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Forms of Survival

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AGNIESZKA DAUKSZA

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ADDRESS

Nowy Świat 72, room A40, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland
phone +48 22 657 28 07, phone/fax +48 22 828 32 06
e-mail: **redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl**
www.tekstydrugie.pl

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Marcin Hernas | tessera.org.pl

LANGUAGE EDITING AND PROOFREADING

Benjamin Koschalka, **Rafał Pawluk**, **Justyna Tabaszewska**

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Agnieszka Dauksza

Forms of Survival

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A nightmare becomes interesting when you can give in to its twisted power. In almost every intense experience, headroom appears that can be exploited for your own objectives, no matter how insignificant. Finding yourself in the sense of powerlessness, exhaustion, loss of control, or defeat? It is certainly worth looking for your own style of resignation. Not even for someone to notice – you must abandon the illusion. But a loss, a personalized form of loss – if we are capable of losing – is a circumstance that can open an ocean of potentials. You just need to switch attention – not only that of others – and wait something out, let it go or take ownership, fight from a weak position, become embroiled, or take a pounding. You can also flee or get involved, enter a role, or, finally, embody yourself. Indeed, you can become almost anything, even just for a moment.

An insect, for example, as in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*; a dog, as in Rachel Yoder's novel; a cockroach or balding bird, as in Bruno Schulz; a modern-day caveman, as in George Saunders's story; or a dolphin, as the actress Jennifer Coolidge declared. For playing a dolphin is a survival strategy. The range of strategies is infinite, but most are connected by the point at

Agnieszka Dauksza – Ph.D., works at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University, author of books: *Jaremianka. Biografia* [Jaremianka. Biography] (2017); *Afektywny modernizm* [Affective modernism] (2017), *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby* [Club Auschwitz and other clubs] (2016, 2021); *Kobiety na drodze* [Women on the road] (2013). She edited, among others, volumes: *Maria Jarema: wymyślić sztukę na nowo* [Maria Jarema. Reinventing Art] and Świadek: *jak się staje, czym jest?* [Witness: How does it become, what is it?]. Email: agnieszka.dauksza@uj.edu.pl.

which the person begins to draw a strange – unexpected, subversive – power from inverting the previous perspective. "Hang in there, it's only life," or something similar. This kind of statement can be overwhelming if we hear it from others. But if it comes in the act of recognizing that we have nothing to lose, it can be a salvation. Not only from convention and pressure, but also from means of concentrated violence.

Starting Points

This is the case with the main character of Tahar Ben Jelloun's book *This Blinding Absence of Light*. After participating in an unsuccessful putsch, Salim, a Moroccan military school cadet, is almost buried alive. Almost, because the powers-that-be decide to prolong the torment of those condemned to death. They are placed underground in cells the size of a grave without access to light but with air. The unbearable ordeal stretches into an expedition lasting many years – losing the orientation points of one's own biography. In the eighteen years he spends underground, Salim divests himself of feelings and memories, drives them away, shaping his perception in such a way that the increasingly blurred images became stationary, ultimately cutting him off from the figure that was once him, "to break free of everything."[1] However, he cares about biological survival – not to cultivate the idea of life as such or in the name of some impossible future. He wants to survive in an act of resistance. The only way he can do this is "to master the little that was left" to him, meaning the consciousness seeking to sustain his tormented body. "I absolutely did not have the soul of a martyr. I had no desire to declare that my blood was 'permissable' [sic – A. D.] and might be shed with impunity. I stamped on the ground as if to remind the madness stalking me that I would not be an easy prey."[2] As a result, from these struggles emerges a new entity carried by the power of survival, existence in subsistence.

Ben Jelloun's story about the secret Tazmamart prison is based on facts, with the example of Salim, while extreme, revealing a certain fundamental mechanism. To survive is to renounce. A person can survive only by cutting him or herself off, forfeiting the past, abandoning that which is familiar and close – to that person and others. An act of survival interpreted as continuity, as success and victory, is usually a myth – one of those not necessarily innocent myths upon which so-called Western culture is founded. In fact, the stories of Arachne, Odysseus and Job also do not portray survival as the continuation of fate. Instead of return, there is a process of radical change, rejection, exclusion, or decay, and only from this does a new

1 Tahar Ben Jelloun, *This Blinding Absence of Light*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: The New Press, 2001), 134.

2 Ibid., 79.

subjectivity emerge – one with little in common with the previous course of life. The victims of violence testify to this rupture in various ways.

For example, the testimony of Stefan Lipniak, who survived several years of captivity at Auschwitz, breaks down when his return to the family home in 1945 is raised, when his mother does not recognize her son. "'Who's there? What do you want? Go away. […] You're not my son, I lost my son long ago.' I tell her, 'But no, Mom, I'm your son, let me in. I'm alive.' […] 'You're Stefek? I don't know you, you don't look like him. I had such freedom, and such a life.'"[3] In Lipniak's biography – like most of those who experience events of mass violence – survival is not the same as subsistence. Retaining one's vital functions – thanks to one's own determination, chance, help from others – does not mean a return to the world from before the event. On the contrary, such individuals are usually once again cast outside of mainstream society. One might say that, after the Second World War in Poland, this circulation was created practically from scratch anyway – the old world ceased to exist. And yet survivors such as Lipniak additionally had to endure the long-term effects of their salvation. Life after survival was one big unknown: they had nowhere to return to, nor did they have loved ones, a home, shelter, contacts, education, and economic or symbolic resources.

Impossible returns are attested to by the ghostly protagonist of a novel by Kossi Efoui, a victim-perpetrator-witness of a fratricidal war in a country reminiscent of Rwanda:

> He returned home, but didn't recognize his neighborhood where it should have been: didn't recognize his house where his house should have stood, didn't know anyone where his family should have been; so he hurried to his friends, but didn't recognize either their houses or their fields, nor their faithful animals. And neither did anyone recognize him. Everyone looked at him as if he were an unknown vagrant.[4]

The context of death is not needed to discern the rift in what outsiders, and sometimes survivors themselves, try to turn into a coherent narrative about survival as a return or continuation. Olga Tokarczuk's Mr. Distinctive, realizing with alarm that his costly replacement face is a replica of a ton of faces looking at him, receives one piece of advice: "you'll get used to it."[5] The bluntness of this suggestion results not

3 Stefan Lipniak, in Agnieszka Dauksza, *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby. Rwane opowieści przeżywców* [Auschwitz Club and other clubs. Torn stories from survivors] (Kraków: Znak, 2021), 43.

4 Kossi Efoui, *Witajcie, powracające widma* [*Solo d'un revenant*], trans. Wawrzyniec Brzozowski (Kraków: Karakter, 2012), 30 (translated from the Polish).

5 Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Concejo, *Mr. Distinctive*, trans. Antonia Lloyd Jones (New York: Seven Stories Press, forthcoming 2025).

only from the impossibility of choosing and the hero's similarity with "everyone." A fundamental change takes place in his self-perception: Mr. Distinctive is no longer distinctive; he becomes someone else entirely.

Transitions

The question of what survival is or can be usually sounds inappropriate. It is either too abstract – when we ask about survival "in general" – or excessively intimate when posed to individuals. It makes sense when it concerns something that is being or has already been done, referring to something embodied and concrete. The answer, meanwhile, either dodges the question or touches the nub of the issue: everything that had to be done or neglected to overcome adversity. Usually contrary to the rules in place, often at the cost of others, frequently without dignity. The successful one tends to use all possible means to secure survival, enduring longer or more successfully than others or the thing that made the struggle necessary. A serious attempt to answer this question entails disclosure of our own tactics for survival to the full extent of this experience: from powerlessness, via dependence, to attempts to maneuver these states. There are therefore as many responses as strategies and forms of survival.

Many times, they are connected by fractured transitions between resignation, activation, withdrawal, and engagement. All those moments when people feel that they cannot go on, yet this is just a warm-up to the suffering. When we delude ourselves that we have strength, and do it so effectively that we ultimately gain it. When someone unexpectedly offers a helping hand, although it seems that we lost our grasp reflex long ago. When we let go and refuse to survive, but do so by our own rules. Or when we are already lost, but defeat proves to be a liberation. After all, it is not always identical biological reflexes – the atavism of the struggle for survival – and attempts to more consciously guide our fate, the seeds of discord and resistance, that work together in us. The process of survival, despite all the contextual differences, always resembles a sine wave, and until the very end it is uncertain when and at which point of the line the cut will be made. A new system of connections forms dynamically around the individual – forces are at work that make the existing endurance difficult, those that benefit it, and those that seem neutral, but can be used for one's own purposes. The contradictory forces are not mutually exclusive, but operate as a resonance determining the context of the event. The individual need not be aware of them to feel the influence that activates streams of passivity and activity and leads to moments of exhaustion and lifts in energy. A person trying to survive is not so much in the whirlpool of events as embodies the mechanism of the whirlpool, drawing into their field everything that can increase their causative mass.

In this sense, survival is the struggle of the individual with outside forces and oneself as the object of survival. A split, or at least mediation, between the "I" struggling for agency and the "I" who gives up, weakens, and withers, seems unavoidable. The act proceeds in trembling – of the body, affects, status – and oscillation between the active and the passive. Except that people trying to survive are not solely active or passive; this division is impossible to sustain. What they are is counter-passive, balancing between agitation to act and withdrawal, and actively responding to stimuli that arrive. I understand counter-passivity as the ability to counteract one's own passivity, manage one's discord, mobilize reserves, and make a series of turns, shifting smoothly from defense, via evasion, to fighting, escaping, and dependence. Counter-passivity is based on known scenarios of behavior, while also marking the potential horizon of salvation through acts of improvisation. Arguments of past and future are only potential references – some among many tools of survival. What counts above all is the here and now, spontaneous reaction to a changing context, mindfulness of one's own feelings and interpretations, and sensing what is happening. To survive means to have good intuition. And this is always past-future, drawing from the body's experience and with designs on further materializations.

However, the sense of time is complicated. One cannot survive by living only in the past. Indeed, cutting oneself off from habits, people, places, things, and memories can be a condition of salvation. It would therefore seem more obvious to keep up the strength by thinking about what will come next when the adversities have been overcome. But the strangeness of this experience is often complex: the past is a closed chapter, with no return, and the future seems so uncertain that it is unthinkable. What is happening now is the only dimension available, but it can be equally unbearable: the person is immersed in a present he or she does not want and tries to wait out. The present, therefore, is embodied, but not necessarily experienced – there is no access to it. This means that those affected by this process, by embodying the present are thrown off the experience of intimacy. They are corporeally exposed to the actions of destructive factors, but have no chance either of regeneration or of feeling themselves. The freedom of the body, urges, customs, the right to manage their own time and space are subordinated to the dictate of external forces. The paradox of the act of survival is therefore that the illusion of steering one's own course is dispelled, and yet individuals are left to their own devices, able to depend solely on themselves or on a changing, improvised community of survival.

It is no coincidence that one of the verbs meaning "survive" in Polish, *przetrwać*, has only a perfective aspect, indicating completion. So one can declare a desire or intention – "I will survive" – or assess a completed act – "I survived" – but not say the equivalent of "I am surviving." Similarly, Polish lacks a word for "survivor" – coinages

such as *przetrwaniec*,[6] *przeżytnik*[7] or *przeżywca*[8] are still met with a skeptical or indulgent reaction. So where is the present of survival lost? And what happens to the subject in this process?

For many reasons, the transitory nature of survival cannot be consolidated, presented, or narrated. It is not so much a snatched-away time as a maelstrom of time and space sucking in the individual's senses and generating intensity. The act of survival contains numerous mutually exclusive possibilities, critical points, turns and ruptures. This seems to be the state that Hayden White described as "a moment of absence of presence, the moment at which one presence is drained of its substance and filled with another."[9] Survival does not occur pre-rationally, just as it is not located outside of experience. While it is taking place, it is by no means clear yet whether this act will crystallize into an experience, whether the individual will manage to surface from the wave of pressure. The subject of survival is exposed to the effects of conflicting tensions and as such becomes a "hot-and-cold" excluded middle. Yet this gap of feeling is not about a void or stoppage; there is a surfeit of impulses and impressions that it may not be possible to assimilate. It is no coincidence that this diagnosis coincides with Brian Massumi's description of the subject lifted by affective stimulation, which is all receptivity.[10] And at the same time, the relational nature of such people is usually suspended, an incidental presence – excluded from circulation. Those who confront them do not see the surviving individuals as they once were, and cannot imagine what they might become. Like the German residents in Kornel Filipowicz's story, who throughout the war – as long as their everyday lives remain – ignore the sight of camp prisoners being led to work next to the ruins:

> Days passed, and every morning at the same time we marched through the town that smelled of caramel candies and synthetic fuel. The town's residents paid no attention

6 Krzysztof Wodiczko, "'Najpierw jestem podejrzany,' rozmowa z A. Sabor" ["First, I am suspected," conversation with A. Sabor], accessed April 6, 2023, https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/najpierw-jestem-podejrzany-132979.

7 Zygmunt Bauman, "Świat nawiedzony" [The haunted world], in *Zagłada. Współczesne problemy rozumienia i przedstawiania*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński and Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2009), 15–27.

8 Dauksza, *Klub Auschwitz*.

9 Hayden White, "Postmodernism and Textual Anxieties," in White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957–2007*, ed. Robert Doran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 305.

10 Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn, 1995).

> to us, didn't turn their heads, didn't look at us, although the clacking of clogs could be heard from far away in the quiet morning air. They were blind and deaf.[11]

But of course, one can survive against hope, with no chance of returning and no future prospects. Without motivation and optimism, against all reason. I do not think that people live in a situation of extreme threat in some abstract, impossible future – survival takes place in small doses, from one respite to the next. It is about being tenacious, latching onto moments, which grow into larger units of time, using more and more tracts of the here-and-now to replenish your bodily and affective endurance. What matters is not the hope itself, but the arduousness of the attempts made, the flexibility of momentary connections, the accumulation or adept spending of energy and matter. Perhaps, in fact, there is even room for hope in survival, but this is a tissue hope, or, as Björk puts it, hope as a well-developed muscle.[12] One that gives support, but is forged through painful repetitions, damage, and ruptures.

Would-be survivors straddle the instinct of self-care, the desire or duty to be involved in the community, and suspension of all reciprocities. Dangers knock them out of the linear experience of time and remove the fluidity of being, but also expose the fragility of the idea of solidarity. However, they also disrupt the sense of one's own agency and the point of the solitary struggle. Support from others is therefore often the only chance – ultimately, the act of survival is seldom performed alone. A labile survival network is formed. Like the one mentioned in his testimony by Karol Tendera, a prisoner at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Depleted and emaciated, sick and with no desire for life, he was supported by his fellow inmates who shared a common place of origin. They carried him, hid him at selection, cared for him, held him up on both sides while marching, and talked him out of throwing himself "at the barbed wire": "Władek Krok saved me – because I was almost unconscious, ready for the crematorium [...] I was two or three days away from getting burned. [...] I was as weak as a fly."[13] Tendera was joining the ranks of the *Muselmänner*, but turned back from the path of absolute decay by solidarity, persuaded at the last moment of the need to survive.

The labile community formed in the situation of threat is a network of reciprocity – the network retains some flexibility of reactions and moderate tolerance for weaker elements – but it by no means excludes the effect of rivalry, hostility, and antagonism. In this "negative" form too, however, survival is a form of dependence,

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11 Kornel Filipowicz, "Biała ręka" [White hand], in Filipowicz, *Biały ptak i inne opowiadania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973) (translated from the Polish).

12 Björk, "Atopos," *Fossora* (One Little Indian Records, 2022).

13 Karol Tendera, in Dauksza, *Klub Auschwitz*, 340–341.

relational and changing everyone embroiled in the process. Many cases could be listed, but the mechanism is the same whatever the context, as seen in even the simplest stories. Ulrich Hub's tale of the lame duck and blind chicken, for instance.[14] A chance connection formed because of the protagonists' loneliness and powerlessness grows into a survival network. Their relationship is concocted, invented by one of them. Like the journey, in which the protagonists deceive each other and – rather than forests, rivers and mountains – take on the obstacles of their own yard. Yet the dangers that they face have a real meaning, for this is how they experience them. And the potential loss also becomes real, especially when mystification turns into engagement for a shared experience. Past traumas fade and old dreams vanish – the characters in Hub's fable do not remember, or do not want to remember who they were, and are emancipated, joining together to form a hybrid entity. First they are together to survive, and then to survive they only need each other.

The answer to the question of what it means to "survive" is becoming increasingly complicated. For some, it simply means to live through, to maintain vital functions and biological continuity. There is much to suggest, however, that s u r v i v a l can differ from s u b s i s t e n c e. The biographies of Tadeusz Borowski, Paul Celan, Jean Améry, Jerzy Kosiński and Romain Gary, for all the differences of fate separating them, make it clear that survival of the concentrated violence of war need not go hand in hand with subsistence, enduring its far-reaching consequences. Bruno Bettelheim writes of survival without subsistence as a phenomenon of "retaining a life that has lost all meaning." Such people not only lose their subjective continuity and their self-image, but above all, by living through something they should not be forced to experience, they pass the "point of no return." Adjudicating on such individuals, Giorgio Agamben says that there was nothing human about their maximum suffering. Forced to endure more than they should have had to, they are unable to rejoin social life. When they testify – if they are capable of doing so – they represent not only their own loss, but also – and maybe above all – those who have lost their lives. It is they whom Agamben calls "superstes" – witnesses who survived everything until the end, who were and are mired in it, "charred" by the event, and are forever branded, unable to be neutral. They are at once witnesses and victims. They have often admitted that, though they survived in an objective – biological and legal – sense, nothing protected them from losing themselves. From the maelstrom of the experience of violence, they emerged as different entities. Yet their voices and gestures were dispersed in the welter of more optimistic, unambiguous declarations. They lost out in competition both with individual testimonies of salvation "against all odds" and with the community, political strategies of planned separation from the difficult past – separation meaning a new beginning, a project of power

14 Ulrich Hub and Jörg Mühle, *Duck's Backyard*, trans. Helena Kirkby (Wellington: Gecko Press, 2022).

and agency, (re)building social relations – incidentally, all differences notwithstanding, strategies employed after the war in both Israel and Poland.

Human Lizards

I am writing about the spectrum of survival – about those who lose themselves or are lost on the way – but there are also those who manage, or are at least able to feign, to themselves and others, the fortuitousness, or even success of their efforts. What is it to survive "against all odds"? Survival attempts are often described as aiming for a goal, with clear motivations – the desire for revenge, dissension, hope, the need for reckoning, to punish the guilty, testify to harm, or preserve biological and cultural continuity. As if the fortuity of the act depended on a rational plan, determination, and effective implementation. But might these motivations not be created by survivors ex post as a secondary justification for the strange, difficult process they underwent? And above all, are they not provoked or enforced by the community, which makes stories of determination a prerequisite for survivors to return to social life? It is difficult to escape the impression in such cases that the category of survival is closely interwoven with the concepts of emancipation and social advancement. The fortune of survival is usually viewed through a prism of continuation, the scale of success in the "new life." In the perspective of the narrative memory and trauma, the physical survival of the experience is only a starting point for potential continuations of survival as endurance. It therefore spans between the past – the experience as a precondition – and the future based on this condition.

I call this form the lizard model, survival "against all odds," since the description of it usually focuses on the act of saving some essence of identity, status, or image, and all the losses borne by the individual are presented as an unavoidable cost, something that had to be cut off or abandoned as it would have rendered salvation impossible. This idea of survival is reminiscent of the mechanism employed by lizards, which cast off their tail when endangered to distract their opponent. Although a tail can grow back – in a smaller or deformed state – autotomy means that lizards lose their previous position in the hierarchy.

Wisława Szymborska wrote about the autotomic defensive reaction of the sea cucumber:

> When in danger the sea-cucumber divides itself in two:
> one self it surrenders for devouring by the world,
> with the second it makes good its escape.
> It splits violently into perdition and salvation,
> into fine and reward, into what was and what will be.
> In the middle of its body there opens up a chasm
> with two shores that are immediately alien.

On one shore death, on the other life.
Here despair, there hope.
[…] To die as much as necessary, without going too far.
To grow back as much as needed, from the remnant that survives.[15]

This model, according to which it is possible to salvage the essence of individuality, in the European context has become the most obvious form of representation of survivors. It certainly became entrenched in Western societies after the First World War. Psychologically and physically ravaged soldiers returning to their local communities made a major impact on the social imaginary. They returned alive, albeit radically changed; they experienced loss, and yet survived. Their social status changed, but still they were part of the community and could aspire to rebuild themselves and their position by new rules – performatively as veterans, for example.

The exterminatory nature and scale of mass violence of the Second World War should potentially have changed the way of defining what survival is and in which terms the status of survivors is described. Yet this did not happen – at the level of symbolic and political representation, the loss of those who survived was again gradually turned into a model of survival "against all odds," a lizard model. When, after the Adolf Eichmann trial, a new era began – that of testimony – and thus only then did a delayed, postwar convention of testimony emerge, at the same time the form of expression on survival stabilized. The institutions gathering testimonies from Jewish survivors in Israel, the United States, and Western Europe developed templates of asking and telling about a survival, struggle, resistance or escape. As a result, certain standards of possible reactions to these testimonies were also accepted. Survivors were expected to provide a narrative of the heroism, agency, activation, and action that enabled them to get away from the epicenter of violence. The human lizards therefore spoke of why it was they who had survived, but also about what they had lost: families, friends, homes, their health, dreams, plans. But the more and more often they spoke, the more they moved from a position of victims – which they also were, after all – to one of witnesses – at least from the perspective of outside observers of the testimony. The community expected testimonies to have drama and intensity, colorful illustrations of the triumph of the strength of the spirit over the weakness of the body (and vice versa), cunning, persistence, solidarity. It also expected above all a happy ending and "tried and tested" stories of a successful survival strategy, tips forming a more universal guide or handbook on how to escape oppression.

In this process, the figure of the witness has become synonymous with that of the survivor, who, having survived, should testify. The category of survival is

15 Wisława Szymborska, "Autotomy," trans. Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak, in Szymborska, *Map: Collected and Last Poems*, ed. Clare Cavanagh (New York: Ecco, 2016), 183.

increasingly broad, no longer concerning only traumatizing events. Survival has become an experiential pass to adopt a position, speak out, and testify as an attempt to change status. Those testifying with the power of their authority and the authenticity of their experience and image built a cultural figure of survival, reinforcing the myth of biographical continuity as well as the model of the human lizard. They testified to their losses as well as their painful and difficult, yet still possible continuation, while between the words there was an impossible gap to fill, a barren mental field.

Today, however, it is increasingly difficult to argue for the suitability of the model of survival "against all odds" – for example for describing the experience of migration forced by wars, terror, famine, lack of access to water and poverty. Separation with the family context and loved ones cannot be described as a single, neat cut – "just as required, without excess." Yet Szymborska also states in "Autotomy" that "The abyss doesn't divide us. / The abyss surrounds us."[16] And it seems that the metaphor of constant threat, exposure to loss or failure is closer to the reality of those who first try to survive, and later live – although these stages are also hard to separate. Exposure to extreme stimuli, endless uncertainty, the need to sharpen the senses and reactions to stay alive, while temporary, have long-term consequences. One never emerges from the process of survival whole. This mode is only ever a moment from being ruptured. The next installments are always marked by the damage done; the loss never ends. The destructive potential endures, the individual consigned to incidental continuation.

Indeed, it is worth considering survival as a sum of the interruptions that dispel the illusion of linearity of the experience, knocking the individual from the previous framework violently enough to create a different quality of being. And this is not about the notion of "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger" beloved of capitalist thinking, training the individual in intense experiences to bring about development and progress. Nor is it about complete disintegration, a transformation so far-reaching that it makes self-recognition impossible. For example, the kind that Catherine Malabou is referring to when proposing the idea of destructive plasticity to describe people harmed in sudden accidents, affected by dementia, or experiencing major cognitive disorders.

Malabou argues that the impossibility of escape from an extreme experience leads to a new form of presence that does not inform of an outlet, but constitutes one itself. Transformation entails an explosion of form that makes people "become someone else, an absolute other [...] without last wishes,"[17] without a future or po-

16 Szymborska, "Autotomy."

17 Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 2.

tential. The philosopher writes of being that retain their vital signs but, by fleeing the impossibility of escape, become insensitive to their fate, dissimilar to themselves; their metamorphosis is final, breaking causality, and incomprehensible as to its effects. Malabou draws on Spinoza, arguing that in such cases the overwhelming force of affects is revealed with full force, usually regulating intensity and instincts and affecting the capacity of living beings to remain in their being. However, their disruption deregulates the ability to be stimulated, to react, and to act.[18] And the domain of this disruption is destructive plasticity – constantly present in us as a potential and able to be activated at any moment. A rift appears between life so far and death, a strange state of suspension, withdrawal, indifference, apathy, which in certain cases can last for years. Malabou says that this concerns subjects that do not survive their own transformation.[19] The problem is, however, that they survive it, but do not manage to do as self-aware individuals.

Who Stays in the Tal?

I mean the gray area between survival and subsistence. An experience that is an irreversible change, a radical break with the previous order, but retaining awareness of the change and its scale. Survival with no happy ending, deprived of hope, not even desired by those who have made the effort, nor wanted by outsiders. One that is too unstable to be able to breathe a sigh of relief, or is only temporary, when there is no chance of a return to the community, or even of feigning optimism. So this time it is not about survival against all odds, but about those and that which was cut off, the remnants, the scraps of survival. One could say that what has been lost, removed, or rejected like the lizard's tail no longer matters or even exists. But I want to ask about these tails and offcuts, their status and further date.

When referring to the living-dead, Malabou does not clarify what these beings are or specify whom this category includes – they are certainly not all mired in lethargy or torpor inhibiting any activity.[20] When Ariella Azoulay writes of the worldless as refugees from imperial history,[21] she leaves something unsaid – to whom is she referring, who are these people, and where are they? When Paul B. Preciado writes of himself as a gender dissident and generates a liberating ambiguity in thinking about what refusal to accept a binary world can be, he still evades telling the potential

18 Ibid., 27–29.

19 Ibid., 27–29.

20 Ibid., 64.

21 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

story about what has not survived repression.[22] When Judith Butler writes of the specters yawning from the gaps between statistics, reports and summaries of wars, the question arises as to the traces of these people, their stories, gestures, bodies, and finally their graves and memorials.[23]

Who and what is in fact meant here? Indeterminate figures that do something and have a certain function, yet remain abstract at the descriptive level – it is hard for the reader to imagine their materializations. Surpluses of meanings can be sensed in what is unsaid – we do not necessarily understand them, but we suspend this moment of uncertainty in reading, adding coherence to it, focusing on the substance and not the extraneous. Yet something remains on the edges of perception, lingers, and sometimes returns in completely different circumstances. Contrary to appearances, the mechanism of framing our own interpretation has much in common with selection of what is needed for survival, with casting off the tails of endurance. Both our own and the shared one that divided communities – usually in a violent, painful way. Survival is usually at the cost of someone or something, even a part of ourselves.

> The entire universe cut in half and solely in half. Everything is heads or tails in this system of knowledge. We are human or animal. Man or woman. Living or dead. We are the colonizer or the colonized. Living organism or machine. We have been divided by the norm. Cut in half and forced to remain on one side or the other of the rift. What we call "subjectivity" is only the scar that, over the multiplicity of all that we could have been, covers the wound of this fracture. It is over this scar that property, family, and inheritance were founded [...] names are written and sexual identities asserted.[24]

Preciado is writing about his own crossing, the experience of transition, which he treats not as a passage from point A to point Z, but an endless road with many junctions on the way. This crossing also marks a broader social context that enforces identity declarations, stubbornly identifies and attributes, stripping the power of individual diversity. Everyone is stripped in this way, although of course at varying costs. Yet the offcuts of endurance are not extinguished once and for all. Scars are visible, and memories resurface, along with phantom pains and embodied intuitions manifested in various ways. Gestures, for instance, tics, hesitations, or changing timbre of voice. Preciado advises being attentive of these signals: "if you feel your throat constricting when you hear one of these words [classifications of identity], do not silence it. It's the multiplicity of the cosmos that is trying to pierce through your

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22 Paul Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2020).

23 Judith Butler, *Frames of War? When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

24 Preciado, *An Apartment*, 27.

chest."[25] Archives are full of cast-off tails, with documents, testimonies, stories, literature, and art recording the traces of the separation process. They can be masked and ignored, but since they are still an obstacle to attempts to maintain continuity, does it not make sense to harness their subversive potential? Especially for those who have not endured their own endurance or are lost in this process. After all, these are entire groups of marginalized people, minorities condemned to oblivion, invisible people without citizenship, with unclear or disjointed political status. The offcuts from endurance are often reactive, seeking material and symbolic carriers; they might be a seed of resistance and form its strategies. As Efoui's protagonist says, we are not yet finished with the present.

Translated by Ben Koschalka

Abstract

Agnieszka Dauszka
FACULTY OF POLISH STUDIES, JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Forms of Survival

The author writes about aspects of survival: powerlessness, withdrawal, engagement, activation, dependence, and maneuvering between these states. She proposes the concept of counter-passivity as the ability to counteract one's passivity, manage disagreement, mobilize reserves, and transition from defense, through evasion, fight, and escape. She distinguishes acts of surviving – or attempts to maintain vital functions – and subsistence as the preservation of self-awareness, cognitive functions, and capacity to resist. She writes about the dominant in twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural models of thinking about survivors as winners of fate. The author calls it the lizard model or survival "against all odds," which focuses on the act of saving the essence of identity, as any losses the individual may suffer are presented as an inevitable cost, something that had to be cut off because it would have prevented salvation. Continuity is the primary determinant of survival success, considered in the context of advancement and emancipation. The article provides an alternative survival model: without a happy ending, without hope, with no chance of returning to the community. Hence, she means that which has been severed through division, about remnants of survival and their political and subversive potential.

Keywords

survival, living, resistance, disagreement, survival network

25 Ibid., 28.

Essays

Marcin Kościelniak

Protection of Religious Feelings in the People's Republic of Poland. Archive of Transformation

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.2 | ORCID: 0000-0001-8738-9116

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Those interested in art are not necessarily also interested in the law; nevertheless, in Poland we are all familiar with at least one point of the 1997 Penal Code, that is Article 196 on insulting religious feelings: "anyone found guilty of offending religious feelings through public calumny of an object or place of worship is liable to a fine, restriction of liberty or a maximum two-year prison sentence." On the one hand, convictions of male and female artists under this article are rare as Jakub Dąbrowski shows in his work on censorship in Polish art after 1989, but on the other hand, indictments themselves are very frequent due to the imprecision of the term "religious feelings."[1] As a consequence, the Article has a paralysing effect in the field of artistic expression and provides a powerful weapon in the hands of those who invoke it in

1 Cf. Jakub Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku* [Censorship in Polish art after 1989], vol. 2 *Artyści, sztuka i polityka* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2015). If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

Marcin Kościelniak – Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Researcher in the field of cultural studies and theatre. Editor of the academic journal *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna* (www.didaskalia.pl). He recently published a monograph *Aborcja i demokracja. Przeciw-historia Polski 1956–1993* [Abortion and democracy. The Counter-history of Poland 1956–1993; 2024] and co-edited the book *Autocenzura i cenzura. Nowe ujęcia* [Self-censorship and censorship. New approaches; 2024]. Email: marcin.koscielniak@uj.edu.pl.

order to guard the boundaries of the public sphere so that they are consistent with the extremely strong position of the Catholic Church and national-Catholic ideology in Poland after 1989.

Bearing this in mind, it is surprising that the article on the protection of religious feelings was also in force in the communist Polska Republika Ludowa (PRL) (People's Republic of Poland). Article 196 of the 1997 Penal Code is a literal repetition of Article 198 of the 1969 Penal Code. Furthermore, the article from 1969 is an almost exact copy of Article 5 of the Decree of August 5, 1949[2] (which amended the provisions of Chapter XXVI of the 1932 Penal Code).[3]

Mentioning this, Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko state that this regulation "began to stir controversy only after the introduction of the democratic system when it turned out that it could significantly restrict other freedoms, especially the freedom of expression, which was obviously illusory during the communist era."[4] While accepting this argument, I still consider the existence of a provision for the protection of religious feelings in the communist regime to be something highly controversial. This is because it is clearly at odds with the common, or at least the popular view on the nature of the public sphere in the PRL as being dominated by atheistic Marxism and repressive towards the Church.

In this essay I present the results of an enquiry into the problem of the protection of religious feelings in the PRL. I have an interest in this issue as part of a larger project concerning the origin of the legal ban on abortion in Poland (January 7, 1993), and more broadly, the logic of the Polish transformation the result of which is non-secular democracy.[5] I understand transformation here broadly, as a systemic change being the effect of a complex process of political, social, legal and symbolic transformations, for which the founding act was the first Solidarity (1980–1981).

In the first two parts of the essay I present the results of a search in the archives of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) (Institute of National

2 The amendments served to clarify the definitions used in the provision and the criminal sanctions.

3 In particular, this concerned Article 172 of the 1932 Penal Code: "whoever blasphemes God in public shall be punished by imprisonment for up to 5 years," repealed by a 1949 decree.

4 Anna Demenko and Jakub Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku*, vol. 1 *Aspekty prawne* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2015), 159.

5 Cf. Marcin Kościelniak, *Aborcja i demokracja. Przeciw-historia Polski 1956–1993* [Abortion and democracy. Counter-history of Poland 1956–1993] (the book will be published in 2024).

Remembrance) where I looked for court case files related to the Article on the protection of religious feelings. In the following parts, I analyse the daily and monthly reports of the Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk (GUKPPiW) (Main Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances) that is the state censorship authority in the PRL, kept at the Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) (Archives of Modern Records). In the case of the AAN collection, I limited myself to the years 1976–1990 in accordance with the assumption that preventive censorship reports might reflect the political change in relations between the communist authorities and the Church, which I was interested in and which was taking place in those years. The search covered 145 folders, a total of several tens of thousands of typed pages, so the material was quite extensive. In the case of the IPN collection, the number of cases found is so modest that I decided to go beyond the previously assumed time frame and also mention examples from the 1950s; I allow myself this inconsistency guided by the need to outline a topic that has not yet been properly dealt with.

The research results presented here are therefore not exhaustive with regard to this issue, but their groundbreaking nature means that they are, I believe, of cognitive value. In the summary, I propose a short methodological reflection, which draws on theoretical considerations of censorship and archives, and above all on the experience gained from the search presented, and provides a suggestion for the "setting" of research on the Polish transformation.

Penal Codes

The identity of the articles on the protection of religious feelings in the criminal codes of the PRL (1944/45–1989) and the Republic of Poland (after 1989) means that they are sometimes discussed together in legal interpretations, and some the interpretations of provisions issued by the Supreme Court before 1989 are still used in judicial decisions today.[6] However, this identity is largely apparent and it is so for several reasons.

First of all, the articles functioned as parts of larger wholes (Offences Against Freedom of Conscience and Religion) differing in content. In the 1969 Code, the article on the protection of religious feelings as well as other provisions on freedom of religion and irreligion are placed next to the articles that are intended to safeguard the interests of the state against the influence of the Church. This applies in particular to Article 194: "whoever

6 Cf. Stanisław Dziwisz, *Ochrona uczuć religijnych w polskim prawie karnym* [Protection of religious feelings in Polish criminal law] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2019), 73.

abuses freedom of conscience and religion in the performance of religious rites or other religious functions to the detriment of the interests of the Polish People's Republic, shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of one to ten years"; and Article 195: "whoever exploits other people's religious beliefs or other people's credulity in matters of faith, misleads other people and causes a confluence or other disturbance of public order, shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of six months to five years." Obviously, these articles, which are repressive towards the Church, cannot be found in the Penal Code of 1997.

Secondly, it is not just the letter of the law that is important, but also the accompanying justification in criminal law. The justification for the chapter Offences Against Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the 1997 Code reads:

> The change of place in the structure of the specific part of this chapter (i.e. moving from item 28 in 1969 to item 24 in 1997) testifies to the significance of freedom of conscience and religion as a fundamental legal good. The new Code embraces several types of offences from the 1969 Penal Code, but introduces changes in their definitions to emphasise the different axiology underlying that Code (Art. 192 of the 1969 Penal Code – Art. 194; Art. 198 of the 1969 Criminal Code – Art. 196). For axiological reasons, the new Code also omits several types of offences [...] (Art. 194 and 195 of the 1969 Penal Code) [emphasis – M. K.].[7]

A particular exposition of this new axiology can be found in the collective monograph *Prawo wyznaniowe* [Religious law] published in 2000 by the Department of Law on Religion of the Catholic University of Lublin. Referring to the amendments to the pre-war penal code introduced in the PRL and to the continuity in this respect between the law of the PRL and the 1997 Penal Code, Andrzej Wąsek states:

> By decriminalising public blasphemy of God (Art. 172, Penal Code of 1932) and public vilification or mockery of a legally recognised religion or religious association, its dogmas, beliefs or rites (Art. 173, Penal Code of 1932), the Decree of August 4, 1949 on Freedom of Conscience and Religion and later on the Penal Code of 1969 very significantly limited the scope of the criminal protection of religious feelings

7 *Kodeks karny. Kodeks postępowania karnego. Kodeks karny wykonawczy* [Penal Code. Code of Criminal Procedure. Executive Penal Code] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, 1997), 195.

> against public insult. One may be surprised that the new Penal Code is to follow the same path [emphasis – M. K.].[8]

This legal remark is a reminder that Article 196 of the Penal Code is only the legal arm of the invisible rules and norms that frame the symbolic order of Polish democracy, that is, it is its emanation and ensures its visibility and permanence. From this perspective one can look at the statistics.[9] As far as convictions under the article on the protection of religious feelings are concerned, a total of 22 were handed down in the 1970s and also 22 in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the number was already 66[10] with 88 in the following decade. The "axiological change" is visible to the naked eye. Is it also evidenced by court cases?

Investigation of this issue is not straightforward as I discovered when I made an enquiry to the archives of the District Court in Krakow. I received an answer to the effect that the archives of the courts are not only widely dispersed, but also structured and catalogued in such a way that there is no real possibility of reaching the data of a case of an offence under a specific provision unless one has precise information about its place and time. In the legal literature on religious law in the PRL, I found a brief example of barely one court case under the article on the protection of religious feelings.[11] A search in the IPN proved somewhat more fruitful. Although the number of examples found there is modest (seven from 1950–1953, one from 1965 and six from 1983–1988),[12] the documentation is not always complete, and none of the

8 Andrzej Wąsek, "Ochrona uczuć religijnych w prawie karnym" [Protection of religious feelings in criminal law], in *Prawo wyznaniowe*, ed. Henryk Misztal (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne, 2000), 258.

9 I only give statistics for the 1970s and 1980s, thus since the entry into force of the provisions of the 1969 Penal Code. Statistics for earlier years, which were based on the 1949 Decree, do not include a separate item for the protection of religious feelings (Article 5). Cf. *Prawomocne skazania osób dorosłych w latach 1946–2018* [Final convictions of adults in the years 1946–2018], Informator Statystyczny Wymiaru Sprawiedliwości, 3rd edition (Warszawa, 2020), accessed February 8, 2024, https://isws.ms.gov.pl/pl/baza-statystyczna/publikacje/download,2779,8.html.

10 The statistics include sentences under Article 198 of the 1969 Penal Code, in force until August 31, 1998, and under Article 196 of the 1997 Penal Code.

11 S. Flasiński and T. Stępień, "Przestępstwa przeciwko wolności sumienia i wyznania w *świetle* orzecznictwa SN" [Crimes against freedom of conscience and religion in the light of the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court], *Problemy Praworządności* 1 (1986): 34.

12 The period between the end of the war and the enactment of the Decree of August 5, 1949, when the legislation of 1932 was in force with regard to offences against "religious feelings," requires a separate study.

cases concerns the field of art (possibly, there were simply no such cases), they give an idea of the type of offences we had to do with.

Court Cases

The examples found in the IPN archives are of a similar nature; they usually involve behaviour during a Mass (disturbing the rite, name-calling and loud comments) or profanation of religious objects (the cross or an image of the Virgin Mary). The place of the incident is usually a village and the perpetrators are males (with one exception) without education, with vocational or secondary education, almost all under the influence of alcohol.

Nevertheless, between 1950 and 1953, the prosecutor's office sought a political motivation, and not without reason; while the role of alcohol cannot be underestimated, in some cases the offences did have such political overtones. An example: an incident in a church in Krośniewice. The perpetrator repeatedly disrupted the Mass by making malicious remarks towards the priest and the altar boys, and "at the moment of the so-called elevation… he knelt down for a moment, rose again, put his cap demonstratively on his head and called out, 'Do you believe in these superstitions?'"[13] In some cases, it is the political nature of the offence that stands out. In 1951, in Kutno, the suspect urged the altar boys to join the ranks of communist organisations (this took place in the sacristy where adoration of a tomb was just being celebrated, hence the charge under the article on the protection of religious feelings). The perpetrator belonged to the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR) (Communist Party); moreover, he "took part in the election and referendum campaign as a [communist – M. K.] agitator,"[14] which might have been the reasons why his case was discontinued. A case that led to a conviction and imprisonment concerned a female Jehovah's Witness (Maria, 40 years old, Polish nationality, Czechoslovak citizenship, secondary education) working as a pre-school teacher in Kisielów (Cieszyn Silesia) and accused in 1950 of having "pulled a cross off the wall in the pre-school despite the fact that the parents of the children protested against it at a meeting."[15] Although the act was probably religiously motivated (iconoclasm is a part of the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses), the accused explained to the parents that she was following a party order. However, as she admitted during her interrogation, at

13 AIPN Ld PF12/766 (files of Institute of National Remembrance). I quote archive documents in accordance with the originals, correcting for punctuation and spelling.

14 AIPN Ld PF12/1002.

15 This and the other quotes in the paragraph AIPN Ka 023/1884.

a trade union meeting in December 1949 she was only given an instruction "to move the crosses from the main walls to the side walls." The convict's opponents were not only the local community or the head of the pre-school, but also the communist justice system, which "in agreement with the party" sued her for "profaning the cross and bringing the authorities into disrepute."[16] This and other examples from 1950–1953 show that, contrary to the stereotype, the policy of the authorities towards the Church at that time was characterised by great restraint, resulting from an awareness of its position in Polish society.

In the second half of the 1980s, this position of the Church was already unquestionable and extremely strong (this was due to public support for the Church, the popularity of John Paul II and the close links between the opposition and the Church). This is illustrated by the surviving court case files. The protagonist of one of them is, again, a Jehovah's Witness, a twenty-five-year-old farmer (with vocational education), who…

> …on the night of February 25–26, 1986 in the village of Hucisko in the commune of Stąporków publicly insulted an object of worship of the Roman Catholic religion in such a manner that he smashed a metal image of Christ with a hammer and hung a muzzle on the arms of a cross. In addition, on March 4–5, 1986, in the village of Włochów in the municipality of Stąporków, he desecrated an object of worship of the Roman Catholic religion by cutting down a wooden cross.[17]

The punishment was demanded by the inhabitants of Włochów. The perpetrator confessed and "explained that he destroyed the crosses because, in his opinion, they are a symbol of crime and people should not see them" and, as a Jehovah's Witness, he has "a hostile attitude towards Roman Catholics." The trial, however, took a different course. Two months earlier, the perpetrator had been in a psychiatric institution and was referred for examination during the investigation; the experts diagnosed him with paranoid schizophrenia and the court, "in view of the suspect's insanity," discontinued the investigation and requested a preventive measure in the form of placing him in a "closed facility for the nervous and mentally ill." Thus, the verdict quashed the political dimension of the act. It is, of course, tempting to ask a j o u r n a l i s t i c question, one that arises from knowledge of the social context of the late 1980s whether the verdict itself was not political given that an act motivated by criticism of the Catholic Church was classified as being a result of "insanity."

16 The background to the case was the increased repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1950 (accusations of being agents for the United States, numerous arrests throughout the country).

17 This and the other quotes in the paragraph AIPN Ki 012/340.

One more example: Rzeszow, April 1, 1985. A man (35 years old, secondary education) "while in an intoxicated state destroyed the decoration [in the form of 'flowers and candles' – M. K.] of the missionary cross next to the Parish Church in Rzeszow," and furthermore "tore a photograph of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko off the cross and destroyed it."[18] This innocuous case becomes interesting after reading the perpetrator's testimony. Admittedly, he was intoxicated ("two beers and two vodkas of 50 grams each") and, as he said, he acted in the heat of the moment, but the indignation that pushed him to do the deed had its source in his grudge against the Church, caused by several situations from the past. Firstly, the deception of the local priest who had allegedly underpaid him (by 1,500 zloty) a decade earlier for a painting service he had performed. Secondly, the resentment on the part of the community due to the fact that his brother abandoned the seminary, something that the local priest allegedly reproached his family for from the pulpit. The third reason is the most interesting. The perpetrator goes back to an accident that happened on the same spot, that is near the Parish Church, five months earlier: "in the month of November 1984, was passing by and I tripped on glasses and jars arranged in the shape of a cross and reaching almost as far as the roadway of Kosciuszko Street, as a result of which I fell on the pavement and cut my belly."

The grotesqueness of this scene is uncanny; an almost literary juxtaposition of the "high" and the "low," the "spiritual" and the "material," the Real and the Imaginary. After the imposition of Martial Law on December 13, 1981, and later on, after the murder of the immensely popular priest Jerzy Popiełuszko by the secret police, arranging floral crosses was a regular part of the social rituals within the spectacle of the Catholic nation's resistance to the communist authorities where resistance was all too often understood in terms of the struggle between good and evil. Among the court case files from the 1980s which I was able to access, this one is the most productive in terms of going beyond this moralistic pattern of knowledge. This is because it shows how the experience of a particular individual, Edmund, son of Bronisława and Stanisław, born on May 11, 1950, resident in Krasna, working as a bricklayer in a repair and construction company, d i d n o t harmonise with the collective experience, manifested in the national and Catholic symbolism, and how it d o e s n o t fit into the framework of today's memory of the "Polish" 1980s.

The shape of the religious law in the PRL leads researchers to the judgement that the provision on the protection of "religious feelings" was an reputation-enhancing sham gesture as in reality the aim was to use the law

18 This and the other quotes in the next two paragraphs AIPN Rz 052/921.

to combat the Church and discriminate against religious people.[19] However, as the examples discussed reveal, such judgements should be approached with great caution. As far as the 1970s and 1980s are concerned, available statistics show that there were in total almost three times as many sentences related to the protection of religious feelings as sentences under the repressive articles (44 to 16). Evidence of the growing position of the Church can be found in the talks undertaken in the early 1980s between the Episcopate and the government to regulate the legal status of the Church. From the perspective of the logic of the Polish transformation, it is telling that the repressive articles 194 and 195 of the 1967 Penal Code were abolished on May 17, 1989 under the so-called Church Laws. These gave the Catholic Church extensive privileges, many of which formed the basis of its functioning after June 1989.

Reports from the Censorship Office (GUKPPiW)

The examples presented above do not exhaust the subject of the protection of religious feelings in the PRL as it should be remembered that there was also an institution of preventive censorship. The GUKPPiW reports stored in the AAN are the first source of information on this subject although it should be noted at once that it is not exhaustive and not the only one. Firstly, the reports only deal with selected examples. Secondly, the GUKPPiW was "only the superior superstructure and ultimate overseer of the entire system of the de facto censorship, deeply embedded in the structure of the management of publishing houses, the press, television, cinematography and theatres," which structure played the role of "pre-censorship thresholds removing *in limine* works deemed undesirable by local management teams."[20] To gain a more complete picture of the work of the censors, one would have to look for example at the documentation covering pre-approval screenings of films or censor's copies of theatre scores, and even this would not give a complete picture as it would not take into account the phenomenon of (conscious and unconscious) self-censorship, most often remaining hidden.

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19 Cf. e. g. Krzysztof Warchałowski, "Prawnokarna ochrona wolności religijnej w Polsce w latach 1932–1997" [Criminal law protection of religious freedom in Poland in the years 1932–1997], *Studia z Prawa Wyznaniowego* 4 (2002): 63; Andrzej Wąsek, "Przestępstwa przeciwko przekonaniom religijnym de lege lata i de lege ferenda" [Crimes against religious beliefs de lege lata and de lege ferenda], *Państwo i Prawo* 7 (1995): 27–28.

20 *Prace konwersatorium „Doświadczenie i Przyszłość". Ankieta na temat cenzury z 15 IX 1980* [Works of the 'Experience and future seminar.' Survey on censorship of September 15, 1980), AAN 2/2783/0/18.2/407, 3.

In the daily and monthly reports of the GUKPPiW from the period of 1982–1988, I found a total of eleven interventions the character of which was to protect the Catholic sacrum. I say "character" because the reasons for the interference are easy to guess, but as a rule the censors did not provide them. Two cases are exceptions. In April 1984, "the Film Service Company Polfilm was refused permission to print a poster for R. Polański's film *Rosemary's Baby* on the grounds that it insulted religious feelings" (the censor explained the objections with one sentence: "the author of the poster used the motif of Raphael's painting *The Sistine Madonna*"[21]). The second example is from March 1986 and concerns Eriprando Visconti's film *The Nun of Monza* (1969) submitted for distribution by private video rental companies in Warsaw. The plot of the film, as the report reads, is set in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in a nunnery where the aristocrat Rossio, wanted for murder, seeks refuge.

> The priest, who is the guardian of the convent, and the nuns are burdened by the pride of the superior. Looking for a way to "shatter this pride," the priest persuades Rossio to rape the Mother Superior. This happens in the presence of the nuns who afterwards take full advantage of Rossio's stay at the convent.

"The film abounds in pornographic scenes and, in addition, many scenes may offend the feelings of believers,"[22] concludes the censor.

The most interesting group of interventions the character of which was protecting the Catholic sacrum concerns contemporary artistic works that were intended to be critical of the religious order or of the institution of the Church. Their authors were young or very young (exclusively male) artists, which confirms the observation that in the suffocating times of the national-Catholic intensification of the 1980s, the change in uncritical attitudes towards Catholicism and the Church was at least partly generational in nature.

The earliest example comes from July 1983 and concerns the exhibition *Zapisy* [Records] in Lublin, from which "a colour representation of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa with a moustache painted onto it" was removed.[23] The work concerned is by Adam Rzepecki, who in March 1983 drew a moustache on two hundred copies of the postcard with the painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa purchased from a devotional shop, and then placed each picture on the cover of one of the two hundred copies of the art magazine *Tango*. Rzepecki's work was a foundational gesture of the Lodz-based Kultura

21 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3835 (files of Archives of Modern Records).

22 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3860.

23 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3917; also in AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3826.

Zrzuty [Pitch-in Culture] community which very consciously sought independence in the institutional and identity dimensions outside the "red and black alliance"[24] as it called the two then dominant cultural communities and centres of power, that is the state and the church.

More politically intricate was the artistic output of Sławomir Marzec. In April 1984, the censor removed from his exhibition at the Staromiejski Dom Kultury in Warsaw a collage depicting "a cut-out sign of the cross on a background of newspaper cut-outs, "holy" pictures, a photograph of the Pope, naked girls, etc." The critical dimension of the work acquires a different shade if one bears in mind that apart from this work, two other collages by Marzec were removed from the exhibition, depicting "a cut-out swastika on the background of various graphic ornaments" and "a shape of a five-pointed star, cut-out in the centre, on a background of a set of drawings, newspaper cut-outs, slogans and headlines related to the USSR, all with ironic overtones."[25] Seen in this context, the collages created by Marzec, who was then a twenty-two-year-old student at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, bring to mind the gesture of the anarchist rejection of all systems of power and their symbols en bloc, which is a recurring feature in the circles of the youth of dissent.

