone" with her talent for writing [*pisać po kimś*], we should hear echoes of the phrase "cry over someone" [*płakać po kimś*]. Perhaps, then, it is as much about somebody (the father?) who is the genetic source of the narrator's writing talent, as about somebody (the father? mother? children?) whose actual, or so far only potential, absence is to be represented in writing: and it is in this "precise moment," in this ironic bipolarity and loosening of the phrase, that it is actually represented.

Finally, the third example is based on the extraordinary possibilities concealed in a stock newspaper phrase. In the passage titled "But why doesn't Dad sleep in Mum's room," the members of the family talk about various matters, jumping pell-mell from subject to subject. The weighty issue that is raised is that of quilts, which "get dirty from disuse," even when kept in a bag (again a container), because they need to "regularly feel a human body under them"; otherwise they "grow mouldy." At this point of the exchange, seemingly innocent but already reeking of a grave, the narrator–protagonist makes a sudden

leap and asks perhaps a cousin, a quilt expert, or a sister who has experienced miscarriage: "Speaking of getting mouldy – I remembered – they took a photo of your belly for the paper, but they captioned it «Archive». You ain't angry, are you?" (O, 64). Many things have been squeezed into the dark ironies of this sentence. Through this otherwise standard caption, the newspaper discourse pushes into anonymity both the woman presented in the photograph (along with her suffering) and the one who took the picture. But if we treat the caption not so much as an indication (or erasure thereof) of the source and author of the photo, but rather as its title, the woman's stomach here becomes an archive in the most dramatic sense: an archive of dead foetuses. So perhaps it is again saying: you have no name and are only an archive of obsolete things, just another stillbirthlet. Nonetheless, "archive," as the title of the photograph, can also mean something else of course, such as the place where the pain of loss in its entirety is really archived. Ultimately, therefore, the sister (if she is the addressee of the narrator–protagonist's words) should not be "angry," because her anger, *menis*, itself comes out in the fracturing, ironically splitting word. If Loraux showed that the location of the Athenian archive – a container for the city's institutional memory – in the temple of the mother goddess was meant to tame the force of women's mourning, perpetually posing a threat to legal–political continuity, in Bargielska's text, the word "archive" becomes a double agent: on the one hand, it does indeed erase a woman's name, but on the other hand (contrary to those who made use of it) it brings to light women's loss and becomes the name of a great container of wrathful counter-memory.

The last example sends us to a certain fundamental question that we have not yet touched upon. The narrator–protagonist of *Obsoletki* takes photographs of stillborn foetuses, before processing them on the computer (computer memory? another container?) and forwarding them to parents, even if in the photos one can often only see something like a "little liver" (O, 39). These photographs seem to fulfil a key function in the economy of the text. For, ultimately, what does it mean to make room for loss in language? What does it mean to transform a poem into a peep show, into a booth in which one can see something? Is the linguistic container to hold what is lost, or the emptiness that results from this something or someone, this someone as lost? But what does this look like? What is the linguistic and ontological status of this unique content? Perhaps the photos of dead foetuses – although not the photographs per se but their ekphrastic representation in the text with the images emerging from language – are the strange things that need to be placed in storage; perhaps they are what can be seen in this peep show, and it is they that elude the opposition between what is lost and the absence of what is lost, and it is they that, as a visual remnant, mark this acute absence.

Justyna Bargielska's lamentations are ironic lamentations. Their irony does not neutralize the pathos exposing language to suffering, but is itself a tool of the subtle tears that make room for loss in language. And in the centre of these lamentations stand the images appearing in language which complement stop, and stitch the ironic play of the text and allow loss to be seen in its absolute singularity.

These ironic, textual–photographic lamentations also have a barely sketched, but important theological dimension. We observe here an outline of a heretical theology that we could (only partially in jest) call "Marian anti-Paulinism." Indeed, Paul of Tarsus gets flake at least twice. First, in the conclusion of the poem *Gringo* (SW, 122), Bargielska writes: "O death, unpronounceable, touching young lady. / Wherever is your victory? I'll show you myself." The rhetorical question answered with such a foolishly obliging proposal radically changes its meaning, and the hymn about the theologically decreed mechanisms of the resurrection is transformed into a fragmentary, sarcastic lament championing the manifestly dead. The second blow is aimed at the apostle in the passage from *Obsoletki*, referred to previously, which mentions the ghostly jar that Bargielska could point to without hesitation if she were to help death seek out victory. The excerpt begins with a paragraph filled with another brief quotation from the Letter to the Corinthians, adjusted in Polish to use feminine forms for the first person singular: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child." This sentence heralds a childhood story about burying a pigeon, told in a brief paragraph. The next paragraph is again a single sentence, which really shows off Bargielska's sarcasm (still using feminine forms for the first person singular): "When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (O, 27). Immediately afterwards comes a story about a miscarriage, which mercilessly exposes the grotesque chasm between Paul's discourse and women's experience of loss.

As stated, however, this anti-Paulinism is Marian in character: Bargielska plays off against Paul the figure of the Virgin Mary, with a curious version of the latter whom her heroine identifies with. We have already come across the bottle in the shape of the Virgin Mary where "water was poured inside." Meanwhile, in a dream the narrator–protagonist imagines that she is fighting evil as Mary's deputy, but one who needs to stay in constant touch with the central Mother. Here the author paints another vision of the woman's body as container:

> Furthermore, being in constant touch with the Mother of God, the commander-in-chief, could also be tiring. Sometimes I'd feel like the reputed lady who called the radio to ask if it is possible to do a transplant remotely because she felt she was losing organs. (O, 37)

The next passage, discussing photographing dead babies – similar in appearance to livers – finishes with a subsequent record of the protagonist's dream with the Virgin Mary in the main role:

> In the night I dream that on the eighth day they bring the Lord Jesus to the temple. The Virgin Mary unwraps the cloth and unwraps, and unwraps. "Whoa," says the Virgin Mary. She takes off more layers, and the cloths become ever whiter. She unwraps, until it stops, but I don't know what she finds in the whitest cloth, because she's in my way, bending over it. "That wasn't the plan," she says. (O, 40)

The figure of Jesus altered, perhaps, into a little liver, radicalises this heretical, sarcastic Marian theology to the extent that the Virgin Mary liberates herself from her function as intermediary en route to the men of her life, a function that she fulfils in Catholic theology, and as mother of a divine, but dead, liver (how's that for a version of the doctrine of the Incarnation!) becomes the source of an endless, wrathful grievance tearing apart the text concerning the ideology of the resurrection.

It is also in this spirit that I would read the conclusion to *Obsoletki*, which at first glance smacks of a somewhat infantile narcissism. The last section of the book again begins with a biblical quotation: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you (Jeremiah 1: 5)," and ends with an apocryphal quotation: "No, I do not know you. I formed myself (Justyna 1, ∞)" (O, 87). God the Father knows his prophet (the very one who is credited with being the author of the Book of Lamentations) even in the mother's womb, before he has even formed him. He reaches for him there, as he would, without asking, to inspire him with a prophetic word, which Jeremiah, like it or not, must pass on. In this function, God – the aggressive father who at times beats his son to death and then does not know what to do – is a great phallus who passes on to poor Jeremiah the transfer of inspiration. Bargielska, however, knows another meaning to this touch. In the poem *Radyjko* [*Little Radio*] (SW, 119), she writes:

> Unrestrained divisor, with that rough paw
> from the newborns section I don't know if I want
> you to touch me. I'm telling you, really.

This is why she juxtaposes the biblical quotation with her apocrypha. The old regret of not having given birth to herself more thoroughly, and the consequent decision to bury herself by her own hand, is now transformed into a wrathful statement of facts. Is this a declaration of absolute autonomy, of the independence of primal narcissism? I do not think so. If anything, it is an

expression of refusal to participate in the male game of transfer of prophetic inspiration – I do not know you, I do not want to know you and I do not want to be known by you, especially in the biblical sense – as well as a refusal to accept the grand systems of theodicy moving to the order of things which we did not sign up for. The sign of infinity in the bibliographical reference is, therefore, not a sign of narcissistic self-deification, but rather of indefinite lingering in the position of mournful, persistent counter-memory, which holds on to its loss, torn by eternal *menis*.

By its very nature, though, this literary theology also inevitably turns it into an anti-theology. Bargielska's dirges, no matter how explosive and dangerous they potentially are for various orders of discourse, in their very nature remain something extremely intimate. This is why the peep show ultimately closes up, as the poem *Jednym słowem* [*In a Word*] (SW, 121)[8] says:

I'm asking if they've sent off that goddamn corpse
or not. They write me that they have,
the delay might have been due to the weather
and that I should drop them a line next Wednesday
whether I was going to complain or if I wanted another corpse instead.
I don't really know, I have time till Wednesday
to think this over. A worm betrayed another worm
and now it writhes, both in dreams, and everywhere.
Whereas in the light from the school's library windows
it seems that my child's turned into stone
and it says: don't cry, woman, if I'm not crying.
Come on, close up, nothin' to see here, nothin' to see.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

8 Poem translated by Katarzyna Szuster. Available at http://www.versopolis.com/poet/53/justyna-bargielska/poem/607/jednym-sowem, accessed March 24, 2017.

Paweł Mościcki

Shadows in a Petrifying City

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an avalanche fell upon our heads
made of granite gravel granules
Tadeusz Różewicz[1]

It may well be that all directors try in their films – each in turn and all together – to create their own, specific blueprint which could express their attitude towards the world and to cinema itself. Just as philosophers continue to think and remain faithful to one idea despite the multiplicities and diversities of their interests, filmmakers too, while piecing their pictures together from many different elements, are actually searching for the same blueprint throughout. According to Pascal Bonitzer, what Michelangelo Antonioni is seeking in his works is "an empty, desolate shot."[2] His cinema continually revolves around

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1 Tadeusz Różewicz, "avalanche," trans. Joanna Trzeciak, accessed March 24, 2017, http://littlestarjournal.com/blog/2011/02/rozewicz-comes-to-america-ii//.

2 Pascal Bonitzer, *Le champ aveugle. Essais sur le réalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1999), 62. Here and further: where the original French texts are cited, the quotations are translated into English from the author's translation.

abstraction, a frame that marks the emptiness in its space. The Italian director is therefore, as José Moure puts it, the creator of the original "poetics of emptiness," designating both the type of film space, identity of the character or construction of the narrative, and the very way of organising the field of vision.[3]

Yet the poetics of emptiness in Antonioni's work has nothing to do with transience, lightness or ephemerality. It is rather a poetics based on an emptiness that weighs a lot; one of overloading that smothers and suffocates. However paradoxical it may sound, Antonioni's emptiness is one that results from a fullness that rather floods meanings and inhibits characters' movements than exposes them to a free landscape ready to settle. In other words, this emptiness is one more of stone than of air.

Antonioni's film practice means that the emptiness is also – or perhaps above all – contained in a frame full to the brim, populated by human shadows roaming aimlessly around the urban wilderness. For a fuller argument for considering the weight of stone in the poetics of emptiness we might take the scene from *La notte* [*The Night*], in which Lidia suddenly leaves an event promoting Giovanni's book to go for an aimless walk around the city. This is certainly one of the classic measures that Antonioni takes in his films to slow down and distract the narrative. In terms of any conception of action, this sequence is practically empty, even though not lacking in events. At the same time, as the protagonist visits the city's empty streets or its secondary spaces, we see her own sense of being lost, desire to escape her previous existence, and (as we will later learn) the slow death of her emotional relationship with her husband. But it seems to be no coincidence that Antonioni follows Lidia's steps, showing her constantly rubbing against the stone walls of the buildings surrounding her and roaming around the concrete maze. A number of shots depict her as a tiny figure in the corner of a frame that is almost entirely filled with a heavy and impermeable wall of housing blocks. The emptiness here – existential, psychological, narrative and visual – is in fact an emptiness of ossified minerals, while filming it recalls grisaille painting, in which the chiaroscuro of a drawing comes incessantly closer to a stone relief.

The Complex Modality of Sight

One of the most general – and also striking – interpretive keys of Antonioni's entire film poetics is Pier Paolo Pasolini's category of "free indirect speech," as a principle not so much of narrative as of sight fashioned by his works. In *Deserto rosso* [*Red Desert*], for example, we look at the world as if we were reading a novel written in free indirect speech.

3 See José Moure, *Vers une esthétique du vide au cinéma* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

> This means that the author sees the world through the eyes of his characters. Indirect speech in the cinema corresponds to something that I have called "subjectivity": meaning that the camera literally replaces the characters' eyes. […] Antonioni freed himself from this by finding his own stylistic formula: he finally managed to perceive the world through his own eyes by identifying his delirious aesthete's view with the view of a neurotic woman.[4]

In one film, the presence of two points of view sharing the same space of the shot leads to their inescapable contamination, since, as Pasolini notes, these visions "are inevitably analogous, but difficult to perceive, being closely intermixed, having the same style."[5] As a result, the protagonists' emotions, their subjective experience of the surrounding world, is expressed in the external elements of the picture composed by the author. From psychologically understood emotions, the picture shifts into the dimension of affect, shaped by all the elements of the film – the colour and texture of the materials, distribution of figures, pace of shots, their editing, and so on.

However, this contamination of various types of vision brings with it further consequences which are not usually mentioned (Pasolini does not refer to them either). If external objects correspond to subjective emotional states, then the characters' behaviours and emotions also become an expression of the material externality of the world. In other words, the contamination works both ways. If, as the popular view has it, the empty, desolate, and hazy landscapes that Aldo roams in *Il grido* [*The Cry*] express his inner tragedy and solitude, then the hero himself also imitates the scenery, becoming, with all the depths of his experience, an inextricable element of the wildernesses shown in it.

Antonioni's free indirect cinema therefore reveals a characteristic connection between subjectivity and objectivity, a kind of coagulation or mixture characteristic of the structure of concrete. Only thanks to this understanding of contamination can the director reach the threshold of "internal neorealism"[6] to which he aspires. And only thanks to this, for example, can he conclude the dramatic hospital scene in *La notte*, in which Lidia and Giovanni

4 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Je défends Le Désert rouge," in *Ecrits sur le cinéma. Petits dialogues avec les films (1957-1974)*, trans. Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2000), 128-129.

5 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry," in *Movies and Methods, vol. 1*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 554.

6 Michelangelo Antonioni, "A Talk with Antonioni on His Films," in *The Architecture of Vision. Writings and Interviews*, ed. Carlo di Carlo, Giorgio Tinazzi and Marga Cottina-Jones (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 23.

visit a dying friend, with the sudden appearance of a loud helicopter in the sky. Or, at the end of the opening sequence of *L'eclisse* following a long conversation between lovers who are splitting up, the concrete tower that stands majestically across from them. At the narrative level, these sudden manifestations of material reality remind us of the eruption of affects to which the characters are sometimes subjected to at a more individual level. Which is why they can mesh so well with each other.

In *L'eclisse*, the blending of the objective and the subjective corresponds to the work of the camera itself, its definition realized in the practice of every filmmaker. One subtle process returns on a number of occasions throughout the film which we might call stopping the view or the petrification of visibility. This occurs when, rather than the figure in the window whose presence we expect, an image of it on the wall appears in the frame. The viewer is therefore startled by the appearance of an unexpected figure, but simultaneously his gaze must stop at the wall; it cannot penetrate into the depths of the frame. This happens first when Vittoria returns home, switches the light on, and we (the camera is placed outside the building) see through the window not the heroine, but a figure standing in the window, on a poster hanging in her room. The second instance of this technique occurs in the flat of her neighbour Marta, when a photograph of a black woman appears by the open shutters (inside the home). This is the first shot in the new place, just after we have seen Anita and Vittoria in the window of the latter's flat. The women on the wall and the film's female protagonists appear to have some kind of fundamental connection, which the camera is seeking to imply. The open window of the camera – after all a fundamental metaphor for the entire phenomenon of the depth of field and filmic realism[7] – rather than the view of the external world, reveals a wall to us, on which certain figurative representations might be visible. But the very frame then becomes rather a stone demanding a relief than a window opening onto free space.

When Vittoria first visits Piero in his flat, again the window is duplicated, except that this time we are confronted with the figure of an elderly woman looking out of the window opposite the one which the heroine approaches. Yet it looks as if one window contains the other one, meaning that the old lady would virtually take Vittoria's place. We can therefore not only be stopped by a wall, but also by the Other and his glance. Or is Antonioni suggesting that the two versions of sight blockage are by no means all that different from one another, and that the visual contact with the Other works similarly as a flat wall suddenly appearing before one's eyes?