Chronologically, the last case of interference with works by artists representing the young culture included in the reports dates from 1988. The monthly report for April reads:

> A banner with the text "Come ye all to the manger, to the baby Jesus and some (naked) gals" and a painting entitled *Opus Dei* depicting Christ on a toilet seat were removed from an exhibition of paintings by Żegalski, Szpyt and Naliwajko at the BRAMA Student Gallery at the University of Warsaw.[26]

Piotr Naliwajko, Janusz Szpyt and Leszek Żegalski had been active since 1983 as a trio known under several names: Grupa Trzech [The group of three], Tercet Nadęty [Trio puffed up] and Całkiem Nowi Dzicy Normalni Dadaiści. This last name [All new savage normal dadaists] is the most relevant one because the painting style of the "new wild ones" is maintained in the spirit of the "new expressionism," popular in the 1980s, also in Poland, popularised by such far-famed group exhibitions as "Expression of the 1980s" (1986) or "What's Up?" (1987). "The savage painters" often sought energy in juxtaposing religious,

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24 On this subject, cf. Marcin Kościelniak, *Egoiści. Trzecia droga w kulturze polskiej lat 80.* [Egoists. The third way in Polish culture of the 1980s.] (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Z. Raszewskiego, 2018).

25 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3919.

26 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3924; also in AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3887.

metaphysical or national themes (and the prevailing styles of depicting them) with the Dadaist defiance and the anarchist spirit. "In Poland during the communist era, only one painting was removed from my exhibition, and that only two days after the opening,"[27] Leszek Żegalski, author of the *Opus Dei* canvas, recalled years later. A few months later, at the end of 1988, his painting *Wartki Janek, czyli wypadek motocyklisty* [Rapid Johnny, or a motorcyclist's accident] won the Grand Prix of the celebrated Arsenal'88 – Polish National Exhibition of Young Visual Arts (which paved the way for Żegalski to an international career as a portraitist). I mention this because of a special circumstance: the Arsenal'88 was organised by Leszek Jampolski and Jarosław M. Daszkiewicz, curators of the Brama Gallery. It can be assumed with a high degree of probability that it was their experience with censorship that led them to include a clause in the terms and conditions of the exhibition opened a few months later: "the Qualification Committee reserves the right to eliminate from participation in Arsenal'88 works that offend morality, r e l i g i o u s f e e l i n g s, as well as works that do not meet the conditions specified in these terms and conditions."[28] This is the first example known to me of the o f f i c i a l invocation of "religious feelings" as an artistic criterion after 1945.

The Act of July 31, 1981 on Control of Publications and Performances

In the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, "despite numerous conflicts and disputes, a certain range of common interests between the Church hierarchy and the authorities of the PRL began […] slowly to emerge,"[29] stated Antoni Dudek and Ryszard Gryz in their monograph on state-church relations in the PRL. Although they only mentioned the fight against "social pathologies" and the "cultural and moral patterns coming from the West" (there is an abundance of interventions of this kind in censorship reports), the practice of eliminating gestures bearing the mark of profanation of the Catholic sacrum from the public sphere fits well into this conservative view. A behind-the-scenes insight into the relations between the government and the episcopate

27 Krzysztof Strauchamann, "Leszek Żegalski. Obrazoburca i skandalista" [Leszek Żegalski. Iconoclast and scandalist], *Nowa Trybuna Opolska*, August 20, 2011, accessed February 8, 2024, https://nto.pl/leszek-zegalski-obrazoburca-i-skandalista/ar/4448145.

28 Regulamin Ogólnopolskiej Wystawy Młodej Plastyki "Arsenał – 88" [Regulations of the National Exhibition of Young Fine Arts "Arsenał – 88"], in Archiwum Zakładowe MKiDN 1410/42. I owe this trail to a book by Jakub Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy. Rozpad państwowego systemu sztuki 1982–1993* (Warszawa: ASP, MSN, 2020).

29 Antoni Dudek and Ryszard Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945–1989)* [Communists and the Church in Poland (1945–1989)] (Kraków: Znak, 2003), 348–349.

is provided by the transcripts of the talks held within the framework of the Joint Commission reactivated at the end of 1980 the aftermath of the tide of change set in motion by the Solidarity. On the sidelines of the discussion on censorship, representatives of the Church raised, among other things, concerns that Andrzej Żuławski's film *Diabeł* [The devil], which was banned from distribution in 1972 because of, inter alia, "scenes offending religious feelings," might be released for distribution. "I listen with trepidation to what is not to be in Polish culture,"[30] stated Kazimierz Barcikowski when summarising the exchange with Church representatives. It is worth remembering that the Church on the one hand guaranteed freedom from the intervention of state censorship in the particular spheres of public life under its control, such as the independent culture movement of the 1980s organised using church-owned premises, but on the other hand, it exercised censorship of its own.[31]

The awareness of the existence of an "alliance" between the party and the Church in the field of censorship does not nullify the question whether there were provisions within the regulations on the GUKPPiW that authorised intervention in defence of religious feelings. Neither in the Decree of July 5, 1946 on the establishment of the GUKPPiW, nor in the regulation of the Prime Minister of April 22, 1975, that is in the documents defining the criteria for censorship, does such a provision appear. For 35 years there was no such provision, until October 1, 1981 when the Act of July 31, 1981 on c o n t r o l of publications and performances came into force; Article 2 point 8 deals with "the protection of religious feelings and at the same time of the feelings of non-believers." The law remained in force unamended until the imposition of Martial Law. Amendments were soon introduced and codified in the Press Law of January 26, 1984, but these did not include the provisions on the protection of feelings.[32] The only change in this respect was that whereas in the censorship reports from the period between October 1 and December 13, 1981 justifications for the interventions appear in the form of a reference to a specific provision of the law (Legal basis: Article 2 point 8 of the Act on control […]), in the period after the imposition of Martial Law the justifications disappear and the reader of the reports has to guess at them. Such justifications only appear again in

30 *Tajne dokumenty państwo – Kościół 1980–1989* [Secret State-Church documents 1980–1989] (Warszawa: Aneks, 1993), 24–28.

31 Cf. Kościelniak, *Egoiści*, 83–103.

32 One of the remnants of the Act of 1981 was the option for magazines to mark the sites of censorship interventions, which Catholic magazines took advantage of throughout the 1980s.

reports after May 29, 1989 when the Act of July 31, 1981 was reinstated in an almost unchanged form as a result of the agreements between the opposition and the government (concluded at the so-called "round table").[33]

A search in the reports of the GUKPPiW from the time before the Act of 1981 was in force reveals, however, that the censorship office did not need any formal regulation at all to protect "religious feelings." Example: a poster by Jacek Bieńkowski was removed from the 7th International Poster Biennale at the Zachęta Gallery (1978) where the said poster "depicted a crucified Jesus holding trouser legs in his hands; the poster bore the inscription: 'JESUS JEANS ORIGINAL AMERICAN FABRIC – WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF ADVERTISING?'"[34] This intervention is interesting because Bieńkowski did not go against the Church, but acted in defence of traditional religious values being abused (in his view) in consumerist capitalist societies. The censors probably wanted to be on the safe side. The justifications were therefore not based on the official legal regulations concerning the GUKPPiW, but were taken directly from the Penal Code and probably unofficial internal guidelines.

This makes it all the more intriguing that the issue of the protection of religious feelings within the scope of activity of the GUKPPiW was formally regulated in the declining period of the first Solidarity (1980–1981) and it was claimed as soon as the opposition came to the fore again in late 1988 and early 1989. A closer look at the history of the Act of July 31, 1981 and an analysis of the censorship reports from these two short periods provide an interesting starting point for thinking about the Polish transformation in terms of axiological change.

Protection of the "Feelings of Non-believers" (1981)

The history of the Act of July 31, 1981 on control of publications and performances goes back to the demands formulated by the striking Gdansk Shipyard on August 17, 1980 (item 3: "to respect the freedom of speech, printing and publication

33 On the history of censorship laws in the PRL, cf. e.g. Zofia Radzikowska, *Z historii walki o wolność słowa w Polsce. Cenzura w PRL w latach 1981–1987* [From the history of combat for freedom of speech in Poland. Censorship in the Polish People's Republic in 1981–1987] (Kraków: Universitas, 1990); Tomasz Goban-Klas, *Niepokorna orkiestra medialna. Dyrygenci i wykonawcy polityki informacyjnej w Polsce po 1944 roku* [A rebellious media orchestra. Conductors and executors of information policy in Poland after 1944], trans. Anna Minczewska-Przeczek (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR, 2004); Tomasz Mielczarek, "Uwarunkowania prawne funkcjonowania cenzury w PRL" [Legal conditions of operation censorship in the Polish People's Republic], *Rocznik Prasoznawczy* 4 (2010).

34 AAN 2/1102/0/7.3.4/3676.

guaranteed by the Constitution of the PRL and thus not to repress independent publishing houses as well as to make the mass media available to representatives of all faiths"). The abolition of preventive censorship proved unrealistic; instead, the agreements between the strikers and the government of August 31, 1980 contained provisions that obliged the government to submit a draft of a new censorship law to the Sejm and set the course for changes in the basic principles of the activity of the GUKPPiW. "Censorship, unfortunately, still remains […] but it is overt censorship […] whose competences will be defined in a law and whose decisions will be appealable to a court,"[35] explained Andrzej Gwiazda to the shipyard workers. In the following months, two working drafts were prepared, a public one and a government one, on the basis of which, on January 14, 1981, a special committee announced a single draft; however, in the absence of agreement on all issues, some items were given in two different variants. In drafting the final law of July, 31, the government made an arbitrary unification of the drafts.[36] Crucially for me, the provision on respecting the principle of "freedom of conscience and religion" was included in both the public and the government drafts while the compromise draft was uniform and was not a matter of dispute with regard to the item on the prohibition of "insulting religious feelings and feelings of non-believers." This accord becomes understandable if we consider that the already mentioned protocol of agreement of August 31, 1980 included the suggestion that the future censorship draft should guarantee "the protection of religious feelings and at the same time the feelings of non-believers."

The fact that the "feelings of non-believers" were also included in this provision is intriguing. It has a legal basis in the 1969 Penal Code; admittedly, Article 198 on the protection of religious feelings does not mention "feelings of non-believers," but the other sections of the chapter on offences against freedom of conscience and religion were structured in such a manner as to include both "religious affiliation" and "irreligiousness" of citizens. This does not change the fact that the inclusion of the "feelings of non-believers" in the censorship law was an expressive political gesture. Although it is uncertain whether this initiative came from the strikers, such an assumption can be made bearing in mind that Solidarity readily referred to the idea of pluralism, which, incidentally, still determines the strength of its myth today. The functioning of the Act on control of publications and performances during the less

35 Andrzej Drzycimski and Tadeusz Skutnik, *Gdańsk Sierpień '80. Rozmowy* [Gdańsk August' 80. Conversations], (Gdańsk: Aida, 1990), 401.

36 The drafts were widely covered in the trade union press, cf. in particular *Zeszyty Forum Sierpień '80*, 1980; *Tygodnik Solidarność* 3, 30, 35 (1981). The state press also reported on the talks and drafts, cf. e. g. *Życie i Nowoczesność*, November 27, 1980; *Prasa Polska* 1 (1981).

than three months when it was in force (between October 1, and December 13, 1981) undermines this myth in a particularly impressive way.

Only one intervention was made during this period, which was based on Article 2 point 8 of the Act of July 31, 1981. The information can be found in the GUKPPiW report of October 19 and the matter concerns the following passage from the biweekly *Kwadrat*, the magazine of the printing workers of the Solidarity trade union in Szczecin: "one should be grateful for what they have done. They made the nation aware, that much is true," he said to his own folks. "But atheists must not be allowed to come to power. Atheists have no moral principles. Atheists have ruled for so many years."[37] The censors demanded that the last three sentences be removed. The final version in the pages of *Kwadrat* looked like this: "one should be grateful for what they have done. They made the nation aware, that much is true," he said to his own folks [-----] [Intervention has been made under Article 2 point 8 of the Act because religious feelings and the feelings of non-believers must not be insulted]."[38]

The quote comes from the article "Obok nurtu" [Beside the current] in which the author, Tadeusz Szumigraj, provided behind-the-scenes coverage from the point of view of a participant in the First National Congress of Delegates of the "Solidarity" Trade Union (September–October 1981). This particular case concerns a well-known episode from the fourth day of the proceedings of the second round of the Congress (September 29, 1981) during a discussion on a draft resolution expressing gratitude to the Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR) (Workers' Defence Committee), the famous opposition organisation established in 1976 having a reputation for being left-wing (its best-known leaders were Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik). At that time, a group of Solidarity delegates from the Mazovia region put forward a counter-proposal that completely ignored the KOR's merits, highlighting in particular the Christian genealogy of the Solidarity (from the Baptism of Poland in 966 to John Paul II's pilgrimage to Poland in 1979).

This episode is known as the appearance of the "true Poles," that is the faction of Solidarity that came to the fore at the end of 1981. The passage from the censorship reports quoted above is another argument why the national-Catholic ideology of the "true Poles" should not be perceived as an aberration,[39]

37 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3805.

38 Tadeusz Szumigraj, "Obok nurtu" [Beside the current], *Kwadrat* 14 (1981): 8.

39 Cf. e.g. Andrzej Friszke, *Rewolucja Solidarności 1980–1981* [Solidarity Revolution 1980–1981] (Kraków: Znak Horyzont, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2014); Jan Sowa, *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa! Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości* [Another Republic is possible! Ghosts of the past, visions of the future] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2015).

as the guardians of the discourse of the inclusive Solidarity might want, but as an attitude that fits into the symbolic universe of the movement which is rooted in many ways in the Catholic ideology.[40] As can be seen from Szumigraj's article, the demand to exclude atheists from the community is fully understood by a member of the Solidarity committee at the Gdansk Shipyard talking to the workers who are on duty keeping order that day. When making the intervention, the state censors obviously took into account the interests of the party ("Atheists have ruled for so many years"), but this does not change the fact that we are dealing here with a spectacular rupture in the discourse of the relation between the authorities and the opposition in the PRL; some state censors made an intervention under the provision demanded in the August Agreements and thus defended the "feelings of non-believers" who belonged to Solidarity and were attacked by other members of Solidarity, which was described in the union's bulletin without any comment.

When looking from this perspective at the provision on the protection of "religious feelings" and "feelings of non-believers" negotiated by Solidarity, it is possible to put forward the thesis that the requested inclusiveness functioned here under special conditions, characteristic of many of Solidarity's legal acts; as a rule, they demand a pluralistic worldview, but at the same time emphasise the special status of the Church and the so-called Christian roots of Polish culture.

Protection of the "Feelings of Non-believers" (1989)

As in August 1980, also during the talks between the opposition and the government, assisted by representatives of the Church at the Round Table (within the sub-group for mass media), the complete abolition of censorship was not taken into account as a possible option, and the demand for the restoration of the Act of July 31, 1981 in its original wording was understood as a compromise. This was supported by the fact that the law of July 31, 1981 was the fruit of "broad, serious public consultation in which the Church also participated," as Jacek Ambroziak put it, referring to the position of the episcopate during the negotiations.[41]

40 See Marcin Kościelniak, "Revolution in the Cross's Shadow: Solidarity as Performance," *Polish Theatre Journal* 2 (6) (2018), accessed February 8, 2024, https://www.polishtheatrejournal.com/index.php/ptj/article/view/181/880.

41 Transcript of the first meeting of the Mass Media Subgroup on February 17, 1989, 133, accessed February 8, 2024, https://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/OkraglyStol.nsf/0/A7680B4367D9EBBAC1257CDF003DA5F1/%24File/000140303.pdf.

The censorship reports from the period after May 29, 1989, that is when the Round Table agreements on the operation of preventive censorship were put into practice, contain as many as four interventions annotated that they were based on article 2 point 8 of the law of July 31, 1981. Two are from June: these are "scenes of profanation of religious symbols: a statue of the Virgin Mary and a crucifix [which – M. K.] were removed from the videocassette film of American production *The Exorcist*" and the lyrics of the song *Kanibalizm* [Cannibalism – M. K.] by Z. Trysinski, removed from the programme of a music event of the Iłża Days of Culture ("What sort of religion is this that eats its god on the altars / They eat his flesh, drink his blood from the cup / Satiated cannibals return home / Having confessed, the doubt is already gone / They can go on sinning with a clear conscience"[42]). The information from September contains a record of interventions in Andrzej Dudzinski's article "Sataniści" [Satanists] published in the daily newspaper *Wieczór Wybrzeża*. Among the statements by Polish Satanists quoted by the author, criticism of the clergy for living in the lap of luxury was allowed, but the accusation that they "live with their house servants" and the statement by "Naamah" summarising these observations were removed: "I hate them for this sanctimony and hypocrisy." From the statement made by "Lilith" ("For the sake of wooden altars, dead idols, they demand unprecedented sincerity and total devotion from us"), the words, "For the sake of wooden altars, dead idols" were deleted.[43]

The last such case, from November, involved the deletion of the words "the dick of our Lord Jesus" from the sentence "and may the dick of our Lord Jesus get erect in your throat."[44] The sentence, uttered by a priest character, comes from Jerzy Niecikowski's book *Reguły gry* [Rules of the game], a story about the struggle of the underground opposition against the security authorities in the mid-1980s. The book was submitted for publication in instalments by the weekly magazine *Kultura*.[45] Interestingly, it was a reprint of Niecikowski's novel that had been published two years earlier, uncensored, by the clandestine publishing house Most. In this case, the underground publishing turned out to be genuinely "independent" although it should be noted that Niecikowski's book, "depicting the clash between moral principles and the

42 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3925.

43 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.4/3905.

44 Ibid.

45 The printing of the novel in instalments in *Kultura* was barely brought halfway through so it ultimately did not include the passage with the curse challenged by the censorship.

game for a career"[46] generally has a fully dissident tone; it can therefore be said that the censors took care of the purity of the message.

The quantitative change in the information on interventions motivated by the protection of "religious feelings" in 1989 relative to previous years is manifest, but it is not clear whether there were more actual interventions, or those who reported them were simply more zealous. Far more telling is the seemingly insignificant fact that in the June 1989 report, the category "Protection of religious feelings" was singled out in the table of contents for the first time.[47] Apparently, in view of the humiliating defeat of the communists in the June 1989 elections, GUKPPiW officials expected not only a quantitative and qualitative change in this type of interventions, but also a change in the structure of the censorship activity. I wish to point out that the category singled out in the GUKPPiW report of June 1989 speaks only of the protection of "religious feelings" and omits "feelings of non-believers." This is, of course, a trivial matter, but it can be considered symptomatic bearing in mind the nature of the changes for which June '89 became the pivotal moment, the changes that meant that the social and legal norms of social life were thoroughly subordinated to the Catholic ideology.

Archive of Transformation

I suggest that this moment when the "protection of the feelings of non-believers" emerges and disappears as a legal principle and an element of the symbolic order be remembered as an apt illustration of the logic of the Polish transformation.

The common knowledge of the transformation is founded on a binary opposition between the communist party (PZPR), identified with the sphere of power, and the Church and Solidarity, identified with the sphere of freedom and resistance. This knowledge can be called "school-based" or "national" because of its "normativity" characteristic of the institutions transmitting it, which belong to the state industry of collective memory. In the theory of censorship, this type of "set-up" knowledge is called productive censorship.[48] The idea here is to point out that it is not only what is banned that deserves

46 Quoted from the fourth page of the cover of the second (and first "non-underground") edition of Niecikowski's 1991 book; the disputed passage is quoted here uncensored.

47 AAN 2/1102/0/7.4.5/3925. The last monthly report, dated July 1989, did not record interference under art. 2 point 8. The daily reports, the last of which is dated April 9, 1990, did not use a table of contents.

48 Cf. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), chapter 4.

the name of censorship, but also what pre-legally sets our way of thinking and speaking, causing us to unconsciously move within a certain framework permitted by the social and cultural norm. This implicit "setting" is the result of a complex process, beginning at the moment of entry into language and continuing at the level of the discourses being acquired, conceived as socially sanctioned tools for ordering, understanding and making the senses of reality. Not only knowledge is involved, but also desires, having in this case their origins primarily in society's collectively nurtured ideas about itself.

The method I propose in this paper for breaking the seal of productive censorship comes from the resources of classical cultural history: it is a return to the archive as a means of verifying and producing knowledge. We automatically think of the archives of communist censorship as evidence of the repression of state power applied to manifestations of social insubordination. If we "remove" the filter of this productive censorship from the archives of the PRL censorship, they become a testimony to a more complex (although, of course, as a rule, always incomplete) picture of social life in the PRL. To put it differently, the censorship archives, so far serving as a source of knowledge about the distortion of social life by the state authorities in the PRL, this time will serve as a source of knowledge about the distorted image of social life in the PRL functioning to this day in collective memory and constituting an important component of the imaginary structure of collective identity.

This method of a "classical" return to the archive is therefore not "classical" in the dimension in which it is supported by the awareness that a return to the archive is not possible because the archive as such does not exist. An archive, a material one, such as the archive of the communist censorship, only exists in a discursivised way.[49] What I have in mind here is not the discourse that precedes the material archive and determines its content (deciding on what is considered worth collecting and why), but the discourse that each time determines our entry into an already existing archive, deciding on its content, on what and why we consider worthy of interest and making public, and on what and why we manage to perceive it as meaningful at all (and what gets missed). After all, the examples of the protection of religious feelings in the PRL cited above do not come from newly discovered archives, but from archives that have already been analysed many times by various researchers as a basis for the knowledge produced. These examples, however, have been omitted or even, I believe, simply overlooked, because they come from

49 I refer here to Michel Foucault's thought, fundamental to archive theory; cf. his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), chapter "The Historical a Priori and the Archive."

outside of the field of knowledge about Polish transformation, from outside of its (discursivised) archive.

Work in the archive of the Polish transformation, as I understand it, is thus primarily about deconstructing the existing archive, and further about constructing new discursive strands, a new archive that has the potential to threaten the legitimate patterns of collective identity.

Abstract

Marcin Kościelniak
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Protection of Religious Feelings in the People's Republic of Poland. Archive of Transformation

The author examines the under-researched issue of protecting religious sentiments in the Polish People's Republic, focusing on the 1980s. The study is based on examples of court cases and interventions of preventive censorship, identified through extensive inquiries in state archives. The author analyzes the results of these inquiries in legal, historical, and political contexts, referring to methodologies from the fields of censorship theory and archive theory. The protection of religious sentiments in the final decade of the Polish People's Republic interests the author primarily as evidence of the logic of the Polish transformation, which resulted in a non-secular democracy: the examined archives reveal an "axiological change" that happened since the first Solidarity movement.

Keywords

archive, censorship, religious feelings, feelings of non-believers, transformation, nonsecular democracy, Polish People's Republic, Church, Party, Solidarity

Joanna Szewczyk

Pandemiographies: Theories, Practices, Forecasts

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.3 | ORCID: 0000-0002-3486-9455

Joanna Szewczyk – PhD, adjunct in the Department of Anthropology of Literature and Cultural Studies, member of the Center for the Study of Cultural Discourses of Illness, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University. Author of the book *Historiografia i mitologia kobiecości. Powieściopisarstwo Teodora Parnickiego* [Historiography and mythology of femininity in the novels of Teodor Parnicki] (Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Warszawa-Toruń 2017). Email: joanna1.szewczyk@uj.edu.pl.

In a book published in 2020 after the first few months of lockdown, *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic*, Ivan Krastev noted that major epidemics change our world in a similar way to wars and revolutions, but do not leave comparable traces in our memory.[1] In making the mechanisms of memory in the face of epidemics the subject of reflection, Krastev cited Laura Spinney's publication *Pale Rider. The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*. Spinney pointed out that the Spanish Flu pandemic, which surpassed both world wars in terms of losses resulting from a single event, is located on the periphery of collective memory and, particularly surprisingly, also seems to have been forgotten by historians, as evidenced by the relatively small number of works devoted to it. Following these findings, Krastev acknowledges that it is easier to count the victims of wars than the virus, but at the same time points out the difficulties

1 Ivan Krastev, *Nadeszło jutro. Jak pandemia zmienia Europę* [Tomorrow has come. How the pandemic is changing Europe], trans. Michał Sutowski (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2020), 12.

of narrativizing a pandemic and turning it into a good story. Recalling the findings of psychologists regarding as much the mechanisms of remembering as the elementary narrative competence, the subconscious knowledge of the essential shape of a story – with a beginning, a climax and an end,[2] the political scientist concludes that it is very difficult to write the story of the Spanish flu and any major epidemic into such a narrative structure.[3] Krastev draws an ironic parallel between the pandemic and a Netflix series, in which the end of one season is only a temporary pause before the next. And further reaching for genological analogies, he argues that an epidemic is therefore to a war what modernist literature is to the classic novel: it lacks a clear plot.[4]

The indefinite trajectory of the pandemic, its peculiar "seriality" – its processuality, antifinality and non-conclusiveness, and at the same time the need to tame what is threatening and unknown – even in the first months of 2020 triggered an expansion of pandemiography – narratives written from within the pandemic experience. The category of pandemiography that I propose for the purpose of this text is open and inclusive. It includes essayistic, reflective projects that attempt to grasp the pandemic in both its experiential and symbolic dimensions, to take a questioning and critical stance towards it. It also encompasses possible scenarios relating to the (post)pandemic reality, narratives that are a kind of laboratory for creative writing in the period of isolation/quarantine, and finally – of particular interest to me – different varieties of non-fiction literature, auto/bio/ethnographic and reportage forms. Crossing the boundaries of genre, pandemiographies are both a search for a formula that makes it possible to descriptively describe a reality affected by an infectious disease and an attempt to produce a pandemic poetic. The subject of pandemiography is one affected directly or indirectly by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, incorporating the pandemic into the perimeter of one's experience, projecting an individual narrative or seeking empowerment in a community story, making a gesture of defiance against pandemic reality in the act of writing/reading/acting.

Failing to fit into a clear narrative structure, the pandemic proved to be a generator of a variety of narratives – those drawn from within the pandemic experience and lacking distance, those looking for patterns in literature and culture that have long developed the theme of a humanity-affecting, spreading infectious disease, and those that are predictive, opening up a post-pandemic

2 Cf. Jonathan Culler, *Teoria literatury. Bardzo krótkie wprowadzenie* [Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction], trans. Maria Bassaj (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), 98.

3 Krastev, *Nadeszło jutro*, 13.

4 Ibid., 13.

perspective, prompting reflection on how the SARS-CoV-2 virus might reorient the future. As Slavoj Žižek noted in *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*, in the face of a pandemic threat, we desperately need new scenarios and new stories that can provide us with a kind of cognitive map, a realistic and non-catastrophic sense of where we should be heading.[5]

Reconstructing the cultural images of epidemics, Mateusz Szubert pointed out the previous tendency to speak of them in the past tense. The achievements of modern medicine have caused the word to cease to fit modern realities, functioning until December 2019 primarily as a historical lexeme, referring to plagues affecting humanity in the past. This trend was accompanied by the exploitation of the metaphorical capacity of an epidemic in journalistic discourse, related to its detachment from its native, medical context – for a long time, "epidemic" denoted primarily the spread of negative social phenomena.[6]

The pandemic not only intensified the process of building up the world with various narratives, but also unleashed a demand for stories endowed with myth-making potential. Janusz Barański, writing about the anthropology of the Smolensk plane crash, noted that with the beginning of the mourning rites there were immediate voices about the "mythologization" of this disaster in the colloquial sense of myth-making: lying, manipulation, falsification.[7]

The myth-making nature of the catastrophe is also revealed on the symbolic level – by suspending linear time and restoring the semi-carnival, festive time of the eternal now[8] and the associated state of *communitas*. Considered in this perspective, the advent of the pandemic was linked to the experience of collective trauma, but also to the experience of mourning the previous life free from isolation and fear of infection. The pandemic set in motion liminal

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemia! 2. Kroniki straconego czasu* [*Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*], trans. Jowita Maksymowicz-Hamann (Warszawa: Relacja, 2021), 99.

6 Mateusz Szubert, *Choroba, ciało, grzech. Kulturowe studia maladyczne* [Sickness, flesh, sin. Cultural maladic studies] (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski, 2022), 126.

7 Janusz Barański, *Etnologia w erze postludowej. Dalsze eseje antyperyferyjne* [Ethnology in the post-people era. Further anti-peripheral essays] (Kraków: WUJ, 2017), 88.

8 In terms of Polish anthropological and ethnological research, Monika Sznajderman's monograph is a pioneering work on the mythology of pestilence. Sznajderman proposes to treat pestilence as a kind of festivity, pointing out that the way of experiencing it shows similarities to religious experiences. She writes: "anthropological reflection captures the phenomenon of pestilence in terms that go beyond its empirical dimension, in terms of myth." Monika Sznajderman, *Zaraza. Mitologia dżumy, cholery i AIDS* [Plague. The mythology of the plague, cholera and AIDS] (Warszawa: Semper, 1994), 11.

and apocalyptic tropes and evoked a sense that "nothing will be the same as before."[9] At the same time, it stimulated cosmogonic sentiments, hopes for a salutary, post-pandemic reboot. As Szubert noted, "countless cultural texts are built on fear and anxiety about the return of further plagues or the arrival of new ones. The salutary (world order, sense of existence) power of myth is an invaluable kind of cultural refuge."[10] The cure for pandemic fear is still the appearance of a new threat on the horizon:

> SARS-CoV-2 allayed the fear of Ebola just as HIV/AIDS had previously downgraded all other infectious diseases, condemning most of them to oblivion. Cyclically, "new" infectious diseases appear in the face of which previous ones lose their original strength (not necessarily biological).[11]

However, it seems that a contributing factor to the suppression of the fear of coronavirus and the associated media panic was not the arrival of a new biological danger, but the political threat of the ongoing war in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, as a result of which daily Covid statistics have lost ground.

Endowed with metaphorical bearing, the epidemic itself becomes metaphorical. Writing about the conceptualizations of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maciej Michalski pointed out the two-pronged nature of their development – on one side are those that see the pandemic as a surprising and unpredictable phenomenon, and on the other side those viewing it rather as the culmination of phenomena that have been growing for a long time.[12] An example of the first strategy for conceptualizing a pandemic is the figure of the black swan, coined by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, referring to unexpected and sudden events that leave a permanent mark on individual and social life, to which Ivan Krastev refers in his reflections.[13] Michalski sees the realization of the second

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9 Barański, *Etnologia w erze postludowej*, 89. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

10 Szubert, *Choroba, ciało, grzech*, 138.

11 Ibid., 128.

12 Maciej Michalski, "Konceptualizowanie pandemii, czyli dlaczego nie będziemy wiedzieli, co przeżyliśmy" [Conceptualizing the pandemic, or why we won't know what we've been through], *Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne* 14 (2022): *(Re)interpretacje (post)pandemiczne*: 6–7.

13 Cf. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (London: Penguin, 2010); Tim R. Wind, Marleen Rijkeboer, Gerhard Andersson and Heleen Riper, "The COVID-19 Pandemic: The 'Black Swan' for Mental Health Care and a Turning Point for E-health," *Internet Interventions* 20 (2020): 1–2.

strategy in the philosophical sketches of Slavoj Žižek and Jean-Luc Nancy,[14] capturing the pandemic in turn as an assemblage of natural, economic and cultural processes, human and non-human factors, and as a magnifying glass through which the world gains the opportunity to look at itself. In his reflections, however, Michalski doubts the effectiveness of a pandemic as an epistemological metaphor. In his view, treating it in terms of the accumulation of previously occurring phenomena leads to the duplication of subsequent discursive stories and previously made diagnoses. Moreover, he explicitly refers to Susan Sontag's treatment of illness as a metaphor and writes that metaphorizing a pandemic can be considered immoral because it strips it of concreteness, invalidating what it does to people in psychosomatic terms.[15]

A pandemic has always been a breeding ground for literature, and recent years are a reminder that literature also functions as a breeding ground for a time of pandemic. This is evidenced not only by the interest in various stories whose narrative axis is the rapid spread of an unknown and mysterious disease, but also by the popularity of various types of dystopias. The pandemic has left its mark on literary and cultural studies reflection, as evidenced by the monographic journal issues created in recent years devoted to cultural images of the epidemic or (post)pandemic interpretations. Their guiding themes have been the textualizations of infectious disease over the centuries, its "long duration," and the interrelated representations and symbolizations of pandemics. The discursivization of the pandemic, moreover, involves methodological reflection, thinking about the usefulness of research perspectives developed in the contemporary humanities, such as the affective and memory turn, trauma and disaster studies, or reflection on the twilight of the Anthropocene, for analyzing the pandemic experience. The pandemic crisis has raised questions about the condition of the humanities and the university and the possibility of treating the COVID-19 pandemic as a tool for cultural change or reconfiguring the contemporary literary field.[16] Such attempts are defined by a clear predictive attitude.[17]

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14 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *An All-too-human Virus*, trans. Cory Stockwell, Sarah Clift and David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022); Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020); Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

15 Michalski, "Konceptualizowanie pandemii," 13–14.

16 Cf. Grzegorz Olszański, "Literatura współistniejąca" [Coexisting literature], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media* 2 (2021): 159–174.

17 An excellent example of this research perspective is the published transdisciplinary monograph *To wróci. Przeszłość i przyszłość pandemii* [It will come back. The past and future

The Affective Topographies of Pandemics

Forecasting the development of pandemic literature in 2020, Inga Iwasiów predicted that "in addition to diaries, reports from empty places, poems about loneliness, narratives about isolation, sensationalist fiction will be written […]. About the trade in masks, fraud, about transactions, smuggling, falsification of data, scams in laboratories, all-control."[18] While it is still difficult to verify the researcher and writer's somewhat ironic predictions about the rash of post-pandemic fiction, there is undoubtedly an expansion of nonfiction literature: reportages recording the initial struggle with the coronavirus (Paweł Kapusta's *Pandemia. Raport z frontu* [Pandemic. Report from the front]), Paweł Reszka's *Stan krytyczny* [Critical state], and Mira Suchodolska's *Wirusolodzy* [Virologists]), diaries and memoirs aimed at capturing the unique experience of the first lockdown. Situated within the pandemic literature of personal document are autobiographical narratives written for competition purposes, which are then the subject of sociological study, and those that were a continuation of the earlier writing practice or literary activity of their creators or authors. These include the post-competition anthologies *Wiosnę odwołano* [Spring canceled] and *Świat w grupie ryzyka* [The world in a risk group], with a sociological commentary *Pamiętniki pandemii* [Memoirs of a pandemic], as well as the polyphonic book *Jutro nie mieści się w głowie* [Tomorrow is unthinkable], initiated by writer Agata Tuszyńska,[19] which consists of diaries of

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of the pandemic], to which representatives of various disciplines and professions were invited to contribute. As the volume's editors declared in their introduction: "we don't know whether we will be talking about the pandemic in the past tense in the fall of 2022, when our book reaches readers. There is little indication of that. In view of this, perhaps the alarming warning 'It will come back' should not be used – since 'it' has not yet gone away. Yet we are sticking with the 'It will return' wording. For it represents a call to look at our reality from a post-pandemic perspective – as if the virus is gone. As long as we are stuck in the middle of the danger, our thinking is focused on saving lives and minimizing losses. To this necessary concern for the present, we want to add the perspective of tomorrow. This forces us to ask whether the pandemic is the only danger that threatens us in the future – so the idea is that, having taken the risk of temporarily moving out of the present, we should begin to fear differently"; Przemysław Czapliński and Joanna B. Bednarek, "Zanim wróci" [Before it returns], in *To wróci. Przeszłość i przyszłość pandemii* (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2022), 11–12.

18 Inga Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie. Literatura w potrzebie* [Unfreezing. Literature in need] (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2020), 143.

19 The anthologies of selected pandemic diaries were organized around different dominants: thematic (*Spring Canceled. An Anthology of Pandemic Diaries*), generational (*The World at Risk)*, and "simultanic" (*Memoirs of a Pandemic*) – in the latter case, the sociological analysis preceding the excerpts from the pandemic diaries gave them a presentist dimension. Cf. *Wiosnę odwołano. Antologia dzienników pandemicznych* [Spring has

the time of the pandemic being a kind of creative writing exercise. In addition to these, Jan Polkowski's diary *Pandemia i inne plagi. Notatki marzec – lipiec 2020* [The pandemic and other plagues. Notes March–July 2020] or Agnieszka Taborska's *Człowiek, który czeka. Pandemia na mansardzie* [A (wo)man awaits. The pandemic in the loft].[20] A particular example of pandemic writing practice is Inga Iwasiów's collection of essays *Odmrażanie. Literatura w potrzebie* [Unfreezing. Literature in need], which can be described as a blurred genre, playing with the conventions of a diary and a creative writing manual, as well as being a kind of laboratory for academic and creative work in the first months of the pandemic, an attempt to develop a poetic appropriate to the pandemic experience. Iwasiów's book reveals the inextricable intertwining of reading, writing and action in the pandemic academic and social space, which are also a gesture of political resistance to the new reality. In the afterword, the researcher emphasized that the editorial work on her book took place in the fall of 2020, and thus coincided with the "Women's Strike" protests in Poland after the Constitutional Court ruling on the tightening of the anti-abortion law. Iwasiów ends her book by writing:

> I have actively participated in protests and used their slogans, not seeing it as a transgression of principles, but as a practice arising strictly from theorizing about language, communication, and engagement. Protest is also a discourse inside the pandemic; it unfreezes society more effectively than weak anti-crisis shields and frail promises of a "return to normalcy."[21]

In the case of non-fiction pandemic literature, the temporal perspective is of obvious importance; diaries and memoirs bear witness to the taming of the liminal time of the pandemic – a time of isolation, but also of proximity and

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been canceled. An anthology of pandemic diaries] (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Walery Butewicz, Jacek Adamczyk and Miłosz Tomkowicz, *Świat w grupie ryzyka* [The world in a risk group] (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Maja Głowacka, Monika Helak, Małgorzata Łukianow, Mateusz Mazzini and Justyna Orchowska, *Pamiętniki pandemii* [Memoirs of a pandemic] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2022); Ka Klakla, Jarosław Księżyk, Marek Mżyk, Sonia Pohl, Monia Prylińska, Joanna Stryjeńska and Agata Tuszyńska, *Jutro nie mieści się w głowie. Dzienniki czasu pandemii* [Tomorrow is unthinkable. Diaries of a time of pandemic] (Warszawa: Blue Bird, 2020).

20 Jan Polkowski, *Pandemia i inne plagi. Notatki Marzec – lipiec 2020* [The pandemic and other plagues. Notes March–July 2020] (Warszawa: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Agnieszka Taborska, *Człowiek, który czeka. Pandemia na mansardzie* [The man who waits. Pandemic on the attic] (Kraków: Lokator, 2020).

21 Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie*, 246.

equalization of individuals in the face of the threat of the virus, a time that precipitates a sense of security, but which can at the same time unleash the creativity of the writing self.[22] Equally important, however, is the spatial perspective – the place from which pandemic narratives are written, challenging the notion that pandemics are egalitarian.

Iwona Boruszkowska and Mateusz Antoniuk noted that the pandemic-affected space has transformed into a large heterotopia, suspending the existing social and interpersonal relations. According to the editors, the notion of affective heterotopia, proposed by Aleksandra Wójtowicz, could become a useful tool for describing the pandemic reality:

> It seems to describe well our current spatial situation, namely confinement, attempting to isolate ourselves from the disease, creating cordons sanitaires, staying in an affective sphere governed by emotions associated with a sense of danger and living in constant fear of the epidemic, in fear of what cannot be seen.[23]

The category of affective heterotopia primarily emphasizes the commonality of the pandemic experience, the need to confront a new reality and the fear of the unknown. However, isolation in a specific space depends on a number of factors – personal, economic and social – which prompts us to think about the place in which pandemic narratives are fixed.[24] The experience of isolation initiates pandemic narratives, although at the same time the meanings ascribed to it are diametrically opposed. In the notes of the poet Jan Polkowski's *The Pandemic and Other Plagues*, isolation is a strategy of the writing subject for life and writing, an extension of his earlier choices in the biographical plan and creative activity. The title alone of the academic and writer Agnieszka Taborska's diary *A (Wo)man Awaits*, written between April 1 and June 27, 2020, visualizes the temporal and spatial state of limbo in which the author found herself, returning just before the announcement of the first lockdown

22 As one of the authors of the works submitted to the *Memoirs of a Pandemic* competition writes: "yesterday, looking for funding for people and cultural institutions in our city, I found by chance a grant for myself. Symbolic and in all likelihood unattainable, but motivating. Maybe I will finally dare to send my writing somewhere; admittedly it will not be poems, which I have been publishing in my mind for more than two years, but its most non-metaphorical part – a diary." "Memoir 323, 18.04.2020," in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 156.

23 Iwona Boruszkowska and Mateusz Antoniuk, "Introduction," *Konteksty Kultury* 3 (2020): 250.

24 This brings to mind Giovanni Bocaccio's *Decameron*, in which a group of wealthy Florentines, sheltered from the plague outside the city limits, indulge in narrative activity to overcome the boredom of isolation.

to Poland from the United States and beginning a vacation dedicated to creative work: "the plan was this: first creative lofting in Warsaw, and finally time for acquaintances, friends and my ageing parents. And with the advent of spring – travel! First will come Italy: Malta and Sicily."[25] The outbreak of the pandemic partially verifies these plans – the projected trip around Europe transforms into an erudite wandering in the titular loft space on the trail of literature and film, in which the current pandemic experience is reflected and broken, framed by the narrator in a highly artistic, essayistic way. "Creative lofting," which results in a diary written during forced isolation, involves meticulous noting of daily rituals and practices of the time of the pandemic, insightful observation of the awakening – contrary to and in spite of the pandemic – of spring in the plant and animal world, and, finally, observation from the perspective of the loft of the pandemic reality, which bears the hallmarks of surrealism so close to the narrator and therefore evokes curiosity above all. Taborska's diaries are conducted from the midst of the pandemic experience and at the same time from a distance, and are an example of narrativizing the pandemic with the help of literary and cinematic tropes, quotations and allusions. This is evidenced by the title of her pandemic diary, which refers to Georges Perec's novel *A Man Asleep*, a story about voluntarily annulling the temporal and spatial parameters of existence, withdrawing from life and interpersonal relations, and the consequences of this decision. In addition, the narrator confronts her reflections with diaries textualizing the experience of the plague – Jonathan Harker's diary from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Daniel Defoe's *Diary of a Plague Year* or Samuel Pepys' *Diary*, while complementing her reflections is an impressive inventory of books read during the pandemic and films watched. "The woman who awaits," in Taborska's terms, is at the same time a writing subject who reads, looks and constantly undertakes the act of interpreting the reality around her, exposing her own positioning: "I know, I'm writing from the point of view of a person doesn't lose grip for lack of money, who doesn't have remotely controlled responsibilities or children to take care of. I have the luxury I have earned through years of lectures: a sabbatical, a semester dedicated to creative work."[26]

A radically different narrative perspective is presented by Wioletta Grzegorzewska's *Wilcza rzeka* [Wolf river], published in 2021, consisting of diary entries initially posted on Facebook, reporting on the writer's stay in the United Kingdom during the lockdown and the growing Covid panic. *Wolf River* can be read as an autobiographical pandemic novel, and at the same time a road

25 Taborska, *Człowiek, który czeka*, 9.

26 Ibid., 15.

novel, a narrative of the literal and metaphorical search for a room of one's own by Wioletta and her teenage daughter Julia. Projected by the author's alter ego, her move from the Isle of Wight to Hastings coincides with the outbreak of the pandemic, the disease affecting her, and the loss of her previous residence and ability to move freely:

> It started with a chill that filled me, as if someone had injected freon into my veins or thrown me into an icy river. It was a warm noon in March 2020. The police were roaming around the town. Horse patrols slid through the center of Ryde like eels […]. The radio broadcast a message: "stay at home," and I was getting ready to leave.[27]

Signs of impending disaster, appearing from the first pages of the novel, take a turn for the worse when Wioletta manages to get to Hastings with her ex-husband and daughter at the last minute before the ferry crossings close. The tripartite structure of *Wolf River* reflects the movement of the narrator and her daughter between successive non-places, temporary spaces of a heterotopic nature: a squalid room in a house inhabited by emigrants, the apartment of a violent and alcohol-abusing husband, and finally a closed center for women victims of violence:

> And so we ended up HERE. Here could have meant a lot. It was an unmarked place on the map, not listed in the phone books, but it certainly meant better than THERE, by the train station. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have become adept at packing: phone, chargers, laptop and reader, toothbrushes, important documents, passports, birth certificates. Two small suitcases and one large one.[28]

Constructed from short notes, *Wolf River* is a novel in process, accumulating the pandemic-related experiences of incapacitating illness, being stranded in a hostile, claustrophobic space inhabited by outsiders, isolation that is a source of domestic and sexual violence, loss of financial resources and a sense of security, and the temporariness of existence. The narrative of Grzegorzewska's novel is conducted from the perspective of a defective subject, struggling with psychosomatic ailments, searching for her place in space and pandemic dystopian reality. Referring to the category proposed by Arthur W. Frank, Wioletta can be described as a wounded narrator who weaves a story through her body. However, this is a narrative not only about illness,

27 Wioletta Grzegorzewska, *Wilcza rzeka* [Wolf river] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2021), 11–12.

28 Ibid., 251.

but also about the sexuality she discovers in adulthood and the satisfaction of her own desires.

Grzegorzewska's story ultimately turns out to be a survival narrative, a scriptotherapy conducted from within a traumatic experience,[29] prompting a rethinking of one's own past along with a defective family structure, failed marriage, codependency syndrome and suicide attempts. However, *Wolf River* is also an (auto)ethnography conducted from the heterotopic space of a succession of boltholes, recording the laws that govern them, the experiences of female emigrants, victims of violence subjected to the supervision and judgment of welfare institutions. It is also a study of migrant loneliness exacerbated by Brexit and pandemic isolation, in which the collapse of the publishing market in the era of the pandemic also peeks out from underneath the individual and social catastrophe – canceled author meetings, long-awaited royalties confront the readers of this prose with the situation of an expatriate writer deprived of a steady income and a metaphorical and literally understood room of her own. Grzegorzewska's pandemic-autobiographical novel is set in heterotopic spaces, but also affective heterotopia is produced – it is a space built from Facebook notes, emotions, pandemic fears and hopes.

Another perspective on the Covid reality is offered by Paweł Kapusta in his reporter's chronicle of the first weeks of the pandemic. The subtitle "report from the front" can be taken as a foreshadowing of the raw reporter's account of the places that can serve as spatial metaphors for the epidemic and isolation: major hospitals, infectious wards, smear ambulances, hospital laboratories. The reporter gives voice to so-called key workers – primarily medical representatives, but also a hospice worker, a funeral parlor employee, a salesman, a letter carrier, a postal worker, a teacher. Their stories, supplemented by the perspectives of Covid convalescents (including the author of the report himself) and the mother of a cancer-stricken child, form a polyphony to which the subsequent chapters, corresponding to 23 days of the pandemic, are subordinated. In designing the pandemic polyphony, Kapusta primarily draws attention to the perspective of representatives of medical professions who, until the pandemic, were situated in the realm of social invisibility, including laboratory diagnosticians. First and foremost, however, *Pandemic. Report from the Front* is a story about the inefficiency of the health

29 I use the category of scriptotherapy from Suzette Henke's approach. In her book *Shattered Subject*, Henke described the literary strategies of women healing the wounds of psychological trauma, for whom writing from within a traumatic experience has a therapeutic dimension. Cf. Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subject. Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

service, the pathosystem[30] enmeshing medical services and patients in its networks, the problems escalating in the face of a pandemic catastrophe. The picture of the health service in the first weeks of the pandemic that emerges from the accounts of Kapusta's interviewees resembles a post-apocalyptic landscape – representatives of the medical profession face chronic fatigue, a constant sense of threat to life and health, a lack of protective measures and empathy on the part of superiors, social stigmatization in the face of the threat of coronavirus, and, finally, the disregard of the epidemic threat by patients, which is largely a consequence of long waits for treatments and the fear of losing their place in line. Kapusta's report, through its subtitle, also sets in motion military metaphors, provoking thought as to whether we are dealing here only with a conventional ploy to inscribe the experience of the pandemic into a war-heroic narrative structure, or rather with a contribution to the construction of social memory of the pandemic and its victims, an attempt to reformulate the notion of heroism, associated primarily with war, in a spirit of solidarity and concern for the fate of the other. For, as one of the protagonists of the reportage confesses:

> Every time I see and hear this term ["heroes without capes"], I feel that it is unnecessary. We are doing exactly what we did before the epidemic. […] It's just that before, hardly anyone noticed our work. Hardly anyone heard our cries for help. For reform of the health system, the lack of which is now hiccupping. No one noticed that, after all, we also risked our own lives back then. […]
> For me, the heroes today are people who lose their jobs and still drive up to the hospital and drop off a cardboard box of masks. Or elderly women sewing masks. Or the ladies who bring us disinfectant fluids and gloves from beauty salons, and bankrupt themselves in the process. […] These are the real heroes.[31]

The personal documentary literature created during the pandemic highlights the power with which catastrophic-war associations are imposed in the face of crisis. In Mateusz Pakuła's intimate dying diary, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję*[32] [How I didn't kill my father and how much I regret it], the pandemic is an essential actor in the network in which the narrator writes

30 Cf. Agnieszka Dauksza, "Humanistyka medyczna: o leczeniu (się) w patosystemie" [The medical humanities: On healing (oneself) in a Pathosystem], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2021): 38–58.

31 Paweł Kapusta, *Pandemia. Raport z frontu* [Pandemic. Report from the front] (Kraków: Insignis, 2020), 88.

32 Mateusz Pakuła, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję* [How I didn't kill my father and how much I regret it] (Warszawa: Nisza, 2021).

and acts, encompassing the institution of the hospital and the palliative care unit, as well as the space of the family home as the setting for Marek Pakuła's dying. The diaristic narrative that reveals here the intertwining of the affective and the experiential is set in motion by the affects of shame, guilt and humiliation, as well as the experience of helplessness in the encounter with the medical pathosystem whose neglect and abuse, even if related to a lack of communication and condescension, the pandemic mercilessly exposes. The pandemic context of Mateusz Pakuła's book reveals not only the invalidation of cancer and the resulting death by Covid morbidity and death statistics. Lockdown contributes to the escalation of intergenerational conflict in the narrator's family home, but also, paradoxically, offers time and space for a final emotional closeness with his dying father.

Community of Individual Experiences, or You Will (Not) Know What You Experienced

It was not only professionals who engaged in writing in the first period of the pandemic. Shortly after the lockdown was announced, there were forecasts predicting an outpouring of various forms of personal documentary literature, bearing witness to the "strange spring" of 2020 and having a clear self-reflective and self-therapeutic dimension in the process. The need to narrativize the pandemic experience was managed by institutions and research teams that announced competitions for pandemic diaries and memoirs, thus drawing on the tradition of memoir competitions and adopting the sociological method of analyzing personal documents initiated by Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas.[33] The genre of the competition diary has a long and rich tradition, and therefore requires a separate study from a cultural genealogy perspective, emphasizing its processual nature and connection to a specific historical moment. Pandemic diaries and memoirs, the outcome of competitions announced by the Institute of Literature and a group of researchers centered around the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institutes of Sociology and Culture of the University of Warsaw, not only provide valuable research material for the sociology of literature or the sociology of everyday life,[34]

33 Maja Głowacka, Monika Helak and Justyna Kościńska, "Konkurs 'Pamiętniki Pandemii.' Założenia, wyniki, wstępne refleksje" ['Pandemic Diaries' competition: Assumptions, results, preliminary reflections], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media* 3 (2020): 230.

34 Cf. Wiesław Gumuła, ed., *Dzienniki stanu pandemii (Czytane z perspektywy socjologii codzienności)* [Diaries of the state of the pandemic (Read from the perspective of the sociology of everyday life)] (Warszawa: Nomos, 2020).

but also confirm the vitality of the genre of the competition memoir, the importance of an individual, salutary and ordering narrative in the face of a collective threat. As Olga Drenda noted:

> Memoirs written in the heat of the moment, from the midst of events and, more importantly, unfiltered by the reflection of the writer, who is probably inclined to look for additional contexts or stylize events so that they look more digestible narratively – are always valuable documents, especially in moments when, as a result of shock, breakthrough, disaster, surprise, there is a "dislocation of time."[35]

The pandemic diaries and memoirs revealed a wide spectrum of varied, and time-varying, responses to the pandemic crisis, which, being a communal experience, meant something different for each individual, and involved a different mix of affects, intensity of emotions, and experience of loss(s). The introduction to *Memoirs of a Pandemic* contains the following statement:

> There was not one pandemic. At least from the point of view of the authors of this book, there were exactly 404, as many as the number of works submitted to the competition. What is known, however, is that there were actually many more of these viewpoints, as everyone experienced, interpreted and named it in a way that was profoundly their own. The contagion caused by the coronavirus showed us that a truly community-wide phenomenon can only be fully understood when one adopts the perspective of many different individuals in looking at it.[36]

Researchers appreciating the uniqueness of pandemic diaries and memoirs as the material of sociological analysis have, on the one hand, insisted on the necessity of its immediate execution, and, on the other hand, highlighted the opportunities offered by reading them from the distance separating the period of their creation from the moment of publication, when the memory of the first months of the pandemic gradually began to dim. In this way, the pandemic literature of personal documentaries can also be treated as a creation of preposterous history[37], allowing one not only to reflect on the past from the perspective of the present, but also to project a future in which disaster becomes conceivable.

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35 Olga Drenda, "Życie z wciśniętą pauzą" [Life with pause pressed], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 7.

36 "Wstęp" in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 14.

37 Cf. Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

The pandemic literature of the personal document is a record of various survival strategies in the face of crisis, such as "building a sense of security in domestic routines, searching for universal references, seeking salvation in rationalism and science (or the opposite), creating new relationships, habits, ways of dealing with everyday life."[38] In my opinion, the phenomenon of its feminization deserves special attention, since the diaries and memoirs of the competition were created overwhelmingly by women, particularly affected by the crisis, both professionally and privately, as those most often burdened by care work and the emotional baggage associated with it.[39] Looking at the practices of writing women's diaries, Iwasiów emphasizes that writing revolutionizes women – the pandemic gesture of writing would therefore take on a particular significance in the context of women's strikes on access to abortion coinciding with the pandemic, to which direct references can also be found on the pages of competition diaries, which reveal the interpenetration of the private and the public, the relationship between writing and action.

The diaries created during the first lockdown period can also be considered an important element of therapeutic culture, and at the same time a testimony to pandemic mental disorders, triggered or intensified by the fear of a global catastrophe that turns into a private one. Monika Helak, who analyzed the therapeutic diaries, distinguished in them the threads of depression resulting from isolation, anxiety and peculiarly looped time, recognizing that "these are typical feelings in an ineffective – that is: not ending in escape or rescue – reaction to a (subjectively assessed) deadly threat,"[40] inherent in the experience of trauma. The therapeutic dimension of the diaries created in the first months of 2020 is related to narrativizing the experience of crisis, and therefore to counteracting trauma. In the pandemic diaries one can see traces of struggling with the matter of everyday life and noting victories in this field, as well as struggling with space and one's own resisting body:

> I dream of pictorial cataclysms, I wake up heavy with anxiety, sadness, mourning for the loss affecting me in my sleep. I have to get up, set a plan for the day, the

38 "Wstęp" in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 15.

39 Monika Helak, Małgorzata Łukianow and Justyna Orchowska, "Kobiety – piszące bohaterki pandemii" [Women – writing heroes of the pandemic], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 84.

40 Monika Helak, "Trauma społeczna? Dzienniki terapeutyczne czasu pandemii" [Social trauma? Therapeutic diaries of a time of pandemic], in *To wróci*, 337. The researcher noted that the severe stress reaction resulting from the pandemic began to be described as a subunit of Post-COVID Stress Disorder.

next day, which must be survived and not collapse into the black, dirty and sticky. Not sink into a sense of meaninglessness, crumpled bedding, stuffiness and dust. To come up with something that can be considered a plan of action. […]

I was supposed to write, write down the interview, create, create something worthy of attention. Only whose? Probably not mine. Attention I am currently unable to focus. So I scrub the wall, bake a cake.[41]

March 24, 2020

It's been a week, nine days, and my rot is still progressing, gently. The informational and ontological shock that accompanied me recently (first illnesses, deaths, bans, injunctions) is subsiding a bit, although the situation doesn't seem to be improving at all.

The apartment is made of rubber, the walls expand under my increasingly heavy body, but I also bounce off them, I can't get anywhere further. The apartment has become the center of a black hole.[42]

Researchers analyzing the biographical material collected as part of the *Memoirs of the Pandemic* competition recognized that figures fixed in collective memory played an extremely important role in taming the pandemic experience.[43] The authors of the diaristic notes, in their attempt to interpret the pandemic crisis, drew on the stock of personal memories, but also family histories, passed down from generation to generation.[44] As Mateusz Mazzini notes, "collective memory, of society as a whole as a community, expressed through shared rituals, symbols and interpretations of past events, proved to be a useful tool in initially naming the threat that the coronavirus carried."[45] Both collective memory and post-memory mechanisms did not so much provide ready-made narrative structures to make sense of the pandemic, but hinted at strategies for survival in crisis situations – hence

41 "Pamiętnik 60, 15.03.2020," in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 147–148.

42 Dominika Chmiel, "Panna Pandemia" [Miss Pandemic], in *Wiosnę odwołano*, 136.

43 Mateusz Mazzini, "Pandemia czy stan wojenny? Wirus a polska pamięć zbiorowa" [Pandemic or Martial Law? The virus and Polish collective memory], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 202.

44 An example is Renata Kochan's diary entitled "Niewybuch" [The unexploded] – its narrator, by means of a received photograph, returns to her own family history and difficult relations with her father, which become the background for her strained relations with her teenage daughter, escalating during the period of isolation. Renata Kochan, "Niewybuch", in *Wiosnę odwołano*, 227–252.

45 Mazzini, "Pandemia czy stan wojenny?," 203.

the frequent references to Second World War or Martial Law, evoking reminiscences of border closures, imposed restrictions on freedom of movement or shortages of supplies. Ultimately, however, the topoi of collective memory did not stand up to the clash with the unprecedented nature of the pandemic – both the metaphorization of the virus as an occupant and references to the concept of heroism, which occupies an important place in Polish collective memory, proved ineffective.[46]

The lack of models to narrativize the coronavirus pandemic is related, I believe, to the Spanish flu pandemic, still unassimilated by Polish collective memory, effectively obscured by the heroic independence narrative.[47] The increasing temporal distance separating the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic from the present moment is clearly conducive to critical-revisionist readings of the pandemic abundantly building up the first months of 2020 with a variety of interpretations, stretched between forecasting the end of the existing social order and the absence of any change, among which would be the announcement of a "new normal." At the same time, the mechanisms of forgetting that Tomasz Michniewicz wrote about in *Chwilowa anomalia* [Momentary anomaly] were activated almost immediately:

> This book might as well have been titled *Unforgetting*. Our ability to forget is truly amazing. Evolutionarily, it helps us not to go crazy. Thanks to it, we push traumas and unpleasant experiences out of our consciousness and do not relive them every day. Today, one might already suggest, probably to our own destruction. […]
>
> The worst did not come, or perhaps it had no right to come at all. Several months have passed, after which few people remember at all what happened at the

46 In *Memoirs of a Pandemic*, for example, there is a recurring theme of talking to members of the older generation and comparing the current pandemic situation with Martial Law: "I asked my mother […] if this time we are currently experiencing and the time of Martial Law introduced in Poland in the 1980s, which of these periods would she consider more severe. My mother's answer was short: It's hard to live now, my child. During Martial Law, at least you could meet people without fear and experience this difficult time together, now this fear of this invisible enemy is the worst and this isolation from others." "Memoir 225, 13.04.2020," in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 232.

47 It is worth noting that Łukasz Mieszkowski's monograph *Największa. Pandemia hiszpanki u progu niepodległej Polski* [The greatest. The Spanish flu pandemic at the threshold of independent Poland) was published only in 2020, coinciding with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The 1963 outbreak of smallpox recorded in Wrocław was also not etched in Polish collective memory. Cf. Łukasz Mieszkowski, *Największa. Pandemia hiszpanki u progu niepodległej Polski* (Warszawa: Polityka, 2020); Jerzy B. Kos, *Ospa 1963. Alarm dla Wrocławia* [Smallpox 1963: Alarm for Wroclaw] (Wrocław: Warstwy, 2018).

> beginning of the pandemic. Then again, we may still remember, but the emotional memory has faded. We think about that time as if we were replaying a movie in our heads, rather than our own experiences and emotions.[48]

Polish collective memory is still resisting the pandemic, and it is now difficult to imagine pandemic memorials or anniversaries commemorating victims of the coronavirus. Whereas in the past plague columns were a votive offering for saving the population from the plague, today it is impossible to imagine their modern counterparts. What remains are pandemiographies written from inside the crisis, grounded in individual experience, seeking support from universal stories or traditional narrative structures. Considering the impact of the pandemic on literary life from the perspective of useful disasters, Grzegorz Olszański concluded that even if the pandemic was not indifferent to the literary field, still it did not directly affect literature. Olszański writes, "reportages describing the fight against the pandemic […] and the rash of pandemic diaries […] are far too few to note this in the category of a significant phenomenon, which we have never faced before."[49]

However, it is worth noting here the relationship between the genres of pandemiography and Chernobyl, discussed by Tamara Hundorova. Although the Chernobyl nuclear disaster is incomparable to the coronavirus pandemic, it serves as a kind of mirror. According to the Ukrainian researcher, the template for the Chernobyl genre is Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. This reportage, a collection of interviews written ten years after the nuclear disaster, proposes to see this event in terms of testimony and remembrance. Hundorova points out that the English title of Alexievich's book legitimized oral history as a current form of storytelling about the Chernobyl trauma. Alexievich avoided the classic attitude of the narrator, giving voice to her characters and not imposing her perspective on them. A similar assumption guides pandemiographies as documentary literature, especially post-competition anthologies of pandemic diaries. The experience of the Chernobyl catastrophe, suppressed and subjected to political regimes of censorship, obtained its representation belatedly, while the pandemic unleashed an immediate movement of writing and expansion of narrative autobiographical forms, in which the fundamental difference between the Chernobyl and pandemic genres should be seen. Hundorova diagnoses the emergence of a new post-Chernobyl literature, triggered by post-memory

48 Tomasz Michniewicz, *Chwilowa anomalia. O chorobach współistniejących naszego świata* [Momentary anomaly. On the comorbidities of our world] (Kraków: Otwarte, 2020), 7–8.

49 Olszański, "Literatura współistniejąca," 171.

mechanisms. According to the researcher, "Chernobyl remains [...] a current signifier of modernity, capable of producing new artistic forms."[50] However, it is difficult to expect that the pandemic could play a similar role if the mechanisms of forgetting were activated during its first months. This, in turn, leads to the gradual exhaustion of pandemic writing, despite encouragement to look at reality from a post-pandemic perspective.

According to Hundorova: "it is of particular importance that the Chernobyl discourse remains a post-catastrophic and post-traumatic discourse; it is not only a means of commenting on the present and real accidents, but forms new ways of thinking."[51] The researcher diagnoses that during the time of post-disaster uncertainty, new forms of expression are being created that permeate different genres and speaking styles.[52] Characterizing the poetics of the Chernobyl text, Hundorova mentions, among other things, "the non-linear narrative method, the visualization of the moment of explosion, the introduction of parallel worlds, repetition, transgression, open ending, and the focus of the action on the narrative plane."[53] The pandemic literature of the personal document seems to draw more inspiration from war or epidemic diaries than from post-apocalyptic narratives. Pandemic personal documentary literature seems to draw more inspiration from war or epidemic memoirs than from post-apocalyptic narratives. References to classic cultural texts and grounding one's own stories in traditional narrative structures strips away the uniqueness of the pandemic experience, but can also build a sense of security in an unpredictable reality. Nevertheless, the expansion of pandemiography can be considered a large-scale writing experiment in an extreme situation, which multiplies narratives and points of view, provoking reflection on language and metaphors appropriate to the pandemic, or on the usefulness of the category

50 Tamara Hundorowa, "Gatunek czarnobylski: wyparcie realnego i nuklearna sublimacja" [The Chernobyl genre: Displacement of the real and nuclear sublimation], in *Po Czarnobylu. Miejsce katastrofy w dyskursie współczesnej humanistyki*, ed. Iwona Boruszkowska, Katarzyna Glinianowicz, Aleksandra Grzemska and Paweł Krupa (Kraków: WUJ, 2017), 66.

51 Tamara Hundorowa, "Czarnobyl, nuklearna apokalipsa i postmodernism" [Chernobyl, the nuclear apocalypse and postmodernism], trans. Iwona Boruszkowska, *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2014): 253.

52 Hundorowa, "Czarnobyl." Writing about the phenomenon of pandemic narratives, Inga Iwasiów notes: "this is the strangest experience of writing in pandemic – although we participate in unusual events, the massiveness takes away the uniqueness of our reactions. Our notes don't need ciphers, we don't hide them. On the contrary [...] we are encouraged, asked." Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie*, 54–55.

53 Hundorowa, "Czarnobyl," 256.

of catastrophe to conceptualize it.[54] References to Chernobyl literature can be seen not only in the diversity of pandemic genres, the non-conclusiveness of pandemiography based on narrative, but also in the reflection on human and interspecies relations, the state of nature and the end of the Anthropocene from the perspective of the pandemic.

References to the Chernobyl text are also of a more direct nature. In Sylwia Chutnik's short story "Pandemino. Dziennik czasów zamknięcia" [Pandemino. A diary of closing times], a fictional journal from the time of the pandemic first published in 2020, two realities overlap disturbingly. The first consists of pandemic snapshots: a microcosm of balconies where momentary human relationships are established, daily activities in the confined space of an apartment, rituals that give the illusion of a sense of security, and finally conspiracy theories and rumors spreading like a virus:

> Yesterday, when I went out into the dumpster for a while, I heard someone warn that: "the corpses are going straight to medical examination, and those who are still alive are being deliberately poisoned so that they die faster." When asked why anyone would care about our deaths, the answer was one: they want to raze whatever is left of us to the ground and then build huge manufacturing plants. Factories and warehouses where the pandemic's survivors will work: children, the poor, perhaps robots. Goods will be shipped to Mars, where a colony for the richest is already being prepared. A mass evacuation of planet Earth – this is what the virus, which has been worked on in secret in government laboratories for years, was needed for.[55]

The second level of the story opens up a post-anthropocentric perspective and reveals its post-apocalyptic dimension. The narrator of "Pandemino" draws on resources of collective memory, when she recalls a neighbor who died of a heart attack a few days after the partial closure of the city was announced: "it reminded her of the ghetto and the walls that were erected along the streets, separating people from each other. She didn't want to go on living."[56] At the same time, the narrator refers to the Chernobyl imaginary when she writes about the mass killing of animals contaminated with the

54 Cf. Anna Barcz and Jarosław Płuciennik, "Post-pandemic Nature, Crisis, Catastrophes and Their Metaphorical Discourses. Editorial Introduction," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (2021): 7–18.

55 Sylwia Chutnik, "Pandemino. Dziennik czasów zamknięcia" [Pandemino. A Diary of Closing Times], in Chutnik, *Dintojra* (Kraków: Znak, 2024), 48.

56 Ibid., 53.

virus or evacuations from residential buildings. The narrator chooses her own survival strategy and refuses to comply with top-down, pandemic decisions: "I will not take part in any evacuation. I'm not suitable for running down the stairs and crowding in front of specially provided buses. I refuse to take part in the last maneuvers. I have no more money, so I have no more burdens. I'm staying at home."[57] In this way, she refuses to participate in the pandemic reality, and her pandemic survival strategy is reduced to the act of breathing, which takes on a special dimension in the face of the coronavirus. The breath that fogs up the glass makes the observed apocalyptic reality unreal. Jolanta Brach-Czaina, framing breathing in a philosophical perspective, observes:

> We participate in the world through breathing, and this is what is dominant and never a form of activity that we relinquish. […] We change interests, plans, work, we move away from places and people. Breathing is one of the few activities that we cannot abandon. Where we are is first of all, our breath. Although we take refuge in buildings, the only permanent the place of existence for us is the air.[58]

The imperceptible and fleeting breath violates the boundaries between the living and the dead, the external and the internal. In the pandemic reality, breathing is the most primal survival strategy. In the case of a pandemic, "catching breath" can be a particularly eloquent metaphor, referring to what is psychosomatic, social and political, individual and collective, needed for life and potentially threatening.[59]

A multitude of first-person narratives cannot (and should not) produce a monolithic story about the pandemic, just as it is ineffective to think in terms of a pandemic imagined community. If one accepts, following Ivan Krastev, that the pandemic resembles a television series, it may be worth looking at it through the lens of the observations made by Olga Tokarczuk in her essay *The Tender Narrator.* According to the writer, a series offers the contemporary viewer a kind of cognitive trance, multiplies new narrative orders, while not shying away from anachronistic solutions, since "The potential materialization of another season creates the necessity of open endings in which there is no way that mysterious things called catharsis can occur or resound fully – catharsis, formerly the experience of the internal transformation, the

57 Ibid., 60.

58 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, "O oddychaniu" [About breathing], *Kultura Współczesna* 1/2 (2000): 10.

59 Cf. Brach-Czaina, "O oddychaniu," 14. Iwasiów compares the pandemic metaphor of the ventilator and the "iron lung" from the times of the polio epidemic, analyzing their sociocultural and political meanings. Cf. Iwasiów, "Odmrażanie," 57–59.

fulfillment and satisfaction of having participated in the action of the tale."[60] Perhaps, then, it is worth replacing the word "series" with "pandemic" and recognizing that:

> the *pandemic* inscribes itself into the new, drawn-out and disordered rhythm of the world, into its chaotic communication, its instability and fluidity. […] In that sense, there is serious work in the *pandemic* on the narratives of the future, on reformatting the story so that it suits our new reality.[61]

Abstract

Joanna Szewczyk
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Pandemiographies: Theories, Practices, Forecasts

The article discusses selected narratives written from within the pandemic experience, created in the first months of 2020, defined by the inclusive category of pandemygraphy, which encompasses both essayistic projects and pandemic autobiographical literature. The analysis considers strategies of narrativizing the pandemic in its experiential, affective, and symbolic dimensions. Based on diverse stories – including those by A. Taborska, W. Grzegorzewska, P. Kapusta, M. Pakuła, along with diaries during the first period of the pandemic – the article analyzes the described survival strategies, including the autotherapeutic dimension of the narratives. Thus, the author reflects on the mechanisms of collective memory that resists the pandemic experience.

Keywords

pandemic, pandemiography, affective heterotopia, pandemic diary, narration

60 Olga Tokarczuk, "Nobel Lecture: The Tender Narrator," December 7, 2019, trans. Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones, accessed September 26, 2024, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/tokarczuk/lecture/.

61 Tokarczuk, "Nobel Lecture."

Tomasz Szerszeń

To Survive: Towards an Anthropology of Shelter

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.4 | ORCID: 0000-0003-1522-1327

Tomasz Szerszeń – cultural anthropologist, essayist, visual artist. Assistant Professor at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he heads the Laboratory of Anthropology of Culture and Audiovisual Arts. Since June 2024 editor-in-chief of *Konteksty* quarterly. Author of the books *Być gościem w katastrofie* [Being a quest in a catastrophe] (2024), *Wszystkie wojny świata* [All the world's wars] (2021), *Architektura przetrwania* [Architecture of survival] (2017), *Podróżnicy bez mapy i paszportu* [Travelers without a map or passport] (2015), editor of the anthology *Oświecenie, czyli tu i teraz* [Enlightenment or here and now] (2021). Editor of the publishing series *Atlas. Anthropology of the Visual* (słowo/obraz terytoria). Email: tomasz.szerszeń81@gmail.com

To Make Yourself Invisible

In Lena Lagushonkova's *Life in Case of War*,[1] a drama written less than two months after the outbreak of war in Ukraine "on the basis of real stories," an instruction manual on how to survive is created from scattered dramatic stories, traumatic flashbacks and heard truisms. The convention of the text oscillates between the elaboration of real textual help for people threatened by warfare and the exposure of the total helplessness in the face of war, revealing – always – the randomness, fragility and precariousness of human life in the face of brutal violence. Despite the collective and therapeutic dimension of both Lagushonkova's drama and its staging (the text was written specifically for specific Ukrainian refugee actresses and also included their stories), it fundamentally reminds us that, as Judith Butler wrote, "precariousness

1 I would like to thank the Theatre Polski in Bydgoszcz for providing me with the text of the drama. The text was translated by MAart translation agency for the "Kontakt" International Theatre Festival in Toruń, all quotes are from this translation.

implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other" and that "precarious life implies life as a conditioned process."[2] At the end of the performance, the actresses transform again symbolically into refugee women whose status is uncertain and who are exposed to the randomness of war and refugee biopolitics.

Life in Case of War is made up of eleven short scenes, constituting the successive points of this manual. One of them refers to rape as a potential and at the same time probable event threatened by life in a country at war. The fact that the text was written for six Ukrainian actresses who flew to Poland after February 24, 2022, and also takes into account their stories, emphasizes the collective, feminist dimension of this drama, in which sexual violence becomes an experience that unites a community of potential victims. Rape appears here as one of the old techniques of war, part of a brutal necropolitics whose aim is to ruin the enemy's world, to turn the space of her/his existence into a place where life is impossible:[3] this is achieved through the real and symbolic destruction of the space and time in which the victim/colonized lives, but also the destruction of her/his body and psyche – fragile and vulnerable elements.

According to Lagushonkova's war manual – taken here, of course, in ironic parenthesis by putting it in the mouth of a chorus of psychologists, most probably men – the only way to avoid the destructive power of rape is to try to separate the body and the affective sphere. To make the body a s y m b o l i c s h e l t e r, and thus – to be able to survive. Faced with the cruelty of this kind of violence and the possible strategies to "minimize losses," we are confronted here with the question: what does it mean to survive? Is survival inscribed, as it were, a priori, in the subsequent rebirth? And is not the potentiality of rape itself a form of violence that turns the world into a hostile place in which, in order to survive, one must make oneself as invisible as possible, d i s a p p e a r f r o m s i g h t?

> If rape cannot be prevented and you are not sure whether you're able to put up a fight, try to "freeze" inside and out. The rapist isn't interested in sex but in proving his power over you, he wants to humiliate and degrade you. Active resistance on the part of a victim will spark and feed sadistic behavior. Therefore, the woman might be exposed to more pain and suffer genital and bodily injuries.
> CHORUS: Advice from psychologists:

2 Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 14, 23.

3 See Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

Repeat to yourself: "This is only my body, my soul is bigger, stronger, it cannot be possessed. I am 1000 times greater than my body. It's just a body."

- Important: do not allow yourself to feel guilty. The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame.

If possible, perform basic hygiene. But don't risk your life to fetch a bucket of water from a well that is under fire.

- Most importantly: do not allow yourself to feel guilty. The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame.

If you're in pain, use household antiseptics: a solution of baking soda (1 teaspoon per 0.5 liters of water), plain clean water, alcohol-free wet wipes for children, Triderm ointment, Levomekol ointment, Triacutan ointment, Bepanthen ointment. You can use Chlorhexidine once. Also regular hand cream, if you have any.

Remember: The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame. Do not allow yourself to feel guilty.

Do not use antiseptics or wipes containing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, Panthenol, oil, or other greasy products.

- Important: do not allow yourself to feel guilty. The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame.

If you are of reproductive age, the risk of unwanted pregnancy is high, especially on day 6 to 16 of your menstrual cycle. For emergency contraception, take 0.1 mg of ethinylestradiol (i.e. 5 tablets of 0.02 mg or 4 tablets of 0.025 mg, or 2 tablets of 0.03 and 0.035 mg), and no less than 0.5 mg of Levonorgestrel. Repeat the dose after 12 hours.

This contraception is most effective if used within the first 24 to 72 hours after unprotected sex.

Remember: The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame. Do not allow yourself to feel guilty.

As soon as you have the opportunity, see a psychologist and a doctor, and get tested for sexually transmitted diseases.

Do not allow yourself to feel guilty. The rapist is to blame, the occupier is to blame.

Were you taking notes?

Here, Lagushonkova touches upon an experience that remains – constantly – tabooised and – always – insufficiently reported and represented, and whose real image and traumatic impact on the lives of specific individuals will probably only be discovered many years after the end of hostilities in Ukraine. This invisibility of rape is also highlighted by the Israeli researcher and curator Ariella Aïsha Azoulay in her text "The Natural History of Rape"[4] (under this

4 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 236–264 or Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, "The Natural History of Rape," accessed January 2, 20203,

title, she also presented a work at the 12th Berlin Biennale in 2022: it consisted of a montage of historical photographs, book and magazine covers, textual commentaries, drawings, and finally the so-called "untaken photographs" – a concept whose theoretical basis she develops in her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*). Azoulay focuses on the rapes carried out by Soviet (but also, somewhat later, Allied) soldiers in Berlin at the end of April and throughout May 1945: several hundred thousands[5] women fell victim to them there at the time. The official date of the end of the war does not mark the end of the suffering of German women: in fact, the next month is a period of suspended law, a moment removed from "historical time" and therefore formless in its own way. This obscurity of the end and uncertainty of the beginning, so characteristic of moments of historical catastrophe, becomes for Azoulay a pretext to point to the oppressiveness of imperial history, which establishes itself by making invisible the suffering of the powerless.

In her essay, Azoulay refers to Marguerite Duras, who notes in the days of the war's end: "Berlin is burning. […] There are still some people alive there. […] I think of the German mother of the little seventeen-year-old soldier who lay dying on August 17, 1944, alone on the heap of stones on the Quai des Arts."[6] The French writer empathizes with the fate of German women and outlines a perspective on the potentiality of rape as a universal experience – thus evading the national, wartime logic that denies the enemy care and humanity. Rather, she tries to make the memory of violence and destruction multidirectional:[7] she later develops this way of talking about the catastrophe of war in the screenplay *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). The theme that appears here, between the words, of the hunt for women – they are German women, but after all, the same experience happened in France and elsewhere to collaborators, lovers of Germans, finally: completely random women who find themselves in the "wrong place at the wrong time" – is later developed in the scenario of the film about the double tragedy of Hiroshima and of Her (the French Woman), where the main character survives the end of the war

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https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/fourcs-content/files/689/original/natural_history_rape.pdf?1588861085. As an artistic installation *Natural History of Rape* (2017/2022), accessed January 2, 2023 https://12.berlinbiennale.de/artists/ariella-aisha-azoulay/.

5 Different sources give different statistics. Azoulay writes, for example, of between 500,000 to 700,000 women raped in Berlin, which at first glance seems exaggerated, although not impossible.

6 I quote from: Azoulay, *Potential History*, 249–250.

7 See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

locked in the basement of the family home: a place that is her private prison and, at the same time, a shelter, protecting her from the "hunt" and, in effect, from being lynched or raped. This reference to *Hiroshima mon amour*, is also related to the question of what is invisible:[8] what eludes vision in the historical process, what remains impossible to represent/tell or is overlooked by an imperial, universal history. What, however, survives "in spite of all."

The title of Azoulay's essay and work directly refers to Winfried Georg Sebald and his "On the Natural History of Destruction."[9] In it, Sebald recounts the Allied bombing and complete ruination of many German cities during the Second World War as an experience that never fully entered either literature or the collective consciousness of Germans, remaining something not fully experienced, repressed, partially erased also from the realm of the visual. Azoulay – contrary to the author of *Austerlitz* – focuses, however, not on the image of ruined cities, but on the blinded (also by Sebald) "human ruins": she draws attention to the invisibility of rape and to the absence of testimonies related to this experience in historical archives. Meanwhile, German cities, especially Berlin, were full of photojournalists in the days just after the end of the war: "did they not witness these rapes first hand, or did they choose not to use their cameras when their fellow soldiers raped women in front of their eyes?"[10] In keeping with her methodology of analyzing non-existent visual testimony, Azoulay also analyses the photographs of ruined Berlin: she points out that, outside the ruins, only soldiers and photojournalists are in them. The absence of women in the photographs is a kind of *à rebours* testimony to prove the scale of the oppression directed against them. Azoulay draws attention to the facades of ruined houses: depending on the case and the specific situation, they become, for the women living in Berlin at the time, a trap – an isolated crime scene – or, by contrast, a refuge or shelter, allowing them to hide from their oppressors. The invisibility of the victims resonates here in an interesting way with the invisibility of the hiding places in which they managed to hide and survive. Going already beyond Azoulay's text, we can see that we are dealing here with movements that have opposite vectors. The first – belonging to imperial history – seeks to render invisible bodies and spaces subject to wartime oppression, to invalidate them. The second – this

8 I write more on this in my book *Wszystkie wojny świata* [All the world's wars] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2021).

9 W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House 2003).

10 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 239.

one belongs more to specific individuals, the "weak," powerless against the forces of history[11] – means making oneself invisible (as well as the space one inhabits), in order to survive.

Constructing Shelter

Yet another experience that Lagushonkova evokes, and which is very literally related with "survival," is living in a shelter or, to be more precise, seeking and constructing a safe shelter from bombs. The instruction manual is broken down in this scene of the drama into a series of sentences-advice spoken by specific refugee actresses:

> If you cannot go to a shelter, stay at home. (Olena)
> The safest place in your flat is between two solid walls: the first wall will take the impact, the second will shield you from any debris. (Żenia N.)
> Do not take shelter in stairwells, under arcades or on escape stairs. (Asia)
> If you're caught under a collapsed wall, don't try to take it apart by yourself. Wait for professional help. (Aliona)
> Take down all mirrors and any doors with glass elements and lay them on the floor. Cover them with blankets. (Olena)
> Tape up the windows. (Żenia N.)

In fact, this is a manual that helps to turn one's own home into a shelter – at the same time, it makes us realize that shelter often still needs to be constructed. Here, Lagushonkova touches on a theme that emerged strongly after February 24, 2022: the topic of adapting private spaces for warfare recurs in photographs and media reports from Ukraine (especially in the first weeks of the war). One of the many images appearing on social media showed, for example, a window of a house in Kyiv that had been very tightly, completely draped with books: they had been treated as protective material over the glass that had been shattered during the bombing. This is typical of a wartime disaster situation: objects change their function – some turn out to be useless or suddenly become a lethal threat, others are necessary, gaining new functions. The use of objects, space and the bodies placed in it becomes something subject to metamorphosis, negotiable, performative. The same ambivalence and oscillation is inscribed in the very notion of home: in a situation of war, its familiar space is both the safest shelter and a place

11 We can also add here the category of the "insignificant people," which is used by Agnieszka Dauksza in her text "Wojna bezsilnych. Niekończąca się historia" [War of the powerless. An endless story], *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2020): 9–20.

constantly threatened with destruction, which can suddenly – in the blink of an eye – turn into our own tomb.

However, it seems possible to try to look at the problem of shelter construction in the broader context defined by the notion of crisis. "If you can't go to a shelter, stay at home": the COVID-19 pandemic (with the slogan "Stay at home!" recurring like a mantra), the war in Ukraine and the migrant crisis that hit Europe with such force in the middle of the previous decade put the primary anthropological function of the home back in focus – as a place of survival in which the fragility and contingency of life is simultaneously revealed. Perhaps it is this intuition linking habitation with impermanence and anxiety that lies at the root of a number of art projects in recent years redefining the notion of home/shelter.

The interest in impermanent architecture (as identified with that made by migrants) gains its most recognizable material dimension in Rebecca Belmore's work *Biinjiya'iing Onji* [From inside], made especially for documenta 14 in Athens (2017). She prepared a sculpture in the form of a marble tent, which stood on the Filopappou Hill located opposite the Acropolis. Belmore reverses the meanings in a perverse way: something impermanent acquires the characteristics of permanence, a nomadic, usually fast-disappearing temporary shelter is immortalized, elevated to the status of a contemporary "antiquity" – it becomes a fossil of contemporary history, something that s u r v i v e s and in which, as it were, a preposterous look from the future is inscribed. The Canadian artist's work draws attention to the impermanent, ephemeral nature of contemporary shelters: they often remain invisible to the gaze. Again, there is a double movement: on one hand, those who temporarily inhabit them try to make them and themselves as invisible as possible, try to disappear from view (their survival may depend on it); on the other hand, these places and their inhabitants are permanently made invalid by the power and associated imperial history (as meaningless and therefore unworthy to survive and to be seen). Belmore gives the work a title that directs us to the relationship of the gaze and invisibility: *From Inside*. There is no one in the empty marble tent, yet it is giving a glimpse from within. History written from the point of view of the powerless, the "insignificant," the deprived of rights and visibility remains to be written.

The theme of the i m p e r m a n e n c e o f s h e l t e r is also echoed by Dutch photographer Henk Wildschut, who between 2009 and 2016 documented the so-called "Jungle," a temporary migrant town that grew up on the outskirts of Calais and which, in 2016, at the moment of its greatest growth, is being demolished by a decision of the local authorities. Wildschut has created two series of photographs, *Shelter* (2010) and *Ville de Calais* (2016) – the first dedicated to the architecture of migrant shelters, the second already

a full documentation of life in the "Jungle of Calais." It focuses on the construction of living space as a gesture of survival. The inhabitants have to constantly renew their efforts to make their space "domesticated": it is periodically destroyed by the authorities (which makes their efforts almost Sisyphean), and at the same time these attempts seem to be a form that allows them to survive – necessary in the face of the biopolitics of the state of emergency that is stripping them of meaning.

Wildschut photographs, for example, the gardens created next to the migrants' "houses," a kind of "micro-Edens" – some of which have only survived a few days. It is also worth noting the performative dimension of these gestures: the shelters are subject to constant construction and deconstruction, the materials are reused, the use of space is something that is subject to transformation. For the author himself, this draws parallels with children's practices of constantly establishing and transforming domestic space and building shelters during play. The surprising book *Huts, Temples, Castles* (2022) by German photographer Ursula Schulz-Dornburg can also be recalled in this context. It is a series of photographs of the experimental playground Jongensland in the suburbs of Amsterdam, which existed from 1948 until the late 1970s; the photographs were taken in 1969. The entire area, which was heavily isolated from the outside world, was put at the disposal of children as a play space – over the years a micro-town consisting of temporary children's shelters, built from whatever the little builders had at hand, had grown up there.

This childish procedure of constructing a shelter becomes the main subject of Joanna Piotrowska's photographic series *Frantic* (2016–2017). The photographs show adults – the artist's friends – hiding in the provisional shelters they have constructed (made of chairs, bedding, clothes, other furniture) in their own flats (so-called "body fortresses"). The idea of the series directly refers to children's games of building hiding places, but "the starting point for dwelling on this game and transposing it into the adult world was the artist's fascination with those shelters being always built inside a home, as if the domestic space itself did not provide enough protection from the outside world."[12] The photographs evoke an aura of omnipresent danger, and one can also feel a certain regressive and neurotic quality to the characters portrayed. What is striking is the apparent incompatibility of the worlds of children and adults, and the fact that the line between play and oppressive situations becomes blurred. In order to survive (the category of survival acquires a more universal and less defined dimension here), it is necessary, again, to make oneself invisible or barely visible – to create a wall

12 For a description of the project and the book see https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=6026&menu=4, accessed January 2, 2023.

that protects one from the world and makes it difficult to be seen. Here, the gesture of constructing a shelter acquires a fundamental dimension, becoming something almost primordial – and at the same time, paratheatrical, performative action is the framework. In this context, it is worth mentioning the theory of the "theatricalization of life" of the avant-garde theorist and director Nikolai Evreinov:[13] he pointed to the childish drive to play as crucial to theatre and, at the same time, to our lives. From this perspective, the constant process of p e r f o r m i n g t h e s h e l t e r would be a necessary gesture in order to survive.

The Anachronism of the Shelter

In contrast to the ephemeral shelters discussed here is the nuclear bomb shelter – an example of typical wartime architecture, a true "survival machine." Ukrainian artist Mykola Ridnyi's 2013 video work *Shelter* shows a Cold War-era underground shelter in Kharkiv, where defense training and weapons handling exercises take place. The guide to this enclosed underground microworld is a retired teacher – the caretaker of the place and at the same time the embodiment of the old Soviet ideology. In one of his statements, he outlines a kind of theory of the shelter:

> Shelters are installations that protect those inside from adverse factors such as nuclear, chemical or biological warfare, as well as high temperatures and fire-related factors. In addition, the shelter must have a living room. This room must be equipped with chairs, benches and bunks so that adults can sit and those who are sick and children can lie down. This room must have a kind of manned post to supervise the behavior of those inside. There must also be an emergency exit so that people can get out if the primary entry/exit points are blocked by debris. No more shelters are currently being built in Kharkiv and existing ones are being sealed.

In contrast to temporary shelters, which depend on the creativity of their maker, Cold War-era shelters were therefore created according to a clear pattern, in a way that would ensure survival. The overriding principle is functionality: there are no superfluous things in it, every position of the body is already planned in advance and is intended to increase the chances of survival. At the same time, the shelter is here a figure of the militarization of space, a fear of war fueled by propaganda and, perhaps above all, an escape from the real world. Ridnyi's work is based on the contrast between past and present, theory

13 Nikolai Evreinov, "Teatralizacja życia" [Theatricalisation of life], trans. Julia Holewińska, *Konteksty* 2 (2008): 140–153.

and practice: when the film was made, the threat of war seemed distant, while the shelter had become an anachronistic place in its own way, deprived of its original function, a relic (survival) of a different order. At the same time, the film very quickly gained, preposterously, a new meaning: since 2014, the possibility of reusing these spaces in the context of a potential military threat began to be recreated in cities in eastern Ukraine. The Russian invasion in February 2022 realized these fears – underground life became an important part of the experience of the inhabitants of this part of the world once again. Shelters have become not only places of hiding, but also places of creation – these activities are sometimes intertwined. For example, this was the case with Yermilov Centre in Kharkiv – an important contemporary art gallery located in the basement of the local university, on the site of a former shelter. For the first two weeks of the war (we should remember: Kharkiv was on the front line at the time), people were hiding in this space and there was an interventionist exhibition *How Are You?*:

> Banal everyday photos and videos document the life of the artists in the gallery, which for two weeks was turned into a bomb shelter. People watch films, cover windows with protective shields, eat, sleep, and have long conversations. It looks like some awkward indoor picnic, but endless explosions can be heard. The gallery is located in the heart of the city, in the basement of a constructivist building at Kharkiv's Karazin University. By an ironic twist of fate, these are the areas of Kharkiv that have been most affected by the bombing. The curators of *How Are You?* emphasize that these photos are the documentation of a performance. Referring to Ilya Kabakov's immersive artworks, they call the gallery turned into a bomb shelter a "total installation."[14]

At the same time, the fear of nuclear war and about surviving in a completely destroyed world is revived anew. It can be seen here that the nuclear threat multiplies the question posed by Judith Butler about the "precarious life" and the necessity of a politics of care. As Günther Anders wrote, in the era following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our status is permanently altered: we are s u r v i v o r s,[15] as the potential for complete destruction and annihilation is now inscribed in our existence. Any history written nowadays should therefore be written with the awareness of the necessity of adopting a different epistemology: from the point of view of the survivors, not of the victors.

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14 https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/articles/alisa-lozhkina-we-are-only-seen-when-we-die/, accessed January 2, 2023.

15 Günther Anders, *L'homme sur le pont*, in: *Hiroshima est partout*, trans. Denis Trierweiler (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 71.

In another video *Father's Story* (2012), Mykola Ridnyi again explores the space of the underground: we see the basement of the family home, hear the artist's voice guiding us through this rarely visited place, which served as a food storage space and which, in the event of war, would act as a private shelter with a reinforced concrete structure. "People who remembered the war would store various products here" to then "come here and eat like animals." The cellar is therefore overflowing with old preserves – a mass of jars dating back to the last decade of the USSR and the 1990s, the time of political transformation. At the same time, the cellar is a place long unvisited and unused: it becomes a kind of "sideways branch lines of time," an anachronistic space. Everything is covered with old Soviet newspapers, serving as protection from dust and water. Never-opened jams, salads, lard, pickles and moonshine become here a kind of inhuman survivors, persisting persistently despite the change of historical epoch and epistemological paradigm.

In the case of both of Ridnyi's works, the underground world is presented as a space of post-imperial nostalgia, a relic of a time when the fear of nuclear annihilation was alive and the need to organise one's own survival was an everyday experience. The shelter and the basement become a form of tomb in which unwanted memories are deposited (which is particularly topical today, when many Ukrainians are asking themselves what to do with the memory after the USSR, in the face of the need to decolonise imperial culture), an inner space which, like our memory, is made up of different layers of temporality and where material remnants of another era survive.

What survives then appears as a form of anachronism of time. Aby Warburg's concept of the posthumous life of Antiquity and the related term *Nachleben* are worth mentioning here. It refers to the "survival" or "survivance" of forms and images, a deep visual cultural memory not subject to changes in artistic or cultural style and paradigm. This notion, so central to all Warburgian thinking, derives from nineteenth-century evolutionism, Anglo-American anthropology and from cultural scholars such as Edward B. Tylor. As Georges Didi-Huberman notes:

> *Nachleben* is for Warburg what *makes historical time impure* [...]. In Warburg's understanding, the surviving form does not triumphantly relive the death of its competitors. On the contrary, it experiences, symptomatically and spectrally, its own death: it disappears at a certain point in history, only to reappear again, at a moment when we probably do not expect it [...]. *Nachleben* can, from this point of view, be compared to the models of time which, in evolutionary theory, form a symptom, i.e. an obstacle to all continuous and linear patterns of adaptation. Evolutionary theorists spoke of "living fossils," those perfectly anachronistic forms of survival.

> [...] Warburg's *Nachleben*, however, does not tell us about "living fossils" or "backward" forms. It tells us about *heterochronies*.[16]

Against Tylor and the evolutionists, for Warburg what survives is thus not strong enough, but rather adequately weak in order to be able to disappear and appear, to exist in a spectral way. Weakness seems to be the paradoxical but necessary condition for survival.

Between the Living and the Dead

Shelters are, it is worth repeating once again, also places of execution and particular types of violence – removing oneself from sight in order to make oneself invisible to the oppressor(s) facilitates, under certain circumstances, the hiding of traces of the violence and thus the double invalidation of the victim. This regularity can be clearly seen in the media coverage of Bucza, Irpien and Hostomel (taking into account the as yet unexplored nature and scale of the crimes committed there and the incomplete access to information – surely the "Bucza effect" remains a chapter for researchers and artists to write as well). In those sub-Kyivan villages occupied by Russian troops at the very beginning of the invasion, much of the drama took place in the cellars and basements of houses – out of sight not only of bystanders, but often also their neighbours. The inhabitants usually chose to hide in these places in order to wait and survive. At the same time, in some cases, the shelters turned into their tombs: some cellars turned into places of execution, where people were killed and raped. The bodies of those killed usually remained for days afterwards among the living or had to be left in the streets: burial became something extremely dangerous in those days.

This living with the unburied dead has become an experience that provokes reflection on yet another meaning of shelter/refuge/bunker/hideout: as a place where the living and the dead coexist. The identification of the shelter with the tomb appears, for example, in Paul Virilio's book on the archaeology of the bunker, where he notes the similarity of military, fortified architecture to ancient tombs.[17] This recurring association linking the bunker (and other forms of subterranean architecture) with the tomb asks us to return to perhaps the most fundamental image: the gas chamber with

16 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Image survivante: histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: ed. de Minuit, 2002), 67–68. Translated from French by the author of this article.

17 Paul Virilio, *Bunker archéologie* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), 16.

its concrete, monolithic interior. A place where concrete melts, literally, with grey human ashes.

In Polish art portraying the experience of the Second World War, the shelter/hideout remains something very rarely visualized, almost unrepresented.[18] Among the exceptions is Mieczysław Wejman's oil painting *In the air-raid shelter* painted in 1944 – one of the few visual testimonies of this "underground life." At the exhibition at the Jewish Historical Institute,[19] it was included in Wejman's series of prints entitled *Dancers*, which refers to Goya's series of prints *The Disasters of War* and metaphorically conveys the drama of the Warsaw Ghetto and the complicated relations of gaze and responsibility linking Poles with exterminated Jews, on both sides of the ghetto wall. It remains unclear whether Wejman's painting was created before or after the Warsaw Uprising and whether it refers to the direct experience of the horror of being a civilian in a fighting Warsaw, or whether it rather evokes – like *Dancers* – a mediated drama of the ghetto inhabitants. Leaving this question unresolved, it can certainly be said that it captures the universal wartime experience, when escaping to a shelter becomes not only the only way to avoid falling bombs, but often also simply the last option through which one could try to hide and avoid almost certain death. Wejman's painting shows people crowded into a limited space, there are also children – their movements are restricted. The central place of the composition is occupied by a suitcase standing on the floor. Its presence gives movement to the static composition and introduces unusual tension: the painted figures are actually just waiting to escape (to where?) – but they cannot move. You can feel the mood of anxiety. This experience of stillness and suspension is striking.

In the preserved testimonies from the shelters and bunkers where the remaining ghetto inhabitants and fighters were hiding during the uprising, there is a recurring theme of fear, hunger, claustrophobia and the expectation of death, but above all precisely of stillness, suspension, silence and the inability to breathe. "The bunkers were crowded and squeezed, and at the same time it was necessary to maintain complete silence, as there were Germans on the ground looking for hidden Jews. […] People also died in the shelters: they were suffocating from lack of air, dying of heart problems, from wounds,

18 In this context, we should mention Natalia Romik's exhibition *Hideouts. The Architecture of Survival*, which was presented at Zachęta – National Gallery of Art in Warsaw in 2022. The exhibition is part of the author's research project, done in academic collaboration with Aleksandra Janus, and dedicated to the hiding places of Jewish refugees during Second World War.

19 *Dancers 1944. Mieczysław Wejman*, Jewish Historical Institute, Warszawa 2022, curator: Piotr Rypson.

from asphyxiation, poisoned by gas thrown into the bunkers by the Germans. They were buried – if possible – at night in the courtyards,"[20] writes Barbara Engelking. Unable to find the ghetto inhabitants hidden in bunkers and hideouts, the Germans simply began methodically to burn house after house, changing life in the hideouts into hell and in fact leaving the victims with only one choice: the type of death.

In the margin of these reflections, it is worth noting that the inability to have a full breath, the sensation of suffocation so distressing to those in hiding, is one of the key experiences and at the same time evocative metaphors describing life in the colonial "world-death"[21]: the cry "I can't breathe!" is both a desperate gesture of resistance to the necropolitics of the state of emergency and an attempt to describe the situation of a world in crisis of a simultaneously warlike, ecological and pandemic nature.[22] The inability to breathe is thus, literally and metaphorically, the first step towards non-existence.

In the air-raid shelter thus becomes an important visual contribution to the anthropology of shelter that is outlined here. At the same time, looking at Wejman's work it is difficult not to avoid another, so powerful, association. It is, of course, the similarity – not formal, but thematic – to the world of Andrzej Wróblewski's paintings. In the series *Executions* (1949), but also in many of his other paintings – for example, in those where the motif of "standing" or of a "queue" appears – the gesture of suspension – of holding one's breath? – is associated not only with the necropolitics of war, but also with the suspension of the laws that rule the world of the living. These images are filled with the dead, those "not fully visible" – they coexist in one space with the survivors. Wróblewski usually "marks" these "disappearances" with blue – a transitory color, mediating between presence and absence.[23] *The Executions*

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20 Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City*, trans. Emma Harris (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p.

21 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War. Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 100.

22 Achille Mbembe, "The Universal Right to Breathe," trans. Carolyn Shread, *Critical Inquiry* 47 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1086/711437.

23 On the meanings of the colour blue cf. e.g. Carol Mavor, *Black and Blue. The Bruising Passion of "Camera Lucida," "La Jetée," "Sans soleil," and "Hiroshima mon amour"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, trans. Mark Cruse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Color* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Tomasz Szerszeń, "The Colour of History," trans. Arthur Barys, *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 24 (2019), https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2019.24.1943.

are transformed "into a kind of knowingly instituted communication between the living and the dead."[24]

Perhaps to complete the image of the shelter is to see it as a place of mediation with the dead: through death potentially inscribed in every attempt to avoid it, to hide from it. The gaze coming from this place would thus inevitably focus on what escapes us on a daily basis: the frightening precariousness of life.

Abstract

Tomasz Szerszeń
INSTITUTE OF ART OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
To Survive: Towards an Anthropology of Shelter

The text attempts an anthropological reflection on the theme of shelter. Starting from the current war in Ukraine and its literary and visual representations through the migration crisis and back to the Second World War, the author analyzes images and visual testimonies of examples of hideouts, shelters, ephemeral homes. At the center of the considerations lies the category of "survival" as crucial for wartime and refugee bio-and necropolitics. "Survival" appears here in a dynamic relationship with the visible and the invisible, as well as through the prism of two types of history: the imperial, official one and the one belonging to the powerless, the insignificant, the deprived of visibility, the half-dead.

Keywords

survival, shelter, necropolitics, war in Ukraine, anachronism, visual anthropology, history of wars

24 Dorota Sajewska, "The Necromancers," in *Perspective of Adolescence. Szapocznikow – Wróblewski – Wajda*, ed. Anda Rottenberg, trans. Jerzy Juruś (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie, 2018), 219.

Grzegorz Niziołek

Emancipation, Representation, Censorship

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.5 | ORCID: 0000-0001-5082-8285

Grzegorz Niziołek – prof. dr hab., heads the Department of Theatre and Drama at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University and conducts a drama seminar at the AST National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow. He deals with the issues of cultural memory and the public sphere. He received the Jan Długosz Award for the monograph *Polish Theatre of the Holocaust* (2013); its translation into English was published by Bloomsbury in 2019. Email: grzegorz.niziolek@uj.edu.pl.

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My presentation will refer to very general concepts that are widely used – perhaps overused – with complex genealogies, but whose definitions remain rather murky in everyday practice. While useful for communication, they can also be instrumentalized as new purposes arise. These are concepts in the repertoire of the liberal-leftist discourse to which I am close, though each has a different value. Emancipation, for instance, is an unambiguously positive category, serving to elevate social and artistic phenomena. It means aiding democracy, emancipating, working against violence. Representation, in turn, is a field of negotiation and critique; it can be good or bad, useful or harmful, and can aid or impede emancipation. Censorship carries a stigma; it is ascribed to political opponents, to foes wielding political power. We do not use it to describe our own tactics for controlling the representations we consider harmful, or hostile emancipation. A critique of representation is not considered to amount to acts of censorship.