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7 On the metaphor of the window as a foundation of cinematic ideology of depth of field see Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinéma contre spectacle* (Paris: Editions Verdier, 2009), 17-55.

The tension between the depth and flatness of the screen seems to be a fundamental problem in the entire composition of *L'eclisse.* From the very first shots of the film, we see Vittoria, who, after spending the whole night talking to Riccardo is getting ready to tell him that she is leaving him. She stands, tired, at her desk, trying to grab a figure standing on it, but she does it as if she wanted to remove it from the screen formed by the empty picture frame in front of her. Reaching into the depth of the camera frame, this becomes a symbol of impossible liberation, because after a moment of hesitation, Vittoria withdraws her hand, as if terrified by the gravity of her attempts. Throughout the sequence in Riccardo's flat, she also draws the curtains apart, to get a view through the window; in this way to form a new frame, a new point of view on the world to replace the unsuccessful shared life with her lover. This time too, the opening proves to be an illusion, and the concrete tower ultimately revealed outside the window causes consternation to the protagonists, rather than bringing relief. That the formal strategy of stopping the viewer's gaze corresponds to the characters' emotional state is demonstrated by the fact that Vittoria and Piero are able to kiss practically only through the window pane, which minimally separates their bodies from each other, and stops their desire.

The State of the World

L'eclisse is perhaps Antonioni's most compact, dense film. Suffice is to mention that, according to the director, the project was initially comprised of two films, shot from the point of view of the two main protagonists, Vittoria and Piero.[8] The alloy of Antonioni's own gaze with the characters' viewpoint that characterises his cinema could thus be multiplied, combining at least three perspectives. But the main factor that makes this film unique is that, perhaps to a greater extent than the director's other pictures, its panoramic dimension comes to the fore. In other words, it is a film that does not so much tell (however meanderingly) a story happening in the world as makes an effort to present the general state of this world. "What is today's world?" is the fundamental question that resonates in it and is at the same time the fundamental task set before cinema: to portray the world in its current form, become a window through which the whole Earth can be seen.[9] However, Antonioni avoids the trap of easy objectification of the

8 Antonioni, "Interviews on films. *The Eclipse,*" in *The Architecture of Vision*, 281.

9 On the links between the cinema and worldliness see Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

world in a "world picture" as described by Heidegger,[10] since his attempt assumes a radical redefinition of the language of filmic narration, dissolving the metaphysical conditions and simplifications of the category of image. What other visual media, if not contemporary cinema, will be able to transgress what, from a philosopher's point of view, is the inexorable reification of the world in representation?

The stake that determines the success of Antonioni's undertaking is thus whether he will be able to encapsulate in his work the connection between the current state of the world and changes in the film's language, ensuring that the image of Earth will not be a conclusion distilled from the narrative, but will result from the very dynamic of the way the material is organised in the film. Some film studies scholars argue that what counts most of all in *L'eclisse* is not the course of events, but a certain contiguity between them, the way certain sequences of the film join together – and the motifs that appear in them – rather than the cause and effect relationship between them. As Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier writes:

> Vittoria's world no longer knows any continuity or change; the experience described here opens with the stopping of time, which also means the ceasing of any internal life […]. Time no longer controls her, just as she no longer controls entities, the equivalents of things that slowly replace them instead of explaining them.[11]

These words could equally be applied to the entirety of *L'eclisse*'s structure, and not only to the heroine's emotional state. The plot is suspended in a void, and it does not help to follow the flow of time. Stopping internal life also means an intensified interdependence between objects and people, the urban environment, and the affects that unfold in it.

The individual sequences in the film also seem to be rather loosely connected, while the way they are linked to form a story is almost poetic. Antonioni described his approach to composition as follows:

> So, having a certain amount of material in my hands, I set out to do a montage that would be absolutely free, poetically free. And I began searching for expressive ways and means, not so much through an orderly arrangement of shots that would give the scene a clear-cut beginning and end, but

10 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57-72.

11 Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "L'espace et le temps dans l'univers d'Antonioni," *Etudes cinématographiques (Michelangelo Antonioni, l'homme et l'objet)* 36-37 (1964) : 115.

> more through a juxtaposition of separate isolated shots and sequences that had no immediate connection with one another, but which definitely gave more meaning to the idea I had wanted to express [...].[12]

Watching *L'eclisse* one also has the impression that the various shots follow one another indeterminately, or, when they do build some kind of sequence, draw attention to themselves, and strive for separation. The process of reception here therefore involves assembling in one's own vision an ever newer mosaic of shots sending in various directions and continually drawing attention to elements that are marginal to something that could potentially emerge as main narrative axis. Christian Metz noticed that Antonioni is a master at making use of dead time, lost and insignificant moments as a powerful means of expression and a tool for building complex visual structures.[13] This is also the case in *L'eclisse,* where the comparative looseness of the individual sequences means that diverse, significant juxtapositions are multiplied, expanding the boundaries of the presented world.

John Rhym, the author of an interesting interpretation of Antonioni's film focusing on the category of affect, argues that it

> refuses our grasp of not only the film's possible organization and expression of meaning but also the characters' internal specifications, such as desire and intent, on which conventional forms of character identification depend.[14]

In other words, the main protagonists also seem to follow similar rules in the film as objects. They are figures revolving freely around the structure of the work and entering manifold semantic constellations with the remaining elements of the film. Antonioni therefore constructs something of a plane of horizontal proximity and contiguity of various elements without the conventional hierarchy. He seeks to portray the enigma of the current state of the world by accentuating some of these juxtapositions.

In a short letter–essay that also acts as a hommage to the director, Roland Barthes referred to his strategies for reaching the present, and sketching its current contours,

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12 Antonioni, *A Talk with Antonioni on His Films*, 24.

13 Christian Metz, "Le cinéma moderne et la narrativité", in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 2 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983).

14 John Rhym, "Towards a Phenomenology of Cinematic Mood: Boredom and the Affect of Time in Antonioni's *L'eclisse*," *New Literary History* 43 (2012): 480.

> your work is not a fixed reflection, but an iridescent surface over which there pass, depending on what catches your eye or what the times demand of you, figures of the Social or the Passions and those of formal innovations, from modes of narration to the use of colour. Your concern for the times you live in is not that of a historian, a politician or a moralist, but rather that of a utopian whose perception is seeking to pinpoint the new world, because he is eager for this world and already wants to be part of it. The vigilance of the artist, which is yours, is a lover's vigilance, the vigilance of desire.[15]

If we can discern any affection in Antonioni towards the world he depicts in *L'eclisse,* this would above all be a variation of attentiveness, close to affinity with detail, and anticipating the smallest movements of the situations he portrays. It is this that makes him – as noted by Gilles Deleuze, rightly but with the usual excessive resoluteness – "the only contemporary author to have taken up the Nietzschean project of a real critique of morality, and this thanks to a «symptomatologist method»."[16]

Antonioni in this film is then neither a historian, nor a moralist, nor even (as Barthes claimed) a utopian, but an explorer of symptoms fully concentrated on watching the fundamental transformations taking place in the world and which, with the right approach, can be discerned even in the tiniest wince of a woman's face or in the objects watched in somebody's flat.

> [It was important to see] I won't say the t r a n s f o r m a t i o n of our psychological and emotional attitudes, but at least the symptoms of such restlessness and such behaviour which began to outline the changes and transitions that later came about in our psychology, our feelings, and perhaps even our morality.[17]

The common, critical diagnosis that Antonioni's focus in his work was the atrophy of emotions of contemporary humans is not far from the truth. The caveat that needs to be made is that he is interested rather in the conditions of the global change of affective life and its forms than the psychological afflictions of certain subjects, as well, secondly, that these conditions are most of all analysed from the point of view of symptoms – that is there, where

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15 Roland Barthes, "Dear Antonioni," in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *L'avventura* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 64.

16 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 8.

17 Antonioni, *A Talk with Antonioni on His Films*, 23.

human gestures move close to inanimate matter. This is because by definition a symptom means a kind of trace that eludes the rules of psychological identification and narrative conventions, appearing in the experience of the subject like an alien intrusion.

As Barthes notes in his essay, Antonioni's filmic modernity is

> an active difficulty in following the changes of Time, not just at the level of grand History but at that of the little History of which each of us is individually the measure. [...] Each of your films has been, at your personal level, a historical experience, that is to say the abandonment of an old problem and the formulation of a new question.[18]

Two levels thus come into direct contact: the most general (i.e. the state of the world) and the most minute (i.e. a symptom), leaving out the intermediate stage which usually designates the framework of a film plot and the narrative of its characters' emotions. Only through this short circuit of the general and the idiomatic can an image of modernity, and its essential, irreducible Novelty emerge. The state of the world in *L'eclisse* is above all a set of neighbouring elements, the loose grouping of which corresponds to the poetic structure of the film, as well as showing – in just these combinations – the new symptoms of the contemporary situation. This stability, linked to the rule of contiguity, is appositely described by Pasolini, who is otherwise very critical in his approach to this ploy:

> For Antonioni, the world in which similar events and emotions exist to those he depicts in his film is an immobile, inexpressible world, an absolute system that even contains something sacred within. Fear acts in it without even being recognisable, as is the case in all natural systems: a bee does not know it is a bee, a rose does not know it is a rose, a savage does not know he is a savage. The universes of the bee, rose and savage are worlds outside of history, lasting eternally for themselves, without other perspectives than sensuous depth.[19]

This also concerns characters who are not aware of the essential parameters of their coexistence with others, in the world of others. And so they "content themselves with suffering, without knowing what it is."[20] A characteristic

18 Barthes, "Dear Antonioni," 62-63.

19 Pier Paolo Pasolini, " Moravia et Antonioni (La Nuit), " in *Ecrits sur le cinéma*, 122-123.

20 Ibid., 123.

dimension of the contiguous worlds of individual beings is just this: they do not realise the actual rules of this coexistence. They are like lovers sleeping alongside one another – which could be a good metaphor for the relations between women and men in almost all Antonioni's films – who, absorbed in their own dreams, forget about the corporeal proximity joining them. Yet at the same time each movement, each gesture, says something about their mutual relationship, even if it is not part of its conscious and overt tribulations.

What is most astonishing in *L'eclisse,* standing out and recurring in various scenes, is the human proximity to stone, and existence as a being inhabiting a world made up of concrete, tarmac, and brick. We could even say that the suspension of action (or the cessation of time) in this film, which determines its poetics, is necessary in so far as to point to the puzzle of this intimate, constant, and at the same time abstract proximity that defines the fundamental conditions of modern human existence. Even at the conclusion of the first scene, as mentioned earlier, the frame of the window in Riccardo's flat shows us a huge concrete construction in the shape of a mushroom resembling the petrified form of the atomic explosion mentioned by the newspapers in the film's final scene. The protagonists stand across from this sight, disconsolate not only at their inevitable parting, but also, no doubt, at the presence of this object in their intimate situation, dense with contrasting feelings. In the scene in which she is looking for dogs on an estate of concrete blocks, Vittoria, stumbling around in the dark, encounters an equally mysterious stone monument to a human form, at which she looks as if it represented somebody close to her or implied her own emotional petrification. From this perspective, the fact that the place of Vittoria's renewed meetings with Piero is surrounded with a pile of broken concrete panels is no longer surprising, but only highlights the persistence of this motif and its connection to the film's most important problem.

The Eclipse of Affect

We might say that the main theme of *L'eclisse* does not diverge from Antonioni's other works. As the director himself put it, "Eros is sick; man is uneasy, something is bothering him."[21] The essential dilemma of modernity is that people lose themselves in the excess and complexity of their own feelings, no longer identify with them, and are unable to adapt to their practical needs and social aspirations.

> Today we live in a period of extreme instability – political instability, moral instability, social instability, and even physical instability. The world

21 Antonioni, *A Talk with Antonioni on His Films*, 34.

> around and inside us is unstable. I am making a film on the instability of feelings, on the mystery of feelings.[22]

One of the possible tropes of the affective crisis that Antonioni follows in his oeuvre is therefore the disturbance of the opposition between the internal and external, the contamination between affect and thing, subject and world. This corresponds exactly to the aforementioned poetics of his films in which the characters' environment expresses their emotional states, and they themselves become elements of the landscape. From a subjective angle, this contamination must lead to profound disturbances and destabilisation blocking understanding and communication.

The protagonists of *L'eclisse* therefore undergo a certain defiguration, losing their face in favour of what surrounds them. As Bonitzer notes, "the aim of Antonioni's cinema is to reach what is not figurative through vicissitudes illustrating the eclipse of faces, erasure of characters."[23] Perhaps one of the ways of expressing this state is that on almost every occasion when the characters from his films look in the mirror, they are seized by a kind of panic, their faces contorted by a grimace of suffering. In the first scene of *L'eclisse,* this seems particularly strong, as Vittoria's decision to break up with Riccardo is shown through her attempt to leave the shared frame. We therefore watch a man consumed by resignation on an armchair and a woman, her back turned to the camera, who shifts to the left edge of the frame. She leaves it, but does not disappear; she comes up against a mirror showing her form (the black dress seems almost to hide the torso, revealing a face almost detached from the rest of the body), at first only to viewers, and then to herself, when she turns her gaze towards it, looking at her reflection. Vittoria reacts with disgust, and only then does she find herself in a separate frame, as the camera follows her, leaving the mirror by the side. Separation and autonomy here therefore appear to be ransomed to the break-up of her personality, loss of face and disgust with herself. The heroine makes the decision to leave her lover, but she still almost seems to be waiting for reality to verify her plans and respond in some way, confirming or ruling out this solution. What is also interesting is that immediately after the mirror scene, Vittoria, in her search for an exit from the claustrophobic imprisonment in her own reflection, goes over to the window and opens the curtain, to reveal a huge concrete structure that in the logic of the sequence almost replicates her own form reflected in the mirror.

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22 Ibid., 20.

23 Bonitzer, *Le champ aveugle*, 62.

Defiguration, which entails the replacement of the human subject with materiality, is of course most resonant in the film's famous final scene, in which, instead of the lovers (Vittoria this time with Piero) who have arranged to meet, we observe the mainly empty tarmac streets, the concrete walls of housing blocks, piles of panels, and other elements of the urban landscape, with occasional anonymous people. "All the shots visited by the couple appear in a similar way, but they are adjusted 'through the void', as the title of the film shows: the eclipse of the face. Nobody now appears, not even a «persona»,"[24] as Bonitzer notes. This means that in the film we move from a crisis of recognition – a defiguration that implies a fear of one's own reflection and panic at the view of one's own face – to a total eclipse, in which instead of a human countenance all that is visible is an empty place filled with concrete, steel, and tarmac.

Jacques Lacan, who made the "mirror phase" (a phase when a young child recognises his mirror image) into a constitutive moment for the development of the subject, also used the concept of his eclipse in his writings.

> Similarly, our subject is subjected to the *vel* of a certain meaning he must receive or petrification. But should he retain the meaning, the non-meaning produced by his change into signifiers will encroach on this field (of meaning). This non-meaning clearly falls within the Other's field, though it is produced as an eclipse of the subject.[25]

The moment of the eclipse of the subject, which Lacan also calls alienation, appears when while speaking – especially during psychoanalysis – the subject encounters signifiers that seem alien, imposed from elsewhere, although he said them himself. There are then two possibilities: either one can find some kind of understanding of their link to the subject, or he will remain in a stupor and a sense of alienation which, in the excerpt quoted above, Lacan calls petrification. Either he agrees that present in his utterance is a tinge of non-meaning – that is, a kind of subconscious fantasy or desire – or else this non-meaning will eternally gnaw spasmodically at the entirety of meaning protected by the subject. At the same time, however, agreeing to the fact that the apparently alien signifiers belong to the subject does not preclude the non-meaning attributed to them deriving from the Other, in other words, it determines the inevitable alienation of the subject by language. In both cases,

24 Ibid., 62.

25 Jacques Lacan, "Position of the Unconscious," trans. Bruce Fink, in *Reading Seminar XI. Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 270.

what remains at stake in the whole tension continues to be the impossibility of full self-understanding, the subject's transparency.