While the first two concepts, emancipation and representation, exist in perfect symbiosis in liberal-leftist

discourse, legitimizing one another, the concept of censorship is utterly absent in leftist self-critiques; it is a foreign and inappropriate word – it even threatens the self-legitimacy of emancipation discourses. Even if it is widely defined at present by the concepts of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, it belongs more to the pre-existing hegemonic field of structural restrictions that may be disrupted by an emancipatory intervention. I am interested in the system of tensions between these concepts as they operate in today's art; how they are defined and reevaluated.

Today's postcritical spirit has undoubtedly complicated our picture of these mechanisms. Rita Felski, a major proponent of postcritical approaches in humanities today, asks, "Why is it that critics are so quick off the mark to interrogate, unmask, expose, subvert, unravel, demystify, destabilize, take issue, and take umbrage?"[1] Yet this question ought less to be posed to the critical theorists, as Felski does, than to the widespread swift reactions that dominate today's postcritical media discourses, especially, though not exclusively, in social media. Paradoxically, this critique of critical theory as over-suspicious, paranoid, condescending, and patriarchal provided an alibi for the practice of hastily (without much hermeneutic effort) outing content that is racist, sexist, homophobic, or classist, in both the public discourse and works of art. Yet this is not the practice attacked by postcritics – it seems they rather shield it as an act of compassion, securing the gains of emancipation by eliminating discourses and representations that threaten it. These automatic critical impulses indicate that the gains of critical theory have been less undermined by postcritique than, firstly, they have been normativized, and secondly, they have entered a phase of hegemonic discourse. Felski and Elizabeth S. Anker present a fairly simplified overview of critical discourse methods in the introduction to *Critique and Postcritique*, as mainly based on strategies of suspecting, self-reflexive discourses, and meta-perspectives. As such, they are devoid of all that is considered the virtues of postcritique: ethical care, diverse forms of affect, civic engagement, a spirit of affirmation and speculative invention.

Sara Ahmed has called this phenomenon of conveniently positioning an opponent in order to strengthen one's own position "inflationary logic."[2] She critiques contemporary strands of materialist feminism for similarly simplifying and misrepresenting the accomplishments of historical feminism as solely focused on cultural content, bypassing the biological and material aspects. Ahmed hazards a comparison with those who argue that telling racist

1 Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 5.

2 Sara Ahmed, "Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of 'the New Materialism,'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15 (1) (2008): 23–39.

jokes proves freedom of speech. These people situate themselves in minority positions, trying to grapple with what they believe is the dominant discourse of political correctness. The scholar finds a similar logic in ways of reading the history of feminism as a sphere to prohibit speech about biology, only to elevate the status of current projects that take a biological perspective into account. According to Ahmed, inflation is a power reserved for those who establish prohibitions. The more powerful the old prohibition, the greater the contribution of those now breaking it.

In the spirit of inflationary logic, Anker and Felski depict critical stances as striking at all that might be considered natural:

> Whatever is natural, taken for granted, essentialized, or transparent become the critic's target: such qualities are seen as not only theoretically inadequate (in failing to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural construction of reality), but also politically troubling (in "naturalizing" social phenomena and thereby rendering them immune to criticism and change).[3]

In these new approaches, art is primarily read as a discourse and a social practice, and the basic criterion for its evaluation is its emancipatory value, formulated in a normative manner. This means normativizing it just like any other domain of civic life. Institutional critiques treat the independence of art pragmatically and use it tactically – it is attacked or defended depending on the situation. Renouncing the transgressive strategies that have most often fallen prey to censorship facilitates devaluing freedom of artistic speech as something to be defended. It also strikes me that defining emancipation practices as non-violent automatically eliminates transgressive actions from their scope.

It is a truism that aesthetic values are increasingly seen as a weak basis for defining and evaluating art. Even the appreciation of aesthetics in socially engaged art by Jacques Rancière or Claire Bishop hinges on political efficacy.[4] The radical critique of the autonomy of art vis-à-vis other spheres of public life has become dogma within progressive art discourse. We might add that the autonomy of art is also often now perceived as a premise for legitimizing violence within art institutions, associated with a critiqued modernist model

3 *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

4 Jacques Rancière, *Estetyka jako polityka* [Aesthetics as politics], trans. Paweł Mościcki and Julian Kutyła (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2007); Claire Bishop, *Sztuczne piekła. Sztuka partycypacyjna i polityka widowni* [Artificial hells. Participatory art and audience politics], trans. Jacek Staniszewski (Warszawa: Bęc Zmiana, 2015).

and the artist's position of power. The myth of the autonomy of art might also be included in the inflationary logic cited above – it would be hard to call works of modernist art a domain of impunity. On the contrary, they are full of cases of censorship, penalization and exclusion. Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko have dispelled this myth, writing that "art or artistic activity in its broadest sense are not circumstances that preclude guilt,"[5] while the counter-proposition that art is a circumstance that relieves one of culpability strikes at the principle of civil equality.

Institutional constellations of mutually supporting subjects are formed around this reorganization of art. The basis of these alliances is affirmative practices and not transgressive intentions that threaten procedures stabilizing approved artist/activist practices, justifying the hegemonic claims of the institutions promoting them. We are joined by what we affirm. Small wonder that the concept of censorship has vanished from autocritical discourses, where it has been deemed worthless. Moreover, obscene content is seen as a threat to emancipatory practices and new concepts of art institutions (in which obscenity and transgression once pushed emancipation practices forward). Overpowering affect, negative affect and overly graphic images are threats to affirmative stances taking empathy and compassion as the basis for establishing social relationships. The constellation of allied institutions treats control of artistic practice as an open, democratic and consensus-based procedure – as such, it is hard, at least from this internal perspective, to accuse it of censorship. What is being attacked, at any rate, is less concrete representations than certain models for establishing them.

The politics of deconstruction taught us to focus our critiques on undefined or impulsively appreciated concepts of our own discourse, yet at present the politics of deconstruction have themselves come under fire for weakening the dynamic of activist involvement. Theories of deconstruction are thus being retracted from the modern socially engaged humanities and academic discourse. Anker and Felski examine this, questioning deconstruction's sensitivity to the distinction between sign and signifier, the sign and the real object it signifies, corresponding to a "natural" tendency to wipe out the boundaries between them. And, whereas a deconstructive critique of representation stressed the difference between the representing and the represented, postcritical strategies tend to collapse this difference, aiming to reduce the distance between the work of art and its social effect, between artistic practice

5 Jakub Dąbrowski and Anna Demenko, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku. Aspekty prawne* [Censorship in Polish art after 1989. Legal aspects] (Warszawa: Szum, 2015), 150. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

and non-artistic social practice. Good representations serve social change, while bad ones traumatize audiences or perpetuate damaging stereotypes. The principle of emancipatory art and its reception has become performing one's political, social and ethical standpoint, which means the representing is also the represented, and with the depiction of the other comes an undertaking that involves normative instructions and, where necessary, stigmatization. Moreover, the very notion of representation falls apart, finds itself in a state of disappearance, and consequently the affirmative self-performance contains a prohibition of depicting the other, which is treated as the norm.

2.

The concept of emancipation, if subjected to critique, leads us to a range of contradictions and self-negations. It has its own history, encapsulated by Reinhart Koselleck in his article "The Limits of Emancipation." Above all, we need to stress that at its source (Roman law) the verb "to emancipate" did not have a reflexive form – it was an empowered subject's way of acting to free another subject, their subordinate, from dependency. Self-emancipation was not possible. Change only came, Koselleck says, in the Enlightenment. But Immanuel Kant, aware of the meaning of "emancipation" in Roman law, did not use it when writing about Enlightenment. To his mind, emancipation meant a state of dependency on a position of subordination, more than the possibility of the subjugated subject changing that state. Thus, instead of emancipation, Kant wrote of "a man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity," adding that people "nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity."[6] From this point of view, the obstacle to emancipation processes is not only those who wield the power, but also those subject to it. Koselleck traces the semantic process by which the term "emancipation" lost its strictly legal meaning and gained the "status and force of a catchword, one that admittedly presupposed or evoked a minimal consensus about the equal rights of all human beings."[7]

An interesting unfolding of Kant's critique came two centuries later, in critical examinations of the topic of emancipation, born from within emancipatory movements that were already ripe. A highly apt formula for describing the basic contradictions of emancipatory practices was put forward by Wendy

6 Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd S. Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 253.

7 Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 255.

Brown in the early 1990s in "Wounded Attachments."[8] In creating this concept, Brown revitalized a Nietzschean critique of ressentiment in the spirit of a radical left-wing critique. Her ideas were picked up later by Lauren Berlant, as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri:

> Identity projects for revealing social violence and hierarchies run aground when they become wedded to injury, creating, Wendy Brown claims, a group investment in maintaining the injured status with an attitude of *ressentiment*. Identity is regarded as a possession, we might say, and is defended as property. What is most significantly missing from identity politics, as Brown insists, is the drive for freedom that should be their basis.[9]

From this standpoint, the emancipating subject is not interested in closing the emancipation process, as this would mean losing the basis for their political claims that come with their position of imposed subjugation. Emancipation, which ought to liberate from dependency, and thus from one's prior identity, becomes a tool for reinforcing identity. On the one hand, identity becomes a basis for empowering groups against systemic abuse; on the other, it leads to conflicts between emancipating subjects. For instance: the tensions between Jews and Blacks in American society are well covered, while the history of ideological struggles between the feminist and gay movements also goes way back. As a prime example, let us take Peggy Phelan's harsh critique of *My Queer Body* by gay performer Tim Miller, an artist fiercely attacked by the right-wing media in the USA and subject to economic censorship. Phelan saw Miller's performance, exposing his naked male body, as within the realm of phallocentric patriarchal cultural practices, denying his right to represent queer culture: "Tim Miller is not a lesbian. Nor is he a woman. (Or at least not in public.) As far as I know, he is not a transsexual or a hermaphrodite. The body performed and displayed in Miller's *My Queer Body* is what would have been formerly called a young-white-gay-man's body."[10] We can also refer to postcolonial studies for examples. Caliban – a symbolic icon of decolonizing struggles – is a rapist in Shakespeare's drama, who sees the rape of a white woman as an act of rebellion against his captivity by the whites. In Amiri Baraka's famous play *Dutchman*, the roles are reversed: in a New York subway, it is a white woman who stoops to violence against a random Black man. And the radical queer theatre of Jack Smith, based on Hollywood depictions of

8 Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory* 21 (3) (1993): 390–410.

9 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009), 329.

10 Peggy Phelan, "Tim Miller's *My Queer Body*: An Anatomy in Six Sections," *Theater* 24 (1993): 30.

exotic Asian worlds, was suspected of perpetuating colonial clichés. We could go on listing examples of this sort of collision in the ideological, political and symbolic spheres, between various emancipatory movements.

For all these reasons, Hardt and Negri, inspired by Kant, suggest replacing the word "emancipation," with all its identity baggage, with the concept of liberation. At the same time, they note that nineteenth-century nationalism, elevating one kind of identity above all the others, was, consciously or not, a model and point of reference for many emancipation movements. They also call attention to an evident truth, that no subject is defined by one identity, but weaves many together – a gay man could be a Black worker or a white politician, a white woman may belong to the upper middle class or be a lesbian, a Black man may be heterosexual, a white heterosexual could be an unhoused victim of the capitalist system. As such, a question emerges: might not a subject with emancipatory claims secure class or economic privileges that could come, for instance, from being middle-class, heterosexual or white? Presupposing the hybridity of our identities, which are stabilized by emancipatory processes, Hardt and Negri see the revolutionary process of discarding identity as "monstrous," traumatic and violent. They also critique the concept of queer as another identity category, embracing various kinds of queerness. "The revolutionary project goes beyond the reformist vision of emancipation," they write.

> The terminological distinction between *emancipation* and *liberation* is crucial here: whereas emancipation strives for the freedom of identity, the freedom to be *who you really are*, liberation aims at the freedom of self-determination and self-transformation, the freedom to determine *what you can become*.[11]

Their vision of the revolutionary process is thus liberated from the increasingly confined field of consensus between the rival emancipations detailed by Koselleck. Hardt and Negri, moreover, point out that the forces of repression are not strictly external; they also shape their captives' subjecthood from within. They are internalized, which is why they believe identity-based emancipation at some point impedes the possibility of liberation.

Hardt and Negri draw from Jean Genet's last book, *Prisoner of Love*, an autobiographical tale of the author's stay among America's Black Panthers and in Palestinian fighter camps. They write that Genet was "captivated by the 'style' of these groups, by which he meant their invention of new forms of life, their common practices and behaviors, as well as their original set of gestures and affects."[12] Genet stressed that the Black Panthers' arguments were not "drawn

11 Phelan, "Tim Miller's *My Queer Body*," 331.

12 Ibid., 356.

from the common fund of American democracy,"[13] that this movement was driven by the dynamic of brutal phantasms, not a desire to negotiate a shared normative space: "what separates us from the Blacks today is not so much the colour of our skin or the type of our hair as the phantom-ridden psyche we never see."[14] Genet does not, therefore, advocate creating a utopian space for the harmonious connection of various emancipatory claims; he stresses difference as a challenge for projects of political change.

Now let us turn to another concept – representation. This word is now quite distinct from one once taken for a synonym: mimesis. This matter was discussed in detail during Wolfgang Iser's famous series of seminars on the issue of representation organized at the University of California, Irvine in 1983–84. Iser called attention to the fact that the term "representation" was semantically overloaded (Koselleck wrote about emancipation in a similar spirit). Representation, Iser posits, with reference to the German word *Darstellung*, is a kind of staging, an enactment, a performance, and not, like mimesis, a picture of something, a description of a state of things, an imitation of reality. The stress falls on the performative aspect of representation, which creates reality, rather than replicating it. Performativity is understood here, however, as a constant and inevitably unsuccessful effort to collapse the differences between the object of representation and the very process of portrayal. The result is deformity, a disruption of meanings, an "eventful disorder," a network of links "evoking and simultaneously deforming extratextual fields of reference." Thus understood, the act of representation forces the audience to suspend their "natural attitude to the thing represented,"[15] recognizing the aesthetic dimension of representation. The world as an aside may resemble the world, but at the same time it is a world that has empirically never existed. The performativity Iser describes in no way recalls its simplified concept; it presupposes collapsing this duality, disrupting our everyday approach to the things depicted outside the frame of the performance.

Outlining Iser's concept, Michał Paweł Markowski writes that the basic task of representation is "convincing us of its importance."[16] Robert Weimann, who

13 Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Laurent Boyer (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 47.

14 Ibid., 46.

15 Wolfgang Iser, "Representation: A Performative Act," in *The Aims of Representation*, ed. Murray Krieger (New York: Stanford University Press, 1987), 220.

16 Michał Paweł Markowski, "O reprezentacji" [About representation], in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. Michał P. Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 289–90.

also participated in this seminar series, saw the contradiction between the established order and the performative one as a fundamental source of the crisis of representation in modernity, manifesting itself in increasing efforts to make the audience believe that what is being performed also has a constative value.[17] Weimann calls this phenomenon a culture of useful illusions, seeking to legitimize our performances. The modernist concept of art as domains of autonomy and aesthetics was less a way of resolving these contradictions than of avoiding them. Thus conceived, art, Weimann suggests, frees itself and its audiences from the duty of representation. Representations devoid of aesthetic value become bearers of unambivalent and self-exposing ideological content.

Another participant in the Irvine seminars, Dominick LaCapra, notes that the crisis of Marxism as a critical theory was chiefly tied to three issues. First: making the proletariat the force bringing salvation to history (a temptation of all collective subjects of emancipation). Second: the shift of the Marxist critique toward positivism. Third: putting the stress on the exchange value and the functional value of the representation.[18] LaCapra suggests that an excessive critique of fetishism leads to leveling all representations, which then always reveal the same thing – how the system of oppression operates. The fetishism introduces an added symbolic value, however, that points to something else – something that was missed in the representation, which is not representative or harms representativeness. The concept of representation in psychoanalysis had a similar critical value – the representations available to the consciousness are, according to Freud, partial and distorted, often fetishistic, formed more from what they omit than what they include.

Queer theory gives us the most cogent warnings against excessive positivist and affirmative practices of representation, which emerge under the pressure of group emancipatory aspirations. Heather Love praises "backwardness," which, read in our day, full of progressive and reparative practices in art, seems quite bold. Writing on lesbian literature, she defends dark representations and destructive and anti-communal emotions. In the midst of the praise, she formulates this view: "camp, for instance, with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art."[19] Heather Love stresses that her book on

17 Robert Weimann, "History, Appropriation, and the Uses of Representation in Modern Narrative," in *The Aims of Representation*, 175–216.

18 LaCapra, "Criticism Today," in *The Aims of Representation*, 235–36.

19 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

backward feelings owes a great deal to a long tradition of queer negativeness, such as Lee Edelman's *No Future* or the works of Leo Bersani. José Esteban Muñoz, in turn, creates a queer concept of disidentification, which shatters the moral categories of "good" and "bad" representations:

> Disidentification means recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it continues to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.[20]

Both Love nor Muñoz admitted to being inspired by psychoanalysis. From their standpoints, representations are not the result of intentional and unequivocally ethical actions: they are hybrid, and their dynamic is based on a play of contradictions, which is why they can stage resistance to any simplifying identity politics, be they those of the majority or the minority. The fetishism of the dominant representations ought not to be negated, only reworked – or, as Muñoz puts it, recirculated, which he believes to be the basis of queer subjects' survival.

In Freud's concept, every mental representation is ruled by two processes at once: primary and secondary. The former is based on a constant inflow of energy, images and meanings, taking the shortest path to "hallucinatory reproduction of those ideas upon which the original experience of satisfaction has conferred a special value." The latter process pertains to functions like "attention, judgement, memory, the replacement of motor discharge by an action aimed at an appropriate transformation of reality."[21] There is no representation without censorship, says Freud. Censorship creates its dynamic and complexity. Our task, however, is to discover the covert activity of the censoring mechanisms which, above all, conceal themselves from sight.

Freud reformulated his concept of censorship several times. It was first personified as a guard standing before the door leading from the foyer to the living room, preventing the crush of unconscious desires from entering the space of consciousness. Its next incarnation was the mighty superego,

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20 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queer of Color and the Performance Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 72.

21 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

modelled on moral and social authorities that tell the Ego how to think and behave. In Freud's concept of representation, censorship emerges as a player, a trickster and a negotiator between social processes and aspirations – always ready to change the rules of behavior and paving the way for vital transgression. In this personification I see a chance to restore the concept of censorship to being a self-critical tool in emancipatory practices, especially where they fall in line with conservative tendencies towards normative solutions.

Contemporary postcritical theory keeps its distance from these psychoanalytical traditions. The concept of censorship and dynamics of unconscious processes affecting the shape of representation has been attacked and undermined as part of a phenomenon to which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick attached the lethal moniker "paranoid criticism."[22] One would have to be paranoid to suspect that a good representation is perhaps not good. Yet Freud often behaved this way. Here, I believe, is the reason why the concept of censorship has been cut from liberal/leftist self-critical discourse. The limit of reality is set by the appointed guardians, after all. Performances involved in the emancipatory process, trusting only the mechanisms of the secondary process, are forever recreating this boundary and will not let it be crossed. On the other hand, they offer their audiences a utopia of normative dimensions and protection from destructive phantasms. Discarding the category of censorship as a self-critical tool causes moralizing, idealistic, programmatic and authoritarian standpoints to be inflated in its judicature.

3.

To conclude, in place of a summary, a few remarks on Rainer Werner Fassbinder. I once, in the 2021/22 academic year, explored his work during a dramaturgy seminar at Krakow's Academy of Theatre Arts, no doubt as a form of ideological sabotage and as an invitation to disarm today's dogmatized fields of artistic practice within the theatre. The film director, who emerged in the German counterculture movement, experienced various attempts to censor his work. The most famous event was the aborted Frankfurt premiere of his play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* under his direction in 1975. Fassbinder was accused of antisemitism at the time. A character in the drama is called the Rich Jew, and is indeed a rich Jew, earning on investments leading to the gentrification of various districts of Frankfurt. Many antisemitic remarks in the play are aimed at him: "I'd sleep better if he was gassed," "he drinks our

22 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or: You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Text Is About You," in *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

blood," "he sucks everything out of us." It is hard to describe the extent of the media storm Fassbinder created with his attempt to stage the play. It was claimed that the author had crossed every line, that he was perpetuating racial stereotypes, spitting in the faces of Holocaust victims. The chorus of disapproval was mighty and unanimous – it crossed the whole political spectrum of Germany at the time, from left to right. Yet no one analyzed the play particularly carefully. No one asked who was making the antisemitic statements, nor what politics were behind the events in the drama. It was not conceived that Fassbinder was exposing the covert antisemitism of Germany's respected citizens. The participation of Jewish businessmen in the project to rebuild Frankfurt was a fact, but behind it was cynical calculation by the local government: If they involved them in the investment, it was believed no one would dare to reveal the corrupt relations between the politicians and the businessmen, fearing accusations of antisemitism, which could only mean civil death in Germany at the time. Fassbinder dragged the biggest secret of post-war West German life into the light of day, with all the dissonance between the official anti-antisemitism and privately acknowledged antisemitism.[23] Attempts were made to disarm his radical political provocation, unprecedented in the German theatre of the time, with accusations of regurgitating antisemitic cliches. The Fassbinder case illustrates perfectly how a critique of representation from the tool of emancipation can easily transform into an instrument of censorship in the hands of conservative and reactionary forces and how the ideologies of emancipation, foregrounding moral concerns, are helpless against more complex mechanisms in political life. Judith Butler pointed this out, writing that a "return to ethics" often means an escape from politics.[24] Fassbinder was conscious of drawing from antisemitic cliches, but he also knew that the anxieties about them that were key to a public existence were cynically exploited in a political game raking in huge economic profits. The disgust dished that Fassbinder's play encountered made it impossible to perform it in German theatres even a decade later, in the mid-1980s.

Yet it was not only this play that caused Fassbinder to come under attack. His work probing the consciousness of the German society – bold, uncompromising, artistically innovative – was accused of misogyny, homophobia, racism, and glorifying violence. The "negative" representations that staged resistance against the collective "positive" liberation ideologies were hard to digest. The list of incriminated works is long. I will mention only one – *The Law of the*

23 David Barnett, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the German Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 233.

24 Judith Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence," in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 15–28.

Strongest. This film portrays a wealthy homosexual community who cause the downfall of a young boy from a working-class background, also gay, having relieved him of his lottery winnings. We need not think hard to imagine the accusations that were made here. Firstly, perpetuating social stereotypes of rich and immoral middle-class gays that harmed the cause of emancipation; and secondly, the film's refusal to portray the discrimination against homosexuals that was rife in Germany at the time. This critique was based on criteria developed in the gay liberation movement, which was by then already becoming an institution. The famous film critic Al LaValley stepped up to defend Fassbinder, without obscuring the fact that his films were a form of conscious resistance against certain aspects of the gay liberation movement. Yet he did stress one point: Fassbinder appeared in his own films as a gay man, often nude, in intimate scenes with his lover, as a radical kind of artistic coming out – an unprecedented move at the time. By presenting the lives of gay men as evident and real without stressing their suffering, LaValley believed the director was effectively striking out at bourgeois morality and homophobia. And most importantly, Fassbinder did not hide the brutal phantasms a gay life can hold. His films, LaValley writes, "perform an act of resistance and utopian questing, but they also explore the often troubled world of gay desire and relationships, masochism and conflicting emotions, the persistence of patriarchal patterns and loss of power, domination and submission, separation and mourning."[25] He also recalls that the large Fassbinder exhibition in Berlin in 1992 tried to whitewash the gay content from his films, thus removing "an essential and radical component from his work."[26] This kind of censorship, also extending to the artist's biography, was, LaValley thought, a condition for reintroducing Fassbinder's work into public circulation after the unification of Germany. This is another example of the ties between an emancipatory critique of representation and institutional acts of censorship.

LaValley stressed that the utopian aspects of Fassbinder's work can be found outside the "negative narrative trajectories."[27] He joined Thomas Elsaesser in stating that "what counts most in Fassbinder is not narrative solution but identification, the relationship of the filmmaker to his material and his and our identification with the characters."[28] LaValley points to new ways of reading Fassbinder's work from a queer perspective that focuses not on

25 Al LaValley, "The Gay Liberation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Male Subjectivity, Male Bodies, Male Lovers," *New German Critique* 63 (1994): 108–37.

26 Ibid., 110.

27 Ibid., 112.

28 Ibid., 112.

negativity, but on seeking solutions through acceptance of the masochism that is the libidinal drive of his films. The key is what breaks out of the narrative to support the powerful presence of bodies. It is worth recalling LaCapra's arguments here about the necessity of protecting fetishism to resist the dominant exchange and functional values governing what representations get circulated in culture.

Fassbinder remained true to the Brechtian principle of critical mimesis and the careful separation of politics and morality, which always eventually comes after the arts, demanding censorship. Another lesson learned from Brecht was the powerful conviction that acting – striving for political aims – cannot block the principle of examining reality. Fassbinder not only did not hide the facts that could have blocked the way to emancipation; he teased them out and showcased them with desperate consistency.

Abstract

Grzegorz Niziołek
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Emancipation, Representation, Censorship

This article attempts a critical redefinition of basic concepts such as emancipation, representation, and censorship, and looks at the field of tensions created between these concepts in the field of emancipatory movements, particularly in post-critical discourses accentuating ethical issues and in queer theories complicating the political and ethical meanings of artistic representation. It also explores the modern-day functionality of the definition of censorship in the Freudian psychoanalytic definition.

Keywords

emancipation, representation, censorship, queer art, Fassbinder

Joanna Ostrowska

The Archive is Full! On the Queer Life of Adam Gawron[1] in the Twentieth Century

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.6 | ORCID: 0000-0001-5663-3446

Joanna Ostrowska (1983) – she holds PhD in humanities in the field of history, she also studied at the Institute of Audiovisual Arts of the Jagiellonian University; the Department of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University; Gender Studies of the University of Warsaw; the Department of Hebrew Studies of the University of Warsaw and the Polish Film School in Łodz. Her research is focused on the issues related to sexual violence during Second World War and forgotten victims of Nazism. She is the author of famous books: *Przemilczane. Seksualna praca przymusowa w czasie II wojny* światowej [Forgotten. Forced sex labor during Second World War] (2018) and *Oni. Homoseksualiści w czasie II wojny* światowej [Them. Homosexuals in Second World War] (2021, Nike Audience Award 2022).

I dedicate this text to Maciek, Ewa, and Anna in gratitude for our joint search for "war-relatives" along the Radom Główny-Dęblin train route.

Life itself, while it continues, can be that same oval, or after death, the thread of life running through the tale of what has been. The meek contents of her apartment, feeling themselves to be redundant, immediately began to lose their human qualities and, in doing so, ceased to remember or tom mean anything.[2]

1 For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to use assumed names for all the individuals described. This practice provides my protagonist and his family with anonymity, but this also directs the readers' attention to the narrative rather than personal information. I use found photographs in a similar fashion. The published photos have been "exaggerated" (edited) in such a way, as to emphasize the potentiality of the story I am telling and to draw attention to my involvement as a researcher in the biography in question. All drawings were made by Andrzej Lasocki.

2 Maria Stiepanowa, *Pamięci, pamięci* [Memory, memory], trans. Agnieszka Sowińska (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2020), part 1, chap.1. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

In mid-November 2021, a stranger reached out to me seeking contact with a historian, who specializes in biographies of non-heteronormative people during Second World War. She wrote a direct message on one of the social media platforms, but first attached a photograph. When I opened the file, I was stunned. The image was of another photo, black and white, in a format indicating an amateur print, the framing was small. Clearly it was not the final print, but one of many samples created during the development of the shot. Additionally, someone was holding the photo in such a way that it did not reflect light, so that its content could be clearly visible, it showed two men kissing outside, in the light of day. I also saw a bunch of other photographs in the background, but at the time this was not important to me. I also knew that what I was looking at was a photo from the first half of the twentieth century.

Photographs as well as other graphic documents of queer life in Poland, before 1945, are rare. Queer[3] archives collected by Polish LGBTQIA+ organizations are dominated by materials going back to the 1960s, but not earlier.[4] The same is true regarding private collections,[5] or archives outside Poland. In the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., I found a male couple from Poznan standing beside a bicycle, but during a second query, it turned out that the *de facto* origin of this photo, where it came from, and when it was actually taken, is unknown.[6] Looking at

3 I use the queer category and the terms non-heteronormative/non-normative person also in relation to the biographies of people who most likely used other terms to identify themselves. I consider these categories to be the most inclusive, also in a historical sense. With them, in a symbolic way, I do not determine the gender identity and sexual orientation of the characters. Cf., e.g., Anna Hájková, "Den Holocaust queer erzählen," in *Jahrbuch Sexualitäten*, ed. Janin Afken, Jan Feddersen, Benno Gammerl, Rainer Nicolaysen and Benedikt Wolf (Göttingen: Wallstein Publishing House, 2018), 87; Susan Stryker, *Transgender History. The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 30-31; Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni. Homoseksualiści w czasie II wojny światowej* [They. Homosexuals during Second World War] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2021), 51–56.

4 I based this on the collections of the Lambda Warszawa's Archive, Polish LGBTQIA Museum - Foundation Q and QAI (Queer Archives Institute). See https://old.lambdawarszawa.org/lambdawarszawa/co-robimy/biblioteka/, https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/foundation-q, http://queerarchivesinstitute.org/, accessed February 1, 2023.

5 A remarkable collection of photos of queer/non-heteronormative people, including from Central and Eastern Europe, can be found in a collection owned by Jacek Dehnel, available online. Cf. https://awers-rewers.pl/ - keyword: Gender/LGBT, accessed February 1, 2023.

6 The photograph is still available on the USHMM website. A query at the Schwules Museum (SMU) in Berlin, revealed that it should be in the Sternweiler Collection. Unfortunately, the archivists have not been able to locate it and verify its history. Email correspondence

Fig. 1. The first photo sent by Anna in November 2021.

the photograph sent to me via Instagram, I knew I was dealing with a unique graphic document.

Joanna Ostrowska, Das Schwule Museum (January – February 2021), accessed February 14, 2023, https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/shwimages.php?id=01663&width=248&pic=media/01663.jpg.

At the beginning of January 2022, I traveled from Krakow to Radom, and then to a tiny village along the Radom-Dęblin train line.[7] There I met with a woman – let's call her Anna – who claimed that one of the men in the photograph was her neighbor. No one lived in the old, abandoned, wooden house next to her property. Previously, for a while, a man in a homelessness crisis had resided there, to whom Anna sometimes brought hot meals or hot water. In gratitude, he gave her a collection of photographs, and other documents, left behind in the crumbling house. The woman was aware of online forums for people interested in antiques and historical documents, so she decided to try her luck. While posting the photographs, she asked for help and contacts to specialists. One subscriber advised her to try to communicate with the author of the book *They. Homosexuals in Second World War*. This is how we came into contact.

After a few hours at Anna's house, I returned to Krakow with two bags of papers and photos, which I then spread out on a large table in an apartment. I realized that the initial image was a fragment of Adam Gawron's life archive that became my research basis in the context of his biography and potential queer storylines, which I am trying to record, using family archival materials, in comparison with other documentation and fragments of conversations with his relatives, that is, oral history.

The appendix to the story of the "non-normative" transfer of Adam's archive is Anna's story, who later contacted me several times in order to "complete" the transfer of the collection. After arranging and unraveling all the donated artifacts, I realized that this primary Instagram photo never made it to me. I only received the film from which the prints were created. I have an irresistible feeling that a part of this collection ended up in someone else's hands. However, this matter will remain in the realm of speculation. According to Anna's account, every now and then local "history buffs" would show up at her house, allegedly in possession of more documents relating to Adam and his family. I was scheduled to see them and Anna in July 2022. But already on the way to Adam's village, Anna sent me a text message that she had changed her plans, and would not be in the area. The contact broke off. She never answered my messages again.

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7 I decided not to give the name of the village from which Adam came, so as not to encroach on the local history of the community. I visited the place twice, and each time my arrival provoked curiosity, but also questions as to "why him?" I would not want Adam's story to become a local sensation (inside as well as outside the village) and for his experiences to be used to fuel controversy between the neighbors. It is worth mentioning that Second World War is still very much a living memory in this village and strongly influences relations between the various families. The political divide between "one of our own" and "a traitor" (collaborator) continues to exist. Adam's non-heteronormativity is not a topic used in these disputes. I would not want my research to influence this state of affairs.

Closets, Chests, and Boxes

Analyzing the very process of finding Adam's archive, it is hard to get rid of the impression that in the study of queer life, access to new sources is very often determined by chance. Lost, hidden, often forgotten artifacts of non-normative biographies are found in quite unexpected circumstances.

An online forum is where, in 2002, Ralf Dose found archival materials belonging to Li Shiu Tong – the last life partner and associate of Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering sexologist and founder of the Institute of Sexology (Institut für Sexualwissenschaft) in Berlin. Eight years earlier, a man named Adam Smith had posted an online inquiry about the families of the two men. It turned out that he lived in the same building where Li Shiu Tong had died. He came across his belongings by accident in the residential dumpster. Someone had simply cleaned out the apartment after the death of the tenant, and Mr. Smith took custody of what he managed to salvage. The purchased materials became part of a collection in the archives of The Magnus Hirschfeld Society.[8]

However, strangers are less likely to "save" queer heritage. Those "guarding" artifacts, detailing the experiences of our protagonists, are often their loved ones, family members, who either block access to their queer stories or have a dissenting view of how the story should be recounted.[9] From my point of view, only home/family archives, the archives of their loved ones[10] are today's last remaining opportunities to contribute to the story of queer life in the

8 I reconstruct the history of the collection of documents, belonging to Li Shiu Tong, on the basis of the text by Ralf Dose also cited by Heike Bauer. Cf. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Testament. Heft II*, ed. Ralf Dose (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013), 4–6; Heike Bauer, *The Hirschfeld Archives. Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 3–4.

9 One of the most glaring examples of the family's influence on queerstory research is the story of Anna Hájkova, accused by the daughter of the late witness of "violating her postmortem personality rights." Cf. David Batty, "Holocaust Survivor's Daughter in Legal Battle with Historian over Claim of Lesbian Liaison with Nazi Guard," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/08/survivors-daughter-sues-historian-claim-lesbian-liaison-nazi-guard; David Batty, "Court Fines Historian over Claims of Holocaust Survivor's Lesbian Affair," *The Guardian,* December 21, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/dec/21/court-fines-historian-over-claims-holocaust-survivor-lesbian-affair.

10 I use the term "loved ones" in a very inclusive sense – those who have remembered, but also those, who at some stage of the protagonist's life were alongside, were significant (a reference to "kinship" in counterpoint to family, also non-biological relations). Cf. Anna Hájková, *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub. Homophobie und Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 30–33.

twentieth century, apart from those recorded on the pages of criminal and medical records. There is no denying that had it not been for Wilhelm Kröpfl, Klaus Müller would not have found the artifacts to complete the testimony of Heinz Heger, a.k.a. Josef Kohout, whose *The Men with the Pink Triangle*[11] was a milestone work in the study of homosexual, as well as non-heteronormative victims of the Third Reich.

In 1994, two months after Josef's death, Kröpfl met with historian Klaus Müller to tell him his partner's story. The wartime period in Josef's biography was encased in two shoeboxes that Kröpfl kept in his apartment. Müller spent more than two hours at Wilhelm's house, listening to recollections on Josef and looking through the documents that had survived the war. He tried to convince Wilhelm that there were some serious treasures in his closet. Among the boxes lay Kohout's concentration camp number – 1896, and the only pink triangle found up to that time. In addition to that, there were letters from his parents, Josef's unique diary with notes from the April 1945 death march to Dachau concentration camp, and many other pieces of evidence of the persecution of this prison group.[12] Were it not for this collection, the key biography of the "pink triangle" would have remained grossly incomplete.[13]

In addition to new storylines and biographies, the symbolic closet, which in fact consisted of chests, shoeboxes, gray envelopes and folders containing documents,[14] offers a chance to clarify the mysteries regarding those biographies that in queerstory we already consider "told," that is, ostensibly closed.[15] I probably would have reacted differently to Anna's message had

11 Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*, trans. David Fernbach (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1994).

12 Footage of the Josef Kohout and Wilhelm Kröpfl collection (USHMM) – Documenting Nazi Persecution of Gays: Josef Kohout/Wilhelm Kroepfl Collection (Curators Corner #13), accessed January 12, 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj-wGkcyTL8.

13 For a more extensive history of the biographies of the first witnesses persecuted under Paragraph 175, who left their accounts: Klaus Müller, "Totgeschlagen, totgeschwiegen? Das autobiographische Zeugnis homosexueller Überlebender," in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle. Verdrängt und ungesühnt*, ed. Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 397–418.

14 The chest full of artifacts relating to the biography of her grandmother and her partner is also mentioned by Sylvie Bianchi, the protagonist of the film *Nelly and Nadine*, which tells the story of a lesbian relationship between the women who met in December, 1944 at the Ravensbrück women's camp. *Nelly and Nadine,* dir. Magnus Gertten, 2022, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.berlinale.de/en/2022/programme/202209157.html.

15 A good example of an "ostensibly closed biography" is the story of Karl Gorath (a former inmate of Neuengamme concentration camp, Auschwitz I and Mauthausen concen-

it not been for my experience with the family of Teofil Kosiński. Historian Lutz van Dijk recorded the wartime and postwar biography of Stefan K., a.k.a. Teofil, or Teo, in two books: *Damned Strong Love*[16] and »Endlich den Mut …«[17] published between 1991 and 2015. In which case, the cooperation with the witness lasted over a decade. He was informed of Teofil's death in 2003 by Kosinski's nephew's daughter. After receiving this information, the contact broke off. Fourteen years later, just before the publication of the Polish version of *Damned Strong Love*, I managed to get in touch with Teofil's relatives, who had cared for him until his death. The family had no idea that Kosinski had co-written a book based on his own biography, which had been translated into several languages, and that his testimony was part of the oral history collection at the USHMM and the USC Shoah Foundation. The witness had also never mentioned to them anything about his psychosexual orientation. And they had no idea that the reason for Teo's arrest, during the war, was a love affair with an Austrian Wehrmacht soldier. In the course of meetings and conversations I had with Mr. Leszek and Ms. Anna, I was able not only to fill in the gaps in Kosinski's biography, especially in the period between 1945 and 1990, but most importantly, I received from them all the personal documents – letters, postcards, tickets, brochures, leaflets,[18] as well as photographs left behind by Teofil, which relate to the storylines that were not mentioned in the conversations with van Dijk. These materials are all the more valuable, because three years before his death, Kosinski burned all the "evidence of his

tration camp), who was persecuted under paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code penalizing intimate relations between men. At Auschwitz, Gorath had two Polish lovers, Zbigniew and Tadeusz. In July 1989, during a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, he was informed that Zbigniew and Tadeusz had not survived the war. Gorath died in 2003. Seventeen years later, in the course of my research, it turned out that Zbigniew and Tadeusz h a d survived the war, and that Zbigniew w a s in contact with the Museum in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Karl Gorath was denied the opportunity to ever see Zbigniew again. See https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/karl-gorath, accessed February 3, 2023; Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni*, 257-260.

16 Lutz van Dijk, *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K.*, trans. Elizabeth D. Crawford (New York: Holt, 1995).

17 »Endlich den Mut …«: Brie*fe von Stefan T. Kosinski (1925–2003)*, ed. Lutz van Dijk (Berlin: Querverlag, 2015).

18 Such materials are traditionally considered "superfluous," "unnecessary," "of no benefit – failing to enrich knowledge." In the case of Teofil and Adam, there was no hierarchy in the materials collected. Each collected what he himself considered appropriate and important. Municipal bus tickets from the early 1990s, train package delivery receipts were as important as photographs of loved ones. Cf. Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 33–43.

second/non-normative life," including letters from readers from all over the world, his correspondence with Lutz, articles about him and his life, foreign language versions of a book based on his biography. The pieces he saved must have been of real value to him. I suppose he did not know how to part with them. In the talks with the historian, he claimed that everything was lost.[19] Today, thanks to these materials, the process of rewriting the biography of Teofil Kosinski – Teo – Stefan K. is no longer just about filling in the facts and gaps, rather, it focuses on changing the optics. Kosinski's biography is still untold, it is not closed, it requires a new version supplemented by new sources. The baseline for a revised version of the biography should be both the archival base left to the family and the relationship he had with Lutz van Dijk, the "chronicler" of this queer story. This biography will thus become a tale of two protagonists.

Describing the aforementioned Magnus Hirschfeld collection, Heike Bauer rightly points out that all queer archives "live" – they develop, recording their own history – not only of documentation, but also of those who are archiving:

> The complex history of Hirschfeld's material legacy furthermore indicates that archives are subject to circumstance, the keeper of strange knowledges, which can be shaped by serendipity and unexplained events as much as by traceable personal and financial investments or the agendas of the institutions that make it their task to select materials to keep or destroy.[20]

Thus, the archive is both a metaphor and a method, as well as a material space that connects biographies – subjects, to discourses. The "lack of documentation" that we associate with historical accounts regarding queer Central and Eastern Europe from the twentieth century may be misleading.[21] Paradoxi-

19 Teofil wrote Lutz about this event in one of his letters, available in the book »Endlich den Mut…«, 173-176.

20 Bauer, *The Hirschfeld Archives*, 4.

21 I experienced a shift in my understanding of the queer archive during my own research work. Those specializing in the research of Second World War history in Poland convinced me that the archival sources on non-heternormativity were scarce. This lack of sources was supposed to preclude me from researching and writing a monograph. I was urged to change my research topic. During my initial queries in Polish state archives, it became apparent that the number of sources was, and still is, simply overwhelming, both in the context of the systemic persecution of queer people, queer day-to-day life, as well as the study of the microhistories of individual protagonists throughout the twentieth century. Cf. Raimund Wolfert, "*Damals habe ich mich entschlossen, meinen Teil dazu beizutragen, dieses symbolische Regal zu füllen*. Interview mit Joanna Ostrowska," *Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft* 69/70 (2022): 10–24.

cally, as the aforementioned examples show, the available research material is "extremely abundant,"[22] the storylines keep multiplying, building up, although they do not always form a cohesive sum. In the sense of cause and effect, they can seem deficient, fractured, filled with inadequacies, or "outside the norm." All the better, we just can't let them slip out of our grasp.

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Adam's collection, given to me by Anna, is predominated by photographs. My protagonist collected both professional photos taken in studios, as well amateur developed photos. Some of the latter were most taken and developed by him. The entire collection largely comes from the pre-war and wartime periods. Some shots have more than a dozen prints each, differing only in the exposure of the film. The person developing them tried to make a perfect print.[23]

In the process of arranging the collection, I was able to distinguish four main series. The first consists of photographs of a celebratory family reunion, before the start of Second World War,[24] which took place at the back of Mr. and Mrs. Gawron's farmhouse. It is from this series that the photographs of the men kissing each other comes from, which started my adventure with Adam. This series is incomplete. It most likely contained some thirty photographs numbered on the corners of the light-sensitive film, of which I received only three fragments of film plus one additional print. The two other series were funeral photographs. The first is from July/August 1942, and includes photos of the family in mourning after the death of one of Adam's sisters, Aniela. The second is a farewell ceremony for Emil, Aniela's son, who died on February 25, 1943 as a child. The fourth and final series contains photographs scattered in time, but professionally developed. Among them, the predominant images are document photos from different time periods, in which Adam, and members of his family, can be recognized. Some portraits of men remain anonymous,

22 Cf. Anjali Arondekar, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez and Susan Stryker, "Queer Archives: A Roundtable Discussion," comp. Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy and Zeb Tortorici, *Radical History Review* 122 (May 2015): 211–231.

23 Among Adam's post-war photos are also those belonging to his brother Stefan, Stefan's wife, as well as his adopted daughter Helena. I have the impression that the collection acquired from Anna also includes the family collection (the documents have been mislaid).

24 I dated this series of photos by comparing Adam's appearance and age based on the entire collection of surviving photos. Adam was forty years old when the war started. The comparative images were the war photos signed on the backs – 1942, 1943.

but there is a high probability that they belonged to Adam's relatives/partners/lovers. This collection also includes photos of Adam in a concentration camp prisoner uniform and hat, from the 1980s, which I have delineated as a link to a separate collection of wartime artifacts.

When Anna handed me Adam's collection, she claimed that he was sent to a concentration camp under paragraph 175 of the German statute criminalizing sexual relations between men.[25] She had no proof of this, but repeated the belief that he had been turned in by one of the locals. I verified this part of Adam's biography first. Strictly speaking, had it not been for the association of my research on those persecuted under paragraphs 175 and 175a, I probably would not have gotten to know the story of this protagonist. I was aided by Adam himself, who collected documents relating to his time in the concentration camp – certificates from the municipality office, confirmation letters from ITS Bad Arolsen, correspondence with newspapers describing partisan activity in the areas, his Auschwitz Cross certificate, and so on, in the course of my research queries, I was able to compare the surviving documentation with archival materials. It became apparent, almost immediately, that the lead on paragraph 175 turned out to be false. Adam was a political prisoner detained for fighting the occupying German forces. His non-normativity was not the reason for his persecution, which made this biography seem all the more significant to me in the context of the narratives dominating my research archive.

Additionally, Adam's collection includes surviving pre-war railroad documentation, the family's court and inheritance records, his parents' ID cards, and the ID cards of relatives, as well as the rich correspondence of Adam's niece, Stefan's daughter – Helena, who was a stenographer by profession.[26] From a certain point in time, it was thanks to her that Adam was able to send any letter, private or official. In fact, her correspondence became part of her uncle's collection. Adam dictated the necessary letters to Helena, which she then typed and stored. I found the handwritten originals in Adam's collection.

There is no denying that in the story of Adam Gawron, the motivation for my research work was not the testimony. In the collected materials, both those received from Anna as well as in the archival documentation, there is no trace of a queer account recorded by my protagonist. The starting point is an image – a kiss captured in a photograph preserved among hundreds of others. The

25 The wording of paragraph 175 changed over the period between 1871 and 1994. All changes in German legislation regarding this article of the Criminal Code can be traced here: https://lexetius.com/StGB/175/, accessed February 20, 2023.

26 For the purposes of the text, I have omitted footnotes to the documentation from Adam's collection. I describe the type of surviving source in the main text without a reference – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

print shows two men standing in the middle of a field. Behind them, along the horizon, we recognize several trees, clumps of bushes, perhaps haystacks. Right next to the kissing couple grows a tiny tree. The shot is part of a series. The photographer only catches only one moment in time.

Fig. 2. Adam kissing his anonymous friends.

Adam, the man with short hair, with a lower shave, is a tad older. He is wearing a black suit and fairly wide-legged pants. Sticking out from under his jacket is a stiff white shirt collar and a dark tie. With his left hand, he tenderly embraces the other man's neck, touching his ear with his thumb and holding his face with his whole hand, and kisses him. The man being kissed is younger and remains anonymous. He has longer, slightly curly

hair and a gray suit. Just before the kiss, he took a puff from his cigarette. The cigarette can be seen in his right hand. The men are standing very close together, their eyes are closed. In the upper right corner, the film was labeled with a number, which now remains indistinct. It is definitely a shot from the twenty-something series.

Fig. 3. Adam with his anonymous friend.

A further shot with the number twenty-nine was taken from a different perspective. It is as if the photographer has moved a little to the left. The men are still standing close together. The younger is resting his left arm on Adam's shoulder, fixing his bangs. Adam holds him by the edge of his jacket. A cigarette is still visible in the kissed man's hand. They smile at each other. It might

as well be the moment just after the kiss or just before. The missing shots in between are a record of a longer situation, which is somehow summed up by the print numbered thirty-four.

Fig. 4. Adam and his two friend.

Adam and his anonymous friend are standing side by side along with a third man, who also remains anonymous. The photo was taken against the backdrop of a farm building, but in the same location. Again the photographer turned to the left, trying this time to capture his models in a slightly different setting. Two of them are looking uninhibitedly into the lens. Adam smiles, posing. The third man captured in the photograph is looking at the "couple." He seems as if he is just an accessory. In the background, a woman and a girl

can be seen entering an outbuilding. Like the men they too are dressed up. Thanks to them, we know that these three prints, plucked from a larger set, were created during a family celebration. Perhaps it was a wedding, a christening, or a village hoedown. The photos were not taken in hiding, were not destroyed, and had several prints each. The photographer remains unknown, but it is known who made the prints from the surviving film, who numbered and stored them. The collector of the traces of this visual tale was Adam. They must have been precious to him.

Two basic pitfalls that arise at the beginning of the process of reconstructing this story are, first – whether to show the faces of the protagonists, as well as photographs of anonymous authors, without their consent? Second – by showing these photographs in a queer context, do we not categorize, brand, or out them? To put it another way, first, is it permissible for me as a researcher to bring to light the intimate images of Adam, who did not openly testify about his non-normativity. This argument is often used by families of witnesses, reluctant to queer their relative's past, or by some archivists for whom talking about someone's gender identity and psychosexual orientation is too sensitive data or even a violation of their dignity. Secondly, how do you tell Adam's story without the awareness of how he defined himself, how he talked about himself, whether he wanted to talk about non-normativity or preferred to remain silent.

In both cases we are faced with certain manipulation. It is worth addressing using the example of the exhibition composed of Sébastien Lifshitz's collection of photographs *Under Cover. A Secret History of Cross-Dressers*, shown in Berlin.[27] Lifshitz, a film director and screenwriter, has been collecting photographs of cross-dressers and non-heteronormative people since he was a teenager. Purchased at flea markets and antique stores, he assembled the images into a private collection of thousands of photos of anonymous people. All of Lifshitz's subjects remain anonymous. For the collector, the impetus for his work was not to look for traces of their biographies, but to try to arrange the collection into a certain narrative sequence. His approach is to tell the story of a queer community without deciphering the biographies. Here, the viewer has full freedom of interpretation: "[…] many of these pictures will remain forever a mystery, an enigma – and it doesn't bother me. On the contrary, I like that there is a part of resistance. I would like the audience to be in the same position as I was when I first discovered them. Everybody

27 The exhibition *Under Cover: A Secret History of Cross-Dressers* was shown at C/O Berlin (September 17, 2022 – January 18, 2023) and at The Photographers' Gallery in London (February 23, 2018 – June 2, 2018).

is free to project whatever they want. There are different levels of interpretation [emphasis – J. O.]."[28]

From this perspective, the issue of consent to show anonymous photos in a queer context is non-existent. As does the issue of categorization and outing. Each of these stories, intermediated through photographs, can be interpreted in radically different ways, there is no single, defined scenario for the story. The potentiality of the stories is the baseline here, and at the same time is the most appropriate solution to the dilemmas of non-testimony – consent. I do not know if the protagonists would like to be called queer, outed, and viewed, but the key point is that there is such a possibility:

> If you belonged to the queer community in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century, you had to be very careful and smart to create an environment where you could be safe and meet like-minded people. […] They had to be cautious. It's a miracle that some of these pictures still exist because most of them were destroyed. […] I think we should see these cross-dressers as pioneers: they are heroes from the past – we have to pay tribute to them and try to tell what we know about them as much as we can. They were anonymous people just trying to be themselves at a time when it was almost impossible.[29]

Therefore, I view Adam's photographs as pioneer photos, which he decided to archive. Of this I can be sure. I also suppose that in his case "being himself" was not necessarily "nearly impossible." For the first time I had thought about the fact that Adam "was not hiding," when I saw the number of prints of shots of the men kissing. In the photo sent by Anna, I saw the one selected plus a stack of others in the background. Attempts to develop further prints of the shots included all the frames, both funeral and non-funeral. In this story, we are not dealing with a single image meticulously hidden in household nooks and crannies, so that it never falls into the wrong hands. This kiss was meant to be visible, as later interviews with witnesses would confirm. In the local Radom outskirts village community, everyone knew. They did not need to gossip, because Adam did not deny it. In the case of his biography, "outside the norm" is also beyond what we would expect from a queer biography of a person living in Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. Therefore, in interpreting Adam's biography, it's worth risking, and attempting to contextualize the story according to Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's formula:

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28 Magnus Pölcher, "They Are Heroes from the Past – We Have to Pay Tribute to Them. Interview with Sébastien Lifshitz," *C/O Berlin* 32 (2022): 19.