The characters in Antonioni's films seem to be constantly experiencing these moments of lacking definition and suspension in which their understanding of themselves encounters radical resistance. This is why their confusion is by no means liberating, but acts as a kind of eternal and mutual petrification. As José Moure writes, "although they are not clearly determined, they are also not free. Their indefiniteness, which is not a source of freedom, acts as an alienating principle that, in detaching them from the world and denying them any control over what is happening, forces them to live in an uncertain position of withdrawal and existential distance that does not permit them either to anchor anywhere, fill their lives with meaning or realise their individuality."[26]

Antonioni is therefore a chronicler of modern alienation, of which the main dimension is affective life:

> I have never claimed to define what I do in the cinema in a philosophical way. The word "alienation" was not invented by me; for years it has been part of European critical and philosophical terminology, from Marx to Adorno. Therefore, it expresses a real phenomenon, a concrete problem of mankind that has probably grown acute over the last few years.[27]

This would place the director within a long tradition of critiquing modernity as an era of alienation, except that he would understand it more in line with Lacan than with the theoreticians of Marxism. He was interested in alienation largely as a structural element of the modern affective landscape, rather than as a dimension reserved for socio-political relations.

One of Lacan's well-known statements on affect, which he presented using the example of fear, is that affect cannot be suppressed. It can be reversed, displaced, transformed, or exacerbated, but only a signifier determining a desire that the subject cannot cope with can be suppressed.[28] Antonioni's films seem to contain something of a supplement to this question according to which affect, as a result of an excess of signifiers, can be eclipsed, becoming opaque, heavy, abstract, like the concrete walls of the buildings in which the protagonists of *L'eclisse* live. An affective eclipse of this kind would appear when the understanding of signifiers, attributing meanings to them, and putting them

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26 José Moure, *Michelangelo Antonioni. Cinéaste de l'évidement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 49.

27 Antonioni, "Preface to six films," in *The Architecture of Vision*, 60.

28 See Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire. Livre X: L'angoisse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004), 23.

in new contexts of the subject's life, not only do not cure the subject of his petrification, but even heighten it. This is not just about the cognitive disorientation experienced by the film's protagonists, but also about the forceful consequences stemming from the existence of intensified understanding in everyday life. The constant discursivisation of one's feelings – to which Antonioni's protagonists, particularly women, seem addicted – reduces their power, and leaves them somewhat obscured, slightly covered, at a vanishing point. These almost dormant feelings are no longer enough to form relations, which is why the only escape from their unbearable presence is petrification, or reification giving minimal support.

In one of the scenes mentioned earlier, Vittoria returns to her flat, carrying an object wrapped in paper. After a moment, this turns out to be a stone slab with the imprint of a flower. The conventional situation in which a woman returns home carrying flowers, which she then puts in a vase and places in the window to lend some more life and charm to her intimate space, is thus transported into an image of the heroine's petrification. We might also note that it expresses the extreme, primal boredom in which she is immersed.[29] But it might be more correct to state that this is not so much about a picture of her feelings as the effect of her defence against their lack of clarity, confusion, and eclipse. The woman appears to live in a world in which women no longer bring flowers home, but rather their fossils – only accompanied by the latter do they not feel fear. They prefer extinction in stone to the loop of feelings which they are unable to control and, by continually analysing their various aspects, find themselves completely disorientated.

We are talking here about an eclipse rather than suppression, mostly because affects in Antonioni's film seem to be a question of difference in degree, and not of nature. We do not change a feeling into something else, but reduce its intensity, cover it with the rubble of modern life, or ravage it thanks to the objects accumulated in our homes (like Riccardo and Marta). The problem with intensifying feelings seems to be that they constantly remain at an indirect, nondescript level, without either overpowering the subject with their strength (making him certain of what he feels) or vanishing without trace (freeing up space for further experiences). In one of the final dialogues between Vittoria and Piero, this problem becomes clear:

> Piero: Tell me one thing. Do you think the two of us will agree?
> *Vittoria: I don't know that, Piero.*

29 An interesting interpretation of *L'eclisse* in terms of the Heideggerian category of boredom is suggested by John Rhym, see his "Towards a phenomenology of cinematic mood," 477-501.

Piero stands up, somewhat impatiently.
Piero: Exactly, you can't say anything else, just: I don't know, I don't know, I don't know… So why are you dating me?
Vittoria also gets up and looks at him, perturbed by his words.
Piero: And don't try to tell me you don't know why.
Again silence.
Vittoria: I would like to not love you [at all] or love you much more.[30]

If earlier Vittoria (while talking to Anita) could say "there are days when holding material, a needle, a book or a man are one and the same,"[31] this is by no means because she is confusing them, but because they arouse in her the same, low degree of excitement. And perhaps this is the source of both the petrification in signifiers and the fear that it causes.

Capitalism and Exaltation

The social dimension of alienation in *L'eclisse* is replaced entirely by the analysis of individual emotional relations, but it returns when viewed from the affective perspective. From this point of view, something that seems particularly important is the fact that much of the film's action is set in the stock market building and the stockbroker community to which Piero belongs. This is what guarantees the presence, as Antonioni claims, of "signs of violence that are connected with money."[32] The evident presence of capitalism as a system that above all organises human emotions thus comes to the fore.

The (theoretical) aspect of capitalism that Antonioni depicts in the storyline is its capacity to destroy traditional family bonds. The first time that Vittoria comes to the stock market building is to look for her mother, who has immersed herself in market speculation in an effort to escape from an undefined threat. The therapy, of course, ends up making her illness worse, and the mother's addiction to risk complicates, or even prevents entirely, the endurance of her emotional bond with her daughter. We can therefore say that Antonioni, following the *Communist Manifesto*, regards contemporary capitalism as a system in which

30 Michelangelo Antonioni, "Zaćmienie" [L'eclisse], in *Scenariusze*, trans. Wanda Gall (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1989), 205 (from the Polish translation of the screenplay).

31 Ibid., 164.

32 Antonioni, "Interviews on Films," 277.

> all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.[33]

Although capitalism disrupts the traditional social institutions, it is by no means the same as the process of enlightenment, rationalism, and emancipation. It is rather a step backwards on the path of progress. This is because in the place of the subject attached to eternal institutions it places the subject overwhelmed by an archaic frenzy, seeking mystic participation in the incessant circulation of money. Rather than tradition, we therefore have archaic beliefs that not only do not contradict the capitalist socialisation, but are even strengthened by it. It seems to be no coincidence that the stock market building shown in *L'eclisse* is reminiscent of a church, with its stone flooring, columns, and embellishments. Vittoria's mother starts her day at the stock market by pouring salt on the floor "for luck," before crossing herself, waiting for a positive turn in her fortunes: this is the magic of money ideally incarnated in superstition. And the stock market, incidentally, apart from its brokers and investors, appears to be full of elderly ladies who visit the building like devotees to a new type of church to search for the answers to their quandaries.

There is no doubt that in *L'eclisse,* capitalism is also a kind of religion, and one with similar characteristics to those that Walter Benjamin mentions in his text "Capitalism as Religion," unpublished in his lifetime, in which he writes:

> capitalism is a pure religious cult, perhaps the most extreme there ever was. Within it everything only has a meaning in direct relation to the cult: it knows no special dogma, no theology. From this standpoint, utilitarianism gains its religious colouring. The concretization of the cult connects with a second characteristic of capitalism: the permanent duration of the cult. Capitalism is the celebration of the cult *sans rêve et sans merci.* Here there is no "weekday," no day that would not be a holiday in the awful sense of exhibiting all sacred pomp – the extreme exertion of worship.[34]

Antonioni shows the system of the new religion almost from within, patiently and insightfully portraying everyday life in the stock market building. In fact,

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33 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 2012), 38.

34 Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," trans. Chad Kautzer, in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 259.

these are the only scenes in the film depicting the intensively expressed affects and true pathos of market fever.

In this way, the director endeavours to show the essential affect associated with capitalism, the source mood and *Stimmung* of this system. For him, however, the fundamental affect of capitalism is not a previously known pathology, even widely reinterpreted (like schizophrenia for Deleuze and Guattari),[35] but rather an exaltation, an exceptional state of feelings that cannot be defined, in spite of its extreme intensity and power of "validity." This essential void of intensive emotions is demonstrated by Piero and Vittoria's conversation on his work:

> Piero: You don't like the stock exchange, do you?
> Vittoria: I haven't yet worked out whether it's an office, market, or boxing ring.
> Piero: To understand, you need to come often. When someone starts, he gets drawn into the game, and becomes fascinated by it.
> *Vittoria has started to pace around the room. She turns round, her white dress is almost like a patch of light against the dark background of the wall. Her voice is full of sadness.*
> Vittoria: Fascinated by what, Piero?[36]

The proximity of people to virtual money can be seen as another juxtaposition (besides stone) that Antonioni is seeking to emphasise. The constantly changing prices of shares and index listings appear as signifiers subjecting individuals to an incessant, albeit essentially futile and empty, exaltation. The gestures of brokers – shouting over each other, endlessly running to telephones, waving their arms, and showing their suggested transactions on their fingers – express an extreme pathos that stands out completely from the rest of the film, in which the protagonists seem indolent, deadened and hollow. The montage of the shots featuring brokers makes it seem that their expressive behaviour, facial contortions, and exhortations are signs shown for some Other, whose attention they are making every effort to grab. Yet the god of this temple, in which Piero is a member (belonging both to caste of the priests and the faithful), is not a person, but the abstraction of money.

Whereas in *La notte* Antonioni was trying to show the slow but inexorable disintegration of the relationship of the main characters, in *L'eclisse,* he

35 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1972) ; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie, II* (Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1980).

36 Antonioni, "Zaćmienie," 203.

begins from the break-up, from which point he tries to describe the conditions of forming a new love. Moreover, the latter film is perhaps much more poignant as it completely deconstructs the myth of the beautiful beginning of an intimate relationship. In his philosophy on the "procedure" of love, Alain Badiou notes that the formation of a couple depends on an event that makes a breach in the lives of individuals, rendering their further separate existence impossible. The meeting is just such an event, in which the individual learns that there is a possibility of experiencing the world no longer as an individual, but in a pair.[37] It is this birth of a new subjectivity that Antonioni appears to be observing. What he does, though, is to equate an event in the procedure of love with another one from the world of capitalist speculation: a stock market slump. It is this unexpected and severe market crash, demonstrating something of a fissure in the exchange of goods and the brokers' everyday routine, which brings Piero and Vittoria together.

However, they seem to be a couple that has not experienced any exceptional moment of meeting, perhaps as this was replaced by the impact of another order. This shift of sorts might be what is responsible for the breakdown of their love. Even in the scene of their first conversation, Antonioni places a stone column between them. Its tremendous presence maintains an imprint on the exchange of looks and then sentences, composed in the form of a shot/counter-shot sequence, and forces the pair to lean towards each other. In the next, extremely evocative shot, Antonioni shows them together in the frame, but separated by the column, which partly obscures their profiles. From the outset, their potential love is overshadowed by the stone buttresses of the new religion that does not tolerate any exceptions and does not permit authentic events. For Piero, the crash is just another breakage to a system that otherwise works just fine, the latest feast day reserved for paying homage to the god of money. A further scene that illustrates the impossibility of a truly innovative (or at least distinctive) event in capitalism, even if (or maybe because) the subjects remain in a state of continual exaltation, involves brokers gathered in the stock market building, trying to hold a minute's silence to commemorate a colleague's death. The telephones constantly ringing in booths make it clear that this is a system that never stops, even for a moment.

The symptomatology in *L'eclisse* therefore illustrates the fundamental impasse in which not only the heroes of the film, but the whole world finds itself. The affects in it have been erased and petrified, and the only element that replaces them is the empty exaltation that drives the well-oiled mechanisms of capitalist exchange. All affects merge together, becoming ideally interchangeable. The film's penultimate scene – the only one in which Vittoria

37 See Alain Badiou and Nicolas Truong, *Eloge de l'amour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).

and Piero seem satisfied – is also a bitter foretaste of the inevitable failure of their relationship.

Piero: Will we see each other tomorrow?
Vittoria nods her assent.
Piero: We'll see each other tomorrow and the day after…
Vittoria: …and the day after, and the next day…
Piero: and the next…
Vittoria: …and this evening.
Piero: Eight o'clock, usual place.[38]

Instead of their planned meeting comes the film's famous finale, dominated by a dehumanised landscape and the slow onset of darkness. At the very moment when Vittoria and Piero's love might have been continued with new experiences, the characters disappear, giving way to empty streets, anonymous passers-by, fears of nuclear war displayed on a newspaper's front page, and most of all the lifeless matter of the city – concrete walls, tarmac roads, metal lampposts, and finally the sun, which is almost indistinguishable from the streetlights as they turn on at dusk – the system must switch to its nocturnal mode. After all, all newly formed connections get old and expire, before they can harden – not even an eclipse can prevent this.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

38 Antonioni, "Zaćmienie," 207. Translation modified by author.

Kinga Dunin

The Shameless Dance Cannot Last Forever

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Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity (the 1933 edition) was my first encounter with Gombrowicz's then forbidden work. To this day, I remember my high school fascination with *Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer*. Then the book got lost somewhere and I returned to the stories only in 1986, with the publication of Jan Błoński's edition of Gombrowicz's works. It is this very edition I am looking at right now, no longer titled *Memoirs*… but *Bacacay*. Today, the story, which I know almost by heart, appears to me in a slightly different context. It seems less revolutionary than it was when I read it again in the 1980s. It begins with the protagonist being publicly embarrassed; then, suddenly, "something shifted" in him and he is no longer governed by shame. Quite the contrary.

Sociology believes guilt and shame to be internalized mechanisms of social control. A sense of guilt is supposedly the nobler of the twins, related to a well developed conscience and a stronger internal autonomy. Shame is the lesser of the siblings, the one which looks up to others, determined externally and trembling before social opinion. I am not convinced by this distinction. Maybe guilt is just a sublimated rationalization of shame which in turn is the actual measure of our real relation to the society. It is shame that turns us into conformists, but without conformism, any kind of social cohesion becomes impossible.

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Shame is a natural reflex of the socialized human being. Its manifestations, however, are diverse and specific to time periods, cultures, and groups. Also "shamelessness," "anti-shame" in other words, are instances when we are shamed but question the environment's right to do so. Such instances are specific and individualized. It is a psychologically difficult act, since, as mentioned before, it is a deeply ingrained reflex and to get rid of shame means to become socially uprooted.

Shame defines our boundaries and shamelessness is something more than simply a lack of shame. Shamelessness crosses the boundaries, but it is aware of them. Tell me what you are ashamed of and I will know your place in society and the laws that govern your life. Tell me what you do not want to feel ashamed of, and I will know where you want to be.

Shamelessness can take the form of excess, rebellion, or withdrawal – when we cut ourselves off from those trying to shame us. There are many ways to be shameless.

The Shamelessness of Lawyer Kraykowski

Lawyer Kraykowski (whose surname spelled with a "y" elevates him to the level of aristocracy, above other ordinary Krajkowskis) has nothing to be ashamed of – he embodies self confidence, good taste, and success. He is firmly – almost cartoonishly – rooted in "respectability" and superiority. He finds himself on the side of social power which decides what is to be viewed as shameful, while operating shamelessly itself. Kraykowski is the one making claims, and in fact his entire character is one of entitlement. He speaks in the name of legitimate societal unity, a complex universe, and fulfills the social mission of guarding the world order.

> "We need order! This is Europe!" And, turning to the ladies, he remarked: "We must teach, teach indefatigably; otherwise we shall never cease to be a nation of Zulus."[1]

Lawyer Kraykowski is the one who demands subordination from the Other, the inferior. Shame is the instrument of his power.

Shamelessness of the Dancer

This is met with excess – with surfeit and transgression. The transgression of rules allows the shamed person to retain some dignity by being given

1 Witold Gombrowicz, *Bacacay*, trans. Bill Johnston (New York: Archipelago Books, 2004), 5.

nothing more than a mild reprimand; or silence is enforced when shaming is directed at a child or a someone of a much lower social status. Yet, demands can be met with a surplus of what has been demanded. In the story, the Dancer gives the Lawyer what the latter really wanted.

> Imagine that at every step he comes across indications of a cult, he meets homage and service all around, loyalty and an iron sense of duty, remembrance.[2]

Thus, the Dancer exposes the essence of shame, which is the power of social conventions over the individual. Violence is inscribed in the procedure of shaming. By meeting the demand with surplus, the victim becomes the oppressor not through resistance, but through an obscene refusal to resist.

But is this strategy also not the reason for the victim's failure?

Shame is often associated with anger on the part of the shamed individual. When suppressed anger becomes destructive, once released, it can dismantle boundaries and redefine power relations. The distinction we make between "unacceptable aggression" and "righteous anger" results strictly from our worldview, as only some constraints are seen as worth shedding. But if the Dancer's strategy seems tempting, we must not forget what can be lost as a result – such a strategy castrates us by removing anger, an emotion which is not unequivocally evil.

A lot of emphasis is put today on the role of contracts in mitigating, or lessening, contemporary contradictions. The phenomenal popularity of *50 Shades of Grey* may serve as a good example: the heroine of the novel signs a sadomasochistic contract with her lover. If one consents, does violence cease to be violence? Or not? Or maybe the problem lies in the very consent to violence?

Did Lawyer Kraykowski and his Dancer enter into a contract? It does not seem they did. Pursued by his follower, the Lawyer must escape. On the other hand, the situation presented in the story is far from clear. The strategy of the narrator, revealing a paradoxical victory of inferiority over superiority, is not the strategy of the protagonist. The latter behaves as if he had excessively internalized the violent character of the relation with the oppressor. This is why he is shameless: he seems to have accepted the cultural contract with excessive enthusiasm. However, a contract remains a contract.

It seems that shame can be dealt away with through an acceptance of subordination, a kind of exaggerated and excessive submissiveness. (Yes, I am talking about homosexual and campy excesses). But what is the power

2 Ibid., 10.

balance between submissiveness and exaggeration? In what conditions can it become an instrument of emancipation or transgression?

Shamelessness of *Lovetown*

This, of course, is tied to the question of whether camp as a poetics really is emancipatory. It is certainly a good idea to investigate Michał Witkowski's *Lovetown* (2005) in this context.

The critics swooned over *Lovetown*, and the readers loved all the colorful aunties of the Polish People's Republic (PRL), even though they were quite horrible characters: lustful, envious, ostentatious, willing to break all standards, ready to steal, deceive, or kill. But they also have become a provocative and liberating symbol – responding to the shame of homosexuality, "femininity," and marginalization by ostensibly adopting assigned roles. By responding with excess, with women's clothes, they answered decency with indecency, and reacted to shaming by flaunting shamelessnes through showy displays. Still, let us not forget that we are dealing not with the realities of the PRL, but with a narrative created in the early twenty-first century. And even then, *Lovetown* was already an anti-emancipatory text, mocking contemporary movements for equality. The novel supported the strategy of queering one's identity as opposed to the constructive, rightful anger of the LGTBQ activists.

The Shamelessness of Capitalism

Lovetown's gays lived in a world of their own; in bushes, public toilets, and dingy clubs, invisible even when they were seen. There was even no language to talk about them. They lived in opposition to the whole monotone, oppressive order. However, capitalism works differently – it can absorb and neutralize all eccentricity. Contemporary capitalist culture is embodied not by the poularde-eating Lawyer Kraykowski, whose form and boundaries are clearly defined, but by a much more fluid, protean hybridity, ready to swallow rather than spit. Of course, only for a time.

In Witkowski's latest novel, *Fynf und cwancyś* (2015), the PRL aunties are replaced with other, although quite similar, characters – young Eastern European boys prostituting themselves in the early 1990s in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

In the world of sated, self-satisfied capitalism rushing full steam ahead, boy prostitutes are not an alien body. They are simply an element of the system, only a little more spicy than the rest, being gay after all. In capitalism, whoring is not as much a transgression as it is a norm. It may seem surprising

only in its homosexual form: old, unattractive men pay for the bodies of young boys, as well as several other illusions, with the money inherited from their often fascist ancestors, or earned in banks profiting from sham loans. The boys sell their bodies, but also various false stories and masks hiding their real faces. You can get anything you want in this world: chocolate cows, golden gadgets, fancy labels, limousines, fountains, and even gluten-free dog food – you just need to have the means to get it. How you do it is unimportant. It is the end result that matters. Witkowski's protagonist, Michał – also known, for his penis size, as "Fynf und cfancyś" [twenty-five] – gets it all, not only with the help of his fynf und cfancyś, but also by being clever and cynical. He gets it all, or at least brags about it. Another character, Dianka, loses and quickly becomes nothing more than a piece of trash to be shoved back, with the other trash of Western Europe, to the East. There is no place for the aunties of *Lovetown* in the whorish capitalism that chokes on its own well-being. It is a world you join or else become garbage, waste. And the narrator remarks more than once, the whole thing is not about sex.

Dianka seems to be Michał's second, shameful face. But it is neither his homosexuality, nor profession, that are the cause of shame. What is shameful is the lack of success.

Everything is exaggerated in Witkowski's novel, sometimes even grotesquely, filled with irony and … beautifully prepped for sale. You will find product placement on the pages, and sometimes a character asks how much he is going to be paid for appearing in the book. The author clearly knows what he is doing.

The Shamelessness of Michaśka

Wiśniewski has continued to write *Lovetown* on his own body. Dressed as an old auntie – Michaśka – he has long teased reality through cheap thrills: provocation, tabloid media, fashion, exaggeration, kitsch, and stupidity, and for a long time he did it with impunity. It did end with a scandal though. The publication of *Fynf und cfancyś* was delayed due to public criticism and a complaint filed at the prosecutor's office. Having appeared at a fashion gala wearing a cap adorned with the SS emblem, Witkowski was accused of propagating Nazism and became a victim of a vicious Internet campaign; all of this was reported also by the non-tabloid media and aroused deep and holy indignation in a lot of people. Others, the more tolerant ones, viewed his behavior as simply stupid and distasteful, something deserving nothing more than a slightly dismissive reproach, which ultimately differs little from contempt. Witkowski himself apologized and claimed being unaware of his headwear, which was supposedly selected by the stylist. He behaved as someone effectively shamed and called to order.

A formal repentance, irrespective of the real emotions, signals a submission to the social demand.

No one attempted to interpret the writer's behavior as something other than a desire to provoke or an instance of primitive self-promotion. However, Witkowski's styling, regardless of his intentions, may have another layer of significance.

The stripes on his cap were diagonal but they also bring to mind the clothes of prisoners in the concentration camp. Also, they were pink, just as the triangle used by the Nazis to stigmatize homosexuals. An SS emblem, adorned with tawdry ornaments, placed against such background becomes devoid of its original meaning, it is "queered," ridiculed. Its meaning transforms, disturbing and violating the sacrum: of gender, of the Holocaust, of our attitude to the menacing symbol. It is like a pin touching the bubble of pathos; exaggeration assaulting the boundaries of good taste which sometimes also protect hypocrisy. Why exactly were so many upset? And why was no one able to clearly express what was so disturbing about the act (the accusations of "propagating Nazism" being clearly absurd)?

Witkowski's fateful cap combined parodied symbols related to two important spheres of the social sacrum. The prison stripes evoke associations with martyrdom – that of the Polish nation, of the Jews – but rarely the martyrdom of homosexuals. This is the first strike on the sacrum. But is the space in question really sanctified to the degree that forbids jest? In literature, cinematography, and art, shielded by their seriousness, subjects such as this are presented in tonalities found also in popular and commercial genres, sometimes becoming a hotbed of kitsch, a pornographization of suffering. Michaśka's frivolous use of symbolism forces a reflection on the boundaries of good taste: is Jerzy Kosiński's *The Painted Bird* a great work of art or an instance of scandalously pornographic violence?

The relation between the symbols of martyrdom and cruelty (Nazism, the SS) reflect the relation of the victim and the oppressor. However, the violence in question and the figure of the SS-Mann are also the subject of fascination, sometimes very well hidden, sometimes much less so.

The issues of pop culture, kitsch, and Nazi symbolism, the pornography and homo-erotism of boys dressed in German uniforms (designed by Hugo Boss) are well suited for various types of analyses. Sometimes they become the subject of high art. Fascist symbolism, associated with sexuality, is a topos found in literature and visual arts, from their highly sophisticated varieties to the most pedestrian ones, a spectrum encompassing horror, sublimated disgust, ironic and romantic (!) uses, comedy, gross vulgarity, and pornography. Witkowski simply revealed all that. Do not ask him if his goal was subversion, queer, or camp. He either created Michaśka, and her subsequent, stupid,

embarrassing, and kitschy incarnations, or he simply i s Michaśka. Michaśka/Michał and her life art, whether intentionally or not (this does not matter really), are a part of this world and its caricature.

The Limits of Shamelessness

One could say it was all a storm in a teacup, almost entirely forgotten today. Like many similar events, it provided some short-lived excitement and was replaced by another, and then yet another one.

Literature and art constitute fields of culture where Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer can dance shamelessly and even achieve a symbolic victory. Had Michaśka's cap been placed in an art gallery, it would have surely resulted in interesting critical analyses. As a symbol, it is so complex that Olbrychski probably would not try to attack it with his saber.[3] After all, it is a sphere where nothing happens for real, an autonomous world of symbols, although one would wish it to be far less autonomous sometimes.

Similar opportunities can be found in academic discourse. With its veil of jargon, it allows one to discuss, safely (and shamelessly), subjects which would otherwise be seen as disturbing or controversial. The academic discourse, as literature and art do, allows for more, but this comes at a price of having no influence on reality.

The world of tabloid celebrities, shady elites, fashion foolery, and events for the chosen few is also – despite what it seems – a protective zone. Here we know from the start that we are dealing with entertainment, or a hoax, instead of meaningful symbols of higher culture. However, paradoxically, it is her inferiority that allowed Michaśka's gesture to be recognized by the sphere of ideological and political discourse (something that a few serious artists have also managed to achieve.) I cannot recall any fictional literary work which has provoked similar uproar, even though Witkowski's current work is sometimes even more vulgar and shameless than his performances in real life.

But what results from such interventions into other social fields?

Nothing really. If any sense was to be discovered in it, it has already been digested by the mechanisms of dominant discourses, and is now well-encysted. All procedures of shaming worked with full force. Shamelessness revealed itself to be a convention attributed to certain social fields and not a privilege of the individual.

Michaśka's example also reveals the mechanisms of social control. Emotions appear as a reflexive indignation related to the violation of sacralized

3 In June 2002, Polish actor Daniel Olbrychski attacked with a sabre a series of photographs portraying actors who played Nazi officers in the movies [trans.]

cultural signs. The norm is found only later, even one as absurd as the "prohibition against propagating fascism," and it is an act of *ex post* rationalization, as are the expressions of "disgust" and dismissals of Witkowski's "stupidity," which similarly refuse to look for other possible explanations. What is hidden beneath? Homophobia, probably, but also (perhaps more importantly) an attempt to defend the boundaries. There is no holiness without the possibility of blasphemy.

Social rules determine whether blasphemy has taken place, and they are not always entirely clear. Work on the border of what is "allowed" and "forbidden" leads first to shamelessness and can potentially broaden the scope of the norm. The Kingdom of Shame may cede its lesser duchies to shamelessness but it remains powerful and ruled by the truly shameless ones, as well as by the complacent intellectuals who govern the public discourse determining the final shape of the largely automatic social reflexes. If this shape is subordinated to the simplest clichés and the pursuit of the scandalous, it merely serves to petrify the existing social norms. In the face of such forces, the strategies of camp – including excess, parody, exaggeration, ironic kitsch, transgression, provocation, playing with inferiority – reveal themselves as toothless.

A contract fulfilled through surplus, one where the victims agree to be victims – bizarre, amusing, and acceptable to a degree – may be terminated at any point. Eventually, the shameless dancer will be called to order. Dancing till the end is allowed only in literature.

On the other hand, does not the Lawyer's cry ("We need order! This is Europe!") sound familiar? Liberal discourses were meant to create the standards of "European order" the trespassing of which is tied to shame. The shamelessness of the counter-reaction may shock us today with its strength. But looking at it from a certain distance, one may find in it quite a lot of camp – patriotic kitsch, bizarre exaggeration, and signs contradicting the context. The Hussar wings rustle and the Host bleeds among the modern skyscrapers.

Following the author, the reader of *Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer* adopts the perspective of the narrator. In life, we have a tendency to become Lawyers, guarding the borders of our order with shame. Is this wrong? It all depends on the kind of order we choose to defend.

Translation: Anna Warso

Błażej Warkocki

What a Shame! Memoirs of a Time of Queer Immaturity: Prologue

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The Hidden Memoir

Witold Gombrowicz's debut short story collection, *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity*, has been analyzed and examined from all possible angles. We know that after being rejected by a number of publishers, Gombrowicz eventually used his father's money to self-publish the collection and that it stirred up a lot of excitement in literary and critical circles. We also know that the title turned out to be so bothersome, that the author himself decided against using it for post-war editions of the collection, replacing it with a nonsense word containing a peculiarly suspended reference: *Bacacay*.

The following deliberations are based around the hypothesis posited by Ewa Graczyk in the opening of her monograph, *Shake Before Exploding*, exploring Gombrowicz's pre-war efforts. Graczyk claims that the interpretative starting point should comply, at least to some degree, with the "Purloined Letter" rule, in other words, that the title – *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* – should be read literally. The hypothesis can naturally be rejected, but one has to use it as a sort of jump-off point to some extent against subsequent attempts – also on the part of the author himself – to erase the meaning of that phrase.

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Graczyk writes: "Let us assume that at least in some sense, the *Memoirs* are essentially a sort of diary written by an individual undergoing a coming of age. Let us assume that the narrative inconsistency, the non-identity of characters, and the separate and singular character of each of the stories all conceal a sort of congruence that is both textual as well as subjective (in the sense of the establishment of a single subject across the entire collection). Let us preliminarily accept the hypothesis that the *Memoirs* are a series of texts, arranged in a specific, deliberate order of appearance. Besides the arrangement, the stories are connected at a very basic level by another feature – one ostensibly more important than the arrangement – namely the appearance of a number of echoes and correlations that emerge when the collection is read as a whole."[1] The scholar presumes that the text is consistent both formally and substantively. Therefore, as a consequence of the above: "I believe that if we treat the book as a narrative with a single subject, then the covert preservation of the integrity of the *Memoirs* in *Bacacay* will emerge as a very significant decision. It will then become clear that Gombrowicz was deeply ambivalent about that particular volume: he guarded the consistency of the message and simultaneously concealed it, hampering efforts aimed at reading or deciphering it. In a sense, he confined and imprisoned the *Memoirs* in *Bacacay*."[2]

Graczyk's use of nearly Gothic rhetoric ("confine," "imprison") is not without its significance. Moreover, somewhat against the author's wishes, she instructs us to take the title of the collection literally. Such interpretative efforts should remind of us of the exploits of the Detective from Edgar Allan Poe's highly acclaimed story *The Purloined Letter*, interpreted by Lacan and Derrida and extensively used by Polish scholars in interpretations inspired by queer theory.[3] The truth is up on the surface, and the memoir is a memoir – a grotesque, inconsistent, masochistic biography of subjectivity itself. In line with the etymology, it is an account of what is remembered. A record of negative affects.[4]

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1 Ewa Graczyk, *Przed wybuchem wstrząsnąć. O twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza w okresie międzywojennym* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), 8.

2 Ibid., 9.

3 These include Izabela Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności. Rzecz o Marii Komornickiej* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006) and Joanna Niżyńska, *The Kingdom of Insignificance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013).

4 This hypothesis is confirmed, though in different language, by Jerzy Jarzębski: "Through the entirety of *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity*, the author plays a subtle game with literature itself, invoking names of great authors, such as Poe or Dostoyevsky, writers fascinated with the ambiguity of human expression of the unconscious, with the codes used by the deep «self» to express itself. Gombrowicz also plays with his own image, as it is in-

The title of Gombrowicz's debut has stirred up excitement and concern since its very release. As put by Zdzisław Łapiński:

> Although it may seem strange now, both Gombrowicz and his close friends believed that the title of the anthology may be perceived as an attempt to toy with public opinion, an endeavor not without its dangers. Their fears eventually materialized and the category of immaturity, the full extent of its complexity to be revealed only in *Ferdydurke,* although fairly good samples of it can already be found in the *Memoirs*, has been recognized not as a problem that the author has posed, but rather as an inadvertent symptom, an expression of inexperienced awkwardness in one's treatment of life, literature, and oneself.[5]

It is fairly difficult to grasp today why *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* could have been considered such a dangerous title and why anyone would perceive immaturity as such an inappropriate category or label (especially given the fact that it was further developed, to great success, by the author in *Ferdydurke*). Unless, to use the "Purloined Letter" approach, it is not immaturity that was problematic in the context of the title (suggesting a relationship between the narrators and the author), but rather a sort of "abnormality" or – to use a more modern phrase – "non-normativity." It is difficult not to notice that the characters in the novellas are rarely normative, they touch upon rather non-normative affects and states, and we could – although not without difficulty – incorporate them in some sort of heterosexual teleology. And that is another thing that breathes a measure (however limited) of consistency into the series.