29 Ibid., 21.

> Given that history itself is one such tool that provides its "users" with a neutral point of view from which violent realities are perceived as "historical objects" to be put in a certain plausible order [emphasis– J. O.] potential history rejects the impulse to relate to these tools as objects with their own history that should be narrated. […] Imperial history is potentialized when the radical differentiation between imperially and racially formed groups such as "blacks" and "whites" [queer and straight – J. O.] is undermined, and other options of sharing the world are enlivened as reparations.[30]

From this standpoint, the two questions posed at the beginning of this section come from a different operational order, based on the belief that the protagonist "didn't want to." In the "plausible" (dominant), version of the queer biography, the non-normative person wished, at all costs, and even after death, to remain in the shadows. If there is no testimony confirming his readiness to speak/witness/show, then Adam certainly did not want to speak. To challenge this *status quo*, erroneously referred to as the "neutral point of view," it is not enough just to listen to the witnesses, but also to look at the artifacts.[31] What is emblematic in Adam's microhistory is not just that he recorded a non-heteronormative episode in the form of photographs. His biography does not include either an episode of fleeing his home village or a story of a local homophobic community or persecution, based on criminal documents, such as pre-war and wartime police, court, and prison records. It forces a paradigm shift – thinking in contrast to the historical praxis, concerning not only the survival and hiding strategies of queer people, but also the concept of forced migration from small towns to the city as anonymous space – enabling survival.[32]

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30 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019), chap. "Potential History: Not with the Master's Tools, Not with Tools at All," Kindle.

31 During my two visits to the village where Adam lived, I conducted several interviews with his relatives and with witnesses. I did not ask about his psychosexual orientation – sooner or later each interviewee informed me that Adam was "different," and everyone knew about it.

32 Kamil Karczewski writes about transgressing the phantasm of the "urban queer Mecca" in Poland of the interwar period in his text "Call Me by My Name." Snippets of similar thoughts also appear in the works of Raimund Wolfert and Mathias Foit. Cf. Kamil Karczewski, "'Call Me by My Name': A 'Strange and Incomprehensible Passion' in the Polish Kresy of the 1920s," *Slavic Review* 81 (3) (2022): 631–652; M. Foit, "Of Towns and Villages: Non-Metropolitan Queer Urbanism of Weimar Germany" (Phd diss., Free University of Berlin, 2023), Raimund Wolfert, "Lila Klub," *Replika* 102 (2023): 48–50; Joanna Ostrowska, "Häftlinge nach Paragraf 175a im Lagerkomplex Mauthausen-Gusen. Verschwiegene Biografien von Polen aus dem *Reichsgau Wartheland*," *coMMents* Heft 1 (2022): 88–91.

However, I would not want an "outsider" paradigm to dominate my attempt to record Adam's story. After all, I am the person recording and preserving the protagonist's archive, a non-Western researcher, a Pole, a woman, researching the queer history of Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe, a person who can back herself up using the categories that have been put forward by her co-researchers. For in Adam's story, I see not only Sarah Ahmed's[33] queer moments and Jack Halberstam's[34] subjugated knowledge, but above all the glitches that Aleksandra Szczepan discusses when examining the visual evidence of the Holocaust. This category seems pertinent, in that it applies to the image – video testimonies – just as it does to my protagonist's photographs. And at the same time, it situates itself in Holocaust/Second World War research, which was part of Adam's biographical experience: "glitch in testimony […] denotes various affective disruptions: shifts, incongruities, or infelicitous encounters that challenge us to confront our cultural expectations about the testimony, the memory and representation of the Holocaust, trauma and i d e n t i t y [emphasis – J. O.]."[35]

"Oval-View" of the Biography

In Adam's story, the primary "incongruity" is, of course, the series of photographs with which I began my analysis of his biography, but "queer faults" also appear in the statements of the village's residents.[36] This includes both family members I managed to talk to as well as neighbors. I therefore treat

33 Queer moments in biography are points of disorientation, forcing a change of perspective, in counterpoint to the dominant narrative in the text. Cf. Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 65–68.

34 Subjugated knowledge, that is, forms of knowledge that were not simply forgotten, but were disqualified, considered ridiculous, lacking, "insufficiently elaborated." Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 27.

35 Aleksandra Szczepan, "Przeczulone słowa i drgające obrazy. O potencjalnych metodach badań nad Zagładą" [Sensitive words and quivering images. About potential methods of research on the Holocaust], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2021): 32 (trans. A. Szczepan).

36 In January and July 2022, I was able to talk to six people from Adam's village. Three of them were nearby neighbors, the other two were family (the grandchildren of one of Adam's brothers). One man lived in a neighboring village. In each of the cases, I respected the wishes of my interviewees that they remain anonymous. I have interwoven their statements into the body of Adam's biography. I started each interview with the information that the conversation about Adam's biography was related to his camp experience. I was never the first to mention any queer related storylines. Notes from the interviews (January 4, 2022 and July 22, 2022) – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

this first attempt of writing down his biography as a preliminary "outlining" of the story created from a compilation consisting of Adam's collection, and other collected materials. This "outlining" will henceforth be used by me as an inventory note for further research, becoming part of this peculiar collection.

Adam was born in 1899, and died in 1989. His biographical story covers practically the entire twentieth century, hence I take the liberty of approaching it emblematically. Regardless of the historical moment, the first element that binds Adam's biography together, in this case, will be the place – the family village with a population of six hundred to seven hundred residents, spanning the century. This local community, functioning in a network of familial dependencies, has remained somewhat unchanged throughout the twentieth century up to the present day. The knowledge regarding the members of the community is symbolically inherited, transferred from one generation to the next, a fact that is very evident when talking to the villagers today. [They are all related in some way]. In their stories, Adam is portrayed as a non-heteronormative person functioning in the group on equal terms. For both them and their ancestors, his non-heteronormativity was not a reason for rejection/persecution, not only in the context of personal relationships during peacetime, but also in life-threatening situations during wartime.

Adam's childhood and teenage years remain a *terra incognita* in the narrative so far, but his family tree can be successfully reconstructed on the basis of surviving documents. His parents, Bronisława and Franciszek, were born in the village as well. They owned one farm and had six children. Adam was their oldest son. Three other offspring were Stefan, Andrzej and Feliks. Aniela had been born in between them, and the youngest daughter's name was Matylda. Adam's father farmed the land, as did his mother, her ID states her occupation as "wife." Thanks to her surviving pre-war ID card, we know that she was illiterate. She came from one of the more significant local families.

Mr. and Mrs. Gawron's eldest son worked on the railroad. However, it is difficult to say in what position. It is also unclear what kind of education he received. We can only assume that, because of his profession, firstly, he helped his parents maintain the farm, and secondly, he left his family village. Before the war in Poland, the profession of railroader was a highly regarded and well-paid occupation. Adam's military ID survived in the preserved documentation, which was issued to him in the town of Równe, in the Polish province of Volhynia (currently Рівне in Ukraine). His registration of residence was in Bereźne (today Березне, Ukraine), almost four hundred kilometers from his hometown. This is another indication that his interwar years require further analysis. The existing photographs also necessitate this. Based on one of the previously mentioned photo collections, it is clear that Adam gathered photographs of young men. He may have had intimate relations with some of

them, while others could have been simply his friends. And although most of them will remain anonymous, it can be safely said that until the end of his life, for Adam, his graphic archive was something of a diary, in which images of men predominated.

In the surviving photo collection, the mentioned funeral series stands out. During the war, Adam lost his sister, Aniela and nephew, Emil. Józef Łata was Aniela's husband and Emil's father, who had been raising their second, surviving son Tycjan, by himself since February 1943. Presumably, Adam had already been friends with Józef before the war. Locals say that Adam had returned to his parents house after September 17, 1939, confirming the story that he had previously lived in Bereźne. During the occupation, the two men were active in the partisan forces together. Most likely, it was Łata, along with another member of Adam's mother's family, who drew him into the resistance. They were all members of the SOB (Socialist Combat Organization), which cooperated with the ZWZ (Union of Armed Struggle) and later with the Home Army.[37] Adam's house served as a secret dispatch, information and organizational point for the resistance. Most likely, he did not fight armed, unlike Łata who organized combat training, but he covertly stored weapons.

Józef Łata was arrested by the Germans in late 1943.[38] He was taken to a prison in Radom, and in the second half of January 1944, he was incarcerated in AL Dyhernfurth, a subcamp of Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp. On July 26, Józef was executed in Gross-Rosen by a sentence from the Summary Court in Radom.[39] Thus, orphaning his son. A month earlier, the Germans had arrested Adam. Little is known about the circumstances of his arrest. He was first sent to a prison in Radom, later, in July, to Gross-Rosen.[40] After the war,

37 Cf. Wojciech Borzobohaty, »Jodła«. Okręg Radomsko-Kielecki ZWZ-AK 1939-1945 ["Fir." Radomsko-Kielecki District ZWZ-AK 1939–1945] (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1988), 135-150.

38 Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum (AMGR), 21/87/MF (materials of the GKBZpNP concerning the executions at the Gross-Rosen concentration camp); correspondence with the AMGR in January 2022 – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

39 A query at the Arolsen Archives concerning Józef Łata only identified documentation concerning a person with the same name and surname, but a different date of birth. Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN), GK 165/87, 281–285 (materials relating to executions in the camp 1942–1944).

40 This version of events is confirmed through numerous documents preserved in Adam's collection (including confirmations from the municipality from the late 1940s). Arolsen Archies (AA), 1.1.11.1 / 141567 (Prisoner registry of KL Gross-Rosen – 1940–1945); 6.3.3.2/ 110693486 (Korrespondenz T/D 1042786); AMGR, 6723a/30/DP; 2524 (Księga Bólu i Pamięci, Radom 1993), 9576/34/Dps.154 (Transporty do KL Gross-Rosen, opr. A. Konieczny).

Adam claimed that, while in the camp, he learned of his friend's execution. After a few weeks, Gawron was sent to the Niesky satellite concentration camp, in Saxony.[41] Władysław Zyśk was brought there at the same time:

> The campgrounds were much smaller than those used by the Gross-Rosen camp and had only 5 barracks. […]. However, as it later turned out, the conditions were not so easy, as the hard 10-hour work day in the factory exhausted the body, and the food was no different from that in Gross-Rosen. At the factory, I worked as a carpenter, adapting train cars to anti-aircraft defense possibilities, they were equipped with machine guns and anti-aircraft guns, and the manned cars were protected by armor. We were led to and from work under SS escort and monitored at all times while working.[42]

Whether Adam had the same occupation is not yet known, but his job assignment may have been influenced by his profession. In a 1977 letter to ITS Bad Arolsen, he stated very clearly: "I was liberated from this camp [Aussenlager Niesky – J. O.] by the Polish Second Army, on April 18, 1945."[43] Another former prisoner, Edward Tomala, recalls the liberation:

> At about 9 a.m., 3 tanks drove onto the main road with white eagles on them, they did not drive but rushed towards the town [Niesky – J. O.]. […] shells began to fall on the barracks where the *krank-sztuba* [infirmary – J. O.] was located. We hid in the dead room which was below ground, after coming out we noticed that the barrack was partially destroyed, but there wasn't a trace of the sick. Meanwhile, at the entrance gate, by the barrack of the SS, and the kitchen building we saw the Polish Army. This is how I was liberated from the Niesky subcamp, part of the concentration camp of Gross-Rosen, along with 15 other prisoners who took refuge in the dead house. They included: 8 Poles, 5 Russians, and 3 Yugoslavs.[44]

Adam must have been among those eight Poles, although Tomala does not mention his name. Perhaps like the others, he immediately returned to Poland,

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41 Cf. Danuta Sawicka, "Niesky," in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager Band 6: Natzweiler, Groß-Rosen, Stutthof*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 403–405.

42 Władysław Zyśk, "W Gross-Rosen i Niesky," in *Przeżyliśmy Gross-Rosen*, Tom 2 – "Filie obozu koncentracyjnego Gross-Rosen," Zeszyt 6 – "Komando Niesky" (Warszawa: ZBoWiD, 1987), 55–56.

43 AA, 6.3.3.2 / 110693489 (Korrespondenz T/D 1042786).

44 Edward Tomala, "Pamiętnik z Niesky," in *Przeżyliśmy Gross-Rosen*, Tom 2, 52.

to his home village, breaking off all camp contacts. Certainly his health was in serious condition. In the winter of 1944, the prisoner mortality rate in the Niesky camp was very high. The liberated handful in Tomala's story, represent those who were left behind in the camp, despite an earlier evacuation due to poor health conditions. Adam's relatives recall that he returned home with a broken collarbone. His face was massacred, and he practically lost sight in one eye. He survived typhoid fever in the camp. He was no longer able to work the land. He also never returned to work on the railroad. He was the only survivor of his tiny village. From then on, Adam became a living monument to the martyrdom of the local community. In his closet hung an ironed striped camp prisoner uniform, with a four-digit camp number from Gross-Rosen, along with his camp hat.

But war had resurfaced in February, 1977. That was when an article appeared in a Catholic weekly on the history of the resistance and combat of one of the local Home Army outposts, in the Radom district of the General Government (GG).[45] The writers mentioned local heroes by name. Among them were Adam and Józef. Gawron responded immediately by sending a letter to the editor thanking them: "I am already 78 years old. For a long time I thought that all trace of me and my friends who died would be lost, yet it turns out that not everything we did was in vain." Along with Adam's, a separate letter was sent by Tycjan Łata: "I don't remember my father, because I am 38 years old, and my father was arrested by the Germans when I was 4 years old. There were people who remembered my father and his work. I, personally, owe a lot of gratitude to the editorial staff […]." Both letters were typed and sent by Adam's niece, Helena. It is only because she kept the handwritten copies that I know of their existence.

The newspaper article set Gawron in motion. As early as June of that year, he sent a letter to ITS Bad Arolsen, asking for confirmation of his stay in the camps. He received all the documentation. Most likely, at the same time, he began visiting the local elementary school giving lectures about his experiences in the concentration camps. Some of the locals I spoke with remembered the meetings with Adam and the stories of camp brutality. During these visits, he always proudly wore his striped prisoner's uniform and hat, as he did during the May Day marches.

One other storyline draws attention, namely the relationship between Adam and Tycjan. The youngest son of Józef Łata and Aniela Gawron was most likely born in 1939. At the age of three he lost his mother, a year later, his brother. When he was four, his father was arrested. It is difficult to say who

45 Edward Stec and Julian Szczuka, "Z dziejów jednej placówki" [From the history of one institution], *Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolicki*, February 6, 1977, 38.

raised him until the end of the war. Later, Adam took over custody of him, as is confirmed by Tycjan's 1954 railroad ID card, entitling him to a discount on fares. From the ID photo, a teenage boy gazes at us. Below his name is a note about his relationship to a railroad employee: "raised by Gawron Adam a PKP [Polish State Railways – J. O.] pensioner."

The post-war period in Gawron's life included more than his return to the family village, and a speedy pension from the State Railroad, due to his poor health. Adam decided to take custody of his nephew, whom he raised, most likely alone, possibly with the help of relatives and neighbors. The Gawron family home was divided in half, Stefan with his wife and adopted daughter Helena lived in one part, Adam and his nephew lived in the other. The former home of Józef Łata stood empty. Tycjan took over his father's farm only after he came of age. During my interviews with the villagers, I asked about the matter of Adam's guardianship of a minor boy, after his return from the camp. It came as no surprise to anyone, and did not cause a scandal, although, according to my interviewees, everyone knew that Adam "didn't like women."[46] This phrase was repeated like a mantra during all the conversations I had in that village outside of Radom. No one mentioned a word about pedophilia. So a non-heteronormative man, a former prisoner of concentration camps, after returning home began a new life, taking care of his six-year-old nephew. Their relationship must have been very strong for they were buried in the same grave, at the local cemetery. Tycjan died ten years after Adam.

This abridged camp biography is worth piecing together with other personal accounts of his relatives and neighbors. Just like Adam was considered a hero, at the same time he played the role of the local weirdo, also in the light of his non-heteronormativity. Locals called him "Benek." He would wear drill pants and jacket, and in his later years he never parted with his rubber boots. He always rode a bicycle. He would make his own wine at home, although he never drank alcohol or smoked. Sometimes he would sell the wine to locals. He collected radios, sewing machines and other equipment, such as an enlarger for developing photos. He practiced palmistry, and read books on magic. He would buy fabric and experiment with sewing. Since the 1960s, local kids would come to his house to listen to all sorts of stories and try alcohol. He had several lovers, some of whom were married, which did not stop these relationships from lasting up to a dozen or so years. When I asked about the camp period in Adam's biography, one of the interviewees told me straightforwardly, "He survived the camps because he was

46 Other terms for Adam's non-heternormativity appearing in interviews include: "he didn't love women."

a prison bitch. After all, it is known what the Germans did to those kinds of people."[47] Thanks to this sentiment, I came to understand how Anna had associated me, Adam's story, and paragraph 175, altogether. However, it could have been that Adam mentioned the experiences of sexual violence in a concentration camps, or talked about consensual relations that later became encoded in local memory in this particular way. It could also have been the other way around, a combination of the figure of a non-heteronormative person and the camp experience in postwar Poland reality, would have been seen exclusively through the prism of sexual violence experiences. After all, for years, Polish post-war discourse was dominated by a phantasm linking non-heteronormative persons' persecutions, due to their gender identity and psychosexual orientation, with a leading narrative of sexual predators, exploiting their power and position within the camp's community.[48] To this day, for many people, these experiences are synonymous, also within historical and research terms.[49]

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47 My interviewee used this term, but before that he clearly had trouble finding the right words. This statement was not meant to be pejorative. I suppose it resulted from his helplessness in choosing other terms. A similar phenomenon can be found in the transcripts of interviews with residents of several villages where, in the 1970s, there were child abuse scandals linked to the clergy of the Catholic Church: "[He – J. O.]: That was the gossip. They suspected he had deviances, that he was bisexual. Or what do they call it? Not bisexual! He only liked young boys. What do they call it now ? [He turns to his wife – J. O.]. [Wife – J. O.]: Well I think it's fag. [He – J. O.]: Well not a fag, but.... [Wife – J. O.]: Bisexual. [He – J. O.]: Not bisexual. Well, that he has needs... What do the teens call it? [Author – J. O.]: A pedophile. [He – J. O.]: That's right, a pedophile! That he was a pedophile. Well, he hassled many of those altar boys." Ekke Overbeek, *Maxima Culpa. Co Kościół ukrywa o Janie Pawle II* [Maxima Culpa. What the Church hides about John Paul II] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2023), chap. 8, Kindle.

48 The described phenomenon is part of the post-war homophobia experienced by survivors. Cf. Insa Eschebach, "Homophobie, Devianz und weibliche Homosexualität im Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück," in *Homophobie und Devianz. Weibliche und männliche Homosexualität im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Insa Eschebach (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2012), 65–78, Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni*, 233–310; Uta Rautenberg, "Homophobia in Nazi camps" (PhD diss., University of Warwick 2021).

49 In Poland, the best example of this type of thinking is Bogdan Piętka's text on the paragraph-175-prisoners at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex. The response to this homophobic text was written by his would-be translator, Georg Gostomczyk. Cf. Bohdan Piętka, "Więźniowie z różowym trójkątem w KL Auschwitz" [Prisoners with a pink triangle in KL Auschwitz], *Dzieje Najnowsze. Kwartalnik poświęcony historii XX wieku* 46 (2) (2014): 25–53; Georg Gostomczyk, "Den homosexuellen Opfern des Nationalsozialismus nicht angemessen. Ein Lesebericht zu Bohdan Piętkas Aufsatz über *Häftlinge mit dem rosa Winkel im KZ Auschwitz*," *Invertito – Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 19 (2017): 155–175.

Before his death, Adam suffered an accident. One of his family members said that "he was always on the go." He was unable to stop, "deals, local business and small trade" was his forte. One day he rode his bicycle to a local farmer's market and got into an accident. A cart drove into him. With a broken pelvis, he ended up bed-ridden, he lay immobile, leading to his death. His niece Helena, the stenographer, wrote in one of her letters to her cousin: "Bożenka, first of all, thank you for your name-day wishes for Uncle Adam, and at the same time I want to inform you that Uncle Adam is no longer alive. He died on May 19, 1989 in the hospital […]. He fell ill with heart and kidney problems. The funeral was held on May 20 […]." Adam passed away at the age of ninety.

Coda

The story of Adam and his archive cannot be separated from my experience/microhistory of how I obtained this collection. When I think about the turning points in the process of reconstructing this biography, the moment that comes to mind is when I received the first photograph, sent by Anna via Instagram, but also the moment when I learned that Adam had not been persecuted under paragraph 175. Thirteen years ago, my queerstorical archival research began with a search for the names of those convicted under this paragraph of the German Criminal Code. Sources, recorded by the convicted, in their own language, have accompanied my research on the queer history of Central and Eastern Europe since the beginning. I encounter court, police and camp documentation, as well as medical reports, including psychiatric reports. This "branded" documentation has always been the impulse driving me in my search for new protagonists. That is how the structure for the monograph *Them. The Second World War History of Non-Heteronormative People* was created, which clearly, in terms of the nature of the sources, lacked a story similar to that of Adam's biography.

Thus, my queer archive is dominated by stories brought to light through the persecutors' documentation, to which I made and continue to make efforts finding a counterpoint in the form of personal/family/neighborhood sources. This course of research, at some point, became something of a curse for me, even though Polish state archives are full of files on those persecuted under paragraph 175, as well as others.[50] I remain convinced that they must

50 Other paragraphs under which non-heteronormative persons were persecuted on the territory of today's Poland in the pre-war and wartime periods were paragraph 175a of the German Criminal Code (since 1935), paragraph 129Ib of the Austrian Criminal Code, article 516 of the Russian Criminal Code, and article 207 of the Polish Criminal Code

be researched. I strongly believe that in Poland, not enough such narratives have seen the light of day, and for that reason they should further be researched.[51] There is no doubt that Adam's collection became an inspiration for me. It forced me to revise my long-held patterns and seemingly „neutral" research habits. It unsealed the script, forcing me to repeatedly collate available sources. Over time it sparked the discovery of other microhistories full of queer episodes, in which the non-heteronormativity of the protagonists in question is attested to by others – strangers recalling the episodes, individuals rescued during the war,[52] or an unaware family who even today does not remember the protagonist in question. Criminal and

(since 1932). In the case of the Polish Code, this was only to criminalize so-called professional same-sex prostitution, but as preliminary research of criminal cases from the period 1933–1969 has already shown, this paragraph was used simply to prosecute people accused of "pederasty" or "lesbian love." There is a lack of systematic research on the criminal cases that took place in today's Poland between 1900 and 1969 for each of those paragraphs. Cf. Joanna Ostrowska, "Publiczne pudrowanie nosa" [Powdering your nose in public], *Dwutygodnik*, accessed January 11, 2023, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/10059-publiczne-pudrowanie-nosa.html.

51 So far in Poland, research based on criminal records related to paragraphs 175 and 175a has been conducted by a handful of people, verbatim. Cf. Piotr Chruścielski, "Paragraf 175 w świetle zachowanej dokumentacji KL Stutthof. Zarys zagadnienia" [Paragraph 175 in the light of the preserved documentation of KL Stutthof. Outline of the issue], *Zeszyty Muzeum Stutthof* 5 (2017): 11–32, Piotr Chruścielski, "Między świadectwem a wspomnieniem. Niemieccy więźniowie KL Stutthof w pamięci ich bliskich" [Between testimony and memory. German prisoners of KL Stutthof in memory of their loved ones], in *Świadkowie między ofiarą a sprawcą zbrodni*, ed. Alicja Bartuś (Oświęcim: PMA-B, Fundacja na rzecz MDSM, 2017), 63–76, Katarzyna Woniak, "Homosexuelle Zwangsarbeiter. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis zwischen Sexualität und Rassenideologie während des Zweiten Weltkrieges," in *Justiz und Homosexualität. Juristische Zeitgeschichte Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Band 24 (Recklinghausen, 2020), 74–82.

52 The queer biographies I came across, after finding Adam's collection, are based primarily on the testimonies of male and female Jewish survivors, who, in their Holocaust testimonies, speak of the non-heteronormativity of their rescuers. The best example of this practice is the story of Stanisław Chmielewski, who's memory survived only through the testimony of Janina Bauman. There are more such examples – homosexual/non-heternormative male couples are also mentioned by Janina Forbert and Zofia Trembska. Cf. Janina Wierzbicki – USC Shoah Foundation, 33926; Janina Bauman – USC Shoah Foundation, 43589; Zuzanna Schnepf – Kołacz, "Na ciechańskiej plebanii. Historia ocalenia Zofii Trembskiej. Studium przypadku" [At the Ciechan rectory. The story of Zofia Trembska's survival. Case study], *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 6 (2010): 232–252; Joanna Ostrowska, "Stanisław Chmielewski ratował Żydów w czasie niemieckiej okupacji – obiecał to swojemu ukochanemu" [Stanisław Chmielewski saved Jews during the German occupation – he promised it to his beloved], *Replika* 96 (2022).

medical evidence still exists in the background, but the vector of investigation has been reversed.

Queer archives are full, they are often a fragment of other surviving ones. Narratives multiply and overlap. Queer survival strategies in Central and Eastern Europe, together with the war experience in the background, have been testified to by the "relatives" of queer people, whom we have not taken into account so far. They were often their "loved ones," but not in the heteronormative/familial sense. Their accounts often lack details. It was not possible for them to memorize everything. Often only a rumor, a guess or a hunch was recorded. At first glance, such stories may seem incongruous, devoid of personal, geographical data, tainted by post-war experience. But that is okay. As Jack Halberstam wrote: "memory is itself a disciplinary mechanism that Foucault calls 'a ritual of power'; it selects for what is important (the histories of triumph), it reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures and contradictions, and it sets precedents for other 'memorializations'."[53] For Halberstam, "forgetting becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription."[54] Recordings can be made repeatedly, erasing previous versions or piecing together seemingly irrelevant queer microhistories. In my queer archive, the impulse to erase past experiences came from Adam, *de facto* Jan, although, in this perspective, his real name longer matters.

Translated by Maciej Mahler

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53 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 33.

54 Ibid.

Abstract

Joanna Ostrowska
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR
The Archive is Full! On the Queer Life of Adam Gawron in the Twentieth Century

The article analyzes the queer private archive of Adam Gawron, a person born in 1899 in one of the towns on the Radom–Dęblin railroad line. Gawron passed away at the age of ninety, leaving behind a collection of photographs and family documents. In 2021, the collections were handed over to the author, who began the search to recover the protagonist's biography. The starting point for the research was a series of photographs and several preserved negatives depicting men kissing. The author tries to outline a map of queer archives originating from private collections: the collections of those nearest and dearest, understood more broadly than just family. At the same time, the recorded biography of the protagonist is treated as one of the variants of a multi-faceted story, with the important role of the local community. In her biographical investigation, the author utilizes the protagonist's collection, war archives, and the interviews she conducted with people who remember Adam Gawron.

Keywords

queer, archive, biography, nearest and dearest, glitch, twentieth century

Investigations

Elżbieta Rybicka

Landscape after Transformation

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.7 | ORCID: 0000-0002-7643-5647

The third landscape,[1] the unintentional landscape,[2] the disturbed landscape,[3] the post-industrial landscape[4] – these are arguably just some of the terms that address the peculiarities and diverse aspects of a landscape intensively transformed by human activity, especially industrial activity. Their multiplicity is indicative of the

1 Gilles Clement, "Trzeci krajobraz" [The third landscape], trans. Marta Turnau, *Autoportret* 3 (2019), accessed December 3, 2020, https://autoportret.pl/artykuly/manifest-trzeciego-krajobrazu/.

2 Matthew Gandy, "Unintentional Landscapes," *Landscape Research* 41 (4) (2016).

3 Aleksandra Brylska, "Radioaktywne kwiaty wiśni. Relacje Japończyków ze skażonymi obszarami wokół elektrowni Fukushima Daiichi" [Radioactive cherry blossoms. Japanese people's relationship with the contaminated areas around the Fukushima Daiichi power plant], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 147.

4 Wolfram Höfer and Vera Vicenzotti, "Post-industrial Landscapes: Evolving Concepts," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2013).

Elżbieta Rybicka – works at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. Her publications include *Formy labiryntu w prozie polskiej XX wieku* [The forms of the labyrinth in the Polish prose in the twentieth century] (2000), *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Modernizing the city. Introduction to urban problematics in modern Polish literature] (2003), *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* [Geopoetics. Space and place in contemporary theories and literary practices] (2014). She specializes in the cultural and literary geography, urban culture, literary regionalism and ecocriticism. Email: elzbieta.rybicka@uj.edu.pl.

confusion created by attempts to capture the landscape after human impact. Are these landscapes post-natural? Post-human? Artificial? Sites of a "new wilderness"?[5] Similarly, analogous questions arise not only in academic discourse, but also in culture, predominantly visual culture (primarily photography), albeit also in artistic projects and narrative genres, especially in recent years when the environmental crisis has become the triggering impulse. Here, I would like to approach this growing interest in the post-industrial landscape as a starting point for formulating several issues, most notably the question of how it is perceived by contemporary artists and for what reasons, and how, through cultural practices, they reconceptualize the experience and understanding of landscape.

Thus, the conceptual framework for the analysis of the narrative and landscape photography will be transformation. It defines the time horizon – it concerns, on the one hand, the processes of landscape transformation in Poland after 1989 and the question of the role of political and economic changes, especially the crisis and the partial collapse of the mining industry, in these transformations. Whereas in the 1990s these were not yet clearly perceived and articulated, the last decade, given their rise and the stronger introduction of a global context, has seen a growing wave of multi-directional diagnoses, warnings or interventions. There is indeed no single landscape discourse – taking into account recent practices (textual, visual, aural), it can be noticed that several perspectives coexist: culturocentric and biocentric, apocalyptic and consolatory, triggered by the climate crisis or inspired by Anthropocene or Capitalocene theories. And it is the latter that provide the second, significantly broader optic of perception of the landscape after transformation, that is, to put it more precisely, the anthropogenic landscape, transformed by human action also at the geological and morphological level. Thus, I will consider transformation in terms of two scales – the local one, related to the Polish context, and the global one, triggered by the concept of the Anthropocene and its rapidly proliferating derivatives. With this somewhat treacherous approach, it is possible to see the intersection of two perspectives: socio-economic and environmental.

For this analysis, I have selected primarily photography and non-fiction literature, as they allow to capture the landscapes of the Anthropocene not as a phenomenon safely distant in time and space, somewhere far away and later, but here and now, at a close scale, in an almost everyday experience. However, the manner of understanding landscape results from the specificity of the analyzed phenomena, which resonates best with inspirations coming

5 Ingo Kowarik, "Cities and Wilderness. A New Perspective," *International Journal of Wilderness* 3 (2013): 33.

from two sources. The first is the hardly known but worth recalling approach of Stanislaw Vincenz, who in a sketch from 1943 emphasized the materiality, relationality, hapticity and causal impact of landscape:

> "Landscape" means, of course, not only the pictorial or visual effects, but also the soil on which we tread, on which we work, its undulations or plains, its waters – seas, rivers or swamps – its air that we breathe: whatever lends form to a man's movements, whatever forms his steps, his works, his arms and legs, his posture, presumably even his breath.[6]

The second source is non-representational theories, concepts that have emerged in cultural geography in response to the dominant constructivist approaches, to the excessive emphasis on texts and images.[7] These highlight previously overlooked factors – embodied experience, the senses, affects, practices and actions, performative potential – emphasizing a way of approaching the landscape that discerns in it, as did Vincenz, something "more-than-representation."[8]

Disappearing, Trembling, Extracting

The landscape after transformation is primarily a consequence of at least partial withdrawal and reduction of development based on heavy industry and mining. However, in order to identify its complexity and multidimensionality more precisely, it is worth considering it on a longer time scale and

6 Stanisław Vincenz, "Krajobraz jako tło dziejów" [Landscape as the backdrop of history], in Vincenz, *Z perspektywy podróży* (Kraków: Znak, 1980), 362–363. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

7 I wrote more about the development of landscape research in the article "Krajobraz kulturowy. Między ideologiami a działaniami" [Cultural landscape. Between ideologies and actions], in *Więcej niż obraz*, ed. Eugeniusz Wilk, Anna Nacher, Magdalena Zdrodowska, Ewelina Twardoch and Michał Gulik (Gdańsk: Katedra Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2015).

8 Cf. Emma Waterton, "Landscape and Non-representational Theories," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2013); John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge), 162–169. Reconceptualization of landscape also appears in Polish research – in aesthetics (Beata Frydryczak, *Krajobraz. Od estetyki the picturesque do doświadczenia topograficznego* [Landscape. From the aesthetics of the picturesque to the topographical experience] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2013) and anthropology: Dorota Angutek, *Kulturowe wymiary krajobrazu. Antropologiczne studium recepcji krajobrazu na prowincji: od teorii do empirii* [Cultural dimensions of landscape. Anthropological study of landscape reception in the province: From theory to empirics] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 2013).

based on the example of a particular type of landscape – the Silesian landscape. Following the political transformation, the Silesian landscape was the most rapidly transformed and, as a "landscape built on coal,"[9] it arouses the greatest collective emotions, both locally and nationwide. Meanwhile, the introduction of the Anthropocene as a descriptive category for contemporary transformations triggered a search for new solutions, especially in the case of photography, which is considered to be the primary instrument for documenting Anthropocene transformations in the landscape.[10] Consequently, the "ragged"[11] landscape of Silesia, the region which was the first to confront industrialization and the first to enter, at least in part, the post-industrial stage, has become the most active area for documenting the transformation.

Nevertheless, ruins, including post-industrial ones, can sometimes be seductively picturesque, which is the reason for the contemporary popularity of the ruin porn trend.[12] Photography of the Silesian landscape after the transformation had to deal with this challenge. One of the solutions was proposed by Wojciech Wilczyk in a long-term photographic project carried out since 1992 and presented over the course of time, among others, in the book *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach*[13] [Capital in words and images], published together with Krzysztof Jaworski (2002), in the album *Czarno-biały Śląsk* [Black and white Silesia] (2004), and at the exhibition *Postindustrial* (2004). Adam Mazur calls

9 I refer to the book Justyna Gorgoń, ed., *Krajobraz zbudowany na węglu – intelektualna i artystyczna perspektywa różnorodności krajobrazów w regionach poprzemysłowych* [Landscape built on coal: An intellectual and artistic perspective on landscape diversity in post-industrial regions] (Katowice: Instytut Ekologii Terenów Uprzemysłowionych, 2008]. On cultural representations of the Silesian landscape see also Elżbieta Dutka, "Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska" [Literary landscapes of Upper Silesia], in Dutka, *Próby topograficzne. Miejsca i krajobrazy w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2014); Ilona Copik, *Topografie i krajobrazy. Filmowy Śląsk* [Topographies and landscapes. Cinematic Silesia] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017); Izabela Kaczmarzyk, *Krajobraz, portret, maska. Studia o górnośląskim imaginarium przemysłowym* [Landscape, portrait, mask. Studies on the Upper Silesian industrial imaginarium] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2019).

10 CUCO – curatorial concepts berlin e.V. "Tęsknota za krajobrazem – fotografia w dobie antropocenu" [Longing for the landscape: Photography in the age of the Anthropocene], trans. Małgorzata Szubartowska, *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej* 22 (2018).

11 Henryk Waniek, "Rozszarpany krajobraz" [Torn landscape], *Fabryka Silesia* 3 (2013): 13.

12 Cf. Joanna Żylinska, "Fotografia po człowieku" [Photography after the human], trans. Patrycja Poniatowska, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 353–355.

13 Krzysztof Jaworski and Wojciech Wilczyk, *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach* [Capital in words and images] (Kielce: Zakład Wydawniczy SFS, 2002).

the photographer a "landscape-revisionist,"[14] a critical gesture referring in this case to the trend of landscape photography which was initiated by Jan Bułhak's concept of "homeland photography" and its later continuations, oriented towards the aestheticisation of landscape.[15] For Wilczyk himself, on the other hand, the point of reference is the intersecting areas of interest: the Silesian photography of Michał Cała and various currents of twentieth-century documentary photography, especially the New Topographics Movement.[16]

Contemporary topographic photography often focuses on the periphery and the remnants of modernization. Such was also the Silesian landscape in Wilczyk's photographs – decaying, agonizing, abandoned on the periphery as a result of new economic processes and deindustrialization. One could sense its disappearance and emptiness – the absence of people, movement, action, activity, work – in the desolate spaces left behind by mines, steel mills, coking plants, zinc works. In fact, almost emptiness. Indeed, what Wilczyk could not officially and fully document photographically, he documented narratively.[17] In the text"Czarno-biały Śląsk", a topographical entry accompanying the album, he described his first trips to the "Walenty" coal coking plant in Ruda Śląska in 1992 and what followed apart from the later presented photographic frames:

> There was some sort of strange vivacity here. Even though I almost immediately took my camera out of my bag and started taking pictures, nobody actually paid any attention to me. There was a large group of men covered in dirt and dismantling everything… that could easily be dismantled. It looked a bit like the actions of a community of ants in contact with some dead fauna, as they so readily show in nature films recently. Using french spanners, the ants unscrewed everything

14 Adam Mazur, "*Święta* wojna" [Holy war], in Wojciech Wilczyk, *Święta wojna* [Holy war] (Kraków: Karakter, 2014), 8.

15 On the tradition of Polish landscape photography cf. Maciej Szymanowicz, "O kontekstach utrwalania polskich terytoriów" [On the contexts of preserving Polish territories], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie. O polskim dokumencie fotograficznym*, ed. Marianna Michałowska and Maciej Szymanowicz (Warszawa: PWN, 2021).

16 On Polish topographic photography cf. Marianna Michałowska, "Czy istnieje 'nowa topografia' w polskiej fotografii?" [Is there a "new topography" in Polish photography?], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie*, 25–56, On "new documentaryism": Adam Mazur, "Nowi dokumentaliści" [New documentary filmmakers], *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 54/55 (2006): 299–311.

17 Wojciech Wilczyk is not only one of the most respected photographers, but also a poet, author of the volumes: *Eternit* [Eternit] (Warszawa, 2002), *Realizm* [Realism] (Kraków, 2017), *Minimalizm* [Minimalism] (Warszawa, 2020).

> that could be unscrewed, using crowbars to tear out what could be torn or snapped off. Some other ants took care of the transport. Either on their backs or in baby carriages, they carried away pipes, tubes, bolts, valves, angles of all sizes, window frames and, in general, all sorts of iron and steel.[18]

By recording this scene, Wilczyk suggests a counterpoint supplement to the photographic narrative – the biological, animalizing language emphasizes the close connection between the decay of industrial objects and the vitality of demolition, thus derivatively naturalizing both the industrial object and the process of destruction[19]. Post-industrial life after life, work after work, though, also reveals an alternative circulation of matter and an alternative economy of the unemployed, often former employees of bankrupt factories. Former industrial productivity is being transformed into a practice of a new type – post-industrial productivity, which is transforming the landscape with the same intensity. There is thus a further active life going on in it, although, due to its illegality, it is rarely documented (an important exception is the photographic series *Biedaszyby* by Arkadiusz Gola).

To the extent that photography does teach us how to see, Wojciech Wilczyk's topographic record did so by de-emphasizing the "prettiness" of the view, aestheticizing the landscape of industrial ruins.[20] Instead, he focused on disintegration and decomposition, yet not to expose its picturesque qualities or plunge us into the melancholy of transience and catastrophe, but to raise questions about the repressed consequences of political and economic transformation, about the shame provoked by unaesthetic industrialization, even though we are still, as he says, its beneficiaries.[21] At the same time, he led us into an area beset with traps – both industrialization and its decline were becoming ambivalent processes. After all, the spectacular downfall of the socialist (and modern) myth of industrialization exposed the ruthlessness of the new myth as an economic necessity – that of deindustrialization. As well as an equally ruthless entanglement in the irresolvable conflict between

18 Wojciech Wilczyk, "Czarno-biały Śląsk" [Black and white Silesia], in Wojciech Wilczyk, *Czarno-biały Śląsk* (Katowice: Galeria Zderzak, Górnośląskie Centrum Kultury, 2004), 7.

19 Significantly, Henryk Waniek, in his essay on the transformation of the Silesian landscape, notes a similar analogy: "power over the landscape has been taken by the wind and scrapers" (Waniek, "Rozszarpany krajobraz," 13).

20 On the aestheticization of the photography of ruins, cf. Małgorzata Nieszczerzewska, *Ruinologie. Kontekstualizacje pozostałości architektury* [Ruinologies. Contextualizations of architectural remains] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2018), 240–254.

21 Wilczyk, "Czarno-biały Śląsk," 12.

social costs and ecological costs. Thus, the landscape featured in *Kapitał* and "Czarno-biały Śląsk" in its disintegrated material substance and alternative circulation of matter revealed, from today's point of view, the contradictions in which we are embroiled as we face the effects of the first stage of decarbonization.

In the last decade, however, there has been an exhaustion of the formula for seeing the post-industrial landscape, recognized also by photographers themselves. Nevertheless, the post-industrial ruin reproduced in thousands of amateur photos proved to be excessively photogenic and resulted in a state of aesthetic petrification (which, of course, does not diminish its role and value as a document). The landshaping of the view, however, tends to be the impetus for the search for different visual codes. Such was also the case in Silesia – a new generation of photographers presented less obvious ways of seeing. In fact, post-industrial landscapes have been increasingly approached by the artists themselves from the perspective of the climate and environmental crisis. Arguably, an important catalyst for this change was the 2018 summit, the United Nations Climate Conference, held in Katowice, which was accompanied by an extraordinarily intense nationwide debate focused on decarbonization and many artistic and cultural activities.

For Krzysztof Szewczyk, author of the photographic project *Drżenie* [Trembling] (2017), a landscape "built on coal" means more than just a visually accessible view or image. However, it does also feature a haptic dimension, resulting from ground shaking after mining operations, micro tremors, subsidence and landslides caused by the instability of the excavated ground. Mining tremors occur in Poland in three areas – in Silesia, near the Belchatow mine and in the Zagłębie Miedziowe (Copper Belt). Their scale is surprising: seismic stations record about 1.500 microshocks per year (in 2019 there were about 1.800), although the stronger ones noticeable on the surface are about three hundred per year. Predominant among them are induced tremors, arising from the disturbance of the natural state of geological equilibrium by coal mining, while anthropogenic seismicity is "a manifestation of the dynamic deformation of the rock mass under the influence of the ongoing exploitation of the deposit."[22]

Instability as one of the fundamental properties of the Silesian landscape, its material, geological foundations, at the same time evokes a strong emotional resonance, as the photographer comments:

22 Adam F. Idziak, Lesław Teper and Wacław M. Zuberek, *Sejsmiczność a tektonika Górnośląskiego Zagłębia Węglowego* [Seismicity versus tectonics of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999), 15.

> Thus, "trembling" can be taken literally – as the trembling of the earth, the upheaval that is caused by extractive human activity. In a metaphorical sense, "trembling" refers to a very violent relationship between people and the landscape. It refers to "trembling" understood as fear for life. Indeed, it would appear that the anxiety associated with working underground is experienced mainly by miners and their families. However, this is not the case, residents of mining towns are also terrified. Not so long ago, people were literally sitting on suitcases, fearing that at any moment their house could collapse underground. Those in Bytom said that all you had to do was put your ear to the ground to hear the mine work. Yet the fear, of which my photos are implicitly about, can also last for just a fraction of a second, as much as the bump itself.[23]

Trembling is an exceptionally evocative and pertinent metaphor for the relationship between man and the post-transformation landscape, a symptom of both the feedback and mutual destabilization. It makes almost palpable the resonance, the waves of vibration flowing between the tectonic tremors of the earth, ripped through and hollowed out by tunnels, the vibrations of buildings, objects and human emotions. The trembling conditions bring together geology, matter, the operation of the mining industry and human reactions, thus pointing to interdependencies that can escape visual perception. What makes this aspect important is that shifting attention to the invisible or less visible dimensions of the landscape meant, for the photographer, focusing on what happens underground, researching the "hidden topography of the land."[24] The tools of research involved seismological maps marking the epicenters of underground tremors, and the method of work was walking in the footsteps of successive tremors. However, these often cannot be seen on the surface, even seismological maps pulsate with constant changes. Tremors are thus a condition that hardly lends itself to the rules of traditional photographic representation. Thus, Szewczyk's project had to restrict itself to visualizing the surface, signaling at the same time the rupture, disjunction and desynchronization between the stability of the photographic frame, the tools for measuring seismic tremor (as a metonymy of epistemological order, knowledge and research) and the invisible geological tremors. After all, subterranean movements, though measurable, are uncontrollable, so the tremor also highlights the entanglement of causality – it is human activity, the extraction of minerals, that has thrown the earth out of geological equilibrium,

23 Conversation with Krzysztof Szewczyk, accessed January 18, 2020, http://kulturaobrazu.org/rozmowa-z-krzysztofem-szewczykiem/.

24 Ibid.

initiating a process of destabilization; the seismic tremors themselves, however, are a dynamic response to these activities.

By opting for trembling as a key metaphor and at the same time a physical state, Szewczyk reorientates the perception of the landscape, making visible its haptic dimension, or rather, its polysensory intertwining of relations, which can be combined with the extended hapticity proposed by Marta Smolinska, integrated and cooperating with other modalities, especially auditory and visual, but also with the sense of balance.[25] Trembling is activating through the flow of vibrations a haptic resonance, which, together with the propagating waves, encompasses the full somatic sensation and creates a kind of synergistic union between touch, body balance and awareness of space.[26] Let me just note in passing that exceptionally evocatively this haptic resonance, the synergistic fusion of the trembling Silesian earth with human and non-human reactions, was reported by Felix Netz in his novel *Dysharmonia caelestis*:

> Trembling – it was just another word I picked up while living in a familok. Initially it was just a word, but one day it became flesh: something in the depths of the earth trembled, something rolled lazily from side to side, seeking more space for its own movement; the shadow of a lampshade rocked on the ceiling, a painting on the wall with Jesus with an exposed, burning heart leaned away from the vertical. The pieces of coal in the box, which in German was called kolkista, rattled like mice under the floor. In such a moment, people look into each other's eyes with tense attention, alertly listening to the tremor of varying intensity as the underground roaring rocks burst with a roar of pain, ashamed of that roar, and even more with a sigh of relief.[27]

Haptic resonance, in turn, triggers affective reaction. This correlation was pointed out by Mark Paterson: "haptic orientation reduces the abstract distance generated by the gaze and accommodates the affective response."[28]

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25 Cf. Marta Smolińska, *Haptyczność poszerzona. Zmysł dotyku w sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX i początku XXI wieku* [Hapticity expanded. The sense of touch in Polish art of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century] (Kraków: Universitas, 2020).

26 Ibid, 320; see also Paul Rodaway, "Haptyczne geografie" [Haptic geographies], trans. Dorota Angutek, in *Krajobraz. Antologia tekstów*, ed. Beata Frydryczak and Dorota Angutek (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2014).

27 Feliks Netz, *Dysharmonia caelestis* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 2004), 30.

28 Mark Paterson "'W jaki sposób dotyka nas świat': estetyka haptyczna" ["How the world touches us": Haptic aesthetics], trans. Michalina Kmiecik, *Ruch Literacki* 2 (2020): 183. See

Thus, affect – as sudden, violent arousal – circulates in a looped relationship between the earth's energy discharge and human responses. There is another element to this looping: in the old seismology, light-sensitive paper was used to measure tremors. Szewczyk's photographic project can – by analogy – be interpreted as an attempt to record affective tremor, and at the same time the difficulty of documenting it photographically, which always appears asynchronously, in delay.

Trembling as an entanglement of material effect and affect thus leads toward a view of the landscape that is close to non-representational theories. Here it most accurately defines the diverse manifestations of the Anthropocene landscape and its state of disequilibrium,[29] when what is subterranean, geological (to some extent hidden, implicit, although caused by human interference and exploitation) sets in motion, vibrates what is on the surface and includes in haptic resonance the materiality of the excavated earth, human affects, somatic reactions and, finally, the fragile and violated foundations of life. Indeed, in such a perspective, microshocks cause equalization – the earth, bodies, objects become the same trembling matter.

The question of destabilization of the Silesian landscape and its anthropocenic character is also addressed by Michał Łuczak in a multi-phase project presented in part in the exhibitions *Wydobycie* [Extraction] (2018), *Doświadczanie punktów. Nowy krajobraz śląski* [Experiencing the points. The new Silesian landscape] (2018), *Mgła* [The fog] project and as part of the intervention *Stopnie nachylenia* [Grades of inclination] (2019) presented at the Silesian Museum (carried out jointly with Szymon Szewczyk). Each installment revolves around a common problem – "a landscape built on coal" and the consequences of its extraction, which pulsates with meanings as much as trembling.[30] Nonetheless, the poster announcing the *Wydobycie* exhibition features the landscape not as a spatial frame, but outlined on a human body. Viewed from behind, a man's head, neck and part of his bare back are covered with coal dust, arranged in black dots, streaks and spots on his skin. However, in other photographs of miners, the dust forms dark streaks, zones and bays on their bodies. One may seek an anthropological

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also Mark Paterson, "Haptic Geographies: Ethnography, Haptic Knowledges and Sensuous Dispositions," *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (6) (2009): 766–788.

29 On the post-mining landscape as an indicator of the Anthropocene see Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin N. Waters and Mark Williams, "Human Bioturbation, and the Subterranean Landscape of the Anthropocene," *Anthropocene* 6 (2014): 6.

30 Cf. Ugo Bardi, *Wydobycie. Jak poszukiwanie bogactw mineralnych pustoszy naszą planetę* [Mining. How the search for mineral resources is ravaging our planet], trans. Joanna Bednarek (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2018).

and cultural motivation for this analogy between the corporeal and terrestrial landscapes as perceived by David Howes in his concept *skinscape*.[31] What seems more significant in this case, however, is the indication of the relationship of corporeal adjacency between man, his physical labor in the mine and coal. As well as a subversive reference to one of the oldest artistic techniques – sketches in charcoal, the traditional material of landscape drawing. Subversive because these landscapes on human skin are in fact the work of nature, the unintentional, spontaneous art of the earth, in which it is the earth itself that creates its material image, although they are also at the same time a literalised carbon footprint. Within this multiplied form (dirt-art), the haptic dimension of the landscape experience is also revealed. Coal dust is not something distant, it becomes a material imprint, dirt, and even more, its atomized particles (as respirable dust) penetrate skin barriers, enter the respiratory system and sometimes lead to pneumoconiosis, an occupational disease of miners.

The photographs featured in the *Mgła* [The fog] exhibition, on the other hand, directed attention to one of the most obvious issues – air pollution by dust, from the burning of coal. What is perhaps most significant, the fog, like the tremors caused by underground upheaval, knows no boundaries, settles on bodies, along with the breath it penetrates inside organisms. Here, too, embodied experience is thus activated. However, the photographer problematizes the phenomenon itself, pointing not only to the "foggy" of the air, as the discourse and debate around the smog crisis is equally "foggy," rendering certain and transparent knowledge impossible.[32]

In all the installments of Łuczak's project, he was interested in the changeability of coal and its circulation in non-human and human circulation, including the geological cycle and deep time, which is why it has such a metamorphic form in the photographs. Being a sedimentary rock of plant origin, it is the result of decomposition processes of Carboniferous forests, giant horsetails, forbs and ferns, whose imprints or fossils are found on blocks extracted from mines. It is a hard lump of ore with a lustrous texture. It is scattered matter, dust, tarnish, dirt, derived from the bowels of the earth, which settles on the surface of bodies. It is a mist, toxic dust particles in the air we breathe. A coal footprint. The heaps of post-coal waste that shape the anthropogenic Silesian landscape, sometimes waste

31 David Howes, "Skinscapes. Embodiment, Culture and Environment," in *The Book of Touch*, ed. Constance Classen (New York: Berg, 2005), 27–39.

32 Cf. Mateusz Chaberski, *Asamblaże, asamblaże. Doświadczenie w zamglonym* antropocenie [Assemblages, assemblages. Experience in the foggy anthropocene] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2019), 54–55.

land, and sometimes the substratum of new, living ecosystems. Its excavation gives rise to architectural and landscape peculiarities in Silesia – the earth, plowed through with tunnels and with a disturbed geological balance, reacts with unpredictable and sudden collapses, causes sloping, collapsing or cracking of buildings, as in the nearly 100-year-old Łuczak family house in Giszowiec. In all its shape-shifting forms it is a material component of the landscape, and in all of them it enters into a relationship – sometimes haptic, respiratory, metabolic – with man.

My intention was to strongly emphasize this distinctiveness of Łuczak's perspective, because coal is usually considered one-dimensionally in the optics of the central critical discourse – it is now, as Edwin Bendyk points out, "public enemy No. 1."[33] In Silesia, on the other hand, in the last decade, since the 2013 exhibition Węgiel Boom!, it has become a kind of gadget, used for the post-industrial and design rebranding of the region, a raw material refined in processing as jewelry or cosmetic products. In this sophisticated form, be it a soap or jewelry, it loses its dirtiness, its connection to the earth, natural history, manual labor and its consequences, Łuczak, on the other hand, restores that primal dirtiness associated with the touch of coal.[34] Thus, similarly to Szewczyk, he brings it out from the hidden level, from underground layers, shows its circulation on the surface or in the air as dispersed matter, atomized and circulating among organisms, at the same time directing our attention to the network of interdependencies between the geological and atmospheric dimensions of the landscape.

Such a way of perceiving the landscape "built on coal" – as a material-mineral circulation – results in broadening the perspective to include extinct species (as in the photograph of a fossilized Carboniferous plant – lepidodendron? sygilaria?) and what is inanimate. It therefore activates a different, metabolic perspective, which, within the framework of environmental humanities, Monika Bakke has written about:

> Indeed, there is more than just life involved in the process of becoming within the ecological ruins of the Anthropocene, as metabolic networks of matter and energy flow connect living organisms with non-living – mineral forms of matter organization. […] Thus, social history is linked to natural history, which includes

33 Edwin Bendyk, *Świat bez węgla* [A world without coal], in *Polski węgiel* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015), 7.

34 Aleksandra Kunce writes brilliantly about this dirtiness and tangibility of coal in the essay: *Dotknięcie węgla* [A touch of coal], in Aleksandra Kunce and Zbigniew Kadłubek, *Myśleć Śląsk. Wybór esejów* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 259–269.

> both the biological dimension – treated in terms of life (*bios, zoe*) and death (*thanatos*) – as well as the broader geological dimension (*geos*).[35]

The focus on the entanglements and metabolic circulation of animate and inanimate matter, organic and mineral, seems particularly pertinent to experiencing and understanding the Silesian landscape and firmly established in the region's chthonic-geological imagination.[36] Such mineral-geological-metamorphic flows of *bios, zoe, thanatos* and *geos* are, for example, the driving energy behind the narrative in Szczepan Twardoch's *Drach*.[37]

Thus, in the photographic practices and modes of vision of the new generation of Silesian photographers, what is revealed is not so much a committed rhetoric of intervention, breaking out of the marasm of the Anthropocene,[38] or an accusatory critique, but an attempt to capture the complexity of transformative processes, less explicit and more oriented towards the search for interdependence. However, unlike Edward Burtynsky's best-known photographs of the Anthropocene landscape, which operate with a monumentalism that gravitates toward the aesthetics of the sublime and the beauty of catastrophe, Szewczyk and Łuczak offer a more intimate

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35 Monika Bakke, "Gdy stawka jest większa niż życie. Sztuka wobec mineralno-biologicznych wspólnot" [When the stake is greater than life. Art in the face of mineral-biological communities], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 167.

36 Materiality as a specific feature of the Silesian landscape is pointed out by Elżbieta Dutka in Dutka, "Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska," 244–254. It is worth adding that the founding text for the geological imagination of the region, namely Walenty Roździeński's *Officina ferraria*, was published as early as 1612.

37 Cf. "Upper Silesia is a Drach. A dragon. It is more than a metaphor. [...] Drach's body sometimes trembles, sometimes gases bloat the dragon's intestines, as in Halemba in 2006, or as in Makoszowy in 1958, woe then to those who clean the dragon's intestines of coal, that is, dragon shit, in which are imprinted the organic remnants of worlds that no longer exist and in which we, too, will one day imprint ourselves, another deck high above the forbs and horsetails, ammonites and sharks of the Carboniferous. [...] For Drach we are his body, like everything else, Drach knows that in the end, like everything else, we will turn to black stone." Szczepan Twardoch, "Drach, czyli Śląsk" [Drach, that is Silesia], *Fabryka Silesia* 1 (2013): 94–95. cf. also Anna Barcz, "Pod ziemią. Antropoceniczne narracje na przykładzie *Dracha* Szczepana Twardocha i *Miedzianki* Filipa Springera" [Underground. Anthropocene narratives on the example of Szczepan Twardoch's *Drach* and Filip Springer's *Miedzianka*], in *Poetyki ekocydu. Historia, natura, konflikt,* ed. Aleksandra Ubertowska, Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka and Ewa Kuliś (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2019), 164–170.

38 Ewa Bińczyk, *Epoka człowieka. Retoryka i marazm antropocenu* [The age of human. The rhetoric and torpor of the Anthropocene] (Warszawa: PWN, 2018).

yet multidimensional perception – they expand the visuality of the landscape to include haptics and a corporeal relationship with humans close to eco-haptic photography.[39] Consequently, they reduce the distance – the landscape of the Anthropocene is not an image or view seen from afar, relegated to a safe distance, but something that penetrates, permeates, settles on the skin and lungs, is the trembling earth underfoot, the tilted house in which one lives, matter that vibrates and circulates. Thus, they make the threat real, opening up perception to affective responses.

Therefore, in the case of Szewczyk and Łuczak's projects, one can speak of bringing to the surface the emotions that accompany the transformation of the landscape, especially solastalgia. This is a term introduced by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, referring to the emotional reactions of people living in heavily transformed areas when their immediate surroundings no longer meet the criteria of a safe and secure location.[40] Psychoterratic and somatoterratic disorders are induced by factors related to profound environmental changes, pollution, degradation of the residential landscape. Indeed, the projects of both photographers, who are biographically connected to Silesia, recognize this relational coupling, in which the erosion and destabilization of the land produces not only material consequences, but also the effect of eroding emotional and psychophysical stability.[41] Solastalgia in this case assumes the form of a precipitate sense of balance and security, anxiety, fear, trembling, also a polarization between a strong identification with the Silesian landscape and place of residence and an awareness of living in an environment that is simultaneously threatened and endangered. Autobiographical experience, emphasized by both of them, also makes the internal point of view stronger, making the photographs not so much about the Anthropocene as

39 Cf. Derek Gladwin, "Eco-haptic Photography Visualizing Irish Bogland in Rachel Giese's The Donegal Pictures," *Photography and Culture* 6 (2) (2013): 157–174.

40 Glenn Albrecht, "Solastalgia. A New Concept in Health and Identity," *Philosphy, Activism, Nature* 3 (2005): 41–55.

41 I'm leaving aside the issue of diseases generated by the development of industry in Silesia, since the photographs do not directly refer to them, but one should not forget the pneumoconiosis or lead epidemic in the 1970s among the children of Szopienice. Marta Mazuś wrote about them in her reportage: *Życie na bezhuciu* (*Polityka* 17 [2014]) and Michal Jedryka in his book *Ołowiane dzieci. Zapomniana epidemia* [Lead children. The forgotten epidemic] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna, 2020). Cf. also Marta Tomczok, "Dyskursy ołowicy i krzemicy (na podstawie literatury fikcyjnej i dokumentów literackich o przemyśle metalurgicznym)" [Discourses of lead and silicosis (based on fiction and literary documents about the metallurgical industry)], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2022).

deeply embedded in it,[42] which is why the fragility of landscape, matter, life is so strongly visualized in them.

One more aspect of Silesian post-transition landscape photographs is important, namely their peripherality. Marianna Michalowska pointed to the role of photographs of peripheral places in the context of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, calling them "critical landscapes" as they are "not just about seeing the landscape, but about linking natural thinking with an awareness of the consequences of human action."[43] Indeed, their critical dimension stems from being located on the margins, and the "peripheral gaze,"[44] makes one's view sharper: as in the case of Wilczyk, who portrays the repressed, embarrassing (in the central and dominant perspective of the free market, of course) effects of deindustrialization, or as in the case of Łuczak, who presented the *Mgła* [The fog] exhibition during the Katowice climate summit, where the native, central narrative ignored the environmental and health effects of coal power.

Purification, Fabrication

Wojciech Wilczyk's *Czarno-Biały Śląsk* opens with a short prose piece by Andrzej Stasiuk – *I tak to się wszystko kiedyś skończy* [And so it will all come to an end one day]. In the writer's narrative, there also appears, as in the photographs, a post-industrial landscape of decay and decomposition framed in a mortal and material metaphoric[45]:

> Those are steel mills, mines, coking plants, power plants. Extinguished, exhausted, burned out, destroyed, extinguished. […] All this looks like a skeleton from which the meat is falling off, and only now can you see how it was made. Here you can come like a graveyard to reconcile and prepare. It's only now that it's falling apart that you can see that there was too much of it, that it was unnecessary, and nothing has actually happened now that it's gone.[46]

42 Cf. CoCo, "Fotografia antropocenu," 38.

43 Marianna Michałowska, "Krajobraz krytyczny w polskiej fotografii – geografie peryferii" [Critical landscape in Polish photography: Geographies of the peripheries], *Zeszyty Artystyczne* 37 (2020): 31.

44 Paweł Starzec, *"Ślad w przestrzeni społecznej. Socjologiczne spojrzenie* na 'nową topografię'" [Trace in social space. A sociological perspective on the "new topography"], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie*, 169.

45 Cf. Dutka, "Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska," 262–263.

46 Andrzej Stasiuk ,"I tak to się wszystko kiedyś skończy" [And so it will all come to an end one day], in Wilczyk, *Czarno-biały Śląsk*, 5–6.

However, Stasiuk recognizes even deeper correlations – the link between industrial infrastructure and the exploitation of the earth's resources and the circular movement of matter:

> In order to build a city or a factory, you had to get a lot of stuff out of the ground. You couldn't build from the air or water. Now you need to bury it back somewhere, and before that you need to haul it away somewhere, all those stones, ironstone, those minerals, bricks, concrete and the rest of it.[47]

Following this brief commentary on the ruination of the Silesian landscape, however, comes a passage that radically changes the optics. For this time the main actor in the circulation of matter is not man, but nature, and it is nature that overgrows and patches up the cracks of the "torn" landscape:

> Amazingly, but one can see how grass crawls into the cracks, and trees grow out of the poisoned places. Water appears in puddles, clouds are reflected in the water. Everything indicates that at the end, however, it will be the same as it was at the beginning. Instead, the landscape will simply become covered with sky, water and plants, it will grow together, and the whole industrial episode will go into oblivion. And the trees will feed on inedible leftovers.[48]

A similar perspective can be found in Adam Robinski's book *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* [Black storks. Landscape of side roads], entirely devoted to post-transition landscapes. The destination of one of the expeditions is the anthropogenic lake district of the Łuk Mużakowski:

> There's no better name for it: a moonscape. Here's what mining shallow deposits does to space. Initially, mining was done deep underground, at an oblique angle, with abandoned collapse shafts. Subsequently, as mining technologies advanced, open pit was used. Over time, mines were closed because mining was no longer profitable. Either way, the holes in the ground were filling with rainwater. As groundwater also came to the fore, a lake was formed. Acidic, because the soil contained pyrite accompanying the minerals and a host of other chemicals. There are several hundred such lakes on the Muskau Arc […]. Each one is different, because it is permeated with different kinds of chemicals.[49]

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47 Ibid, 5.

48 Ibid., 6.

49 Adam Robiński, *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* [Black storks. Landscape of side roads] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2017), 187–188.

The anthropogenic lakeland of the Muskauer Arc is an area on the Polish-German border where intensive mining of lignite (first by underground method, then by open pit), ceramic clay, quartz sands has been carried out since 1834.[50] After the last mine closed in 1973, some of the degraded post-mining areas were subjected to reclamation, while spontaneous renaturalization processes are taking place in the remaining areas. They are already so advanced that a geopark was created at the site in 2009, which was listed by UNESCO in 2015.

However, Robinski does not travel to the Lake District to indulge in a fetishization of the disaster, and does not simply limit himself to providing a descriptive account of the contamination of the landscape. Rather, what intrigues him most is the phenomenon of the exceptionally high population of dragonflies in the area and the processuality of the landscape's evolution after the cessation of mining. Indeed, the landscape of the Arc is only seemingly synchronous, with expeditions to particular places in the lake district revealing different stages in the natural history of the place.[51] While the younger reservoirs are indeed contaminated and overly acidic, the older, century-old ones have already become neutralized and eutrophied. Nonetheless, even the acidified ones have proven to be an attractive biotope for rare dragonfly species. The narrative was thus guided to balance the effect of the landscape's toxicity with its reverse – the evolution of the abandoned area into a natural refuge, a "third landscape."[52] And perhaps even more – Robinski builds the story in such a way as to eliminate the horror or fear reflex (usually produced when toxicity is experienced) and reveal the processuality of the post-disaster state – its particular temporality stretched over a long natural time, since the post-transformation landscape is always still in the process of transformation. The current (post-mining) transformation is not the only one, by the way, as the reporter further deepens temporality with a geological dimension, the landscape plowed through by quarries reveals older layers: "I reached my fingers into the wall of the heap and pulled out souvenirs from the Miocene. […] In the Miocene forest from which the local lignite was formed, magnolias, ginkgoes, sequoias, cedars and cypresses grew. After several million years, a mere touch turned them into dust."[53] Significantly, one more time the perception of landscape shifts towards hapticism.

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50 Jacek Koźma, "Antropogeniczne zmiany krajobrazu związane z dawnym górnictwem węgla brunatnego na przykładzie polskiej części obszaru Łuku Mużakowa" [Anthropogenic landscape transformations associated with former lignite mining on the example of the Polish part of the Muskau Arc area], *Górnictwo Odkrywkowe* 3 (2016).

51 Robiński, *Hajstry*, 203.

52 Clement, "Manifest trzeciego krajobrazu."

53 Robiński, *Hajstry*, 207.

Therefore, neither Stasiuk nor Robinski raise laments over the ecological catastrophe – the "post-human" landscape they see, after the destructive exploitation of resources, although polluted, chemical, contaminated, over-lives and often recovers spontaneously. The lake district of the Muskau Arc has become a sanctuary for rare species of dragonflies, in the Błędowska Desert an ongoing battle is taking place between man and nature, which is striving to regain its former territory after an ecological disaster, the heaps of Silesia are being replanted with vegetation. That's one of the prevalent – partly consolatory – approaches in the contemporary perception of the post-industrial landscape, emphasizing more strongly the processes of renaturalization and revitalization than devastation and annihilation. However, the writers step outside the pastoral phantasm, which is why they do not view the nature-industrialization relationship in an apocalyptic manner. They are interested in the very process of transformation, the circulation of matter, in what happens when man withdraws from the industrial landscape and vegetation enters. Therefore, they do not fall into the constraints of the discourse of catastrophe or apocalypse, which are somehow affected by the one-dimensionality and in many cases by the objectification of nature as a passive victim. These are landscapes of a sometimes peculiar metabolism, yet it is then that nature ceases to be a resource exploited by man and becomes once again a zoe, a driving force that performs another act of transformation in a persistent process. Furthermore, such an explicit emphasis on the processuality and activity of nature's forces – its potential for self-purification – radically profiles the viewer's vision of the landscape more differently, highlighting its vitality and thus prudently delineating possible trajectories for the future.

In contrast, an unambiguously apocalyptic interpretive framework is proposed by Filip Springer in his reportage series *Zmiana klimatu już tu jest. Podróż do przyszłości* [Climate change is already here. Journey to the future] published in 2019 issue of the journal *Pismo*. Thus, each of them focuses on a different aspect of climate change, however one that clearly leaves its mark or even ravages the landscape: with the titles *Noteć wysycha na naszych oczach, Śląsk – kraina katastrof, Czy zatrują nas wysychające torfowiska?* [The Noteć River is drying up right in front of our eyes, Silesia – the land of disasters, will we be poisoned by drying peat bogs?] directly evoke further threats. In his perspective, all these phenomena are derivatives of human hyperactivity, so (according to the optics of the Anthropocene) it is possible to reverse the perspective and perceive in them not so much "natural" disasters, but post-natural ones.[54]

Such a perspective is revealed even more clearly in the reportage *Uberlandszaft* from the open-pit mine in Belchatow. Here Springer juxtaposes the

54 Ewa Bińczyk, *Epoka człowieka*, 118.

natural processes of geological landscape formation as they occur in deep time with human short-term actions. By operating on a grand scale, he makes a point of examining the effect of disproportionality in the desert landscape of the quarry. However, most importantly, he regards the landscape as a foreshadowing of the apocalypse:

> I arrived at the edge of the quarry to learn something about the future. I sought to be overwhelmed by the scale in which not only the individual, but also the giant machine means nothing. Both of them are equal here – they are lost in immensity. Yet immensity diminishes the dimension of time. Suddenly the continuance of civilization in it seems a blink. The geological perspective of the stratification, the long duration of millions of years and us with our anxiety about tomorrow. Well, there will be no tomorrow and this thought is just dust on the surface of history. Yes, somewhere here is the beginning of the apocalypse of which we will most likely be participants. We, along with our children and grandchildren. You can read it from the landscape, all you have to do is watch carefully.[55]

In the landscape of the Belchatow area, Springer primarily notices those features that indicate human interference, the transformation of the natural morphology and geology of the area: the shifting of the river bed, the creation of Kamieńsk Mountain with a ski lift on a former mine dump. Basically, all these artificial elements create an artifact, a constructed landscape, an *erzac* of nature. Or to put it even more explicitly, the landscape after reclamation represents for him "an attempt to obliterate the fact of the crime."

> The entire area is full of landscape erzacs. Man replaced nature here, moved the river, piled up a mountain, planted a forest. All this took four decades. How to treat a landscape that was created in such a short time? When the quarries are flooded, one of the largest lakes in this part of Poland will appear here. A splinter of our greed, a landscape attempt to obliterate the fact of the crime. But how to call it? A super landscape? Landsuperscape? Hyper landscape? Uberlandszaft?[56]

Thus, for Springer, the anthropogenic landscape after mining operations is completely unnatural, post-natural, "fabricated." However, the problem is not of aesthetic nature, although the reporter talks about landscape aesthetics. For him, the artificial landscape of the coal "open pit" is only a "cover",

55 Filip Springer, "Uberlandszaft (albo epilog)" [Uberlandszaft (or epilogue)], in Springer, *Wanna z kolumnadą. Reportaże o polskiej przestrzeni* (Kraków: Karakter, 2020), 306.

56 Ibid., 309.

a camouflage for the upcoming apocalypse. The objective of guiding the narrative in this way seems obvious: to provoke a reaction, to provoke a reflexive intervention, to free us from catatonia, so the reporter operates with a strategy of hyperbolization, the rhetoric of shock and the threat of catastrophe. However, most importantly, he activates emotions – those most emblematic of the psychology of the climate crisis, terror or panic, but also a sense of pretraumatic stress.[57] Springer's short reportage thus brings the Anthropocene into the heart of the debates – on the one hand the multiplied loss of nature, the future and the landscape, and on the other the overproduction of threatening emotions.

These are two radically different landscape narratives and two rhetorics. The first can be called vitalist (or neovitalist),[58] stemming from the belief that nature's spontaneous succession, its spontaneous reclamation potential and the spontaneous dynamics of rebirth will lead to the renaturalization of the post-industrial landscape. Thus, it tends to focus on the causality of the ecosystem, the adaptability – it is a landscape of double transformation, first anthropogenic, then natural, now most often referred to as the "third landscape" (Clement) or "fourth nature" (Kowarik). Meanwhile, the second rhetoric, the apocalyptic one, focuses on man's destructive hyperspace, discerning only artificiality in the post-transformation landscape, with a stronger impact on the affective sphere. However, both of them enable us to see not so much an abstract idea or statistical data, but the material consequences of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene discernible in the geomorphology of the landscape. To put it differently, both narratives transfer a concept fraught with the risk of speculativeness to the geological concrete, available in experience.

Heap and Utopia

Heaps are literally leftovers, rejects, mining and post-production waste, ashes, slags and dust. At present, they have become a phenomenon of exceptional complexity: they represent a threat to the environment due to the possibility of spontaneous combustion, from a biological perspective they are a kind of scientific laboratory, new species appear on them, such as the arbuscular

57 Cf. Bożena Gulla, Kinga Tucholska and Agnieszka Ziernicka-Wojtaszek, *Psychologia kryzysu klimatycznego* [The psychology of the climate crisis] (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2020).

58 On the importance of the new vitalism for cultural geography and the non-representational perspective, see Beth Greenhough, "Vitalist Geographies. Life and More-than-human," in *Taking Places. Non-representational Theories and Geography*, ed. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison (London: Routledge, 2016).

fungus *Rhizoglomus silesianum* discovered on the partially unreclosed Makoszowy heap, with time they become refuges of local biodiversity[59]. The heaps are therefore overgrown with plants and become overgrown with meanings. Some of the more important ones were proposed by Diana Lelonek in her project *Hałda rokitnikowa* [Buckthorn slag heap], prepared in response to the Katowice Climate Summit. While it does not concern the Silesian heaps, it nevertheless remains embedded in transformational optics, as the artist, posing the question of what comes after coal, addressed the degradation of the landscape after the open-pit mines of the Konin Basin. The effect of mining is the desertification of these areas, with the Gniezno Lake District disappearing, riparian forests and rivers drying up, among other things. However, Lelonek focused not only on the apocalyptic dimension of the landscape's "exploitation of the ecosystem,"[60] but also on one of the main actors in the reclamation of these areas – sea buckthorn, which, as a particularly resistant plant, is found planted on post-mining spoil heaps. Albeit Lelonek calls it a post-apocalyptic species,[61] it is essentially a pioneer species that strives on the front line, stabilizing the ground, preparing the soil for the next, more demanding plants.

The artist used a kind of imaginative and conceptual volte-face – the title of the project *Hałda rokitnikowa* [Buckthorn slag heap] transfers and shifts attention from the mining industry to the natural-environmental aspect of reclamation. Through this symbolic rebranding from coal to sea buckthorn, the plant becomes a starting point for rethinking the transformation. However, not the one that has already taken place (industrial) and not the one that is taking place (natural), but the next one, the social one, because, as Lelonek points out, she was interested in introducing the issue of "just transformation of the coal region" into the public debate.[62] Thus, the answer to the question of what comes after coal is not just a life-giving plant, but also a different idea of the economic model. So the jars of sea buckthorn preserves, first prepared

59 Adam Rostański, "Wartość przyrodnicza zwałowisk odpadów poprzemysłowych" [Natural value of post-industrial waste dumps], in *Krajobraz zbudowany na węglu*, 141–148.

60 Joanna Bednarek, "Pełzająca katastrofa" [A creeping catastrophe], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 22 (2018), accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2018/22-zobaczyc-antropocen/pelzajaca-katastrofa.

61 "Katastrofa klimatyczna to nie sezonowa moda. Rozmowa z Dianą Lelonek" [Climate catastrophe is not a seasonal trend. A conversation with Diana Lelonek], *Magazyn Szum* January 18, 2019, accessed April 20, 2020, https://magazynszum.pl/katastrofa-klimatyczna-to-nie-sezonowa-moda-rozmowa-z-diana-lelonek/.

62 "Postsztuka w czasach postnatury. Z Dianą Lelonek rozmawia Natalka Dovha" [Post-art in the age of post-nature. Diana Lelonek interviewed by Natalka Dovha], *Fragile* 1/2 (2020): 50.

together with volunteers and then smuggled to the Katowice climate congress, are contraband from a different system. As she comments, sea buckthorn:

> can be the origin of a social economy that is an alternative to the hegemony of the Konin mine. […] To ensure that the transformation of the region is successful – i.e., fair and providing residents with alternatives for survival – it can't be that we replace one giant corpo with another giant corpo. It is necessary to develop a mixture – smaller initiatives, companies, cooperatives, cooperatives instead of one giant – because if this is missing, everything collapses. *Rokitnikowa Hałda* [Buckthorn slag heap – translator's note] is a utopian idea – a rokitniki basin instead of a coal basin, but also an initiative aimed at restoring these post-apocalyptic areas back to the locals.[63]

Consequently, Lelonek does not limit herself to a critical perspective, but creates an alternative scenario for the future, not only in natural terms, but also in social, political or economic terms. She proposes a utopian solution realizing that the field of art is the area where such "real, local micro-utopias"[64] of an even other more just transformation can be imagined and tested.

The discourse of the Anthropocene takes away the future, while Lelonek's project allows this future to be witnessed, as it balances the ecocide perspective with a less catastrophic point of view, one that, however, does not lead to nostalgic or escapist pastoralism. This is not due to mechanisms of displacement, adaptation to catastrophe or other negation strategies identified by researchers, but to the conviction that apocalyptic rhetoric carries the risk of being counterproductive, for example due to habituation. Local micro-utopias are a different kind of mobilization for action because "neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collective survival."[65]

Towards Landscape Geontology

The Anthropocene has triggered an unusually heavy fervor in the scientific sphere in almost all disciplines, the dizzying overproduction of theories,

63 "Rośliny robią swoje. Rozmowa Anny Cieplak z Dianą Lelonek" [Plants do their own thing. A conversation between Anna Cieplak and Diana Lelonek], *Krytyka Polityczna*, January 9, 2019, accessed April 4, 2020, https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/sztuki-wizualne/diana-lelonek-rosliny/.

64 Ewa Domańska, "Sprawiedliwość epistemiczna w humanistyce zaangażowanej" [Epistemic justice in the engaged humanities], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 53.

65 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Sztuki uważności" [The art of noticing], trans. Przemysław Czapliński, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 206.

concepts, notions, nevertheless, results in them often circulating (despite the best intentions of the authors) in their own closed circuit. Should we consider that the role of culture is not only to diagnose, but also to translate abstract ideas into an idiom of concretizations observable in the experiential mode, the referenced photographs and narratives of the post-transition landscape enable us to "see" the Anthropocene as much, as postulated by Nicholas Mirzoef,[66] as much as to realize its haptic proximity, its real, somaterratic and psychoterratic consequences, and the conjunctions and flows between the geological and the atmospheric, exploitation and its material impacts and affects.

More importantly, not only to make the haptic resonance apparent, but also to perceive the complexity of transformative processes. For, the multidirectionality of observation refuses to become reconciled into a coherent, one-line or illustrative narrative. Both processes and discourses proceed in parallel. On the one hand, images of ecocide with recognition of human hyper-powerfulness, aiming at mobilization, breaking us out of our stagnation, with an alarmist rhetoric operating with a strong emotional register, evoking a reflex of panic at the coming catastrophe, as an instrument. On the other hand, the vitalist narrative, emphasizing *zoe* energy, the causality of the natural environment, the potential for rebirth and renaturalization, seems equally powerful. However, this one too sets off emotional registers, closer to restrained and moderate hope as an alternative. Nevertheless, the issue triggered by Wilczyk's photographic series and Lelonek's project – the commonly disregarded problem of the collision between ecological and social costs – deserves equal attention.

In all the recognitions, though, the landscape after transformation is not merely a passive screen onto which the diagnoses and fears of the Anthropocene are projected, but also an active battleground of forces that transcend human manageability. It is a geological and metabolic landscape, imbalanced yet uncontrollable, endangered and threatening, material and affective, fragile and vital, revealing a heterogeneous temporality in which the deep time of natural history and the violent, destructive time of human exploitation are intertwined. Thus, in this non-obvious, agonized (post-natural and post-human at the same time) ontology, it regains its depth of dimensions (geological, temporal) and material substantiality, not only organic (humus, soil), but also mineral, inanimate. Due to this geontological[67] extension, we become part of the landscape after transformation – its "trembling" matter.

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66 Nicholas Mirzoef, *Jak zobaczyć świat* [How to see the world], trans. Łukasz Zaremba (Warszawa: Karakter, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2016), 220–261.

67 Cf. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories," *E-flux Journal* April 2017, accessed May 15, 2021, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/123372/geontologies-the-concept-and-its-territories/; Bakke, *Gdy stawka jest większa niż życie*, 168–169.

Abstract

Elżbieta Rybicka
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Landscape after Transformation

The article reconstructs the modern understanding of a landscape intensely transformed by the mining industry. Its methodological inspiration comes from non-representational theories, which emphasize such factors as embodied experience, senses, and affects, treating landscape as something more than a visual representation. The author analyzes documentaries, photographs, and reportages. They allow her to highlight the complexity and multidirectionality of landscape transformation processes in the Anthropocene, especially the interdependencies between geology and atmosphere, exploitation and its material effects and affects. They indicate the non-obvious ontology of the landscape after transformation, which is simultaneously post-natural and post-human.

Keywords

landscape, transformation, Anthropocene, photography, reportage

Karolina Koprowska

The Shame of the Peasant Body

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.8 | ORCID: 0000-0002-7177-5554

Karolina Koprowska – an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies in Krakow. She received a PhD in cultural studies from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She is an author of the books *Postronni? Zagłada w relacjach chłopskich świadków* [Bystanders? The Holocaust in the accounts of peasant witnesses] (2018) and *Miejsce urodzenia jako uwikłanie. Projekty tożsamościowe w literaturze polskiej i żydowskiej* [Birthplace as implication. Identity projects in Polish and Jewish literature] (2024). Email: karolina.koprowska@uj.edu.pl.

Introduction

At the heart of our thinking about postwar migrations from the countryside to urban centers and contemporary practices of discovering peasant genealogies there lies the problem, itself well-rooted in Polish culture, of the shame brought on by a peasant or a rural background. Announcing the return of the "peasant question" in 2014, Roch Sulima stressed that:

> Shame is a very culturally productive social form, either adopted or imposed. Not every middle class person descended from the peasantry must necessarily work through the shame of their origins, as many are simply unburdened by this particular form of social censure. […] The popular discussion of embarrassing pedigrees most likely indicates the establishment of one of the most important national clinics for Polish neuroses.[1]

A similar tack is taken by the findings of Tomasz Rakowski, who argues that Poland's widespread "culture of

1 Roch Sulima, "Sprawa chłopska i polskie 'przeklęte problemy' "[The peasant issue and Polish "cursed problems"], *Kultura Współczesna* 1 (2015): 29. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article

shame" is to blame for the stigma that renders rural ancestry "marked with a defect" and consequently inferior and culturally lacking.[2] This framing is actualized in the modernization discourse, which describes the post-Second World War social shift in Poland basing on a binary that pits the modern and progressive against the backward and primitive. This dichotomy, however, necessarily paints one group in a negative light, degrading its social, cultural, and political standing and, as a result, putting it in a subordinate position to the dominant class.[3] Rakowski points at two specific outcomes of this thinking about the peasantry: first, it fosters an incorrect belief that the group in question has an inherent cultural disposition (a "peasant mentality" for example), and second, it encourages the use of the rural ancestry category to justify and explain the misfortunes suffered by Polish society.[4] These (ab) uses identified by the scholar suggest two diverging interpretations of peasantness: one sees it as a discursive figure "used in thinking," while the other conceives it as the social experience of countryside dwellers.[5]

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2 See Tomasz Rakowski, "Potomkowie chłopów – wolni od kultury" [Descendants of peasants – free from culture], *Miesięcznik Znak* 692 (2012), accessed June 2, 2020, https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6922013tomasz-rakowskipotomkowie-chlopow-wolni-od-kultury/. Cf. Rakowski, "Sztuka w przestrzeniach wiejskich i eksperymenty etnograficzne. Pożegnanie kultury zawstydzenia: jednoczasowość, zwrot ku sobie, proto-socjologia" [Art in rural spaces and ethnographic experiments. Farewell to the culture of shame: simultaneity, turning towards oneself, proto-sociology], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2016): 66–67.

3 Michael Kearney, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry. Anthropology in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995); James Wilce, "How Shame Spreads in Modernity," in Wilce, *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament* (Malden, MA: Wiley–Blackwell, 2009), 118–138.

4 Traces of such an interpretation of peasantness can be found in much earlier texts. In the 1934 essay *Najazd, którego nie było* [An invasion that wasn't] Stanisław Czernik debates a diagnosis offered by Jan Emil Skiwski, who argued it was the influx of students with rural backgrounds that was to blame for the academic deterioration of Polish studies at the time. See Stanisław Czernik, "Najazd, którego nie było," [The invasion that never happened], in Czernik, *Z podglebia* (Warszawa: LSW, 1966), 54. After Second World War, Józef Chałasiński similarly took a stand against elitist tendencies among intellectuals, harking back to the years before the war, and their dislike of fellow thinkers of rural descent. Chałasiński noted that considerable space in columns, op-eds, and magazines at the time was dedicated to retreading the well-worn trope of warning against enrolling too many students with peasant backgrounds at the universities [he used a piece from the popular *Tygodnik Powszechny* as an example – author's note]." See Józef Chałasiński, *Przeszłość i przyszłość inteligencji polskiej* [The past and future of the Polish intelligentsia] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 1997), 79.

5 Roch Sulima, "Źródło i pion. Figury myślenia o ludowości" [Source and vertical. Figures of thinking about folklore], in Sulima, *Literatura a dialog kultur* (Warszawa: LSW, 1982),

Remarkably appealing empirical research material is offered by advancement narratives, recounting individual and societal experiences of "departees" and their pursuit of identity, still bound by a very specific imaginary related to their rural origins. These departee experiences ultimately merge Rakowski's two modalities of peasantness, which serves as a source of tensions, difficulties, and limitations they must tackle in their new (urban) environment. Discussing memoirs of upward mobility, Maja Głowacka and Magda Szcześniak argue:

> Analyzed against the backdrop of social and economic contexts, including modes of circulation and types of actors involved in their generation, stories of social advancement may reveal deeply assimilated cultural outlooks on class hierarchies, the permeability of the social structure, and the degree of individual agency in the process of upward mobility.[6]

Taking a closer look at what shapes the experience of moving from the country to the city and how, I adopt a similar optics due to my focus on the social and cultural determinants of advancement and the strategies used in joining different social groups.

At the same time, my analysis is predicated on the category of shame, which enables me to capture that which remains unspoken, invisible, or undealt with in Polish culture. Hanna Gosk emphasizes that shame is "difficult to verbalize, situated among the low narratives, leaving dirty traces and stigmatizing what it touches. In long-term situations, it often becomes unbearable."[7] Shame indicates both the problematic nature of Polish collective identity, as well as the ambivalence of the space of public life; all the while the rules governing both significantly affect the experience of the individual. This impact is intense insofar as is manifests in bodily reactions – flushed face,

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75–116. Cf. Grzegorz Grochowski, "Kwestia chłopska" [The peasant question], in *Chłopska (nie)pamięć. Dziedzictwo chłopskości w polskiej literaturze i kulturze*, ed. Grzegorz Grochowski, Dorota Krawczyńska and Grzegorz Wołowiec (Kraków: Universitas, 2019), 7–11.

6 Maja Głowacka and Magda Szcześniak, "Emocje w powojennych pamiętnikach osób awansujących" [Emotions in the post-war diaries of people who were promoted], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2021): 267. Cf. Magda Szcześniak, *Poruszeni. Awans i emocje w socjalistycznej Polsce* [Moved. Promotion and emotions in socialism Poland] (Warszawa: Znak, 2023).

7 Hanna Gosk, "(Nie)obecność opowieści o wstydzie w narracji losu polskiego. Rekonesans" [The (absence) of stories about shame in the narrative of Polish fate. Reconnaissance], in *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy – konteksty i perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 90.

lowered gaze, awkward movements.[8] I see stories of upward mobility as a variant of a narrative which ties shame closely to the "peasant body." Given the somatic and affective context of the experience of moving from the country to the city, we could argue that it's premised on a tension between the belief in the inalienable nature of peasant ancestry, etched into the body and identifiable through certain gestures, posture, movements, behaviors, and even individual physical attributes, and the cultural construct of the "peasant body," based around seeing certain qualities as "peasant" and consequently marked by social maladjustment, helplessness, and incompatibility with established cultural norms.

Rural Ancestry as "Searing Shame"

In his 1946 memoir *Z Komborni w świat* [From Kombornia into the world], Stanisław Pigoń argues that the loss of connection with their birthplace experienced by "peasant sons" receiving their education in the city is closely tied to their seeing their background as embarrassing baggage or, more precisely, to fostering that position toward rural origins through shame. The author explains this link as follows:

> Timid new arrivals, the young, awkward wildlings were often lost in the rarefied air of a station higher than their own; they didn't know how to behave, how to move, how to talk. […] We are seeing a lamentable loss of native qualities in farmer sons educated in city schools. Why, it might be the very root of the evil we are discussing. It is here, at their lodgings, fresh countryside arrivals would receive a schooling in manners that whittled down everything even remotely rustic about them, to such a degree that later – to little surprise – they would deny any affiliation with countryside stock, conceal their peasantness like a searing shame, and etch any and all slights deep into their hearts.[9]

While Pigoń's account pertains to pre-Second World War upward mobility, unfolding in a different historical and social context than the mobility this essay is focused on, and while it connotes a romantic interpretation of

8 See Silvan Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," in *Shame and Its Sisters. A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 134. Piotr Szejnach explores the social foundation of shame in the context of Polish art in Piotr Szejnach, "Sztuka wstydu" [The art of shame], *Krytyka Polityczna* 31/32 (2013): 101.

9 Stanisław Pigoń, *Z Komborni w świat. Wspomnienia młodości* [From Kombornia into the world. Memories of youth] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957), 137–138.

"peasantness," one enmeshed in nationality discourses,[10] the memoir still offers meaningful findings pointing to the affective character of country-city migrations. At the same time, the record also enables us (on account of their specific timeframe) to capture the phenomena and social mechanisms shaping the empowerment of the peasantry (brought on by their migrations into the cities, their education, increased participation in social and cultural life, etc.) and then interrogate them through a *longue durée* lens. The passage cited above indicated that the experience of upward mobility is formed in the context of a socialization process aiming to peasantness and subordinate it to the cultural supremacy of the privileged classes. Pigoń labels it a "schooling in manners" that "whittled down everything even remotely rustic" about the new arrivals. From this perspective, peasantness, on the one hand, implies an inability to adopt proper behaviors and follow certain urban norms (lack of "manners"), and on the other manifests itself in the aforementioned rustic excess – a sort of expansiveness, a spirited overflow that explodes established norms. In his novel, penned after the release of Pigoń's memoirs, Tadeusz Nowak has his protagonists, arriving in Krakow for university entrance exams, greeted by elderly people sitting in a park ringing the Old Town with words like "look at the churls, looking like goatshit and spreading like mushrooms."[11] Seen as a part of this "profuse, overabundant" peasantness, the ability to transgress and violate established norms is, at the same time, perceived as a threat by those occupying privileged positions in existing social and cultural orders.

In the process of taming the "peasant spirit," shame becomes a key (and effective) affect due to its association with modernity, one pointed out by Norbert Elias in his seminal study *The Civilizing Process*. In his interpretation, shame plays the role of a (self)-disciplining instrument which – by way of modeling human behaviors to match established social patterns – compels compliance with external imperatives of change through the undoing of past habits and customs.[12] The dual positive-negative character of shame stems

10 Grzegorz Wołowiec reads Pigoń's memoir as an "educational tale retracing the difficult path of a peasant from the Galicia region and his rise from society's lowest rungs all the way up to enjoying all the perks of citizenship." See Grzegorz Wołowiec, "Filologia i nacjonalizm. Stanisław Pigoń jako ideolog kultury ludowo-narodowej" [Philology and nationalism. Stanisław Pigoń as an ideologist of folk and national culture], in *Chłopska (nie) pamięć*, 103. Cf. Czesław Kłak, *Pigoń* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2013).

11 Tadeusz Nowak, *Diabły. Dwunastu* [Devils. The twelve] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977), 397.

12 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 160.

from entanglement with attempts at modernization, spanning not just individuals but entire social groups. On the one hand, it enables the emergence of a critical awareness of one's own position in the world, defined by a variety of contexts (like class, for example); building on Elias, James Wilce argues that it encourages deciding between either resistance or subordination to one's position in the social hierarchy.[13] On the other, shame – which Silvan Tomkins calls an "affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation" – is suffered as "inner torment, a sickness of the soul."[14] The experience of shame is intense, as it affects the subject as if from the inside, producing a sense of vulnerability of the self, exposing one's own weakness, inadequacy, or lack suggesting an inability to meet social norms and expectations. Which is why Elias ties shame to status anxiety, often accompanied by a pronounced sense of powerlessness toward the advantages held by those higher in the social hierarchy, as well as the inability to extricate oneself from the external (but internalized) compulsion to behave and act according to existing norms.[15]

Through shaming, the "deportees" begin to see their rural/peasant ancestry as – to borrow from Pigoń – a "searing shame." In other words, countryside roots become something of a mark. Incorporated into normative discourses, this stigma reveals its links to the construction, valuation, and hierarchization of social identities. Erving Goffman emphasizes that "the lifelong attributes of a particular individual may cause him to be type-cast; he may have to play the stigmatized role in almost all of his social situations."[16] The devaluation of a person carrying the stigma, manifested in a variety of forms of restrictive discriminations, finds sanction and justification in the derivatively formulated "stigma-theory": an ideology explaining the inferiority attributed to stigmatized persons and – equally importantly – legitimizing the sense of threat and animosity exhibited by "normies," driven by differences in religious belief, nationality, or ancestry.[17] One instrument of stigmatizing the "peasant spirit" can be found in the category of the "cham" – a Polish word that translates into "churl," "boor" or "lout," carrying connotations of serfdom, indenture, and inferiority – conceived by the nobility discourse and used, as Kacper Pobłocki

13 Wilce, "How Shame Spreads in Modernity," 120–121.

14 Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," 133.

15 See Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 417–418. Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 209–214.

16 Erving Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 138.

17 Ibid., 5.

recapitulates in his latest book, to define the limits of peasant emancipation. To those who aspired to higher social standing, it presented a barrier of social distinction and reminded of their appropriate class position, predefined by their birth certificate.[18] The cultural construct of peasantness, therefore, is conceived to normativize and exclude. Although formulated within a discourse that is itself outside rural, countryside culture, it is actualized in the experience of the "departees" – that is people who left the country for the city – and ensnares them in the hierarchical relationships of power.

In his memoirs, Pigoń argues that peasantness requires taming, but in the form of a proper education, rather than forcible instruction in etiquette that relies on a shaming mechanism. Young men from the countryside arrive in the city wholly unprepared, with no insight into how to behave and move around in urban and urbane settings. Their confusion and alienation – obviously stemming from their relocation into a strange and unfamiliar place – drive their readjustment and identity issues. They also increase the risk of them making a social blunder, which can lead to further stigmatization. All of this leaves the departees moving from the country to the city experiencing a profound vulnerability, fueled by the uncertainty of one's place in a new environment, greater susceptibility to harm, and greater dependence on others. Helen M. Lynd argues that shame only amplifies this experience:

> We […] become strangers in a world where we thought we were at home. We experience anxiety in becoming aware that we cannot trust our answers to the questions Who am I? Where do I belong? […] With every recurrent violation of trust we become again children unsure of ourselves in an alien world.[19]

Navigating their urban environments, the departees are left to fend for themselves, struggling – as Pigoń notes – "against fate" and "bourgeois obscurantism." Hence his indictment of "rural middle schools" as delinquent in their social and cultural education efforts, whose primary objective ought to be the "diligent and careful ennobling of country dwellers" and the "shaping of raw material" drawing on the specific community culture of the countryside.[20] While his call for a cultural education blending urban and rural norms seems valid (although the viability of such a project and its framework are a whole other issue), the language Pigoń uses to describe the new arrivals and their

18 Kacper Pobłocki, *Chamstwo* [Rabble] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2021), 152–155.

19 Helen M. Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York City, NY: Harcourt & Brace, 1958), 46–47.

20 Pigoń, *Z Komborni w świat*, 138.

need for education warrants a closer look. His phrasing reveals the trap of a hierarchical interpretation of the relationship between the city and the country, which implies a tension between "being a peasant," here associated with being firmly rooted in the pre-modern world, and the "clumsy savage," who brings up connotations with the primal and primitive, and requires an "ennobling," that a civilizing process (which essentially entails a readjustment to dominant norms defined by the upper classes and the intellectuals). In effect, the modern/primitive binary inherent in the upward mobility experience conceives peasantness as shapeless raw matter lacking any cultural capital.

Internalizing the Figure of the *Cham*

Pigoń's notes on the stigmatization process conceived as "whittling away the peasantness," which brings about the shame of one's own rural ancestry, suggest that it is the self-identification as a "cham" that serves as the foundational moment in which the departee identity constitutes itself. By formulating in his memoirs a call for the "ennobling of the peasantry," Pigoń signals the readiness of the peasant class to interact with the culture cultivated by and reserved for the nobles and the intellectuals – the problem, however, is that as they embrace it, the departees internalize the stigma of peasantness with its inherent belief in social distinction, and adopt an attitude of scorn toward their own ancestry.[21] For individuals with a rural background, this internalization experience was all the more piercing as it tied peasantness with their bodies and rendered it incompatible with existing norms and requiring a corrective. The somatic aspect of these individuals' internalization experience was already touched upon by Pierre Bourdieu in his 1960s findings,[22] in which he describes the desirability of countryside bachelors using his native village in southwestern France as an example. Observing a local ball, Bourdieu noted that peasants were increasingly rejected as potential candidates

21 Already in his prewar work exploring the younger generation of peasant men Chałasiński wrote about the threats posed by education supporting the culture of the nobility: "until lately, schooling peasant sons was in no way a manifestation of the process of democratizing Polish culture. Rather, it was the 'ennobling' of peasant youth. The education of rural youth was not driven by democratic reactions against the patrician nature of culture, but rather by accepting said nature and a desire to attain patrician status by way of education." Józef Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów* [The young generation of peasants] (Warszawa: LSW, 1984), 95.

22 The example suggests that the stigmatization of "lower" social stations is in no way limited solely to Polish culture. Cf. Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. Alison L. Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2022); Didier Eribon, *Returning to Reims*, trans. Michael Lucy (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

for marriage and the phenomenon was driven by two tendencies reflecting certain relationships between the center and the periphery: on the one hand there were the shifting aspirations and expectations of local women, prompted by urban influences, and on the other the peasants' self-perception as *empeasanted bodies*. Bourdieu calls this internalization of the empeasanted body, presuming a consciousness of its inconsistency with prevailing expectations, a "privileged occasion of [...] coming to awareness of the peasant condition." In the scholar's view, the shyness and awkwardness of country bachelors at the ball stems from their obsessive focus on their own bodies as marked with a "social stamp," which ultimately prompts them to abandon their matrimonial efforts.[23] Situated in cultural contexts seeking to tame peasantness, the bodies of the departees connote frailty, weakness, and clumsiness, ultimately confirming their inferior social status.[24]

The internalization of this negatively charged picture of the self that does not fit the social ideal unfolds in the course of social interaction based on humiliation correlated with shame. In Martha Nussbaum's interpretation, humiliation constitutes the "active, public face of shame," deliberately oriented at violating and debasing one's dignity. Explaining the link between shame and humiliation, the theorist writes: "to humiliate someone is to expose them to shame; and to shame someone is, in most cases, to humiliate them (at least if the shaming is severe enough)."[25] The modus of humiliation plays a major role in constituting relationships within the imaginary of Polish culture. In his book *Prześniona rewolucja* [Sleepwalking the revolution], Andrzej Leder writes that the pre-1939 domination of the nobility and the postwar domination of administrative and military elites manifested themselves mostly through the humiliation of other parts of society, primarily the peasantry. Although wartime occupation brought about a complete restructuring of Polish society, the social and professional spheres (particularly the relationship between employer and employee) are to this day shaped by what Leder has come to call a "folwark mentality" ["folwark" is Polish for an agricultural

23 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Peasant and His Body*, in Bourdieu, *Bachelors' Ball. The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 86. For more on the changing landscape of marriage in the Polish countryside, see Ewelina Szpak, *Mentalność ludności wiejskiej w PRL. Studium zmian* [Mentality of the rural population in the Polish People's Republic. Change study] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013).

24 Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York City, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977), 24–31.

25 Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 203.

estate owned by a nobleman and worked primarily by indentured peasantry and serfs – transl. note].[26] In Pigoń's memoirs, this relationship is explored in the following passage:

> Peasants refuse to wear old-fashioned outfits as these draw the ridicule of city folk. They find themselves mocked by fellow passengers on trains, bitterly joked about by scribes at the revenue office. Wearing city garb, meanwhile, gets them respect and polite talk. […] Small wonder, then, that few peasants would want to submit themselves to poor treatment like that. Hence their efforts to meticulously conceal, belittle, and deny their own station. They will readily reject their traditional garb and hide their peasantness, to the detriment of our heritage.[27]

The moment of shaming and humiliation captured by Pigoń well reflects Elias's reading of shame as an instrument of undoing past practices and thus stimulating adaptation to novel social and cultural circumstances. Moreover, it situates the departees within the tangle of antagonistic social relations, as the adoption of patterns typical of the nobility and intellectuals dominant in Polish culture requires that one's ties with one's rural birthplace are severed by way of a variety of concealment and denial practices used to avoid humiliation (the outfit change mentioned in the passage above is motivated by fear of ridicule). Such a "wounding" of identity is also brought up by Pigoń in a more autobiographical reference to his own experience of humiliation, which saw him ridiculed in a city school over his clothes – especially the tall boots that few wore in the city and his "native speech inflections, words borrowed from […] native dialect, table manners, and other unsophisticated behaviors [emphasis mine – K. K.]"[28]. Humiliation used as an instrument of stigmatization typically targets that which its victim holds close – native cultural heritage and the habits and customs of home. Confronting the rural self with the urban conception of peasantness results in a painful depreciation of that original identity, a process driven by the idea that "the most effective method to inflict long-lasting pain on a person is to humiliate them by making the things they considered the most important seem trivial, outdated, and powerless."[29]

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26 Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* [Sleepwalking the revolution] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014) 98–101.