In and of itself, however, "immaturity" is a fairly suspect category – particularly if it appears as the eponymous key to the "memoirs" of a not-that-young of an author (Gombrowicz was 29 when his debut was released). More so if we consider the accusations of "sexualism" and "Freudism" from some readers,[6] which Gombrowicz himself fearfully anticipated in the prologue that

troduced into individual stories in different version, under the guise of characters suffering from problems similar to the author. The voice of the author (although changed to some extent) can be heard in the mouths of the «dancer», Jakub Czarniecki, the investigative judge, the protagonist of *Five Minutes before Sleep*, Zantman, and Alice from *Virginity*. From his first book onwards, masked self-presentation will become Gombrowicz's specialty." Jerzy Jarzębski, *Gombrowicz* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004), 33-34.

5 Zdzisław Łapiński, *Ja – Ferdydurke, Gombrowicza świat interakcji* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1985), 21-22.

6 The popular and critical reception of the *Memoirs* was examined by Jerzy Jarzębski in *Gra w Gombrowicza* (Warszawa: PIW, 1982).

was eventually removed from the book. If we were to look at Freud's "cases" as revealing the historicity of narrative, then we would have uncovered the perils lurking in the implications of "immaturity." One such example would be the "Schreber case," wherein Freud thematized (male) homosexuality and its relationship with the concept of the Gothic. Hence, were we to look at the trajectory along which the subject develops over the course of the narrative, we would have discovered a journey, a pilgrimage, or maybe a particular kind of "odyssey" (given that Freud was extremely well-versed in antiquity). Put in another way, normative heterosexuality, in Freud's work, is achieved over the course of a specific odyssey. There are a number of intermediate stages on the road to maturity – to heterosexuality, that is – and one can get slowed down, delayed, or even bogged down, and not out of one's own volition either, like Odysseus enthralled by the Sirens' song. And so the maturing subject journeys through the autoeroticism stage, the narcissism stage, and the possibly inevitable homosexual object choice stage, eventually arriving at the final, heterosexual stage. The maturing subject, however, can stop at any of these stages, fixate on them, enraptured by the Sirens' call, and thus never reach the Ithaca of heterosexuality.[7]

This particular paraphrase is not supposed to prove that Freudian psychoanalysis[8] is the supreme interpretative key with which to examine Gombrowicz's debut, but rather that an oblique, suspicious reading of "Freud's cases" (one that is consistent with the logic of the narrative) may provide a degree of explanation for widespread anxiety concerning the debut. More so given the fact that subsequent novellas contained in the *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* indeed seem fairly impervious to heterosexual teleologies and heteronormativity. Resistance against being saddled with typical male roles, the bashful fascination with solicitor Kraykowski, the masochisms, the "homosexual panic"[9] spreading across a ship full of men, or the absolute inability to imagine oneself in a heterosexual marriage (on the part of Alice in *Virginity*) – these are the subjects that this particular memoir deals with.

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7 Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalityczne uwagi o autobiograficznie opisanym przypadku paranoi (*dementia paranoides*)" in Sigmund Freud, *Charakter a erotyka*, trans. Robert Reszke and Dariusz Rogalski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 1996). This "odyssey towards heterosexuality" is especially visible in the interpretation part of the "Schreber case," 148-149.

8 Especially given the resistance with which psychoanalysis was met in Poland. See Paweł Dybel, "Urwane ścieżki, czyli z dziejów psychoanalizy w Polsce," in Paweł Dybel, *Urwane ścieżki. Przybyszewski – Freud – Lacan* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

9 See Tomasz Kaliściak, "Statek odmieńców, czyli o marynarskiej fantazji Witolda Gombrowicza," in *Literatura popularna. Dyskursy wielorakie*, ed. Ewa Bartos and Marta Tomczok, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013).

In this context, let us take a closer look at the author's own foreword to the book which seems more odd than any of the seven novellas that follow it. The not-so-young author initially opened his debut with an introduction curiously titled "A Brief Explanation." Shortly before publication, however, he scrapped the introduction, even though some claim – including Tadeusz Kępiński – that at least a couple of 1933 editions were released with the opening chapter intact.[10] From a formal standpoint, the introduction contains a meticulous overview of the novellas making up the book and lays out their interpretation. In careful paragraphs, the author expounds on the contents of the texts and how they should be understood. Why did Witold Gombrowicz, a writer with considerable literary ambition, decide to commit such a questionable gesture? Why did this sophisticated master of the written word involve himself with an attempt to explain to his readers what exactly he was trying to say in his novellas? The answer probably lies in the communication strategy itself: he was not interested in enlightening all readers, but a specific subset of them. In his own words: "My friends' opinion of my person is of great import to me."[11] Indeed, family and friends may end up reading one's work with a more biographical inclination than any author would intend. And Gombrowicz's "A Brief Explanation" could be considered, to borrow a term from psychoanalysis, as a peculiar example of countertransference.[12] In this instance, the author – fearing imagined projections (about both his work and his person) – drafts an interpretation of his own short stories. In other words: such an effort would imply a self-interpretation in response to imagined projections. That is why it seems so defensive and agreeable, so to speak. The stories are "written somewhat evasively," admits Gombrowicz, there is nothing odd or peculiar about them, and the "prevalence" of the sexual themes stems purely from the "spirit of the times."[13] The big Other, friends and parents who financed the book ought to be satisfied. There is nothing

10 Tadeusz Kępiński, *Witold Gombrowicz i świat jego młodości* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), 314.

11 Ibid., 314. Tadeusz Kępiński included "A Brief Explanation" on pages 314-318.

12 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Słownik psychoanalizy*, trans. Ewa Modzelewska and Ewa Wojciechowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1996), 253-254. This Freudian term (although one that Freud himself rarely used) is described as "the entirety of the analyst's unconscious reactions to the individual analyzed – especially to the analyzed's own transference," p. 253.

13 In the final paragraph we read: "As far as the sexual factor is concerned, its prevalence stems from the spirit of the times, which puts an ever-growing emphasis on the relationship between the sexual and the spiritual," ibid., 318. It is a direct (although critical) reference to the Freudian concept of sublimation.

to fear. However, this counterprojection indirectly validates Ewa Graczyk's hypothesis that the *Memoirs* have more than one (non-normative) subject.

Towards the end we should examine one more piece of proof. A trifle from the perspective of formality (and trifles, as detective narratives have hammered into us, are usually of first rate importance). The final story in the *Memoirs* was called *The Events on the Banbury*. In the redesigned anthology released after the war under the new, impenetrable title *Bacacay, The Events on the Banbury* is no longer the last story and loses its subtitle (*…or the Aura of F. Zantman's Mind*). Thus, the line connecting the first and final stories in the anthology, the former being, naturally, *Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer*, is severed. Well, how were the two connected? As noticed by Knut Andreas Grimstad,[14] "Zantman," the name of one of the passengers traveling on the *Banbury* is an anagram of the German word "tanzman" or "dancer." And given that the dancer appears already in the title of the opening story of the anthology, *Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer*, it is hard to think that this was just a coincidence. But before we move on, we will bring up two specific issues: in this somewhat covert way, Gombrowicz emphasized and strengthened the integrity of the anthology suggesting a common thread running through all the stories; and secondly, by doing away with the subtitle of *The Events on the Banbury*, thus removing it from its semantically distinctive placement in the tail end of the anthology, Gombrowicz essentially (to use the phrase coined by Ewa Graczyk) "imprisoned the *Memoirs* in *Bacacay*."

Savage Shame

Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer, the first short story in Gombrowicz's debut anthology, is a first-person narrative about shame that, once inflicted, leaves a lifelong mark, interpellates identity, provides a framework for social interaction, mediates the experience of pleasure, and eventually kills – at least in the narrative's fantasy scenario. In this case, however, shame functions differently from what we would expect based on reasonable scenarios. In consequence, it does not produce alienation and estrangement (of all that we would intuitively associate with e m b a r r a s s m e n t). On the contrary, it drives the action, obsessive activity, and acting out. Thereby, the *Dancer* is a tale about shame and about what Sedgwick has called queer performativity.[15]

14 Knut Andreas Grimstad, "Co się zdarzyło na brygu Banbury? Gombrowicz, erotyka i prowokacja kultury," trans. Olga Kubińska, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2002): 61.

15 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Perfomativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2003).

The story opens innocently:

> It was my thirty-fourth time attending the *The Csárdás Princess* – and because it was late, I cut in line and went straight to the ticket lady: "Dearie, one gallery seat, aquick." Then someone grabbed me by the collar and unceremoniously pulled me back from the counter and put me in my place, the tail end of the line, that is. My heart raced, my breath caught in my chest – is not this s o m e t h i n g s a v a g e, to be taken by the collar in a public place? But I turned my head back: the culprit was a tall, perfumed, well put together gentleman with a neatly groomed mustache. Talking with two elegant ladies and another gentleman, he looked over his freshly purchased tickets. They all looked at me – I had to say something.[16]

Over the course of a single paragraph, Gombrowicz manages to establish an affective essence of the plot. The nameless protagonist breaks the rules of social interaction, "the law of sequence, one of the essential rules of organized public spaces."[17] A minor offence and yet one incredibly vexing for other people participating with us in everyday social rituals. Then, one of them reacts accordingly. We might call the reaction a classic interpellation if it were not for the fact that it is not a verbal act, but a physical one (Althusser's classic example involved a policeman interpellating through the use of "Hey, you!"). Notice the protagonist not reacting in any way (he does not protest against his treatment or try to break free from the stranger's hold). The reaction, or, more precisely, the revenge, will come much later. It is as if, moments after his offence, he accepts his punishment – for two reasons. Firstly, he is aware of his crime against laws governing social interaction. Secondly, and equally possibly, his acceptance may stem from the potentially high station of his accuser, the identity of his status expressed in his actions (these relations of symbolic power are important insofar as they will return in different forms in nearly all of the stories collected in the *Memoirs*).

As a result of these actions, the protagonist is ashamed. Moreover, he is humiliated, as the shaming takes place in a public setting, before dozens of bystanders. No wonder, then, that he uses the word "savage" to describe it. The

16 Witold Gombrowicz, "Tancerz mecenasa Kraykowskiego," in Witold Gombrowicz, *Bakakaj i inne opowiadania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), 5. Emphasis mine. From here on out, I will be using the letter T followed by the page number to denote citations from *Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer.*

17 Łapiński, *Ja, Ferdydurke*, 12. In the cited chapter, Zdzisław Łapiński performed a classic analysis of *Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer* from the perspective of E. Goffman's theories.

word choice will be particularly relevant given the fact that the seemingly minor offence in the foyer will eventually lead to someone's (self-)destruction. Shame can kill. So can public humiliation: "At least forty pairs of eyes and faces were staring at me – my heart raced, voice caught in my throat […]" [T, 6].

Verbalized by the attacker in a theatrical manner, his reasons for the assault are not as self-evident as it may seem: "Go on, to the end of the line with you. Order! Europe!" Turning to the ladies, he observed: "One has to edify the masses, constantly, otherwise we will never outgrow being a nation of Zulus" [T, 6]. Thus Solicitor Kraykowski (although then we have no idea it is him) justifies his assault using metaphors taken straight out of the colonial imaginarium. Europe, a bastion of orderliness and "proper form," is juxtaposed with "savage" and "immature" Zulus. And let us not forget the important role that feminizing and demasculinizing the Other played in colonizing discourse. This approach, described by Edward Said as one of many orientalizing strategies, was used by Otto Weininger to portray Jews. Similarly, the great debate over women's literature, started by Irena Krzywicka's critical reading of Maria Kuncewiczowa's novel,[18] quickly devolved into a squabble over the effeminate nature of "immature" Poland. Can we, therefore, presume that this colonially coded speech conceals an accusation implying the unmanliness of the protagonist who unceremoniously approaches the ticket lady and showers her with effeminate diminutions? That meaning may be valid but does not necessarily have to be. Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that – as evidenced by a number of authors – demasculinizing the male subject is one of the most efficient ways to embarrass and humiliate him.

It is not without import, then, that one of the first acts in the protagonist's crusade against Kraykowski is a clearly gendered affront. The next day, after a sleepless night in the course of which he "went over the theater scuffle many, many times" [T, 7] in his head, the protagonist sends solicitor Kraykowski a bouquet of roses and repeats the gesture soon thereafter to further clarify his intent. He buys a small bunch of flowers from a vendor and then "casts a couple of shy violets on the ground below his feet" [T, 8-9]. To bolster his interpretation of these passages, Zdzisław Łapiński invokes Maria Jehanne Wielopolska whose 1938 opus *Social Customs* authoritatively states: "Never send flowers or sweets to men (excluding actors or stage singers)."[19]

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18 Subsequent texts in this discussion have been collected by Joanna Krajewska in her anthology, *Jazgot niewieści i męskie kasztele. Z dziejów sporu o literaturę kobiecą w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2000).

19 Maria z Colonna Walewskich Wielopolska, *Obyczaje towarzyskie* (Lwów: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Książek Szkolnych, 1938), 121: as quoted in Łapiński, *Ja, Ferdydurke*, 13.

Indeed, the protagonist commits a gender transgression. He sends a bouquet of roses and then a handful of pansies to a man. And not just any man, but one that fully and comfortably inhabits society's gender and class structure, which the novel repeatedly reiterates. He sends the flowers to a lawyer brimming with prestige, someone who acts out the scenarios that society assigns him with irreproachable elegance. And this carefully selected and deliberate gesture is supposed to embarrass or humiliate him. He is supposed to be made to feel like a woman, moreover a woman who is the object of a man's affections: who else would be "frivolously" throwing "shy" violets (notice the gendered stylistic flair) under someone's feet other than a man in love? Thereby, the protagonist deliberately selects gestures supposed to upend the heterosexual norm and humiliate solicitor Kraykowski by emasculating and feminizing him. And, lest we forget, all of these actions are a sort of mimetic revenge, an attempt to get even for what happened the day before at the theater. They are "pastiche rather than parody."[20] Thus, we can surmise that the gender aspect definitely played a significant role in the protagonist's own humiliation in the opening of the story, at least in the protagonist's own opinion.

The opening short story deals with reaction to humiliation – with embarrassing the perpetrator of an earlier embarrassment. With a peculiar relationship between two men based on mutual shaming. Because the protagonist did not react to the theater foyer altercation with aggression or alienation but with profuse politeness (courteous bows, attempts at soliciting a cab) – he considers himself the victor in this symbolic game of affects: "I felt myself strangely calm" [T, 7]. Later on he continues to deploy the strategy and commits to an escalation. It may seem, however, that after his sleepless night, the protagonist shifts towards what we may – somewhat excessively – call a "schizoid position," meaning that he ever more clearly sees himself as an object of his own actions (which splendidly rhymes with the grotesque effect from a stylistic standpoint).

Shame and Identity

But what is shame, really? How does it work? Why, as in the case of the *Dancer*, are its effects so pronounced sometimes? Silvan Tomkins, one of the fathers of affect theory, included the following passage in the introduction to his examination of the "shame-humiliation dyad":

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20 The entire quote from Zdzisław Łapiński, in proper context: "The dancer's deeds are as annoying as mockery and as selfless as an homage. The dancer's mockery is of a special kind – it is pure repetition of the solicitor's gesture, without the exaggeration, so as far as the writing is concerned, it's pastiche rather than parody." Łapiński, *Ja, Ferdydurke*, 13.

> If distress is the affect of suffering, shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation. Though terror speaks to life and death and distress makes the world a vale of tears, yet shame strikes deepest into the heart of man. While terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth.[21]

Together with Adam Frank, Sedgwick prepared and edited a collection of writings from the rather unknown Harvard psychologist to look for possible interpretative avenues that would allow them to transcend dominant patterns of Freudian psychoanalysis (and its Eros–Thanatos binary) and particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis.[22] In this respect Tomkins's affect theory could have fit the bill, especially given the fact that his work, organically and without assuming presupposed anti-homophobic positions, manages to avoid entanglement with "heterosexist teleologies" (in stark contrast to Freud and Lacan).[23] It does not presume the existence of a necessary heteronormative ideal which the subject should strive towards, whether consciously or not, regardless of the timeline. Tomkins considers shame one of the proto-affects, or a primary affect, whereas Sedgwick, in her commentary and interpretative efforts, emphasizes the connection between the experience of shame and the interpellation of identity. And that is exactly what happened (to use that particularly o d d phrase) to the "dancer." The inflicted shame interpellated identity whose sense stemmed solely from that negative affect.

In her essay on Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*, Sedgwick writes:

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21 Sylvan Tomkins, "Shame–Humiliation and Contempt–Disgust," in *Shame and Its Sisters. A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 1995), 133.

22 "It would be plausible to see a variety of twentieth-century theoretical languages as attempts, congruent with this one, to detoxify the excesses of body, thought, and feeling by reducing the multiple essentialist risks of analog representation to the single, unavowedly essentialist certainty of one or another on/off switch. The Lacanian calculus of phallic presence or absence would be only the most blatant of these, but the critique of Lacan [...] exhibit[s] the same structure." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," in *Shame and Its Sisters*, 20.

23 Sedgwick and Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," 7.

> But in interrupting identification, shame, too, makes identity. In fact, shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating.[24]

The dancer – let us stay with this o d d term for now – as a male subject, should identify with other men, particularly with an exemplary specimen like the solicitor. But nothing of that sort takes place. On the contrary, the protagonist clearly does not identify with hegemonic models of masculinity (neither do characters in the other short stories in the anthology). The clearest indication of this refusal is found in the eponymous description: the dancer – implying transgression of traditional masculine behaviors, in stark contrast to solicitor Kraykowski's stalwart embodiment of these behaviors and standards.

What, then, can be said of the identity of the protagonist himself? As noted by Segdwick, the most conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt (although Tomkins does not press the dichotomy) presumes that guilt attaches to what we have done, whereas shame sharpens our sense of what we are.[25] That does not mean, however – and Sedgwick explicitly states as much – that shame is "the place where identity is most securely attached to essences, but rather that it is the place where the question of identity arises most originarily and most relationally."[26]

This may not be the place to discuss subtle theoretical differences, including those between essentialist and constructivist approaches to identity. It should be noted, however, that in the opening story of Gombrowicz's literary debut, shame sharpens the protagonist's sense of his own identity – whether it be the dancer, freak, epileptic (and thus non-normative in the motor sense), or queer – given the fact, moreover, that the connection between non-heterosexual identities and stigma[27] and shame has a long history, documented across a large number of writings.

What does the protagonist do? How does he shame the solicitor after being shamed by him, exposed as careless, disorganized, effeminately insolent, simply too flamboyant, or theatrically flamboyant even? Each subsequent

24 Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality," 36.

25 Ibid., 37.

26 Ibid., 37.

27 The second story in the anthology, *Jakub Czarniecki's Brief Memoir*, is an ironic and painful story about stigma.

attack – as the protagonist engages in something akin to stalking – unfolds as if playing out on stage, with its own script and appropriate props.[28]

Initially, while still in the theater, he bows politely to the solicitor, when it would seem that lobbing phlegm would be his chosen course of action. Then comes an equally cultured request for a shared cab ride, emphasizing the theatrical inappropriateness of the situation and acting wholly against the intuitive scenario one would undertake in an embarrassing situation. It would be completely natural for the protagonist to flee the situation, along the vector of affect, but instead, "in the last possible instant (may it be forever blessed)," [T, 6] he decided to stay.

His plan for retributive shaming takes final shape over the course of one sleepless night. The protagonist sends the solicitor a bouquet of flowers, thus employing the most effective shaming device – a gender-based one. As we have already established, the heterosexual scenario presumes that red roses are what a man sends to a woman he adores. He treats Kraykowski as one would a woman, and that action is supposed to humiliate him. The protagonist stalks the solicitor, steeping himself in the act, and does so with a passion that is difficult to define. "Oh, I could spend hours staring at that place on his neck where his hair give way to the whiteness of his neck" [T, 8]. This fetishization of the flesh implies a degree of ardor that transcends mere fascination. It is essentially a sign of being lovestruck, as Roland Barthes explained in "Tip of the Nose," a chapter in his *A Lover's Discourse.*[29] A fetishizing synecdoche of the object of desire. Shortly thereafter – due to the roses having "no effect" – he decides to push things further and throw a handful of violets at the solicitor's feet. Such a theatrical gesture befits shy youths vying for the affections of schoolgirls more than dancers and solicitors. This violation of heteronormativity, naturally, is supposed to further humiliate Kraykowski. The stalking continues. The next episode takes place in a restaurant, a public place, and takes a particularly theatrical form. What we witness is a feat of mimicry, a masterful performance of imitation. The solicitor makes an order:

> – Appetizers, caviar… mayonnaise… fowl… pineapple cubes – black coffee, Pommard, Chablis, cognac, and liqueurs.

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28 The issue of theatricality and performativity (also in the context of postcolonial and queer theory) is Gombrowicz's later works is explored most lucidly in Michael Goddard, "The Performativity and the Theatricality of Form in Gombrowicz's Theater and Postwar Novels," in *Gombrowicz, Polish Modernism and the Subversion of Form* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010), 65-105.

29 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar,, Straus, and Giroux, 1978), 25-28.

So did I.
– Caviar – mayonnaise – fowl – cubed pineapple – black coffee, Pommard, Chablis, cognac, and liqueurs" [T, 9].

Earlier, the solicitor had not paid the slightest attention to the protagonist, but now he probably has to, given the provocation. The text, however, does not clearly lay out the reasoning. The protagonist does not so much challenge as parodies the behaviors of a well-off, urbane, naturally unpretentious man,[30] one secure in his station in the bourgeois order. But there is something more to the protagonist's behavior, a relational and gendered surfeit. According to popular stereotypes, boys only pull the hair of girls they like, in order to attract their attention and express their equivocal affect. In a similar vein, the protagonist vies for the solicitor's attention, going so far as to accept the considerable financial burden of repeating the solicitor's euphonically pleasing order to the waiter. Let us be frank – if we were to forget the beginning of the short story, we would have to acknowledge that the relationship increasingly resembles infatuation, including all the typical symptoms of that particular emotional state (tremulous anticipation, somewhat irrational attempts at attracting attention, expensive gifts, and a synecdochal fetishizing of the body of the object of affection).[31]

Subsequent theatrical scenes of embarrassing the solicitor further reinforce that strange effect. Following his feats at the restaurant, the protagonist will buy *mille-feuilles* for Kraykowski prior to the solicitor's own visit to the pâtisserie. The object of desire is forced to accept the gift against his own will, and is thus shamed by unwanted love, punished by suspect adoration. From the standpoint of the psychotic yet ironic protagonist-narrator, however, the entire fracas still looks more like infatuation than stalking: "I will not describe all that has happened here, alas, it is impossible to describe all. It was as the sea – timeless, swelling throughout the day, often throughout the night. It was wild, like when we once sat across each other in the tram; and sweet, when I could do some favor for him – other times it was amusing. Amusing, sweet, and wild? – Yes (…)" [T, 12].

Obviously, the solicitor considers these actions parts of a retaliation campaign and reacts as one would expect – aggressively. He swings a cane at our

30 How wonderfully he leaned over! How deftly he made his cocktail! He was so elegant, making his jokes, the toothpick between his teeth!" [T, 10].

31 As proof, let us quote the following sensual passage: "[…] I spied on him through the storefront window as he put them [*milles-feuilles*] in his mouth, gently as to not stain his outfit with the cream, and then licked his fingers or wiped them with a napkin" [T, s. 12].

dancer. But it is exactly in his negativity-steeped. upended world that the climax of ecstasy takes place.

> I was speechless. I was happy. I took it like holy communion and closed my eyes. In silence – I bent over and offered my back. I waited – going through a handful of moments so utterly perfect that they have to mean my days are numbered. When I uncoiled myself, he was leaving in a hurry, his cane clattering on the ground. With a heart full of grace and blessing, I made my way back through the empty streets. Not enough, I thought, not enough! I need more – more!" [T, 14].

The adoration of the object of desire concludes – as it should – with a fulfilling climax. With orgasmic bliss marked with a masochistic streak. What was supposed to inflict pain is now a source of pleasure. We should also mention here that masochism, a boon of early twentieth-century developments in psychology, was named after Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the Lviv-born Austro-Hungarian author of *Venus in Furs*. Despite the gaudy cover art that the novel's editions were usually given[32] (which was supposed to position it among so-called "low culture" genres) – *Venus in Furs* is a subtle story about romantic love. That is also the reading of Gilles Deleuze which he presented in his famous essay, *Coldness and Cruelty*.[33] Deleuze interprets the novel through the lens of the peculiar contract between Wanda and Severin. The vision of masochism that emerges from Gombrowicz's story (and the issue will be brought up in *Dancer* two more times) is more or less consistent with the Deleuzian interpretation: it is an attempt on the part of the protagonist to enter into a contract with the fascinating, yet cold and cruel solicitor. The contract is masochistic in nature and is built on a foundation of primal shame, which is later reproduced and multiplied. But it is not sadomasochism. In Deleuze's interpretation, sadomasochism essentially does not exist; to put it differently – there are no separate and complementary sadistic and masochistic positions. Quite the contrary, the two imply completely different sorts of contracts. And this interpretation is also true in Gombrowicz's work: the dancer wants to bind himself to the solicitor with a masochistic contract, but the latter tries as hard as he can to remain unbound. And not because he is not a "sadist," but because he is just not interested.

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32 See the cover for the Polish edition, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Wenus w futrze* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo „Res Polona," 1989).

33 Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," in Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty and Venus in Furs* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

The signum of masochist ecstasy will appear in the short story twice more: when the protagonist approaches the solicitor, offering his back to him but receiving no blows,[34] and one final time towards the story's conclusion when the protagonist, still chasing the object of his desires, finds himself in the Eastern Carpathians, half-dead from physical and emotional exhaustion, and decides (in what is to be his ultimate ecstasy and final retribution) that his dead body is to be dispatched to Kraykowski himself.

However, as the narrative unfolds, masochist fantasies gradually blend with the arrangement of an emotional triangle. Initially, the "binary" relationship connects the dancer and the solicitor via negative affect. The protagonist, however, quickly arranges a triangle. The word "arranges" seems most appropriate in this context, because the protagonist tries to include a woman in the interplay between him and his object. And rather than involving the solicitor's wife, he homes in on the doctor's wife, because he can sense – like a perfectly tuned monitor – the direction in which the desires of his object are flowing.

Triangles like these are nothing new in prose dealing with love and desire. On the contrary – in his classic volume *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* René Girard claims that the triangle is the most privileged model in European realist prose. This is one of the arguments on which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick based her concept of "male homosocial desire," which she posited in *Between Men*. The triangle arranged in the *Dancer*, however, strangely departs from the Girardian model. In Gombrowicz's story, the male–female–male triangle is constituted by the beloved and the lover who is supposed to be bound to another man who could be his worthy rival. The latter determines the value of the beloved, and the actions of the dancer seem to be almost a parody of this particular model.

In the first reproachful letter to the doctor's wife, the protagonist describes Kraykowski in ways befitting an infatuated lover: "Are you indifferent to this build, the way this flesh moves, these modulations, this smell? And you still deem yourself a woman? If I were you, I'd fulfill his every whim and command he uttered at my poor, meager, dull, female body" [T, 13]. In the following letter he adds an important note, graphically exposed in the novella: "As far as perfume goes, "Violette" is the only choice. He likes it" [T, 15].

Thus, the dancer attempts to make solicitor Kraykowski a mutual object of both their (mostly) erotic desires. That is what he needs the doctor's wife for. He even tries to substitute his own person for hers. Undoubtedly, these

34 This passage seems to be the most revealing example of Deleuzian masochistic ecstasy: "Indeed, he [Kraykowski] leaves after a couple of minutes with two other gentlemen, and then I approach him and silently present my back. [...] I close my eyes, brace my shoulders, and wait, hopeful – but nothing happens" [T, 16].

actions are intended to embarrass Kraykowski (by feminizing him through the mention of "Violette" perfume on the one hand, and suggesting a homosexual relationship on the other). The symbolic reward of this peculiar game (which amounts to stalking, regardless of the way we frame it) is the humiliation of the object of affection. And all of this is undertaken by a subject given to more and more psychotic tendencies. We should note, however, that Gombrowicz's male–female–male erotic triangle is markedly different from the Girardian model. Girard, rather uncritically, essentially made his model patriarchal in nature. Two competing men should be jealous of the woman's affections. In *Dancer*, that model is more or less upended. Young Gombrowicz seemingly acts as if he has recognized the classic model for what it is (Girardian, commonsensical, patriarchal, heteronormative) and then deliberately parodies it.

The ending of the debut anthology's opening story closely resembles one of the final scenes in Witold Gombrowicz's final pre-war effort, *Possessed*, thus creating inadvertent bookends. In *Dancer*, the fantasizing subject gives his d e a d s e l f up to the object of his affections, one that was previously bound to a woman; whereas in *Possessed*, Laszczuk offers his b o u n d s e l f to the lover of his mistress. Male–male–female triangles with a masochistic bent – either deliberate or not – seem to carry significance in Gombrowicz's early work.

However, I believe that this particular stage of interpretation should not conclude with the assertion that *Solicitor Kraykowski's Dancer* is a coded homosexual story, or that it is a story about gay jealousies, as put by Kazimierz Wierzyński in Tadeusz Kępiński's memoirs.[35] At first glance, however, something else emerges from the story – namely, how quickly and naturally the normative model of relationships between men quickly turns "suspect," "queer," and insufficiently heterosexual. The story begins with a wholly understandable situation: an older, stately, hegemonically positioned man disciplines a younger, more disorganized, and still rather undefined lad. This is an obvious and culturally intelligible motif, easily recognizable across a broad range of narratives – from the biological (the dominant male in a pride of lions), through the psychoanalytical (actions of the father figure towards the son), up to the anthropological (the establishment of a new order by the young males who perpetrate a seemingly necessary patricide). In Gombrowicz's story, that obvious relationship is turned upside down very easily, naturally, as if simply by the grace of its movement along a Möbius strip. It is turned upside down and made strange. Made queer.

35 Kępiński, *Witold Gombrowicz*, 269.

This dynamic of the story corresponds to the remarks made by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Male homosexuality should not necessarily be understood from an essentialist standpoint (here: the spark that brought the queer relationship to a boil was a negative affect); the definitional limits are unclear and inconsistent, filled with holes left by the shapes of male heterosexuality. As put by Sedgwick herself: "[…] constructions of modern Western gay male identity tend to be, not in the first place «essentially gay», but instead (or at least also): in a very intimately responsive and expressive, though always oblique, relation to incoherences implicit in modern male heterosexuality."[36] The "dance" around solicitor Kraykowski can be considered a specific emblem of that thesis.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

36 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1990),145.

Rafał Nahirny

"Everyone Says I-Love-You": An Analysis of the Declaration of Love

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1.1

In the examples that J. L. Austin uses in his scrupulous research presented in *How to Do Things with Words*, the whole gamut of interpersonal relations is on display: "I insult you,"[1] "I apologize," "I bid you welcome,"[2] "I am sorry," "I am grateful," "I congratulate."[3] Only one statement appears to be missing, but anyone who has ever fallen in love will testify to its importance. There is no "I-love-you"; that simple and banal declaration of love.

The texts of Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein provide the opportunity for a philosophical enquiry that might supplement the means proposed by Socrates/Plato in the *Symposium*, and expressed by Diotima: "There is nothing to wonder at, [Diotima] replied [to Socrates], the reason is that one part of love is separated off and receives the name of the whole."[4] Identifying the meaning of the

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1 John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 68.

2 Ibid., 44-45.

3 Ibid., 79-80.

4 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html, accessed December 21, 2017.

words "I-love-you" therefore means finding the whole of love, the feelings to which these words refer. The analysis thus requires a breakdown of the statement into simple constituent parts, its atoms: identifying the one uttering the words (I , the speaker, the implied subject), love (that mysterious movement of the soul about which the *I* is talking about), and the addressee of the statement ("the listening you," Hippolytus and Aricia from Racine's tragedy).[5] Yet we will follow the direction in which both *Philosophical Investigations* and *How to Do Things with Words* seem to point, and concentrate our analysis solely on the verbal utterances that concern love – and especially: "I-love-you."