27 Pigoń, *Z Komborni w świat*, 65–66.

28 Ibid., 141.

29 Gosk, "(Nie)obecność opowieści o wstydzie w narracji losu polskiego. Rekonesans," 87.

The process of internalizing the "*cham* body," unfolding as part of the transition from the country-city transition, can be traced in the Tadeusz Nowak novel *Diabły. Dwunastu* [Devils. The twelve], especially its later parts, describing the arrival of the eponymous twelve characters in Krakow where they are set to begin college. Lost in a city they do not know, they ask passersby for directions until they finally start to wonder about the manner they are being addressed in:

> Looking at the people, clearly rushing to one office or another, we hailed a slender young lady wearing a black coat, flats on cork soles, and a round hat pinned to her hair, styled up and resembling a soldier's helmet. "Where are they going?" She asked, without breaking stride. […]
> It was only when we stopped in front of a store window and saw our reflections showing us with pant legs too short, blazers buttoned up despite the heat, shoes caked in dust, hats worn askew, hands red and never not calloused, and eyes that shone with fear and a barely concealed image of a horse pulling a cart, its tail swinging left and right to shoo away the horseflies, and the manure spread behind the barn, we finally realized that these were the same words and the same delivery that our fathers heard from manor lords, lawyers in town, teachers, and even the old reverend when he'd forget himself.[30]

Shame, Sara Ahmed argues, emerges "before others," prompted by a gaze that spark the need to run away and hide: "on the one hand, shame covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze), while on the other, shame exposes that which has been covered."[31] Elsewhere, Ruth Leys notes that in affect studies, shame is conceived primarily as "specular affect that has the fantasy of visibility and disclosure built into it."[32] Seen by the eponymous "twelve" of the Nowak novel through the lens of a new socio-cultural setting, the body appears ugly and inferior, its awkwardness and incompatibility with the urban environment laid bare for all to see. The figure of the stigmatized peasant body is invoked by both the outfits worn by the protagonist and their attitudes, hands worn down by field work, and their insecure, frightened gazes. Later in the book, they speak of themselves: "leaning forward, as if carrying a heavy bucket in each

30 Nowak, *Diabły. Dwunastu*, 394.

31 Sara Ahmed, "Shame Before Others," in Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 104.

32 Ruth Leys, "Shame Now," in Leys, *From Guilt to Shame. Auschwitz and After* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 128.

hand to water the horses, woolen hats on our heads […]."[33] Only affected by a gaze that constitutes the "empeasanted/*cham* body" do they realize the specific manner that urban dwellers use when speaking to them. This idiolect situates them in a subordinate position, which – according to a model of Polish culture rooted in the master/serf binary – their ancestry predestines them to. In the coercive compulsion to submit to those occupying positions of privilege, they recognize the intergenerational experience that defines their heritage.

Bodily Practices of Mimicry

The affective experience of "whittling away peasantness" involves both the objectification and subjectification of the individual. Transformed or profiled to fit socio-cultural norms, the individual is then incorporated into society and culture. The assimilatory impulse suggesting the purging of the "country/rural self" is manifested in the practices and gestures absorbed by the departees, developed within and enforced by the existing cultural paradigm that they aspire to. Breaking down the methods of incorporating practices making up the habitual experience of the body, Paul Connerton proposes a distinction, useful in the context of departee transitions, between the ability to identify a cultural code and the ability to assimilate it; between the casual, easy behavior of a person for whom a cultural norm is instinctive, "innate," and the forced nonchalance and uncertainty over proper behavior that appear when a code is imposed upon or adopted by an individual.[34] The embarrassment and shyness of a person entering a different social group derives from the recognized mismatch between their body and the body that is socially acceptable. In effect, Connerton explains:

> Unable to incarnate an acknowledged model, one tries vainly to compensate for this inability through the proliferation of the signs of bodily control. This is why the petit-bourgeois experience of the world is characterized by timidity and unease the unease of those who feel that their bodies betray them and who regard their bodies, as it were, from the outside and through the appraising eyes of others, surveying and correcting their practices.[35]

33 Nowak, *Diabły. Dwunastu*, 397.

34 Paul Connerton, "Bodily Practices," in Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90.

35 Ibid., 91.

Adapting one's body to a new cultural code is both a consequence of social advancement as well as an instrument for changing one's social status. The horizon of actions available to a subject attempting to conceal their ancestry under a mask of adopted behaviors and attained cultural competencies is defined by the risk of exposure, betraying oneself with some "native gesture."[36] The manifesting of bodily tensions related to the departee condition is well reflected in the Julian Kawalec novel *Tańczący jastrząb* [Dancing hawk], which traces the meteoric rise through the social ranks of protagonist Michał Toporny, taking him from "a man born in a house with dirt floors" to an executive at a large mining enterprise. To shed his peasantness, Toporny performs a series of symbolic gestures, such as burning his peasant outfit, that indicate his will to transcend the more significant barriers to his upward mobility (class, social, and cultural). He swaps out his heavy work pants for a suit, changes his appearance, and even tailors his own gait to fit the brisk rhythm of the street:

> You have this city stride about you now, and flow through the crowds on the street, no longer gawking like a peasant, [...] no longer bound by the serflike acceptance of life and death as they are; your heart no longer tapped out the slow rhythm of the country life, it beat much faster now. Wearing dark or light grey outfits you seemed even taller, after turning slender, and your face grew longer and more, let's say, hawklike.[37]

A similar strategy was adopted by the narrator of the Tadeusz Nowak novel *Prorok* [The prophet], who employs violence turned inward to erase any bodily traces of peasantness: he puts his body through an exercise regimen that disciplines "primitive/rural" reactions and facial movements (a process he calls "righting his face"), tries to scrub himself of the "peasant odor" (hence his relentless bathing), takes meticulous care of his hands to erase any trace of hard labor from his "loaflike palms," and seeks to purge his speech of any rural inflections.[38]

Due to their inherent performative potential, the gestures adopted by the departees in the pursuit of manipulating their own bodies connote an "urbaneness" that can only assume labile and partial forms and, consequently,

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36 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 79.

37 Julian Kawalec, *Tańczący jastrząb* [Dancing hawk] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1974), 191.

38 Tadeusz Nowak, *Prorok* [The prophet] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1977), 5.

demands repeated affirmation and ever new basis for legitimization. Pigoń describes this mechanism as he notes that it's the neophytes embracing class resentment that play the most harmful role in depreciating rural ancestry as a "searing shame": "whittled down in the same manner, the spiritual arriviste took out the slights he had to endure on the younger generations, his cruelty rising in proportion to his desire to appear higher in station, ennobled socially and culturally."[39] Humiliating the new rural émigrés is driven not just by the memories of their predecessors having their ancestry shamefully exposed, but also stands as a stamp that confirms entry into the ranks of urban dwellers, a position which is deeply conditional and steeped in fear of renewed exclusion. Goffman stresses that assimilating the dominant culture and erasing the stigma from oneself does not result in attaining "normie" status, but instead "a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish."[40] Following down the thread of the indelibility of stigma, we could argue that the process of "whittling away peasantness," based on dominant/subordinate relationships, follows the strategy of mimicry, which presumes the assimilation of and subordination to colonizer identities by the colonized. As Homi Bhabha points out, however, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a s u b j e c t o f a d i f f e r e n c e t h a t i s a l m o s t t h e s a m e , b u t n o t q u i t e [emphasis original – K. K.]."[41] The essence of mimicry lies in the visibility of difference inscribed into the body of the colonized. Because complete mimicry is not possible, the identity of the subaltern consistently constitutes itself in the moment that distinction, dissonance, or tension appear.

The indelible divergence between embodied and assimilated cultural codes defines the upward mobility experience of the protagonist of the aforementioned Kawalec novel. The scene describing his "act of grand transformation"[42] or the "shedding of an old skin"[43] captures the moment he (re)discovers himself anew:

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39 Pigoń, *Z Komborni w świat*, 138. Because in Pigoń's view resentment "feeds all sorts of social radicalisms, including in the peasantry" (139), he postulated embracing one's rural ancestry as an answer to the experience of being stripped of one's peasantness. For more on that subject, see Wołowiec, *Filologia i nacjonalizm*, 111–113.

40 Goffman, *Stigma*, 9.

41 Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 126.

42 Kawalec, *Tańczący jastrząb*, 165.

43 Ibid., 172.

> Born in a hut with packed clay for a floor, he performed a handful of seemingly careless skids on the polished marble, then, leaning slightly forward, approached a grand mirror, only to take a couple of steps back and look over his reflection from head to toe […]. The bright light pouring from the lamps above revealed a figure familiar with the mean spirit of dried stubble fields, which now stood face to face with himself, but radically different, essentially a stranger. The man familiar with rakes, flails, and manure forks, performing dancelike, clownish curtsies, stared in disbelief and delight at his other self, familiar with higher mathematics, derivatives and integrals, complex calculations required to design machines, performing the same dancelike, clownish moves. When one drew close, the other followed suit; when one withdrew, the other followed suit; when performed an elegant twist, the other copied it exactly, like a well-trained dog […].[44]

Probing his gestures, examining the movements of his body, and viewing them with a critical gaze, Toporny ultimately engages in a grotesque performance that confronts the rural and the urban strains of his self. The connection between them reflects the imbalance in the symbolic field, where peasantness, equated in the passage above with an obedient dog, is situated in an inferior position and subjected to a strict regime of the urbane. This dissonance also manifests itself in the narrator's juxtaposition of experiences and knowledge apposite to respective pedigrees – and it's only education (that a country boy successfully completes) and intellectual capacity (attained through effort other than physical labor) that draw admiration. Between the two strains of the self, fascination only flows one way. The confrontation before the mirror seems to be staged for the purpose of suppressing the rural self, achieved by absorbing the Other, and choosing the projected reflection as the desired self-image of the protagonist: "the reflection is you and you are him."[45] Toporny gradually realizes the illusion of bodily practices of mimicry, which never bring him a sense of authenticity in imitation; furthermore, they lay bare his own dissimilarity stemming from an incomplete embodiment of the dominant cultural code. The protagonist's apprehension toward this adoptive body manifests itself in the scene, significant in this particular context, that features his confrontation with the young engineer who is both his subordinate and the lover of his second wife, a man who "drew at will on the casual ease allowed by his station, accumulated for him by generations before him."[46] In the presence

44 Ibid., 172.

45 Ibid., 173.

46 Ibid., 246.

of engineer Zatorski, the protagonist is struck by a pervasive sense of lack, which he is simply unable to compensate for.

Summary

The cultural form of the shame of the peasant body, resulting in concealment and denial of rural ancestry, condemns countryside departees to relentless simulation of urbaneness, to an indelible sense of being trapped in between stations. The experience of social advancement, presuming a "whittling away of peasantness," produces individuals othered twice over, at home neither in the city nor in the country. Even Pigoń admits to experiencing the pervasive artifice of the departee condition in his memoirs:

> Rare are the moments where I was fully myself, without dissonance, that is when no obsessive reflection, no critical look from the outside into myself would mar the pleasure of living life, when I would be uniformly myself. There is always some sort of semi-self throwing its weight around, a blend of my own essence and random externalities, accrued on my soul. This likely means that I am fully caught in the claws of "culture," stripped of my peasant honesty, spontaneity, the reflexive immediacy of sense and judgment. I feel robbed or mutilated.[47]

The paradoxical experience of individuals experiencing upward mobility or, more broadly, of the middle class emerging in post-Second World War Poland manifests itself in two retroactive and (self)-reflective diagnoses. Firstly, the assimilation of patterns typical for the dominant culture, itself a marriage of tropes developed by the nobility and bourgeois intellectuals, provided only a short-term opportunity for the departees to conceal their "coarseness"[48] and suppress internalized shame and class-driven humiliation. Eventually, it produces a sense of status apprehension and anxiety. Secondly, the experience of advancement results in the belief that the city does not offer the departees any identity alternatives that would not require from them to judge and ultimately suppress their peasantness or, in other words, that would lead to its "spontaneous" erasure. The passage from Pigoń's memoirs above indicates the existence of deeply pervasive cultural hierarchies premised on stigmatizing rural ancestry. Even when a person, like Pigoń, affirms their countryside pedigree,

47 Pigoń, *Z Komborni w świat*, 246–247.

48 A reference to the last name of the protagonist of the aforementioned novel, Michał Toporny. Used like this, the word "toporny" means "coarse" or "crude," and in the novel, it denotes the condition of being-in-between.

they are still subject to culturally entrenched shame of rural/peasant origins and only notice the value of what their advancement took from them too late.

Translated by Jan Szelągiewicz

Abstract

Karolina Koprowska
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
The Shame of the Peasant Body

The article considers the experience of moving from the countryside to the city depicted in selected narratives of social advancement. The analysis focuses on the stigmatization of peasant origin through shame, which closely correlates with the physical and affective dimensions, a key process for the condition of "migrants." The strong status of peasant roots as a shameful stigma in Polish culture is connected to the mechanism of its internalization by the individuals who experienced social advancement. As such, the status influences advancement strategies, preferring adaptation to urban patterns through bodily practices of mimicry.

Keywords

shame, origin, birthplace, village, peasant body

Interpretations

Agata Zborowska

"It Belongs to Us!" Narratives of Property Relations at a Time of Post-war Land Reform in Poland

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.9 | ORCID: 0000-0001-5919-4274

Postwar representations of the land reform announced on July 22, 1944 by the new government in the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation – the PKWN Manifesto (Manifest Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego) – are characterized by rich "material imagery." According to the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who coined this notion, images that grow out of matter project deeper, fuller, and more lasting experiences. And although "the eye assigns them names [...] only the hand truly knows them."[1] The post-war ownership changes presupposed a radical transformation in property relations, which was associated with strong emotions in fact fueled by the authorities themselves. Material objects owned by the landed gentry played an important role in both the historical process and the narrative of removing and expropriating this social class and parceling out their areas of land.

1 Gaston Bachelard, "Introduction: Imagination and Matter," in *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Ann Arbor: Pegasus Foundation, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983), 1.

Agata Zborowska – a cultural historian with a background in cultural studies. Her research interests lie in the intersection of material and visual cultures, property relations, cultural history, and critical archival studies. She is an assistant professor at the University of Warsaw and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Action Fellow at the University of Chicago and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. Her project "Critical Archives of Ordinariness: Vernacular Moving Image Practices and Migrant Identity in Polish Chicago" investigates home movies and related oral histories of Polish Chicago before the digital era.

In this article, I focus on Poland's immediate post-war ownership changes from the perspective of material culture. I am particularly interested in how objects participate in these processes or, to put it another way, how they are used in narratives about these ongoing events by various social actors. Material objects are entangled in the history of radical sociopolitical changes that make us rethink the relationship between humans and non-humans' tangled networks. I follow the concept of material objects as "critical cultural archives" suggested by Elaine Freedgood, who argued that "the knowledge that is stockpiled in these things bears on the grisly specifics of conflicts and conquests that a culture can neither regularly acknowledge nor permanently destroy if it is going to be able to count on its own history to know itself and realize a future."[2] Starting from material objects in the broadest sense, I look at the historical "production of specific narratives"[3] represented in various materials that have not been read together so far. By taking such an approach, we can see the "uneven power in the production of sources, archives and narratives," which not infrequently, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, contributes to silencing the past.

To introduce different narrators of the ownership changes, I use various sources – official materials produced by the new authorities, newspapers, published memoirs of members of the landed gentry, as well as memoirs submitted by members of rural communities to the postwar "Opis mojej wsi" [Description of my village] contest announced in 1948 and organized by Czytelnik Publishing House, as well as the "Nowe pamiętniki chłopów" [New peasants' diaries] competition organized in 1955 by the magazine *Gromada Rolnik Polski*, Polish Radio and the Wiedza i Książka publishing house.[4]

The main storyline of the "extensive land reform" in the newly liberated areas announced in the PKWN Manifesto – "in order to speed up the reconstruction of the country and satisfy the age-old urge of the Polish peasantry for land" – will receive only cursory treatment here. The Decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation from September 6, 1944 on the implementation of land

2 Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2.

3 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015 [1995]), 25.

4 I use primarily, but not exclusively, the materials published in the volumes: *Wieś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe* [Polish countryside 1939–1948. Competition materials], ed. Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota (Warszawa: PWN, 1967–1971); *Nowe pamiętniki chłopów* [New peasant diaries], ed. Halina Ruszkiewicz and Bożena Wiloch (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1962). If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

reform (Dekret Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 6 września 1944 roku o przeprowadzeniu reform rolnej)[5] explained the tenets of the reform. It announced in the very first article that the reform was to be carried out with the participation of the "social element." The reform was intended to ensure the subsistence of existing farms under five hectares of agricultural land and create new independent farms for landless laborers, farm workers, and small leaseholders. Landed property owned by German citizens or Polish citizens of German nationality and persons convicted of treason and providing assistance to the German occupants was subject to the reform. What is particularly important here is that it also applied to real estate jointly or wholly owned by individual or legal persons exceeding 100 hectares in general size or 50 hectares in an agricultural area, and in Poznań, Pomerania and Silesia provinces with 100 hectares in general size, regardless of the amount of agricultural land utilized within that area. The confiscated property passed in its entirety to the state without any compensation. Before turning to how these ownership changes were lived and experienced, I will begin by reconstructing the atmosphere in which the revolution was to take place.

Collective Affects

> But, although the atmosphere in which we live, weighs upon every one with a 20,000 lb. force, do you feel it? No more than European society before 1848 felt the revolutionary atmosphere enveloping and pressing it from all sides.[6]
>
> Karl Marx

Film footage from November 3, 1944, documenting land reform, shows Edward Osóbka-Morawski, who, in an elegant three-piece suit, stands on a makeshift wooden balcony holding a hammer and chisel in his hands.[7] At first gently, as if shyly, but finally, not without effort, he forges the crest cartouche of the Potocki family from Łańcut Castle. He hangs the Polish emblem over the damaged symbol. The then-head of the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reform at the Polish Committee of National Liberation is shown alternately in two

5 Dekret Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 6 września 1944 r. o przeprowadzeniu reformy rolnej [Decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of September 6, 1944 on the implementation of agrarian reform], *Dziennik Ustaw* 4, poz. 17 (1944), accessed February 2, 2024, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19440040017.

6 Karl Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (London: Norton, 1978 [1856]), 577.

7 Reforma rolna, MF.0467, Archiwum Filmoteki Narodowej. See also "Wielkie święto ludowe w Łańcucie," *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, November 7, 1944.

shots. In the first, the camera leans out of an adjacent window and portrays Osóbka-Morawski from the side – at first, it is difficult to discern exactly what he is working on. Any doubts vanish in the second shot, which clearly shows the entire scene from the perspective of a group of peasants and farm workers standing under the balcony. The gathered onlookers applaud and cheer. We can only guess at the latter, as the film is silent. However, from the expressive gestures, body movements, smiles, and silent shouts, it is not difficult to read approval and perhaps even joy.[8]

Although this film documentation of the event was ultimately not used in the *Polska Kronika Filmowa* [Polish film chronicle],[9] images of the takeover of the castle and the emptiness of its former residents circulated in other media. The event was reported in detail by the *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper.[10] According to its account, a crowd of thousands gathered in front of the castle, and more than a thousand peasants were given land. Then hundreds of people arrived at the castle – the Museum of the Polish Nation[11] – for a people's party "in the first district of the Republic free of landowners." Among the highlights of the evening, the newspaper, in addition to the removal of the coat of arms of the Counts of Potocki, announced dinner and dancing in the ballroom.[12]

> For the first time, hard peasant footsteps sounded on the stone floors and parquet of the palace. More than 500 people gathered in the palace's great hall, where Osubka-Morawski [sic] handed out land grant certificates to the peasants. One can see the emotions on the faces of those receiving them, with tears sometimes glistening in their eyes. [...] There are new hosts roaming around the palace. Here, next to the Great Hall – the magnate's private theater. A deep two-story stage, on the proscenium, there is room for an orchestra of a dozen people, and in the

8 The archival footage is silent; it is likely that it never had a soundtrack (according to information provided by an employee of the National Film Archive).

9 The Polish Chronicle lasted about 10 minutes and was shown before the screenings of the main movie. It usually consisted of information on current affairs and the latest events at home and abroad related to economics, entertainment, and daily life.

10 "Łańcut stał się własnością narodu" [Łańcut became the property of the nation], *Rzeczpospolita. Organ Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, November 9, 1944.

11 "Zamek w Łańcucie zamieniony na Muzeum Narodu Polskiego" [The castle in Łańcut turned into the Museum of the Polish Nation], *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, September 12, 1944.

12 A printout of the invitation is in the collection of the Castle Museum in the Łańcut archive. See also Inga Sapetowa "Dzieje Muzeum – Zamku w Łańcucie. 1944–1984" [The history of the Museum – Castle in Łańcut. 1944–1984], in *Szkice z dziejów Łańcuta i okolic*, vol. 1, ed. Inga Sapetowa (Rzeszów: Towarzystwo Naukowe w Rzeszowie na zlec. Stowarzyszenia Przyjaciół Ziemi Łańcuckiej w Łańcucie, 1987), 101.

> audience, there are seats for… twenty-eight to thirty people. Above the auditorium is a film projection booth with modern equipment that few first-class sound cinemas could boast before the war. And all this for a minimal number of people. An orchestra has now been placed in the theater to play to new guests. Guests whose blood and sweat created the splendor of this palace. Guests who, from now on, are the hosts here.[13]

The vast building is bursting at the seams. Descriptions of the crowd of peasants who literally occupy the estate – crossing the castle's threshold and leaving their material footprints on the rich parquet floors – are juxtaposed with descriptions of the few aristocrats who have hitherto held these luxurious possessions exclusively. "And here I'm sitting in this gentleman's chair, and I can see it's quite good to sit on it. The lords knew how to make a comfortable life for themselves with our blood money, and now it will come in handy for us,"[14] loudly comments one of the gathered peasants, a land reform attorney. The crowd bursts into laughter.

In *Rzeczpospolita*'s reportage on the Łańcut takeover, the change in property relations is shown through a change in the logic of use. The film projector discovered in the palace intended for a small aristocratic group has limited utility and seems virtually useless socially. At the same time, after the war, it can serve hundreds of peasants and workers. Restricted access to private property is contrasted with open access to common property, the hosts of which become new guests previously absent from the palace.[15]

The landed estate becomes a symbol of post-war ownership changes and, more literally, the central stage on which these changes take place. Inside the estate, the ceremonial act of transferring land to the peasants and farm workers (*fornale*) takes place, sealing the beginning of land reform. In Żurawica, the estate of Andrzej Józef Sapieha, the parceling out of land is deliberately moved from the manor garden to the estate itself to emphasize the importance and momentousness of this act. Indoors, the new land division is delineated with the participation of peasants and farm workers in front of the (former) owner. "Sapieha's pupils quickly rolled up the carpets in the table room so that the peasants' feet wouldn't trample them,"[16] reported a correspondent of *Biuletyn*

13 "Łańcut stał się własnością narodu," *Rzeczpospolita.*

14 "Wielkie święto ludowe w Łańcucie," *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, November 7, 1944.

15 Landowner buildings after the war became museums, schools, day care centers, and temporarily also seats of local authorities or agricultural training centers.

16 Stach z powiatu przemyskiego, "Jak dzielono ziemię w powiecie przemyskim" [How land was divided in the Przemyśl district], *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, October 18, 1944.

Reformy Rolnej [Land reform bulletin], noting, on the one hand, the dizzying pace of the changes, and on the other, the contempt with which the peasants' presence in the building was reacted to. However, the owner's presence usually acts as a deterrent and, in most cases, makes it difficult to change the existing ownership relationships. Whereas, the *Bulletin* reported, "in Gibisk and Czudec [villages – A. Z.], where the peasants felt terrorized in the beginning, they were afraid to enter the manor, and made meetings somewhere in the corners and barns… Now they already feel they are the hosts here and are making their division plans in the landlords' rooms that it's so nice to look at."[17] The process of gradually overcoming the peasants' and workers' fear or reluctance is confirmed by postwar memoirs, in which the landed estate is most often depicted as an inaccessible space, separate from the experience of the rural community.[18] "In the manor, […] there were village children not even [allowed – A. Z.], […] when there was a harvest festival, you could walk up to the palace,"[19] recalled a resident of the village of Bieganów. This space remains extremely unfamiliar even when the mansion becomes a place of daily work. A resident of another village, Staromieście, Aniela Gniewek, described her experience in 1944: "I worked from early morning until late at night in the stable. Later, I was transferred to serve in the landlord's rooms. Here, it was even worse. In the stable, I was among the animals that had to be cared for – in the rooms, I was treated alone, pushed around like an animal."[20]

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17 Stanisław Sykus, "Obdzielić wszystkie grupy chłopskie" [Divide all peasant groups], *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, October 31, 1944.

18 See e.g. Włodzimierz Mędrzecki "*Hrabia to naprawdę było cuś*. Problem stosunków wieś–dwór w pracach studentów Instytutu Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego" [The count was really something special. The problem of village-manor relations in the works of students of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Warsaw], in *Dwór a społeczności lokalne na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Wiesław Caban, Mieczysław Bolesław Markowski and Marek Przeniosło (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego, 2008), 357–365. See also Ewelina Szpak, *Mentalność ludności wiejskiej w PRL. Studium zmian* [Mentality of the rural population in the Polish People's Republic. Change study] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013).

19 Interview conducted and recorded by Anna Wylegała as part of her research project "Wokół reformy rolnej 1944–1948: doświadczenie i pamięć społeczna" [Around the land reform 1944–1948: Experience and social memory], sygn. RR_01_Bieganow_01, Archiwum Danych Jakościowych Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN.

20 Aniela Gniewek, "Będę żyła i pracowała dla społeczeństwa które dało mi ziemię" [I will live and work for the society that gave me this land], *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, November 11, 1944.

The seizure of large magnate estates was intended to create "the right atmosphere,"[21] as Edward Bertold, then deputy head of the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reform of the PKWN, admitted in his memoirs. The landed estate provided a material and symbolic basis for the authorities to create an atmosphere of momentousness for the class and property transformations taking place. This experience of momentousness was thus to be directly linked to the space, as well as to the objects that act as tuning media for the postwar events. As Tim Flohr Sørensen pointed out, we should not understand the atmosphere as limited only to the subject or object, but as a phenomenon arising at the intersection of the body and the affective properties of the material environment.[22] This experience concerns, on the one hand, the very act of crossing a threshold and entering a building space previously accessible to few. On the other hand, it entails directly participating in the expropriation or, certainly more commonly, adopting the position of observer and witness to the seizure of property, which is sometimes arranged in manor interiors. According to accounts, people from neighboring villages or even from other counties come to watch the land reform to see for themselves whether the land was actually being distributed. "People from the surrounding area would go to watch how they were dividing up the landlords' land, how they were giving it to those who either didn't have any at all or had next to nothing,"[23] reported the son of a smallholder farmer from the village of Majdan Sopocki in eastern Poland.

Karl Marx described the material nature of the revolutionary atmosphere, which surrounds like air but exerts pressure above all, in a speech delivered in London at the anniversary celebration of *The People's Paper*.[24] The collective experience of the atmosphere is due to its spatial nature and ability to spread. It is an impersonal phenomenon because it belongs to collective situations, yet it can be experienced as very personal.[25] As noted by Ben Anderson, the incompleteness or indeterminacy of the atmosphere is related to the fact that

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21 Edward Bertold, "Lubelska reforma rolna: ze wspomnień zastępcy kierownika Resortu Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych PKWN" [Lublin agrarian reform: from the memories of the deputy head of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform of the Polish Committee of National Liberation], *Rocznik Lubelski* 2 (1959).

22 Tim Flohr Sørensen, "More Than a Feeling: Towards the Archeology of the Atmosphere," *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2017): 2.

23 "Pamiętnik nr 58" [Diary No. 58], in *Nowe pamiętniki chłopów*, 388.

24 Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*," 577.

25 Ben Anderson, "Affective Atmosphere," *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2017): 80.

it is felt in and through experience.[26] Although it can be sensed, it is difficult to measure whether the atmosphere "works" and, above all, "how it works" on others. Despite the sensual feeling of pressure, "equal to twenty thousand pounds […] do we feel it?"[27] Marx asked.

Statements by participants in the ownership transition show the complexity of the experience and awareness of its radical dimension. Henryk Słabek described this atmosphere of crisis, fear and hope as follows:

> Faced with the decision, whether already, in front of everyone, to reach out for someone else's property, fear and pity were intertwined in peasant feelings towards the heir. After all, not only in fiction books, but even rural radicals infrequently lost their animus before the palace thresholds. And indeed, this was the case, as plenipotentiaries and activists reported with amazement. At the same time, there was something peculiar in the mentality of the rural people, which in the changed situation told them to forget and forgive. More often than not, the landed families who were transported on peasant carts were accompanied not by hatred and contempt but by ordinary human compassion. […] The assumption accompanying the provisions of the PKWN Manifesto that the countryside would not support too harsh measures and too ruthless expropriations was now confirmed throughout.[28]

Both male and female memoir authors often write about disbelief and fear or self-doubt accompanying their involvement in carrying out land reform. At the same time, they feel excitement, joy and euphoria. The ambivalence in describing the experience stems from the scale of the goals set and the radicalism of the following changes. "The peasants were looking forward to it, and there was a lot of talk about it – they would go down to their neighbors in the evenings and advise them on how they would farm," as one author wrote. "However, not all peasants believed in what they themselves had accomplished with the help of the workers – they did not believe in consolidating people's power."[29] The processes and accompanying practices taking place at

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26 Ibid.

27 Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*," 577.

28 Henryk Słabek, *Historia społeczna Polski Ludowej 1944–1970* [Social history of the People's Republic of Poland 1944–1970] (Warszawa: Akademia Nauk Społecznych, 1988), 76–75. Andrzej Leder writes about the fear of participating in the postwar changes in his book *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014).

29 "Pamiętnik nr 395" [Diary No. 395], in *Nowe pamiętniki chłopów*, 335.

the time show that the postwar revolution was not "carried out […] by the Others, without the most subjective parts of the nation identifying themselves with the decisions, actions and responsibility for what happened," as Andrzej Leder writes in his influential book on "dreamed revolution."[30] Post-war dispossessions are received with ambivalent feelings, often in conflict with each other precisely because these events are experienced and lived in an active way, with the subjective participation of the rural community. As such, they are evidence of emotional agency, far from the dreaming described by Leder.

Fate of Objects

The *Land Reform Bulletin*, which emerged in October 1944 from the previous *Biuletyn Informacyjny* [Information bulletin], played an important role in creating the atmosphere around postwar events. This four-page pamphlet, which could be read as a chronicle of the parceling out of landed estates, was a source of information and a guide on how to expropriate, aimed at villagers. It published technical tips on how to divide land and seize landed estates and answered questions and legal doubts. The *Bulletin* was intended not only to describe events but also, to a large extent, to mobilize action. We may suspect the pamphlet was written in response to Stalin's criticism of the new authorities' insufficiently revolutionary working methods. As Bolesław Bierut wrote, recounting the meeting in Moscow, "Comrade Stalin said that if the task before us is the removal of the entire social class […], the breaking of the landowners – then it is no longer a reform, but a land revolution […]. Comrade Stalin criticized us for being soft, for being slack, for not knowing how to come forward boldly enough."[31] The bold methods of those in power were to be followed by the bold steps of the peasantry.

The *Bulletin* was based on reports from county land reform plenipotentiaries and participants in the workers' and surveyors' brigades. In addition, it documented on an ongoing basis the first impressions and emotions

30 Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja*, 17.

31 Protokół posiedzenia KC PPR 9 października 1944 roku [Minutes of the meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party on October 9, 1944], in *Protokoły posiedzeń Biura Politycznego KC PPR 1944–1945*, ed. Aleksander Kochański (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1992), 18, as cited in Longina Jakubowska, "Między ideologią i praktyką reformy rolnej: pamięć ziemiaństwa," *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały* 4 (Instytut Historii PAN, 1999), 22. See also Marcin Markiewicz, "Przekształcenia własnościowe w polskim rolnictwie (1944–1956)" [Ownership transformations in Polish agriculture (1944–1956)], in *"Rewolucja społeczna" czy "dzika przebudowa"? Społeczne skutki przekształceń własnościowych w Polsce (1944–1956)*, ed. Tomasz Osiński (Lublin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2016), 187.

surrounding land reform. The "Peasants Speak" column comprised letters to the editor. As Irena Pancerz-Celejowa, editor of the *Bulletin*, recalled years later, among the reports were those collected directly in the field, which "were brought to me from the countryside by a student […]. He would go with the workers' brigades to the countryside, talk to the peasants, give them paper and a pen to write with, or if they didn't know how to write, he would write himself under their dictation."[32]

The pamphlet was also intended to serve as a "reservoir of concepts" (*zasobnik pojęć*)[33] through which peasants and farm workers could make sense of the revolutionary events. Articles often began with an apostrophe to the peasantry and formulated new tasks for them in the new social reality – in this way, the pamphlet singled out a separate group that was not identical to the authors and writers of the texts. To describe the new social and political situation, language referring to social classes was used, based on clear divisions, as master and peasant, exploiter and exploited. This language was intended to shape the perception of events and peasants as active executors of land reform. The political language vividly defined the place of individual subjects and constructed class identities. If Łańcut was meant to be a material symbol of the revolutionary changes in ownership relations after the war, then the Łańcut castle owner, Alfred Potocki, "served as a materialized image of an aristocrat-traitor of the nation […] who transported collections ('national goods') from the palace by railroad cars to Western Europe with the help of the Germans,"[34] as Longina Jakubowska noted.

Inciting hostility or even hatred towards landowners was an essential element of the texts published in the *Bulletin*. Insulting the lord and removing him was a condition for land reform to run smoothly.[35] The authors of the texts devote a lot of space to manorial property, calling for its immediate seizure. This is because landowners not only remove valuable items from the estate, which, according to the new regulations, no longer belong to them. They also give

32 Irena Pancerz-Celejowa, "Redagowałam *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*" [I edited the Agrarian Reform Bulletin], in *Materiały z sesji popularnonaukowej poświęconej zagadnieniom kształtowania się władzy ludowej na Rzeszowszczyźnie* (Rzeszów: Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR w Rzeszowie. Referat Historii Partii, 1966).

33 On the role of ephemeral prints as a "reservoir of concepts" during the revolutionary changes of the early twentieth century, see Wiktor Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne* [Rebellion and reaction. The revolution of 1905 and plebeian political experience] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Universitas, 2016), 127–193.

34 Jakubowska, "Między ideologią i praktyką reformy rolnej: pamięć ziemiaństwa," 21.

35 "Położyć kres rozkradaniu majątków," *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, October 18, 1944.

or donate items, animals, and machinery to trusted persons for safekeeping, hoping they will someday return for them. Also among the trusted persons are peasants and farm workers, who had, until recently, worked on the confiscated property. "Farm committees do not allow relatives and various acquaintances of landowners to drive away from them with full panniers," prompted the *Bulletin*. "Put your heavy, work-worn hand on these treasures and ask: where are you going to, gentlemen? – We are sorry, but it belongs to us." The author of one of the texts stages an imaginary exchange between the peasants and the landowner. The text alternates between directly addressing the peasants, encouraging them to act, and then addressing the last estate owner on their behalf.

> Peasants! Are you unable to find this livestock? In Zalesie [manor – A. Z.], the owner of the estate [Roman – A. Z.] Gumiński saves the remains of the livestock for himself, distributing them to his friends. Hey, Mr. Gumiński! The peasant will not give his [property]! He will claim what is rightfully his![36]

The proclamations published in the *Bulletin* were designed to build a new bond between peasants, farm workers, and manor property by excluding their previous owners. At the same time, the authors note that material objects were beginning to divide the rural community instead of uniting it – for among the "acquaintances of the estate owners" are also trusted farm workers and peasants. Objects are thus used to merge identification and express class identity in the language of manor-peasant antagonism. In these vivid descriptions, an abrupt change in property relations takes place. The transformation of relations with material objects begins in the pages of these ephemeral prints even before land reform is completed and manor property physically changes hands. "Manor property" in the *Bulletin* changes status to "peasant property," looted by landowners. This sudden revolution in language also takes place in official documents: "unless the objects mentioned above [works of art] have previously been looted by the owner [emphasis A. Z.], it is imperative that they be separated from everyday objects and gathered in a separate room,"[37] the Department of Culture and Art in Rzeszów appealed to all county

36 "Jak długo będziecie hulać panowie?" [How long will you party, gentlemen?], *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, October 18, 1944.

37 [Pismo] WKiSz UW w Rzeszowie do PRN z dn. 26 października 1944 roku nr 0-2/45, k. 3, sygn. 2109, k. 1 zespół 36, Urząd Wojewódzki w Rzeszowie, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki, Archiwum Państwowe w Rzeszowie, as cited in Artur Wiktor, "Losy ruchomych dóbr kultury ziemiaństwa w woj. rzeszowskim po zakończeniu II wojny światowej w latach 1944–1947" (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, 2008), 105.

national councils. According to a decree of the minister of agriculture and land reform, as part of the reform, some of the movable property of the landed gentry was not subject to seizure for state ownership. Excluded from the state takeover were material objects that were not directly related to the running of the farm, i.e., clothing, kitchen tools, bedding, jewelry, furniture, or memorabilia, provided they did not have artistic, scientific, or museum value.

No Longer Kissing the Paws of Thieving Masters[38]

The authors devote little space to the landlord and his property in their memoirs on land reform. More frequent mention is made of the land distribution process itself and the differing attitudes of the community that accompanied it. Most often, the palpably tense atmosphere – a mixture of uncertainty, fear, and excitement – is emphasized. Usually beyond description are the incidents of property entry, seizure, or destruction – both of their own practices and those of their neighbors – known from other documents. Even years later, according to Anna Wylegała's research on the peasant experience of land reform and the memory of it, interviewees rarely mention it.[39] In the context of the limited number of accounts, the scholar argues that "apparently there is a self-censorship at work here that makes them consider such actions as nevertheless condemnable."[40] Such a perspective calls for nuance, as it leaves aside a whole range of emotions that do not fit into the guilt and shame associated with looting and the belief that these actions are immoral in nature.

The immediate postwar period of revolutionary changes produces an extensive group of "nobody's" property.[41] The status of the manor possessions

38 Statement by the head of the Provincial Department of Self-Government Stanisław Rejminiak, "Chłopi – wzmacniajcie władzę demokratyczną" [Peasants – strengthen democratic power], *Biuletyn Reformy Rolnej*, November 2, 1944.

39 Anna Wylegała, "O perspektywach badania chłopskiego doświadczenia reformy rolnej. Z warsztatu badawczego" [On the prospects for studying the peasant experience of land reform. From the research workshop], *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 10 (2017): 273–305. See also Anna Wylegała, "Nowi właściciele dworów i pałaców ziemiańskich: próba portretu zbiorowego" [New owners of landed estates' manors and palaces: an attempt at a collective portrait], *Studia Socjologiczne* 2 (2020): 163–192. On the silence surrounding the looting of the manor in the context of ownership changes in Transylvania, see Emanuela Grama, "A Deconstruction Story: Property, Memory, and Temporality in a Transylvanian Village," *History and Anthropology* 31 (5) (2020): 618–642.

40 Wylegała, "O perspektywach badania chłopskiego doświadczenia reformy rolnej," 285.

41 See Agata Zborowska, *Życie rzeczy w powojennej Polsce* [The life of things in post-war Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019).

was unclear because they were not always legally regulated by official decrees.[42] Given the rhetoric the authorities built around manorial estates, it can be argued that looting was somewhat permitted. Personal belongings left behind by the previous owner of the estate were of little interest to the authorities if they did not represent a particular value. While there may have been some connivance in the looting of specific items from the estate, the division between items permitted to be taken and those forbidden blurred in everyday practice. According to first-hand accounts, the authorities did not always even keep up with taking inventory of the items left behind and securing the property. "It was only later, in 1945, that the Związek Samopomocy Chłopskiej [Peasant self-help association], at the behest of the district authorities, began to pursue and record the dismantled equipment, but even then, little could be found,"[43] wrote the author of one memoir. However, the lost items were not only sought by the state administration, but the (previous) owners returning to their estates also tried to find them. The former landowners' desire to reclaim their objects forces them to cross the threshold of a space hitherto left out of the manor's interest. The son of a farm worker in the village of Osnowo noted contemptuously the former owner's greed, which ultimately prompted her to directly confront the workers' deplorable living conditions:

> In the very first days of her stay at the estate, her ladyship [*wielmożna pani*] deigned to visit our stinking apartments, something she had never done before the war. The heiress wanted to pull the wool over the eyes of the ordinary laborer so that she was seemingly not disgusted by the pigsty in which he lived. During these visits, the heiress would recognize in people [from the village – A. Z.] things brought from the palace and have them returned to the field house or gardener. In this way, when she circled the entire village, she had almost all the furniture back.[44]

The looting of the manor involves a large part of the rural community and is both a collective and an anonymous practice, and therefore, it must be based on mutual trust between its members. It can be seen as part of the "hidden transcript" created in power relations by subordinate groups. James C. Scott defines it as a "backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken [or

42 See e.g. "Dekret z dnia 2 marca 1945 roku o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych" [Decree of March 2, 1945 on abandoned properties], *Dziennik Ustaw* 9, poz. 45 (1945), accessed December 20, 2023, http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19450090045/O/D19450045. pdf.

43 "Pamiętnik nr 369" [Diary no. 369], in *Nowe pamiętniki chłopów*, 38.

44 Ibid., 413–414.

done – A. Z.] in the face of power," and which, as such, is created in the face of hegemonic "public conduct."[45] Public conduct includes behavior expected and accepted by the dominant. An example is the empathetic gestures toward the until recently ruling social class by peasants and farm workers, common in the memories of landowners, including helping to store property from which the owners were dispossessed. The expressions of compassion may have had a sincere basis, especially in the case of good relations with the manor. Nevertheless, the depictions of the landowners do not show what the peasants and farm workers really thought about them.[46] Material objects were indeed accepted for safekeeping to help save them from confiscation, but not always with the obligation to return them. As Piotr Turnau, son of the Mikulice estate owner, reported: "in 1947, my sisters traveled to Mikulice from Rzeszów to retrieve a closet given for safekeeping along with other items at the home of former cook Mania Głowata, but she did not recognize the ladies and did not let them into the house."[47] We do not know the woman's account or the details of this event. However, it is possible that she initially acted in accordance with the expectations of the former owner and, as the property was being parceled out, agreed to store his possessions, thus enacting a performance of obedience and empathy.[48] After the war, it was difficult to determine the sustainability of the rapid changes. Such expected assistance was part of the public conduct and may have been "an attempt to secure the favor of the owners of the parceled estates in the event of a possible change in the political situation in the country."[49] When the situation stabilized, it was no longer necessary to uphold public protocol toward former property owners.

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45 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

46 I am paraphrasing the words of Michał Rauszer, who wrote about how the nobility imagined the peasants' perception of them. See Michał Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych* [The power of the subordinated] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2021), 66.

47 "Relacja Piotra Turnaua – syna Stefana właściciela majątku w Mikulicach z czerwca 2007 r." [Report by Piotr Turnau – son of Stefan, the owner of the estate in Mikulice, from June 2007], as cited in Wiktor, "Losy ruchomych dóbr kultury ziemiaństwa," 100.

48 Rauszer discusses other examples of the dynamics between public conduct and hidden transcript, see Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych*.

49 Grzegorz Miernik, "Ewolucja poglądów chłopów na kwestię własności pod wpływem polityki społecznogospodarczej władz (1944–1956)" [Evolution of peasants' views on the issue of property under the influence of the authorities' socio-economic policy (1944––1956)], in *Dwór a społeczności lokalne na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, 315.

As Vicky Osterweil notes in her book *In Defense of Looting*, looting can be seen as a practical activity focused on the immediate and direct redistribution of goods to which one has not previously had access. It is a pragmatic effort to improve living conditions.[50] However, the author emphasizes that looting harbors the revolutionary potential of undermining property rights, often based on relations of power and domination, supported by ideology and violence. Instead of seeing these practices as apolitical and chaotic actions, she suggests regarding them as significant moments in the course of radical social change. This political dimension of radical ownership changes was pointed out by the author of one memoir:

> One had to first understand for oneself that nothing falls easily into one's hands. Brotherly blood was poured, but not in vain. It slowly washed away the mold built up on the psyche of the peasant. And no wonder that, when taking the lord's land, he went to pound the tiled stoves in the palaces and tear up the parquet floors in the rooms. This was not a reflex of savagery but a desire for revenge for the wrongs suffered and a path to self-liberation. I write this because this is how I found myself at the time. And there were many [like me – A. Z.]…[51]

In the landowners' narratives, the descriptions of irrational and barbaric acts of inexplicable destruction of landed property assume the political ignorance of those acting. Contrary to this view, however, the diarist emphasizes the full awareness of the oppressed community carrying out the attack. He describes it as a transformative experience of the participants, who liberate themselves from their previous relations of subordination. The looting may be a means of replenishing resources. Still, it is also an undermining of previous power and a form of revenge for wrongs, especially since it is often not seen in terms of guilt but as a reclamation of what one has "worked out on one's own" for generations, which was then seized. However, as the memoirs show, looting as a form of struggle is also directed against the new power. Expected and unwanted collectivization of farms triggers anonymous resistance practices: "the looted parts of livestock and dead stock and the demolition of manor farm buildings were considered a good solution by our local agrarians, claiming that there would now be no opportunity

50 Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2020).

51 Wacław Daruk, "W poszukiwaniu prawdy" [In search of truth], in *Gotuj broń! Wspomnienia chłopów z lat 1939–1948*, ed. Wanda Chodorowska, Zdzisław Lubowicz and Mieczysław Róg-Świostek (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1969), 335–336.

conducive to the establishment of 'kolkhozes,'"[52] wrote one diarist ironically. These practical measures against the expected actions of the new authorities are carried out with the knowledge of the entire community, although not always with the approval of all its members. Something that could not be expressed in the form of a complaint becomes a covert protest to prevent the implementation of changes in property relations not consulted with the community and often not approved by it.

Misuse and Dislocation

In landowner accounts and memoirs, looting is described as barbarism, uncivilized behavior resulting from a lack of familiarity with valuable objects and a lack of respect for private property. This behavior is accompanied by chaos, an outburst of unrestrained instincts that leads to the destruction of valuable objects. As Tadeusz Czaplicki noted with disdain in his memoirs:

> When I leave the manor, I see a peculiar scene, when some backward crone knocked over a beautiful inlaid afternoon table with the top on the snow, and between the carved legs, having put on pillows, quilts and other bedding, she pulls along a quasi-sled by a string tied to one of these carved legs.[53]

The rural community members give manorial objects new meanings to suit their own needs, thus discovering the objects' "misuse value," to use Bill Brown's term. The misuse value "captions the effectiveness of broken routine (the interruption of habit) as an unanticipated mode of apprehending the object world anew."[54] This applies not only to the afternoon table, used as a handy means of transporting more necessary and useful bed linen, as well as other not-so-ordinary things. As former landowner Ludomir Wolski lamented in his memoirs, "My sister Kleczewska, while in the village of Siennów a few months after being evicted from the manor, saw a Korzec porcelain salad bowl from the manor, so an object of museum value, from which the chickens had pecked the offal and bran."[55] His deliberate

52 "Pamiętnik nr 369," in *Nowe pamiętniki chłopów*, 38.

53 Tadeusz Czaplicki, *Wspomnienia*, as cited in Jakubowska, "Między ideologią i praktyką reformy rolnej," 17.

54 Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 373.

55 Ludomir Kościesza Wolski, "*O tym i owym*. Wspomnienia z przemyskiego z I poł. XX w." [About this and that. Memories from Przemyśl in the first half of twentieth century], Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, Biblioteka Rękopisów, rkps. 13540/11, as cited in: Wiktor, "Losy ruchomych dóbr kultury ziemiaństwa," 102.

distancing from the usefulness of objects – their everyday, most ordinary use – serves to show the new owners' lack of competence. In the landowner narratives, peasants and farm workers are unfamiliar with manorial objects – they do not know how to take care of them or how to use them. They have no relationship with these material objects because objects from the manor do not belong to peasants' and workers' social worlds. The misuse value shows the possible other-than-assumed uses of objects by people from different social classes than those for which they are intended. In this way, it reveals not only the potentiality inherent in material objects, but also the inventiveness of their new users.

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Representations of land reform in the official media, as well as the descriptions of peculiar "looting spectacles" repeated in landowners' memoirs, are powerful images in which material objects play a crucial role. Used in the narrative of the new authorities, they were intended to help create an affective atmosphere and thus involve the rural community itself in the expropriation process. The narrative was meant to simultaneously identify the "rightful" owners – not the landed gentry, but the hitherto exploited peasants and farm workers, who could reclaim the fruits of their labor. In this way, the new authorities try to expose the class conflict, covered on the other hand by narratives of landowners psychologizing the looting of manors, in which a mindless mob participates. Minority narratives nuance this picture by showing the less apparent moments of these post-war ownership changes. The ambivalent, often contradictory emotions surrounding land reform – initial resistance or indecision associated with disbelief in the face of the situation, sympathy for dispossessed landowners, and, at the same time, excitement and a sense of justice from the changes taking place – reveal the complexity of the experience of the actors directly involved in these events. The narratives of peasants and farm workers show the places of active resistance to property relations – both the existing ones and those introduced by the new authorities. One example is looting as an activity not accepted in public conduct but present in a hidden transcript. This way of redistributing material objects allows us to reconstruct other ways of experiencing and understanding radical social changes. These lesser-known narratives point not so much to ethical readings of looting and destruction of landed property, as to possible political ones seeing them as undermining a property order entangled in relations of power and domination.

Abstract

Agata Zborowska
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

"It Belongs to Us!" Narratives of Property Relations at a Time of Post-war Land Reform in Poland

The article deals with the property transformations that accompanied land reform in Poland after Second World War. Zborowska begins by reconstructing the authorities' top-down narrative, focused on the property of the landed gentry (palace, manor). Its aim was to create an atmosphere that would help mobilise rural communities to participate in expropriation and the redistribution of land. She then analyses the looting of (post) manor property on the basis of post-war memoirs and accounts by members of rural communities. The fact that only few such accounts exists, she argues, is not solely due to a sense of guilt. Alternative explanations for the practice of looting are presented.

Keywords

land reform, post-war era, potential history, expropriation, looting, misuse value

Sebastian Jagielski

Kmicic's Cut. The Hidden Anal History of Polish Cinema

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.10 | ORCID: 0000-0002-6989-1265

Sebastian Jagielski – an Associate Professor in the Institute of Audiovisual Arts at Jagiellonian University. He is the author of *Maskarady męskości. Pragnienie homospołeczne w polskim kinie fabularnym* [Masquerades of masculinity: Homosocial desire in Polish cinema] (2013) and *Przerwane emancypacje. Polityka ekscesu w kinie polskim lat 1968–1982* [Interrupted emancipations: The politics of excess in the Polish cinema of 1968–1982] (2021). His articles have been published in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, *Studies in European Cinema* and *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. Email: sebastian.jagielski@uj.edu.pl.

1.