1.2

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein tries to go beyond the theory of language that he himself previously presented in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, formulating a concept of language as tools: "Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws. – The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects."[6] According to the premises of *Philosophical Investigations*, the main subject of our enquiry should be the way in which specific expressions are used. Contrary to what Wittgenstein wrote in the *Tractatus*, the function of words is not just to state facts; there are many other linguistic games, of which reporting on something is just one. Austin is of a similar opinion when he writes, "It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a «statement» can only be to «describe» some state of affairs, or to state some «fact», which it must do either truly or falsely."[7] According to Wittgenstein, the analysis should no longer examine the "s t r a n g e connection of a word with an object,"[8] but the "language-game," "the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven."[9] To describe the language-game, it will be necessary to consider the context in which the words are spoken. We ought to be able to describe language in its action, and point to the rules of use of specific words and phrases. We therefore need to leave

5 We shall return to Racine's *Phaedra* on a number of occasions in order to illustrate the mechanisms and rules of language play related to declarations of love.

6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 9.

7 Austin, *How to Do Things*, 1.

8 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23.

9 Ibid., 8.

aside all our cultural knowledge on what love is, and treat the language-game as a primal fact. As Wittgenstein writes, "The point is not to explain a language-game by means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game."[10] We must therefore go beyond "I-love-you" as a declaration of love. This is also the path that Roland Barthes appears to follow. In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, he proposes understanding "I-love-you" as a figure that does not refer to a confession understood as declaring one's feelings, but to a "love cry."[11] "Whence a new view of I - l o v e - y o u. Not as a symptom but as an action."[12]

2.1

In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* we can read: "I-love-you has no usages. Like a child's word, it enters into no social constraint; it can be a sublime, solemn, trivial word, it can be an erotic, pornographic word. It is a socially irresponsible word."[13] What changes the "I-love-you" during its socially irresponsible wanderings is its usage. After all, it is not only lovers who use these words towards each other, but also, for example, family members. And after all, there is a long, Christian tradition of using these words to address God (prayer, according to Wittgenstein, is also a type of language-game). The same people might use the expression "I-love-you" in many different language-games: apologising, forgiving, seduction and so forth. But a special usage, a particular language-game, seems to be reserved for "I-love-you" as a declaration of love.[14]

2.2

Learning a language is not solely about understanding what words mean using ostensive definitions of their meanings, as shown by the passage from

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10 Ibid., 175.

11 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 147. Is it not the case that Phaedra's cry when Hippolytus is to leave, when she is perhaps seeing him for the last time, epitomises what Barthes is writing about when he speaks of "I-love-you" as a cry?

12 Ibid., 152.

13 Ibid., 148.

14 Let us also note that one can also declare love in many different ways, of which "I-love-you" is just one.

Augustine's *Confessions* that opens *Philosophical Investigations*; it also entails the skill of using them, which we acquire by observing others.[15]

A certain difficulty arises, however, when learning to use words associated with the intimate sphere of human life. The situations in which we use these words and expressions usually exclude witnesses, "the observer."[16] Observing and learning them is therefore somehow mediated (for example by television).[17]

2.3

A language-game involves skill and familiarity with the rules concerning using specific names to which concrete paradigms are attributed: "A paradigm that is used in conjunction with a name in a language-game – that would be an example of something which corresponds to a name and without which it would have no meaning."[18] According to Wittgenstein, in the case of language-games we can speak of two types of paradigms – apart from those crucial for a given game, there are also paradigms of behaviour: "It is, one would like to say, not merely the picture of the behaviour that belongs to the language-game with the words 'he is in pain', but also the picture of the pain. Or, not merely the paradigm of the behaviour, but also that of the pain."[19]

In this case, we encounter further difficulties. Despite many efforts, the paradigm of the name "love" remains rather enigmatic, and in addition, in the case of love there is an internal paradox in the paradigms of behaviour, as Niklas Luhmann notes in *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. These paradigms exist not so that they may be realised, but rather in order to constantly transgress them: "following rules meant not to follow the beloved."[20] Excessively zealous adherence to these conventions may be

15 "One learns the game by watching how others play it" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 31).

16 Ibid.

17 As Barthes writes, "every other night, on TV, someone says: *I love you*" (*A Lover's Discourse*, 151). Given the number of television channels available today, we can surmise that this declaration appears on screens much more frequently.

18 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 31.

19 Ibid., 108.

20 Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 69.

interpreted as hiding behind a social mask, and playing another inauthentic role, whereas an intimate relationship is in fact based upon the illusion of directness, and the assumption that we are in contact with the other person's "true self."[21] This is also why in intimate relations there is a stronger emphasis than anywhere else on breaking – breaking through – conventional behaviours.

2.4

The recipient of the "I-love-you" becomes something of a "certainty" by means of the declaration of love. This declaration also entails an end to the game of seduction, signs and signals of love; it is a radical conclusion to uncertainty and ambiguity. And yet, "the one who does not say I-love-you (between whose lips I-love-you is reluctant to pass) is condemned to emit the many uncertain, doubting, greedy signs of love, its indices, its «proofs»: gestures, looks, sighs, allusions…."[22]

Although the question of certainty appears on the margins of reflections in language-games, and rather in mathematical contexts, one can still draw conclusions regarding the way in which other language-games operate:

> I can be as c e r t a i n of someone else's feelings as of any fact. But this does not make the sentences "He is very depressed," "25 × 25 = 625," and "I am 60 years old" into similar instruments. A natural explanation is that the certainty is of a different k i n d . – This seems to point to a psychological difference. But the difference is a logical one.[23]

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21 Barthes writes of the figure of truth that it is "every episode of language refer[ing] to the «sensation of truth» the amorous subject experiences in thinking of his love, either because he believes he is the only one to see the loved object «in its truth», or because he defines the specialty of his own requirement as a truth concerning which he cannot yield" (*A Lover's Discourse*, 229).

22 Ibid., 154.

23 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 235. In this example, which for Wittgenstein is a point of departure for reflecting on mathematical certainty, another type of certainty, that of someone else's feelings, appears as a counterpoint. Wittgenstein writes that this is not only a difference in the degree of certainty, but also one of the types of certainty. It is not the case that certainty is only a specific psychological state: "Am I less certain that this man is in pain than that 2 × 2 = 4? – Is the first case therefore one of mathematical certainty? «Mathematical certainty» is not a psychological concept" (ibid., 236). Mathematical disputes, says Wittgenstein, can be settled "with certainty" (ibid.).

Every language-game is entitled to a specific kind of certainty.[24] In the case of a declaration of love, of course, this means the certainty of "someone else's feelings." Lovers will therefore organise their behaviour in such a way as to persuade each other of the genuineness of their confessions.

According to certain indications, this game is not about likening this certainty to mathematical certainty. Sometimes, on the contrary, it is advised to walk the tightrope between certainty and uncertainty. In this case as well, the certainty of "the other person's feelings" is taken into account, forming a point of reference for subsequent moves.

2.5

The language-game in which the declaration of love is employed is, as we have realised by now, a unique one. This is because it concerns not so much the adept use of clearly defined names and expressions, but rather jointly defining and negotiating them in the course of the game while constructing an intimate relationship.

The paradigms of love and behaviour accompanying this sensation are highly problematised. The lovers know that a declaration of love is needed for establishing their mutual relationship. Yet they must work out their own system of signs and emblems of love, clarify and specify the language which they use in order to construct a mutual connection. Therefore, whereas the purpose of the language-game described at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* is to build a house, the game opened by a declaration of love is distinctly self-oriented. Granted its ultimate purpose is to establish an intimate relationship, this however cannot take place without defining the fundamental names and expressions during the game, which also decides upon the nature of subsequent moves. What characterises this game is the fact that it is realised by determining its own paradigms.

2.6

A declaration of love certainly fulfils the criteria of "explicit performative" as stated by Austin: one that is "first person singular present indicative active."[25] We can therefore try to examine "I-love-you" from the perspective of his conclusions.

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24 Ibid., 235.

25 Austin, *How to Do Things*, 68-69.

In an analytical sense, a declaration of love is a very risky venture. As a performative, it is extremely susceptible to "failure." According to Austin, the following conditions must be satisfied for the procedure to end in success: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked,"[26] and "the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and completely."[27] It now becomes clear why, according to Barthes, silence is so very painful for the declarer: "To I-l o v e-y o u there are various mundane answers: «I do not love y o u»', «I do not believe a word», «Why do you have to say so?», etc. But the true dismissal is: «There is no answer»."[28] Why is this the case? Because it is not just the emotion that is dismissed, but also the very offer to engage in communication. The procedure may be severed internally, for example through the answer "I do not love y o u," or externally, through silence, as a result of which the words of the declaration lose their performative power.

This is also why Hippolytus is silent when Phaedra confesses her love for him: although in fact Racine takes his voice away in order to highlight her feeling of being rejected by her beloved. Hippolytus finishes with the words: "I go…" He makes to depart, to leave the stage. Perhaps he understands all too well Phaedra's earlier words, and wishes to do what people who suspect that somebody is about to declare their love to them often do: stop them from making this declaration. But Phaedra interrupts him: "You see that Phaedra's wild desires are out, / I love […]."[29] To bring this dramatic scene to some kind of conclusion, Racine gives a voice to Oenone, Phaedra's servant: "For God's sake come, my queen, unless / you want the shame of hostile witnesses. / Return at once from here, and shun this place."[30]

3.1

In their declaration of love, subjects begin a new language-game. In Wittgenstein's terms, this is the first move in a new language-game, although in a certain sense it can also be treated as the conclusion of another one.

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26 Ibid., 34.

27 Ibid., 35.

28 Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 149.

29 Jean Racine, *Phaedra*, trans. C. J. Holcomb (Online: Ocaso Press, 2008), http://www.ocasopress.com/pdf/racine_phaedra_translation.pdf, line 672, accessed December 21, 2017.

30 Ibid., line 710.

The question "What does it mean that you love me?" or alternatively "Why do you love me?" is the next move in the game initiated by the declaration of love. These are formulated in the spirit of the philosophy of language from the *Tractatus*. Above all, they call for analysis of the meaning of such words as "love." In this way, the questions strip the declaration of love of its performative power.[31]

On the one hand, of course, this "question, repeated by women ad nauseam"[32] is a narcissistic one, which should rightfully be posed as such: "what is it in me that constitutes me as an object of desire" and plays a crucial role in the constitution of identity?[33] On the other, though, it is dictated by the rules binding in this language-game, which strives to specify the paradigms of the names used in it.

3.2

At the basis of this question lies a conviction similar to that which introspectionist psychologists have nurtured, and still do. This is based upon the problematic premise that all internal states are transparent and directly available to a subject. Indeed, we may say that we know we are experiencing a feeling defined as fear. We can "be scared" without knowing exactly what fear is, and how, for example, it differs from dread. From this perspective, the sentence "I know that I love you, but I don't have to know straightaway what it means to love" is neither improbable nor false.

In this sense, we are an enigma to our very selves, and, just like the behaviour of others, we must and try to understand our own inner experiences. In this respect, according to Charles Taylor, we need the help of others: "Even as the most independent adult, there are moments when I cannot clarify what I feel until I talk about it with certain special partner(s)."[34] In this sense, the question is not the right one, and the inability to answer it is by no means synonymous with incorrect reading of one's own emotions or feelings. After

31 Slavoj Žižek also uses another example to describe this mechanism. The statement "You are my master" does not mean being a master in general; you are always a master for somebody, an "I" uttering these words, someone's view making you the master thanks to the performative power of this statement. See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 131.

32 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

33 Ibid.

34 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 36.

all, if this were not the case, we would have no need for psychology. The role of this question is different. It is meant to initiate and introduce the problem of defining what love is and what it means to love, in the very centre of the just-started language-game.

3.3

The protagonists of Racine's tragedy are entangled in a complex web of social power relations. Both Hippolytus in relation to Aricia, and Phaedra in relation to Hippolytus hold power over the other person, the object of their feelings. But the actual declaration of love radically turns this state of affairs around. Hippolytus and Phaedra discard their privileges, which are the result of a specific situation in the system of social relations.

As Žižek writes:

> "Being-a-king" is an effect of the network of social relations between a "king" and his "subjects"; but – and here is the fetishistic misrecognition – to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the thing is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of "being-a-king" were a "natural" property of the person of a king.[35]

The enamoured subject, aware of this paradox, so to speak, acknowledges the power, which he sees as resulting from the positive characteristics of the object of love, and not from a symbolic mandate. The declaration of love is therefore also an attempt to transgress the fetishistic recognition of social relations.

In this symbolic abnegation of power, we find a characteristic feature of love: striving to encounter who the Other really is, without masks, social roles, and the theatre of everyday life ("None of you know what he/she is really like!"). It is at this point that the question repeated endlessly by women would find an additional justification unnoticed by Žižek, as a necessary supplement to the gesture of the subject declaring love.

4.1

Classical language theory assumes that "the individual words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. […] Every word

35 Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 20.

has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands."[36] According to this definition, a declaration of love would mostly be about informing the listener of a certain mental state. Yet it is undeniable that certain movements of the soul are the cause of making declarations of love. So what do we need all the earlier analysis for? What did it show us? Is the absence of a declaration of love in analyses dictated by the fear of admitting that a declaration of love does not refer to certain inner feelings?

There is surely no doubt that we can love without declaring love. But this does not change the fact that a declaration has a certain performative power in which, perhaps, the lunacy of love is fulfilled.[37]

4.2

A declaration of love is not limited solely to informing the recipient of one's inner experiences. The attempt to define the essence of love, and what it means to love, is not all that happens in the act of professing love.[38] There is also something that we might call, following Austin, the "performative power" of the declaration.

If speaking is opening up to the Other, as Emmanuel Levinas writes,[39] then a declaration of love is the most radical opening of all, as it exposes one to the most painful wounds, to the humiliation that destroys human dignity. No guardedness or even circumspection are permitted here.

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36 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2.

37 Phaedra and Hippolytus wait until news of the death of Theseus with their declaration. Could this mean that their lunacy has its limits? News of the death of Theseus, a guarantor, as it were, of the prohibitions that they are breaking with their love, triggers a disastrous series of events. Although Hippolytus is to an extent waiting for this situation, it also accentuates his "lunacy," as he offers the crown to a woman whose feelings he cannot even suspect.

38 Barthes is very radical in his opinion, arguing that analysis of the performative effect illustrates the entire meaning of the declaration of love; it "has no other referent than its utterance: it is a performative" (*A Lover's Discourse*, 148); "The word (the word-as-sentence) has a meaning only at the moment I utter it; there is no other information in it but its immediate saying: no reservoir, no armory of meaning. Everything is in the speaking of it" (ibid., 148-149).

39 This exposure "is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability." See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (London: Springer, 2010), 45.

As an example of abuse through "not having the requisite intentions,"[40] Austin gives promises: "«I promise», said when I do not intend to do what I promise."[41] I can promise something, without having the intention of keeping the promise at the moment when I say the words "I promise." But still I trigger the whole mechanism associated with the "game of promising." With these words, I take on a certain responsibility, giving others a reason for specific expectations in the future, although my intentions conflict with my words. Does even a fraud who says "I-love-you" insincerely not expose himself to humiliation and rejection? In this case too, insincerity as an abuse, in the sense in which Austin understands the word, initiates the performative power of the statement.

A declaration of love always assumes the possibility of rejection. It is hard to imagine an easier way to humiliate a person. Is it not the case that every person declaring love faces the other person entirely defencelessly? At this moment, the recipient holds the speaker's fate in his or her hands. The declaration of love is tantamount to saying "You can do anything to me." The enamoured party gives up his privileges, handing the recipient of the declaration complete control over himself. The listener can make him happy, but can also deride his feelings and humiliate him in this or another way.

And is this not where the art of the declaration of love lies? The enamoured subject decides to declare his love, although the feeling that he is experiencing is not entirely clear to him. But is it not in this courage, in the risk to which he is exposing himself, that his love is ultimately fulfilled and realised?

4.3

A declaration of love brings a threefold risk for the enamoured party: that of silence, humiliation, and getting involved in a game whose roles he does not fully understand. Everything here is ambiguous, imprecise, as if impossible to pin down; but it is this lack of clarity, which one cannot avoid experiencing, that sustains and organises the whole game.

As a result of this "impotence" of language, is the only answer to the question "why do you love me?" the tautology "I-love-you, because I love you"? The enquiry designated by *Philosophical Investigations* and *How to Do Things with Words* shows that we can answer this question in the negative. "I-love-you, because I love you" will remain a tautology as long as we consider the declaration in the spirit of the *Tractatus*.

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40 Austin, *How to Do Things*, 40.

41 Ibid.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, we can find the following passage: "But when I call out «Slab!», then what I want is *that he should bring me a slab*! – Certainly, but does wanting this consist in thinking in some form or other a different sentence from the one you utter?"[42] What, then, is this different sentence that results from the performative power of the declaration of love that the enamoured subject thinks? Perhaps it goes like this: "I will take a risk for you…, I will expose myself to injury, humiliation…, I will give you complete power over me…, you can do whatever you like with me now…, because I love you."

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

42 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 12.

Commentaries

Grzegorz Grochowski

Sentimental Education

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Relations between literature and the world of emotions are undoubtedly numerous, complex, and ambiguous, and as such, difficult to frame with a simple and clear typology. One can, however, assume roughly that they resurface in three main areas and determine, to a degree, the work's genesis, content, and mode of interaction. Emotions play, therefore, three different roles: in the first instance they appear as the presumed, pre-textual and irrational source of artistic creation, a field of psychic tensions which provoke a person to reach for the pen. In the second case, various states of the heart are chosen as the object of presentation, becoming the topic of a moralizing or psychologizing deliberation, a phenomenon illustrated or evoked by a sequence of artistic images. Finally, in their third manifestation, they may be approached as an aspect of reading, as mechanisms influencing the nature of reception. The oldest literary tradition seems to rely on the third approach: already in Aristotle one finds the attempt to employ language in the service of the theory of reception, whose essence, as we all remember, lied in the experience of fear and pity. The genetic explanation, assuming the work to be a record of the author's emotional states, blossomed much later, mainly in the nineteenth century

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and had several sources, including the romantic personalization of the poetic word, positivist determinism, and finally the spectacular development of psychology as a separate discipline which included also the psychology of creative processes, aspiring to the standard of science. This approach, undoubtedly, has been embodied best by psychoanalysis which explains literary images, tropes, and figures as phantasmal manifestations of the obsessive speech of desire. But one does not need to look as far as the Freudian theory of sublimation and secondary revision; a wish to decipher artistic images and use literature to enter the intimate world of the artist's emotions can be found also in several classical texts of twentieth-century philology and literary history. Juliusz Kleiner's monumental work repeatedly refers to emotions accompanying the artist writing certain passages, discusses the "atmosphere of renewed feelings which surrounded the composition of the poem," the presentation of "the results of experience" in the completed work, and asks about the extent to which the "emotional hue of the poet's memories" became more vivid in the process of writing. Although interpretations such as these are not based on any particular affect theory, the old fashioned trust in intuition and commonsensical assumptions endows them with a discreet retro charm.

Genetic interpretations and theories of reception are usually located, however, within the range of a broader concept and they bear a clear authorial mark, associated either with a particular scholar or a particular school of thought. Since the emotional life of neither the writer nor the reader is open to us, we must usually put our trust in the intuition of the scholar or the axioms of a given methodology while on the risky journey into the sphere of personal experiences and desires. What seems more tangible and recognizable (although some will view this as a superstition), is the dynamic of human emotions and states of the heart at the level of literary images, in the sphere of presented reality. A sphere which requires special attention because it is here that literature first determines and reveals its attitude to the world of emotions as well as its understanding of the phenomena of psychic life. It is also here that we see with the most clarity the role of the word in the shaping of the collective imagination through its symbolic potential, both mythologizing and demythologizing. Literary images of passion and emotion reveal the importance we assign to emotionality in our life, show where we locate its sources and how we perceive its role, betray the degree to which we identify with spontaneous emotions or wish to be separated from them, and outline the hierarchies we assign to them. Naturally, literature is not the only place where this takes place, nor does literature have a monopoly on the shaping of such convictions – it usually enters various relations, for instance, cooperating, competing with, or complementing other types of discourse (philosophical, religious, legal, scientific). Although, as Anthony Giddens claims

in *The Transformations of Intimacy*, "modern societies have a covert emotional history, yet to be fully drawn into the open,"[1] and the same can be said about the history of the collective emotional imagination, certain similarities are visible even at first glance.

French classical tragedy, for instance, constitutes an important chapter in the development of the literary anthropology of emotions (notably, in a discussion of the declaration of love included in this issue, the author refers precisely to Jean Racine's *Phèdre*) – departing from the ancient model determined by the categories of plot, catharsis, fate, and action it revaluates the notion of character, transforming drama into a study of passion. The work's structure is no longer dominated by the iron logic of events, aiming to present the human being as succumbing to affects and confronted with the moral principles, entangled in the conflict between duty and desire. It is hard to overlook the fact that the same cultural formation gave birth to *Passions of the Soul*, where Descartes attempts to catalogue, order, explain, and in fact cognitively tame the "movement of the spirits" in their various forms. The philosopher approached his task with the utmost meticulousness, venturing even into the areas of anatomical explanation and deciding that, contrary to the general belief, emotions are located not in the heart but in "the little gland in the middle of the brain whence it radiates into all the rest of the body by the mediation of spirits, nerves, even blood, which, participating in the impressions of the spirits, can carry them through the arteries into all the members."[2] Such explanations have their undeniable charm, but what seems crucial here is the clear distrust of the soul's mysteries in this instrumental approach to human emotions – Descartes directly formulates the problem of their proper "use" and asks "wherein all the passions are serviceable and wherein they are harmful."[3] Naturally, the artistic vision seems more pessimistic and mesmerized by the fatal power of passion while the discourse of rationalism clearly opts for the strategy of objectification. However, despite all their differences, there is a similarity in the impulse to submit passions to a detailed (poetic or philosophical) vivisection and, consequently, to enable their differentiation, evaluation, and control.

Actually, it would be more difficult to locate such aspirations two centuries later in Charles Darwin's classic *The Expression of the Emotions in Man*

1 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformations of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2.

2 Rene Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul,* trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989) , 37.

3 Ibid., 59.

and Animals. The work does not deliberate on the measures to be employed against passion or reflect on the joys of the soul, but it retains the impulse for classification and systematic explanation. Darwin is interested mostly in the etiology and symptomatology of all affects, which is why his work presents, first and foremost, a detailed study of the somatic causes behind phenomena such as low spirits, tender feelings, sulkiness, ill temper, or horror (and while the work reveals no clear desire here to control the impulses of the heart, one may still sense in it a tone of cognitive superiority with regard to reactions that can be analyzed in comparison with the stamping of rabbits or the rattling of porcupines). The complications of emotional life are explained thus not by referencing some abstract *spirits*, but rather established behavioral habits – the swelling of the body, the pouting of lips, drawing back of the ears, frowning, or "contraction of the platysma myoides muscle."[4] This focus on the anatomical mechanisms may have been caused by the progressive specialization of the various spheres of human cultural activity and the growing distance between particular discourses: scientific, philosophical, ethical, artistic, and religious. The elimination of the teleological aspects should be interpreted as an attempt to preserve cognitive objectivity and a sign of an increased methodological awareness leading to the removal of all external influences from the (say, psychological) deliberation. However, one could also argue that Darwin was an advocate not only of the unadorned truth of natural sciences but also of the attitudes found in the voluminous literary works of the era. After all, a similar reductionism became the official artistic ideology of Emil Zola who explains his famous tale of adultery and murder by referencing Taine's comparison of vice and virtue to chemical substances such as vitriol and sugar. As a matter of fact, the scientist, quasi-biological approach to the issue of emotions appeared in literature already a little earlier, in Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, a cycle which may be read as an almost encyclopedic compendium of all human passions – from ambition, through anxiety, envy, shame to despair and fear (the author's fascination with empiricism can be seen already in his method – usually a case study – and in the analytical approach signaled for instance by the "scientific" metaphor in the title of *The Physiology of Marriage*). And at the level of immanent poetics, one cannot overlook the popularity of physiognomy in nineteenth-century literature which used the characters' appearance as a medium to express their psychological construction. Naturally, we are talking here about certain imaginative clichés, typical phenomena which did not encompass the entire array of artistic creation from the era. However, the presence of the naturalistic context (even if

4 Charles Darwin, *The Works of Charles Darwin*, vol. 23, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: NY University Press, 1989), 233.

muted or minimal) can be found even in the great stories about the failing mechanism of emotional adaptation such as *Madame Bovary* or *Anna Karenina.*

The nineteenth-century fascination with anatomy and physiology of emotion culminated in the masterpiece of the following century where it also transformed into its direct opposite. I am talking, of course, about Proust's consecutive volumes where he penetrates the microstructure of emotion to such depths that it loses any recognizable, permanent shape, and changes its consistency, falling apart into a sequence of poorly coordinated tremors of sensitivity, returning resentments, and fleeting observations. The inhuman distance accompanying Proust on his journey through the labyrinth of time is admittedly typical of the entire era dawning at that moment. Twentieth-century literature has largely confirmed the diagnosis proposed by Ortega y Gasset in *The Dehumanization of Art* where "a work of art vanishes from sight for a beholder who seeks in it nothing but the moving fate of John and Mary or Tristan and Isolde."[5] Indeed, the writers of the twentieth century, from Joyce to Beckett, from Gombrowicz to Białoszewski, generally used their work as a laboratory for new forms of speech, careful to avoid the issue of the dilemmas of the heart. The novel began to deconstruct existing conventions (through various travesties, parodies, and pastiches), problematize the properties of the material (in several types of linguistic prose), and ask questions about the essence of the creative act (in its intertextual varieties). Drama focused on presenting the alienating power of language and on documenting communicative paralysis (although one should add, perhaps, that several forms of this particular literary genre retained the strongest traces of the fascination with the drama of various emotional tensions.) Finally, poetry, associated not that long ago with eruptions of lyricism, became largely – to quote Ortega y Gasset yet again – a "higher algebra of metaphor." Admittedly, suggestive counter-examples could be evoked with reference to individual artists and their selected works. After all, it seems hardly possible to purge literature (and poetry in particular) entirely of the theme and the problem of emotions, and such a radical and finite separation of the word from the sphere of human experience would surely result in a great impoverishment. Thus, feelings do occasionally have a voice in the work of this or other more lyrically minded writer or poet of the era, but their presence, usually muted by the avant-garde shaming of emotions (notable also in the classical modes), is camouflaged, veiled, translated into a language of motor tensions, reduced to equivalent imagery or encoded

5 Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 10.

in a sequence of metaphorical hieroglyphics (which happens in the works of authors as different as Bruno Schulz and Julian Przyboś).

This tendency undoubtedly goes beyond the sphere of artistic activity, which allows once again to look for similarities, analogies, and mutual influences between the various spheres of culture. For instance, the discourse of literary studies focused on binary oppositions, narrative patterns, layered configurations, generic systems, and conventional structures. All the while, the emotional reception of the work was classified – for instance by the New Critics – as an „affective fallacy." Even a casual observer must see clearly that mainstream philosophy of that period also shifted almost entirely toward language – it would be hard to find approaches treating emotions as a guarantee of reliable cognition or a source of legitimate sense. Music which, according to Ortega y Gasset from Beethoven to Wagner constituted an expression of personal feelings or even a melodrama, in the more recent period became an acoustic phenomenon, a precise combination of sounds, or a random cacophony, as a consequence of not only Debussy, but also Stravinsky, Stockhausen and Cage.

But the picture would be incomplete without mentioning, at least in passing, a significant fracture dividing twentieth-century culture into two areas governed by dramatically different, perhaps even contradictory principles. Programmatic antihumanism became, paradoxically, a battle cry of culture originating in humanism, celebrating cognitive or esthetic values, aspiring to sovereignty and, at least declaratively, striving to cast off ideological and market circumstances. At the same time, there emerged a separate world of popular texts seemingly aimed precisely at showing and provoking various emotions. In fact, one could probably create an emotional genealogy where individual units and genre varieties – melodrama, horror, soap opera, romantic comedy, crime story – are distinguished by the appropriate set of dominant emotions, experiences, moods, and sentiments. In fact, this kind of a mechanical association of form, genre, content, and stereotypes of reception, where literature becomes a kind of spiritual tickling, was precisely what made it anathema to several writers, critics, and thinkers representing both the aristocratic and the emancipatory visions of culture. However, as we know from Freud, all that which is repressed returns as a phantasm, disguised as something else, simultaneously evoking disgust as well as desire, rejected but continuously renewed. This is why the ghosts of simple, naive emotions, native usually to the land of kitsch, crossed from time to time the symbolic barrier and visited the world of sublimated art, disturbing the peace of the solipsistic aesthetes. Actually, several writers and artists summoned these specters themselves and – faced with the exhaustion of high art – reached for forms and methods typical of cabaret, pulp literature tabloid press, comics,

and advertising (let us only mention S. I. Witkiewicz, W. Gombrowicz, A. Warhol, R. Lichtenstein, J. Cortazar, U. Eco). On the other hand, one can clearly see that by neighboring so-called "high art," popular culture has learned a lot and largely shed its simplistic aesthetic naiveté. Movie theatres today, apart from traditional comedies, horrors, and tear-jerkers, increasingly often present narratives which go beyond the simple model of "emotional contagion" by filtering emotions through the sieve of exaggerated stylization and play with generic conventions underpinned with ironic distance. Techniques of composition, methods of editing, and narrative strategies, once associated with great innovators, gradually have become commonplace in mass entertainment. Avant-garde techniques of image creation are used today even in purely persuasive forms such as commercials.

If we go back to literature for a diagnosis of its current state, we will see that writers more eagerly "pollute" their work with the "burden" of the human affects than they did in the mid-twentieth century. The majority of important novels from the last few decades (again, instead of an exhaustive presentation let me enumerate a handful of authors as different as Y. Andrukhovych, J. M. Coetzee, M. Cunningham, I. McEwan, S. Rushdie, S. Selenić, D. Ugresic, M. Vargas Llosa, S. Walters) center on seemingly banal, clichéd, and simple subjects such as infatuation, betrayal, departure, nostalgic yearning, pain, and loneliness. Contrary to their great predecessors, their authors rarely take up journeys leading potentially to the discovery of another form of metafiction, a presentation more radical than the stream of consciousness or to the creation of a novel whose elements can be rearranged in several different ways. Instead, they eagerly present emotional conflicts, yield to the temptation of lyricism, sometimes even reach for clearly sentimental plots. Notably, authorial preferences of this kind parallel the tendencies found today also in other areas of culture. For instance, linguistics – not that long ago still obsessed with systems, reaching for the mathematical methods and viewed as an ideal of exactness, precision, and methodological purism – today (mainly in its cognitive version) increasingly often analyzes phenomena as indeterminate as the experience of love or the ideal of happiness (see, for instance, Luhmann's *Love as Passion* or *Anatomia szczęścia. Emocje pozytywne w językach i kulturach* świata [*The Anatomy of Happiness: Positive Emotions in Languages and Cultures of the World*] edited by A. Duszak and N. Pawlak). It is difficult to evaluate this tendency from the perspective of literary audiences. It has brought some undoubtedly beneficial results: the word, in a way, has acquired substantiality, has become saturated with real content (however we decide to interpret the latter), and it probably also resonates better with readers. This positive evaluation, however, is accompanied by a certain uneasiness. Despite their unquestionable value, a substantial number of recent works seems to be – to

some extent – underpinned with sentimentalism accompanied by its usual faults including moral impatience, a tendency to generalize, a mythologization of happy intimate relationships, and the naive belief in the spontaneous goodness of the "common man." It is something more than simply a shameful disposition of the less notable writers. It is a shadow, however discreet and subtle, falling across the work of the most renowned and "brutal" contemporary authors, not to mention at least some of Michel Houellebecq's novels. And it is not true that the specter of sentimentality is not detrimental to those, indeed exquisite, works. Meanwhile, the authors of the truly intriguing texts use emotions as a tool for gaining cultural knowledge or as a means of social critique; they spin the narrative of feelings, but only to show, as Michel Faber does in his Victorian lampoon, their impossibility in a given world.

Translation: Anna Warso

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