In November 2000, the actor Daniel Olbrychski burst into the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, to Piotr Uklański's exhibition *Naziści* [The Nazis], consisting of photographs of actors playing the roles of Nazi officers. He took out Kmicic's saber hidden under his coat, a prop from Jerzy Hoffman's film *Potop* [The deluge] (1973–1974), and cut to pieces a still photo from Claude Lelouche's *Les uns et les autres* [The ones and the others] (1981), in which Olbrychski appears in a Nazi uniform. This cut was recorded by a Polish Television camera. Jacek Balcer, reporting on the channel's news program, said, "the actor was late. He was very agitated. He talked about what he thought of the exhibition. We started filming it. He really boiled over."[1] The reason for Olbrychski's fury was that he thought that his image had been used to promote fascism. He found it strange that the exhibition was called *The Nazis* when he thought it should have been entitled *Actors Playing Nazis*

1 Iwona Leończuk and Tomasz Kuzia, "Kmicic porąbał nazistów" [Kmicic chopped up the Nazis], *Super Express*, November 18–19, 2000. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

because the stills used were from anti-Nazi films.[2] The star's performance was widely commented on in the media; questions were raised as to where art ends and propaganda begins, or where happening ends and marketing begins. The press wrote, on the one hand, that Olbrychski had only copied the gesture of the Nazis destroying avant-garde works considered by them to be "degenerate art," but on the other hand, that he was symbolically annihilating Poland's eternal enemy, that is Germany, which was seen as a general public approval of his action.[3] The controversy surrounding the exhibition led to its closure by the culture minister, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski [Solidarity Electoral Action, AWS]. It seems that the cut at Zachęta was hiding something rather than revealing. Olbrychski's hysterical act of cutting himself off from his own seductive image[4] compels us to ask about cuts of a different kind, that is anal, editorial and censorial.

A cut always points to that which is concealed. D. A. Miller, in his analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), associates cuts with the anus.[5] The anus, unlike the phallus associated with the social field, is deeply hidden. An anal cut thus signifies the place where that which cannot be revealed and seen is stored. It indicates a concealment that nevertheless invariably attracts attention.[6] That which is hidden in the communal discourse founded on national

2 Daniel Olbrychski, "Szabla Kmicica" [Kmicic's sabre], interview by Aleksander Kropiwnicki, *Wprost*, December 3, 2000.

3 Jarosław Jakimczyk, "Daniel ikonoklasta" [Daniel the iconoclast], *Życie*, December 6, 2000. In the TVN program *Pod napięciem* [Live voltage] on November 19, 2000, more than 7,000 viewers backed the actor, while only just over 1,000 sided with Zachęta.

4 As Olbrychski himself said, "in the exhibition booklet you can read that actors are seduced by the Nazi uniform; that they willingly put it on. Some rubbish about fascination with Nazism!" (Daniel Olbrychski, "Zorro, syn Tuhaj-beja?" [Zorro, son of Tugai Bey?], interview by Bogdan Maciejewski, *Super Express*, November 24, 2000). And likewise in another place: "it said in the booklet that there was something alluring about the Nazi uniform so seduced by this, the artists donned it frequently. I'm very sorry, but that is rubbish!" (Daniel Olbrychski, "Nadal jestem nieobliczalny" [I'm still unpredictable], interview by Małgorzata Puczyłowska, *Przyjaciółka*, January 6–12, 2001). Olbrychski was clearly disturbed by the (homo)erotic aura – as much of the Nazi uniform itself as of the men who wore it. Incidentally, at the same time he was starring in an openly gay production of Charles Dyer's play Staircase, directed by Piotr Łazarkiewicz, in which he and Jerzy Radziwiłowicz portrayed a gay couple.

5 D. A. Miller, "Anal *Rope*," *Representations* 32 (1990): 114–133. See Lee Edelman, "*Rear Window's* Glasshole," in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 72–96.

6 See Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

and religious values, of which Olbrychski, Kmicic's saber in hand, became a defender, is revealed in Tomasz Kozak's video *Klasztor Inversus* [Cloister Inversus] (2003). In various artistic projects, for example multimedia installations (*Zmurzynienie 1. Krótka historia pewnej metafory* [Negroization 1. A short history of a certain metaphor, 2006]), his found footage films (*Lekcja Lucyferyczna* [Luciferian lesson, 2006)], or essay-manifestos (*Późna polskość: pamięć nie/naturalnie trawersująca* [Late Polishness: (Un)naturally traversing memory, 2017]), Kozak boldly explores the boundaries of Polishness. He rewrites those images and narratives that seem suspicious, troublesome, discredited in the public discourse, seeing in them a chance to critically, that is ironically and autoerotically, overcome the ossified and empty Polishness. His strategy, like Uklański's, is to capture and appropriate other people's images; on the one hand, those most sacred in society, and on the other, those most condemned. In *Cloister Inversus*, he juxtaposes selected scenes from the communist-era adaptations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy*, *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Colonel Wołodyjowski] (1969) and *The Deluge*, both directed by Hoffman, with a gay hardcore pornographic film. The editing cuts make it possible to show that which is not visible in Sienkiewicz's overly religious and patriotic adaptations, but which is, after all, still present there; that which has been deeply hidden in body cuts and film cuts. Kozak enables us, as Jean-Luc Godard would say, to see what cannot be seen.

This violation of a prohibition provokes a different kind of cutting, that is a censorious cutting that makes it possible to remove (i.e. conceal) offensive, obscene images. Lou Andreas-Salomé calls the moment of renunciation of anal pleasure the "first prohibition" that leads to the constitution of the individual as subject.[7] The anal prohibition introduces a clear cut causing separation between genital and anal sexuality. The former is privileged, associated with what can be seen (the penis) while obscuring what cannot be seen (the anus). Judith Butler argues that the subject is performatively produced through a series of hidden and explicit norms and prohibitions, referring to this process, the process of censoring, as the "primary cut."[8] Kozak sets images in motion, multiplies and loops them, all in order to violate the permanent connection between God and the Nation in Polish culture through, as he puts it, "sadistic anality." In *Cloister Inversus*, anality means the negating of the compulsion to reproduce the traditional, that is national, religious

7 Lou Andreas-Salomé, "Anal und Sexual," *Imago* 4 (1916). See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, vol. 7, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 104.

8 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 138.

and patriarchal codes of Polish culture, in which lies the transformative and liberating power. The anal cut thus becomes a way of radically breaking the social contract, on which the national community is founded, and opening up to the creative work of others, that is non-traditional, non-patriarchal and non-heteronormative social practices.

2.

Colonel Wołodyjowski and Kmicic, the main protagonists of the communist-era film adaptations of Sienkiewicz's books, became identifying figures in the 1970s and reflected social hopes and desires. These films reinforced the image of national, religious, and patriarchal Polishness, and moved society away from emancipatory experiences. A few years later, in the period of Solidarity, they would contribute to the restoration of the code, disrupted as a result of the "dreamed-through revolution" (1939–1956) and founded on the noble ideology of the code on which the post-1989 identity of the community would be based. This code was built on patriotism, Catholicism, the sacred patriarchal family, the marginalization of Others, and Sarmatian morals.[9] The myths of the Sarmatians, the nobility and national unity would return with renewed strength in the late 1990s. In 1999, cinema adaptations of Sienkiewicz's *Ogniem i mieczem* [With fire and sword] directed by Hoffman and Wajda's film adaptation of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* [Sir Tadeusz] were released. Like *Colonel Wolodyjowski* and *The Deluge*, they were spectacular box office successes; in the year of their premiere, they were watched by more than 13 million viewers. Why such great popularity for adaptations of school set texts? These films did well in implementing the conservative ideology that prevailed in the public sphere at the time and in reinforcing the stereotypical, overly religious and patriotic image of Polishness. Through identification with heroic protagonists, they effectively cured collective, post-turning-point frustrations and complexes, while at the same time expressing a longing for what was supposedly permanent and unchangeable (the noble tradition). The great need for patriotic and nationalist affects was also linked to the fear of Polishness being dissolved into Europeanness in connection with Poland's efforts to join the European Union.[10]

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9 See Przemysław Czapliński, "Plebejski, populistyczny, posthistoryczny: Formy polityczności sarmatyzmu masowego" [Plebeian, populist, posthistorical: Forms of politics of mass Sarmatism], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2015): 21–45.

10 See Marek Haltof, "Narodowe nostalgie: Uwagi o współczesnych adaptacjach klasyki literackiej" [National nostalgies: Remarks on contemporary adaptations of literary classics], in *Polskie kino popularne*, ed. Piotr Zwierzchowski and Daria Mazur (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo

Only a few years after the success of *With Fire and Sword*, Kozak proposed in *Cloister Inversus* a shocking deconstruction of Sienkiewiczian notions that had been organizing the symbolic framework of the collective for decades. Above all, however, he recklessly exposed their perverse potential. This can be illustrated with two excerpts from the two parts of *The Trilogy*: in *Colonel Wołodyjowski*, the writer associates the impaling of Azja Tuhajbejowicz with the bliss penetrating the body of the convict. In *The Deluge*, meanwhile, he describes the scene in which Kuklinowski, before touching Kmicic's body with a tar brush, has him stripped completely naked as if he wanted not only to shame and humiliate him, but perhaps also to take pleasure in the sight of the naked, tormented male body.[11] Kozak reveals this sadomasochistic pornography of Sienkiewicz's using the found-footage technique. The editing makes it possible to combine fragmented and separated images to show what cannot be seen in a single frame. Georges Didi-Huberman, writing about Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988) in *Images in Spite of All*, noted that "what we cannot see must therefore be m a d e i n t o a m o n t a g e." This, in turn, will make it possible to "k n o w i n s p i t e o f a l l even that which remains impossible to see entirely, that which even remains inaccessible as an all."[12] To be able to make a montage, however, one must first dissect.

In *Cloister Inversus*, images that would otherwise never have met come together and influence each other. In the opening section of the film, Kmicic does not defend the Jasna Góra Monastery, but is in charge of the siege thereof. "Time to assault the monastery! Time to assault God!" he blasphemes. The first shot exposes the unveiling of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, while the next shot shows a series of looped explosions turning the monastery into rubble. Yet it is not the Jasna Góra Monastery, revered by Polish Catholics, that is at the center of the frames, but the phallic cannons being laboriously rolled up the hill by some men, from which a series of bullets will be fired like male semen ejaculated at sexual climax. Kozak consistently uses these sexual references in the film; where the symbol of the first part is the phallus, the male anus becomes the sign of the second part. As a result of the injuries sustained during the attack on the monastery, Kmicic is delirious with fever. He dreams, and this state is distinguished by

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UKW, 2011); Ewa Mazierska, "In the Land of Noble Knights and Mute Princesses: Polish Heritage Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 2 (2001): 167–182.

11 See Ryszard Koziołek, *Ciała Sienkiewicza: Studia o płci i przemocy* [Sienkiewicz's bodies: Studies on gender and violence] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2018), 358–378.

12 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 137–138.

different colors in the images; as if on a tropical island, a strange man fishes him out of the sea. From then on, the sadomasochistic images of *The Deluge* seamlessly intermingle with gay hardcore porn. Kmicic's double scorches his body suspended from a beam with a flaming torch, which is juxtaposed with huge close-ups of a penis penetrating a man's anus. In turn, the image of Azja's burnt-out eye symbolizing castration is combined with a scene of brutal anal fisting. Kozak mocks the nightmares of the right-wing and Catholic reason; here anal sex is associated with hellfire, and the difficult-to-bear scream of Azja being impaled on a wooden stake seamlessly merges with the sound of church bells. The third part of the film, entitled *Duchu tajemniczy wprowadź mnie do tych bez wyjścia polskich otchłani* [Mysterious spirit, lead me into these exitless Polish abysses], shows Kmicic's transformation into Azja. Here we have a metamorphosis of a national hero into an ethnically alien anti-hero. Kmicic and his companions look into the orifice of a well just as a porn actor would look into an anus in a rimming scene. Then we see, from Azja's point of view, the point of the stake plunging into his anus. This shocking spectacle of suffering is watched by the men around him as if it were staged for them, for their pleasure. In the background we hear: "Your Grace" (literally, "Your Love"), and on the screen we see the caption: "My love." Kozak emphasizes that this torment sends Azja into ecstasy, which faithfully illustrates Sienkiewicz's words. He wrote that the impalement caused Azja pain "so terrible that it almost bordered on monstrous pleasure."[13] This brings to mind Freud's reflections on sexual pleasure. As Leo Bersani put it, "the sexual emerges as the *jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is 'pressed' beyond a certain threshold of endurance."[14] It is significant that the sexual is revealed in *Colonel Wołodyjowski* not only by the suggestion that the impalement gave Azja painful pleasure (*jouissance*), but also by the explicit linking of this act, which is in fact a death sentence, with an act "contrary to nature," which, according to religious doctrine, signifies sodomy.

Kozak exposes the male body being opened with a pointed stake, penis, hand or tongue. And this body is only penetrated by other men. The violation of the corporeal boundaries of masculinity in patriarchal culture is seen as the most profound threat to gender stability. The male body, unlike the female body, should be tightly sealed as any attempt to penetrate its orifices

13 Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Colonel Wołodyjowski] (Warszawa: Ex Libris-Galeria Polskiej Książki, 1999), 485–488.

14 Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 24.

risks losing the stability and coherence of the phallic (patriarchal) subject. In the development of the libido, the genital stage is preceded by a pre-genital organization in which it is not the genital partial drives, but the sadistic and anal drives that turn out to be crucial. Andreas-Salomé, cited by Freud in his *Three Treatises on Sexual Theory*, noted that the event that decisively influences our entry into the world as subjects is not the castration complex, but the renunciation of the anus as an erogenous zone.

> The history of the first prohibition which a child comes across – the prohibition against getting pleasure from anal activity and its products – has a decisive effect on his whole development…the infant has a glimpse of an environment hostile to his instinctual impulses, on which he learns to separate his own entity from this alien one and on which he carries out the first "repression" of his possibilities for pleasure. From that time on, what is "anal" remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life.[15]

Anality is henceforth associated with what is abject, and genitalia with what is vital and life-giving. Freud added elsewhere that the child must relinquish anal pleasure in favor of their "social dignity."[16] If the only distributor of identity is the phallus, linked to the social field, then the public use made of the anus, linked to the private, entails the danger of disintegration of the tight boundaries of identity. This is what Guy Hocquenghem wrote about it; homosexual anal desire "is related in particular to the pre-personal state of desire. To this is linked the fear of loss of identity, as it is state of desire."[17]

It is the anal impulses that are the subversive power behind Kozak's interference with Sienkiewicz's patriotic fantasy. He returns to anality as a source of pleasure and, at the same time, to the first prohibition that compels one to see the anal as the abhorrent. The mix-up of the images of Azja and Kmicic leaves the audience perplexed; who is actually behind the destruction of the Sarmatian world? In the finale, Kmicic, transformed into the resurrected Azja, that is, into that which is repulsive and has to be removed from the social space, returns as an ethnic one-eyed monster. In other words, the otherness excluded from the national body manifests itself in the form of an erratic abject being. Kozak argues that he becomes the "personification of

15 Andreas-Salomé, "Anal und Sexual." See Freud, *On Sexuality*, 104.

16 Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. Stanley Hall (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1920), 272.

17 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 106.

transgression" which "consumes, digests and destroys the overly religious and patriotic discourse" in order to open society to change and renewal.[18] Kmicic-Azja, transformed into a monster, turns out to be a queer subject, a figure of the death drive of the social order "opposed to every form of social viability."[19] This hard-to-articulate excess, writes Lee Edelman, "names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism."[20] Instead of fighting against associating queer subjects with nihilism, destruction and negativity, he proposes to accept this affinity, distancing himself ostentatiously from the "heterofuturism" investing in the child. In a similar, anti-community spirit, Kozak wrote of his film, "The sodomitic negation of general norms also has an emancipatory dimension as it signifies the liberation of the individual from the constraints imposed on them by repressive social and cultural institutions."[21] This liberation can be achieved by breaking with the "first prohibition," and thus by incorporating repressed anal pleasure into the social field.

Even in the early 1970s, Guy Hocquenghem noted that male homosexuality gives life to a different, non-hierarchical, non-phallic and non-vertical type of social bond. He refers to these new social relations and practices as anal grouping, "homosexual desire is a group desire" for it restores to the anus "its functions as a desiring bond, and by collectively reinvesting it against a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret."[22] In *Cloister Inversus*, sadomasochistic anal fantasies are mixed with images of crucifixion. Together with his companions, Kmicic gazes into the orifice of a well as if looking at a projection screen, where he sees his double, Azja, being impaled. Other men watch fascinated as the orifices of his body – the anus and the mouth – open up under the painful sensation. This choreography is reminiscent of an arrangement known from the sexual practice of gangbang, where multiple partners take turns to penetrate one person. And this obscene image becomes associated with Christ nailed to the cross. Kozak clearly provokes these associations; in one of the earlier

18 Tomasz Kozak, "Jak filozofować szablą (Kmicica)" [How to philosophize with a saber (of Kmicic's)], in Kozak, *Wytępić te wszystkie bestie: Rozmowy i eseje* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, 2010), 452.

19 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

20 Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

21 Kozak, "Jak filozofować szablą (Kmicica)," 449.

22 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

scenes, we see a sculpture depicting Jesus on the cross, as a voice off-camera is heard saying: "suck my breast, touch me." Moreover, he juxtaposes the scene of Azja's "crucifixion" with a shot in which Zagłoba recites the Christian prayer *Eternal Rest* and Basia prays in front of a holy image. The spectator gets the impression that Azja has become an object of worship. Through these shocking displacements, the anus gains a symbolic representation and becomes public and not just private. The phallic and vaginal symbolism has a permanent representation in culture, while the anal one is not recognized and thematized. Kozak spectacularly exposes it to the public in his film.

3.

The aesthetic rule used in *Cloister Inversus* is reminiscent of the contraction-dilation principle adopted by Godard in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Sudden images, bursting in an accelerated rhythm, such as cannon shots, an inverted cross or anal fisting are combined with slow-motion shots of a gay utopia (naked men and a paradise island). The emphasis shifts from representation to affective impact; Kozak condenses and contrastingly sharpens the images to bring them into violent collision and an explosion of pent-up energy. These image-explosions form a visual excess. In film theory, excess is a sign of surplus, or anything that exceeds the needs of the film narrative. It is a significant textual "failure," a gap or rupture in the fabric of the film narrative. The concept of excess emerged in film theory in the 1970s through Roland Barthes's essay *The Third Sense*. Barthes analyzes several still photographs from Sergei Eisenstein's 1944 film *Ivan the Terrible*. The third, open-ended sense, stands for that which is excessive. Barthes describes it through a series of dividing cuts:

> It is clear that the obtuse meaning is the epitome of a counternarrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative) – an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet "true."[23]

Barthes later developed this concept further in his work on the photographic *punctum*, which means a small cut, a hole or a wound. The author of *Camera Lucida* describes this concept as if he were writing about penetration: "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."[24] Punctum is a "mark

23 Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 63.

24 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 26.

made by a pointed instrument"[25] like the sharpened stake piercing or opening Azja's body. Kozak repeats this gesture on the film material, cutting Hoffman's films to pieces and reassembling them. He highlights their aesthetic, affective and corporeal intensity and reveals the perverse and iconoclastic nature of national culture insidiously hidden in them, in the bodies of the films.

However, the opening of what should remain tightly closed is never unpunished. In the word "excess" we hear not only an echo of the third sense or *punctum* from Barthes's essays, but also that which violates and transgresses social norms. Excess signifies both a method of dismantling the structures of film narrative and a strategy of political resistance. It brings to light, through the excessively corporeal, the shocking or the provocative, the various ruptures and fissures within the dominant ideological, cultural, social or political structures, while at the same time revealing what these structures conceal and exclude.[26] It is not surprising, therefore, that *Cloister Inversus* fell victim to censorship before it was even presented to the audience. In 2004, Kozak's debut solo exhibition, *Wprowadź mnie do głębszych nocy* [Lead me into deeper nights], took place, including *Cloister Inversus*. As a result of the objection of Wojciech Krukowski, director of the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, the film was only shown at the opening. According to Kozak's account, Krukowski said that it was his "Catholic conscience" that did not allow him to include this piece in the exhibition.[27] What is more, after the Law and Justice party regained power in 2015, that is during a period of further national-religious intensification, the film was removed from the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw where Kozak's works were collected. The works and activities of the critical avant-garde, which explored the tension between nationalism, Catholicism and sexuality, were perceived by the extremely conservative authorities (Law and Justice, League of Polish Families) as an attack on things of national sacredness. This "sacredness" therefore had to be defended at all costs. The most emblematic example was the case of Dorota Nieznalska, who in 2003, the same year when Kozak made *Cloister Inversus*, was sentenced to six months' community service for offending religious feelings with her installation *Pasja* [Passion]. What offended the faithful was a color picture of a large penis placed on a metal cross.[28]

25 Ibid., 26.

26 See Sebastian Jagielski, *Przerwane emancypacje: Polityka ekscesu w kinie polskim lat 1968–1982* [Interrupted emancipations: The politics of excess in Polish cinema, 1968–1982] (Kraków: Universitas, 2021).

27 Tomasz Kozak, email message to author, October 11, 2021.

28 At that time, the defenders of religious values, who were attached to patriotic art, fiercely attacked the works of critical artists who referred to religious symbols. These attacks

Significantly, Azja's body opened with a stake aroused concern in both capitalist and communist Poland; it bothered not only art historians invoking Catholic conscience, but also communist officials. This is evidenced by the reactions of decision-makers to the scene of anal penetration with a stake during the pre-approval screening of *Colonel Wołodyjowski*. Film critic Zbigniew Klaczyński said that *Colonel Wołodyjowski* is "a very valuable film and it is in our interest that it be watched by schoolchildren," and for this reason he insisted that the scene of the impaling of Azja be shortened. "Perhaps leave out a little bit…I think you need to be rather careful,"[29] he added. Although the figure of the child, as Edelman notes, continues to serve to establish and stabilize traditional and often oppressive social norms, it seems that it was not only the fear of depraving young people that was behind Klaczyński's words. After March '68, the party had to return the favor to the Church for maintaining a passive attitude towards the "March events," which helped stabilize the tense situation in Poland. Therefore, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the authorities blocked and censored absolutely everything that might irritate the Church hierarchy. This meant not only openly anti-Catholic films, but also those that broke with the puritanical approach to carnality and sexuality. Censors explicitly invoked Catholic morality when removing erotic scenes from films such as *Gra* [The game] (1968) by Jerzy Kawalerowicz or definitively blocking the distribution of works such as *Przeprowadzka* [Moving] (1972, premiere 1982) by Jerzy Gruza or *Diabeł* [The devil] (1972, premiere 1988) by Andrzej Żuławski. If anything could irritate the Church hierarchs in *Colonel Wołodyjowski*, it was only the scene of Azja being impaled. Hoffman tried to defend this scene, noting, firstly, that the audience knew *The Trilogy* very well so they would not

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were catalogued by Jakub Dąbrowski in his work *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku: Artyści, sztuka, polityka* [Censorship in Polish Art after 1989], vol. 2 (Warszawa: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014).

29 Zbigniew Klaczyński, "Protokół z posiedzenia kolaudacyjnego filmu *Pan Wołodyjowski* w dniu 31 stycznia 1969 r." [Minutes of the screening meeting for the film *Pan Wołodyjowski* on January 31, 1969], National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute, ref. no. A-344, item 455, 5. During the pre-approval screening, however, there were also voices defending the extended version of the scene of the impaling of Azja. "This was an era of great passions and cruelty," said the journalist Stanisław Kuszewski, "this is a historical truth that does not need to be varnished. It is a very functional scene and it was shown very tactfully. The image of cruelty […] will remain in the viewer's imagination" (Klaczyński, "Protokół," 6). And Wojciech Żukrowski added: "this is just a severe punishment inflicted at the time. After all, they also burned at the stake and showed the burning of Joan of Arc. The impalement scene is done very discreetly, it is very subtle, there are no moans, screams, etc." (Klaczyński, "Protokół," 9). Żukrowski must not have remembered this scene very accurately, because during the impalement a shrill scream comes out of Azja's wide-open mouth.

forgive him for this deviation from the literary original. Secondly, he argued, the scene had already been "muffled" anyway, because "Sienkiewicz provides multiple opportunities for sadistic exploits" from which the director chose only those that proved dramatically necessary.[30] Ultimately, however, Hoffman had to "speed up, shorten…the very moment of impaling [of Azja]."[31] This censorial cut was justified by the chairman of the approval committee, deputy culture and arts minister Czesław Wiśniewski, stating that the sight of Azja being impaled arouses our sympathy, whereas this torture should be seen as a just revenge upon him for the murder of his future father-in-law and the attempted rape of Basia Wołodyjowska. It is therefore inappropriate, Wiśniewski continued, to expose this drastic act so "calmly and minutely."[32]

Why did this image torment communist and Catholic consciences? Why was it necessary to hide it, or at least crop it? It might seem that in *Cloister Inversus* Kozak is only showing what is still on the surface in Sienkiewicz's and Hoffman's works anyway, despite the cuts. Almost every primary- or secondary-school pupil has either read about how the impalement gave Azja "monstrous pleasure," or at least seen on a TV or computer screen how the point of the stake plunges into his body, as Sienkiewicz wrote, "deeper and deeper."[33] Interestingly, it turned out that this image, so disturbing to the censors and policymakers, passed unnoticed in the public discourse. As if the scene should never have appeared in a work that reinforced the image of conservative Polishness and steered Poles towards the patterns of noble ideology. It was unacceptable to assume that the strong masculinity of Sienkiewicz's protagonists is haunted by an anal drive that indicates an unconscious need to escape from the patriarchal regime. Hoffman's films bring this carnal excess to the surface, even if incompletely, and yet it remains unnamed. It must remain so in order for the national discourse to maintain its integrity and stability. The only trace of any violent public impact of the scene in which Azja is impaled is the affective reaction of the audience to the idea that Daniel Olbrychski, who played Azja in *Colonel Wołodyjowski*, should play the role of the brave Kmicic a few years later when Hoffman was working on a film adaptation of *The Deluge*. Viewers sent letters to *Kultura* and *Życie Warszawy* magazines asking the director to amend this unfortunate choice. Since the actor had played the demonic Azja in *Colonel Wołodyjowski*, it was argued, he could not now be Kmicic, who symbolizes Polishness. It seems that viewers were annoyed that in the national hero they would see

30 Ibid., 17.

31 Ibid., 21.

32 Ibid., 21.

33 Sienkiewicz, *Pan Wołodyjowski*.

an ethnically, racially and culturally alien enemy who tried to contaminate the ideal body of the nation (the attempted rape of Basia Wołodyjowska), or that in beautiful Kmicic they would see the anally "raped" Azja. That masculine Kmicic might have something in common with Azja, disinherited from masculinity and thus from power. As a matter of fact, the prevailing belief in patriarchal culture is that, as Bersani puts it, "to be penetrated is to abdicate power."[34] In *Cloister Inversus*, Kozak goes after this irrational fear and takes it to the extreme. The artist himself associates the found footage technique, which enables him to combine the overly religious and patriotic works by Sienkiewicz and Hoffman with gay porn, with anality; first repressive one, then liberating. "If the anal character focuses on the fear of 'intrusion' (Fromm), then found footage makes it possible to overcome this fear by arranging a variety of 'intrusions' (exciting, satisfying)."[35] The editing cuts, therefore, not only make it possible to censor images, but also open up the possibility of creating other, disturbing and liberating, constellations, forms and meanings out of them by gluing the shots back together in surprising ways.

4.

As Hocquenghem notes, "to reinvest the anus collectively and libidinally would involve a proportional weakening of the great phallic signifier."[36] It is worth considering what this reinvestment might mean in the case of (sexuality of) cinema. Cinema approached not from a phallic, but an anal perspective. In her famous essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, foundational for feminist film theory, Laura Mulvey argues that in classical narrative cinema the woman is a passive object for male contemplation, while the man turns out to be the all-powerful master of the male gaze. It is the male protagonist that the male viewer identifies with, that rules the action of the film and moves the narrative forward. Power in narrative cinema, being an emanation of the patriarchal system, inevitably accrues to the one who acts. And the woman, according to Mulvey, does not act. The female character, being an erotic performance, has no access to power. Her power, which evokes castration anxiety in men, is neutralized by the transformation of female subjects into harmless fetishes that bring solace to the male protagonist.[37] Thus, cinema analyzed

34 Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 19.

35 Tomasz Kozak, email message to author, October 11, 2021.

36 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 103.

37 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

from this perspective turns out to be a medium that enables the male (and heterosexual) part of the audience to satisfy their desire to rule over the female subject. It only stabilizes patriarchal power and controls the dominated female Others.

Gaylyn Studlar, in turn, writes that what attracts us to the film is not the desire for domination at all, but the masochistic desire to submit to the Other, for it is the pre-Oedipal masochistic desire rather than the later active desire for power that proves constitutive of the subject.[38] As Todd McGowan puts it, "rather than seeking power or mastery (the phallus), our desire is drawn to the opposite – the point at which power is entirely lacking, the point of traumatic enjoyment. This enjoyment is traumatic insofar as it deprives us of power but nonetheless compels us."[39] Thus, the attractiveness of cinema lies in the promise of masochistic pleasure, that is, the combination of the pleasure of the sensual and affective experience of images with the pain of losing control as much over the cinematic objects as over one's own body. As in the case of sexual pleasure, which is irrevocably intertwined with the loss of control over one's own self (orgasm). The definition of sexuality formulated by Freud is recaptured by Bersani as "an aptitude for the defeat of power by pleasure, the human subject's potential for a *jouissance* in which the subject is momentarily undone."[40] In his view, *jouissance* is a masochistic self-shattering; "it disrupts the ego's coherence and dissolves its boundaries."[41]

In *Cloister Inversus*, proud men roll huge cannons up the Jasna Góra hill, taking great pains to place these "exploding phalluses" on the top. Under the mask of patriarchal fantasies of power, Kozak recognizes repressed anal impulses; he breaks with the "first prohibition" and makes the hitherto privatized anus public. Thus, instead of cannon-phalluses cutting through the screen, he exposes masochistic and spasmodic images of male bodies being opened and proposes a different way of experiencing cinema. Kozak's viewer is a passive object of aggressive attack by the cinema, yet at the same time the cinema opens him up to other pleasures and new potentialities through transgressive representations, and thus paradoxically strengthens their position.

In an essay on Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) interpreted through the prism of anal film theory, Filippo Trentin writes that the desire for cinema

38 Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 616.

39 Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 10.

40 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 100.

41 Ibid., 101.

is rooted in the latent need to be permeated or at least moved by the huge images shown in close-up; in the repressed desire to be penetrated, a desire that heterosexual masculinity must officially renounce in order to take its place at the top of the social hierarchy.[42] The origins of the desire for cinema, the pleasure derived from watching moving and sensual images, should therefore be sought in the desire to return to the pre-genital stage of development. Jean-Louis Baudry wrote of cinema as a return to that relationship to reality that can be described as being melted into it, "in which the separation between one's own body and the exterior world is not well defined."[43] In this approach, cinema stimulates or at least allows one to imagine a repressed bodily memory of the time before the first prohibition. It enables a return to an anal, gender-undifferentiated stream of sensual experience. Thus, the pleasure of cinema is related perhaps not so much to the genital drive as to the censored anal drive, not to power and domination, as in Mulvey, but to an ecstatic blurring of the boundaries of one's own self, a masochistic *jouissance*, as precisely in Kozak. The open body of the queer monster, Kmicic-Azja, is an abject vestige of this painful pleasure.

42 Filippo Trentin, "The Queer Underside of *La Dolce Vita*: Towards an 'Anal Theory' of Looking," *Screen* 4 (2020): 545–567.

43 Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Film Theory & Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184.

Abstract

Sebastian Jagielski
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
Kmicic's Cut. The Hidden Anal History of Polish Cinema

The author analyzes Tomasz Kozak's video *Klasztor Inversus* [Cloister Inversus] (2003), in which selected scenes from the film adaptation of Sienkiewicz's *The Trilogy* mix with a gay pornographic film. In this way, Kozak exposes the perverse nature of national culture. It is anality that enables one to negate the obligation to reproduce the conservative codes of Polish culture, opening up to the creation of non-traditional, non-patriarchal, and non-heteronormative social practices. Viewing Kozak's video through the prism of various types of cuts – montage, anal, censorial – provokes reflection on cinema as a medium that not so much satisfies the desire for domination but rather promises masochistic jouissance.

Keywords

Tomasz Kozak, national culture, queer, jouissance, censorship

Marta Tomczok

Prenatal Defenses. On the Hapticity of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's Objects, Poems, and Prose

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DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.11 | ORCID: 0000-0001-9512-007X

Marta Tomczok – she investigates the literature of the Holocaust, the environmental history of coal and the relationship between art and science. She works at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Silesia in Katowice and recently published *Amiel. Życie* [Amiel: Live] (2021) and, together with Piotr Mitzner, edited poems and prose by Krystiana Robb-Narbutt *Cień dotyka mnie. Wiersze i proza* [The shadow touches me. Poems and prose] (2023).

An Artist of the Hands: Outline

More than anything else, Krystiana Robb-Narbutt was an artist of the hands. Her extraordinary, minimalist art has been assigned to surrealism, outsider art, naive art, or compulsive expression of grief.[1] Elements of body art, second-wave feminism, and political resistance associated with the student protests of 1968 have all been detected, as has escapism expressed in her homemade cabinets of curiosities. The artist exhibited at the Pokaz, Kordegarda, and Milano galleries. In 2003, her individual exhibition *Nostalgia Is Elsewhere* was held at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, and in the final years of her life she presented her installations at the Festival of Jewish Culture on Próżna Street in Warsaw. The only monograph

1 Izabela Kowalczyk, "Krystiana Robb-Narbutt i Krystyna Piotrowska" [Krystiana Robb-Narbutt and Krystyna Piotrowska], in *Reprezentacje Zagłady w kulturze polskiej (1939 – 2019). Problematyka Zagłady w sztukach wizualnych i popkulturze*, ed. Sławomir Buryła, Dorota Krawczyńska and Jacek Leociak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2021), 426. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

on Robb-Narbutt's output,[2] published after her death, introduces only some of her works, those associated with the visual arts, without offering a more general picture of all the artist's creative practices. When we call Robb-Narbutt an artist of the hands, we must also consider her writing, focused on miniature poems published in three slim volumes – *Ziemia dotyka anioła. Ścieżka słów* [Earth touches an angel. Path of words],[3] *Jest jest inaczej* [It is it is otherwise],[4] and *Wiersze ze stacji Skoo* [Poems from Skoo Station][5] – as well as short autobiographical essays first printed after the author's death in 2012. Unlike the graphics, objects, and installations, these have not been subject to critical analysis. They probably also did not concern the poet herself, as many of them give the impression of ephemeral, occasional literature encrypting a specific, scarcely important event. Together, Robb-Narbutt's epigrams and brief prose pieces form a locket of her anxieties that, despite said publications, were seemingly not intended for the public eye.

Robb-Narbutt's texts and arts are linked by the same "thinking hand," which, according to Juhani Pallasmaa, symbolizes a broad and undervalued medium of knowledge that is in a sense much more fundamental than the eye, associated as it is with touch, the first sensory form of cognition, used by living beings still in the prenatal phase of their development.[6] This is a hand sometimes using a pen, and other times a nib dipped in Ecoline, writing texts in lines, creating graphical structures with dots, forming props in cabinets, arranging objects bought at flea markets in the artist's studio, soaking boards in paint; a hand capable not only of designing a space but also using it to philosophize.[7] The workshop places no

2 Dorota Jarecka and Wanda Siedlecka, eds., *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia* [Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Drawings, objects, studio] (Warszawa: Fundacja im. Krystiany Robb-Narbutt, Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2012).

3 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, *Ziemia dotyka anioła. Ścieżka słów* [Earth touches an angel. Path of words] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Galerii Zachęta, 1997).

4 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, *Jest jest inaczej* [It is it is otherwise] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, 2002).

5 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, *Wiersze ze stacji Skoo* [Poems from Skoo Station] (Kazimierz Dolny: Dom Michalaków, 2002).

6 The process of multi-level formation of knowledge about the world through touch among organisms developing in their mother's womb is described by the psychologist Martin Grunwald, a specialist in research on hapticity: *Homo hapticus. Dlaczego nie możemy żyć bez zmysłu dotyku* [German: *Homo Hapticus. Warum wir ohne Tastsinn nicht leben können*], trans. Ewa Kowynia (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019), 21–42.

7 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009), 24–45.

restrictions on the choice of material, work tools or technique. The poems and objects are created in the same head, using the same hands, by the same tools and at the same desk. Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's "thinking hand," understood as an identifying feature of her lengthy, painstaking work, performed with impressive patience, is much more than a symbol. It is in fact an indicator of the most important problem the artist tackled: that of touch, touching and not touching, and subsequently also issues of what should remain untouched, withdrawn from the social circulation of art, removed from direct contact with the viewer, partly or fully obfuscated. The artist uses it to entirely change the face of relational esthetics. She does not so much unseal the rules of capitalist economy, creating a post-Marxist rift nullifying the principles of demand and sales,[8] as search for a storage place, shifting the entire weight of contact with others from their eyes to their touch – especially hands seeing mutual contact with the object that cannot be fully accessed by the audience looking at it. To paraphrase Serge Daney, we could say that every form of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's art is a hand touching itself, and indirectly also the spectators observing the touch – but separated from the object and its creator by a pane of glass, boards, the secrecy of poetic metaphors and initials. As Vilém Flusser wrote, "when the hands reach out toward the world with open arms, fingers spread, palms facing one another, and when they come across something, then distinguishing an object from a person does not come easy to them. Unless in the encounter with this thing they recognize themselves in it, and recognize another person."[9]

In this article I will be interested in the sources and forms of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's work, their distinct differences from the art and literature of the so-called second generation (the children of Holocaust victims and survivors), and also the aims of this project – to the extent that they can be distinguished given our incomplete knowledge of the artist's biography and respecting her silence regarding her own and her family's privacy. In the last part of the article, I will show how Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of the matrix can be used to understand the shelters that Robb-Narbutt produced for all kinds of objects, from the literal item to fantasy. Following Julia Kristeva, I assume that since we were all born prematurely, and project our fears onto things trying to get rid of us or shake us off by leaving us to our own devices, the mechanical work of the hands on things might have the task of overcoming the primal fear of loss of contact with a thing, but also overcoming its

8 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses du réel, 1998), 24.

9 Vilém Flusser, *Kultura pisma. Z filozofii pisma i obrazu* [Writing culture. From the philosophy of writing and image], trans. Przemysław Wiatr (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia, 2018), 37 (translated from the Polish).

innate ambiguity as a vessel for impurities or waste.[10] The protection that Robb-Narbutt builds for her fears, transformed into material post-sacred forms such as relics, reliquaries or reliquaria, but also mountains, gravestones, cases, casks, caskets, or trinket boxes, also has its source in imagining art as a permanent prenatal phase, an endless pregnancy. Every type of fear is then taken care of and sheltered under the (symbolic) skin of a growing, pregnant belly. The actual size of this refuge determines the structure of the artist's *objets d'art* – they are only visible behind or together with a curtain, undercover, with a protective (even transparent) shield, creating an integral whole with them like an abdominal wall with the growing fetus. The idea of protection given to fears is also expressed in Robb-Narbutt's texts, and in the article I will therefore show how the poems and prose manifest haptic and tactile sensations, together with the artist's other works creating an extensive structure of prenatal defenses.

Thumbelina's Psychobiography

Krystiana Robb-Narbutt was born on February 19, 1945, yet it was the nightmare of the first years of freedom that had the strongest impact on her work. This hypothesis does not tally with the reflections of art critics, who trace the sources of the artist's ideas mainly to the Holocaust, but neither does it exclude this account. The complexities of Robb-Narbutt's life began soon after her birth, when, for unknown reasons, she ended up at the Franciscan convent in Laski, near Warsaw, without her mother.[11] At this time, her father, Ignacy Robb-Narbutt, a soldier in the People's Guard, left-wing social activist, and writer, was demobilized and fell into political disfavor, forcing him first into hiding, then to leave Warsaw[12] and withdraw from public life. He returned only in 1951. The direct threat to life, itinerancy, and poverty ("Warsaw, Saska Kępa, an interior in which scarcity is known,"[13] wrote Adolf Rudnicki about Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's parents' home) must have had an acute effect on

10 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 11.

11 I thank Piotr Mitzner for this information, provided to him by Robb-Narbutt, although it is not included in any written biographical sources on the artist.

12 The details on Ignacy Robb-Narbutt come from Andrzej Krzystof Kunert's biography of him at https://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/ignacy-robb-narbutt, accessed March 10, 2022.

13 Adolf Rudnicki, *Krakowskie Przedmieście pełne deserów* [Krakowskie Przedmieście is full of desserts] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986), 195.

all four members of the family (Krystiana's brother Jacek was born in 1949). Robb-Narbutt's father died when she was 13 years old. He left behind a collection of brief memoirs and stories, entwined with a thick thorn of autobiographism that today in many places is unclear, but also uninterpreted[14]: "I read the stories of Ignacy, my father, […] there are so many threads tangled with Ignacy's life, I feel that strongly, but I know nothing – there is so much of me there, the syntax, storytelling, so much of him, I feel it and so much is unfulfilled,"[15] his daughter recalled in 2003.

The poem "[an unknown woman recalls]" from the volume *It Is It Is Otherwise* alludes only indirectly, but very perversely to these events. The poet dubs her autobiographical figure Thumbelina, creating a narrative that could be called psychobiographical:

an unknown woman recalls
her childhood
when her father laughed often and heartily
and loved her so much
– he wanted to shut her in a matchbox
(like Thumbelina)
so they'd always be together then the father stopped laughing
but didn't stop loving her
now in old age he comes
for her - perhaps you'll come to me -
he says
she's grown unaccustomed to his presence
she prefers to stay with the assembled
knick-knacks - it's not time dad -
she whispers
and imagines his smile[16]

14 Ignacy Robb-Narbutt's literary oeuvre comprises two volumes of prose published posthumously: *Ludzie i wydarzenia* [People and events] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1961) and Łabędzie *gniazdo. Wybór pism* [Swan's nest. Selected writings] (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1963).

15 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "Tam i z Powrotem" [Back and forth], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie. Wiersze i proza*, ed. Piotr Mitzner and Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2023).

16 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "[nieznana kobieta wspomina]" [unknown woman recalls], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie*.

Nothing in this poem is clear – neither the authenticity of the memory nor the purpose of blurring the authorship. All that remains evident is the connection between the father's departure from the narrator's life and her adult life among tiny objects. If we look at this poem as a singular poetic personal psychodocument, we can trace in it a process of reparation. Like the one discerned by the authors of the article "Późne skutki wczesnej traumy. Psychoterapia Ocalałych z Holokaustu" in the poems of Mrs. W, who survived the war as a tiny baby abandoned by her parents.[17] The objects that appear in her works, presented to therapists during sessions, are seen as a signal of a return of symbolization destroyed by trauma, but also a return of memory itself, with which the patient cut off contact in early childhood (with regard to her memories of war). The character of Thumbelina, understood as a figure of reparation, can therefore help us to understand some of the sources of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's work, but above all to see her as the development of the plot of the fairy tale, whose heroine is a lonely child forced to fight for her life against monstrous animals.

Read with the fate of Jewish children during and immediately after the war in mind, "Thumbelina" becomes a horror fairy tale, showing the array of extreme situations they could find themselves in as symbols (encounters with a toad, mouse, mole).[18] The dream of the father from the poem "an unknown woman recalls" alludes indirectly to such situations, but also interferes with them, as Thumbelina is to be plucked out of them and shut in a box where she will be completely safe. The fantasy about the tiny girl put away in a matchbox by her father is much more complex – it can also be read as fear of oppression from him, fear of the thanatic role he might play in the future (the father-death), but also the dream of being continually hidden or living surrounded by objects reminiscent of such hiding places. Robb-Narbutt's psychobiographical poem omits more than it discloses, but it highlights an important issue in the artist's works – the symbolic role of miniature things regarding the question of protection. These objects, the poem suggests, are probably not for resolving conflicts, but mitigating or partly stopping them. The poem therefore recognizes certain conflicts, but does not resolve them.

17 Katarzyna Prot-Klinger and Krzysztof Szwajca, "Późne skutki wczesnej traumy. Psychoterapia Ocalałych z Holokaustu" [Late effects of early trauma: the psychotherapy of Holocaust survivors], in *Psychoanaliza w cieniu wojny i Zagłady*, ed. Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 301–323.

18 Hans Christian Andersen, "Little Tiny or Thumbelina," in *Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), 587–602.

No Touching

The question of things in Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's art has its source in her early drawings of shapeless beings resembling human embryos and fetuses. The artist's interest in such forms was probably informed by her private experiences of miscarriages.[19] According to Ewa Kuryluk (who studied with Robb-Narbutt), the subject of early pregnancy, and especially miscarriage and abortion, was a taboo in 1960s and 70s Polish art. "At the Academy [of Fine Arts in Warsaw – translator's note] we painted Kapist pictures – no one touched those things."[20] Robb-Narbutt turned embryos into a kind of symbol – she began to see them everywhere: in the cobweb-like ground structures of the *Gniazda* [Nests] cycle from 1977–1979, the drawings from the series *I cannot be counted on, I will not defend myself* (1975), and particularly in the possibility of radically expanding the narrative technique of a picture. Dots became her personal expression of creation, corresponding to meditation and the search for a way out of the state of threat and feeling of fear.[21]

From tiny dots, Robb-Narbutt moved on to collecting things. These were mostly unwanted objects from flea markets and fairs, old, found items, examples of shadow architecture, made up of "objects that function on the margins of attention."[22] Objects appeared in her art at the same time as drawings, in the 1970s, but, as Paweł Leszkowicz notes, they were mostly meant as a private gift not intended for the public eye.[23] These were usually small boards given to her husband or friends. The artist began to create more complex objects resembling installations in the 1990s, using such things as dried fruit or cookies from fairs. She would place the small objects in glass cases measuring 19.5 x 14 x 8 centimeters – tiny spaces which required great dexterity, patience and precision to make. Robb-Narbutt's best-known series of cases, exhibited at Zachęta and Próżna Street, is *Memory Fugue* from 2006. Alluding to Paul Celan's "Death Fugue," a canonical work of Holocaust poetry, the artist created seven cases dedicated to her family – her grandmother, brother, and mother's

19 This conclusion is prompted by Agata Jakubowska's essay "Staje się kamieniem. O wczesnych rysunkach Krystiany Robb-Narbutt" [It becomes a stone. About Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's early drawings], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 43–55.

20 Ewa Kuryluk, "Węgiel, embriony, ptaki..." [Coal, embryos, birds...], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 58.

21 Ibid.

22 Aleksandra Wasilkowska, *Shadow Architecture. Bazary i szalety/ Bazaars and Toilets* (Warszawa: Fundacja Inna Przestrzeń, 2014), 5.

23 Paweł Leszkowicz, "Przedmioty odnalezione Krystiany Robb-Narbut" [Found items of Krystiana Robb-Narbut], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 128–129.

sister, as well as her twins. The individual titles of the case sound like extracts from documents, but in reality are part of Robb-Narbutt's poetic practice, like other captions for objects, such as matchboxes: "The train Róża boarded was supposed to go to Switzerland," "It is lucky to die in your own bed three days before being transported to the ghetto," "There is nothing worse than a young, gray-haired Jewish woman," "Róża is worried about the twins," "In her hand she holds a card saying 'Does God see this?,'" "How the twins might have played," "No one could cry or scream they buried him by the wall."[24] All these titles are also part of the memories passed on by Franciszka Narbutt, who was saved from the ghetto, to her daughter, and they mainly depict an imagined version of what could have happened to the family – and imagined doubly, by the mother and daughter. Only some of the cases are connected to facts. It is worth noting the impulse from the imagination, which enlivens the artist's handiwork – it is intuition, suspicion, the desire to do something influenced by affect, and not memory or somebody's recollections. Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's art therefore does not fit into any memorial format (one of post-memory or blank spots),[25] but rather, as the title of the series suggests, is an escape from memory (or, also, her escape).

Telling Ewa Stawecka about one of the cases, dedicated to her murdered young nephews, the artist, the artist particularly summarized her searches for toys and difficulty in understanding how, and with what, children could play in the ghetto.[26] The conceptional work here was not about searching for reminiscences or documents, but searching for objects and combining her own affects with the fantasies they triggered. The other cases came about in the same way – the artist put inside them tiny objects such as sugar cubes, syringes, a toy train carriage, or an artificial rose, guided by the miniature properties of *objets trouvés*, which she replaced with "objects of return," found items from the past giving the descendants of a murdered family the chance to discover some part of the truth of their loved ones' horrific past.[27] By eschewing this possibility

24 From the documentation for the exhibition *Adoracja słodyczy* [Adoration of sweets] (Zachęta, 2014). Material in the archive of the National Art Gallery made available to me by Piotr Mitzner.

25 Katarzyna Bojarska wrote about various types of memory of the second generation in the context of Robb-Narbutt's art ("Robb-Narbutt – spotkanie z resztkami" [Robb-Narbutt – meeting the leftovers], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 149).

26 *Krystiana Robb Narbutt, rozmawia Ewa Stawecka* [Krystiana Robb Narbutt, interview by Ewa Stawecka], accessed March 13, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG9HmNLLyyc&t=178s.

27 Marianne Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 204–211. Dorota Jarecka points to this

for the glitter of the accidental and kitsch object, Robb-Narbutt would be approaching the practices of André Breton, allowing herself to be carried by the uncanny towards the layers of previous experiences and "convulsive beauty."[28] However, a found object, put inside a case and closed, ceases to be an ordinary object and becomes a relic,[29] a holy remnant not to be touched. The process of transforming it into a relic in Robb-Narbutt's art partly alludes to the iconoclastic tradition of Holocaust discourse,[30] but it is simultaneously something more, the endeavor of thinking hands[31] seeking to withdraw the materialized fantasy out of the sphere of touch into a prohibited area.

The artist also withdrew an object from the sphere of touch in two installations in 2006 – a crate and a stone circle titled *They Are in Me, I Am of Them*, exhibited on Próżna Street. In the first case, she placed family mementos – photographs of her parents, brother, and her husband's family – into a wooden coal crate. The mirrored side walls of the crate reflected and reproduced their contents only if the crate was first illuminated – by a torch, for example. The objects that would allow Ewa Kuryluk to conduct a biographical investigation and produce a narrative surrounding it[32] were here almost immediately immersed in the gloom of the reliquary (originally a coal box). As the latest photographs of the artist's studio show,[33] the crate still stands there untouched, protecting and sheltering the documents.

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meaning of objects of return in *Surrealizm, realizm, marksizm. Sztuka i lewica komunistyczna w Polsce w latach 1944–1948* [Surrealism, realism, Marxism. Art and the communist left in Poland in 1944–1948] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2021), 330).

28 To quote the title of Hal Foster's book. See Jarecka, *Surrealizm, realizm, marksizm*, 345.

29 Ewa Kuryluk referred to the objects produced by Robb-Narbutt as "relics." The artist herself and her husband, Michał Wejrich, also used this term for collected and processed objects (from a letter to the author of this article from February 24, 2022).

30 Agata Stankowska, *Ikona i trauma. Pytania o "obraz prawdziwy" w liryce i sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX wieku* [Icon and trauma. Questions about the "true image" in Polish poetry and art of the second half of the 20th century] (Kraków: Universitas, 2019), 235–264.

31 Robb-Narbutt's "relic-forming" activities are perhaps mediated in the ideas of Alina Szapocznikow, whose works were compared to reliquaries (Jacek Waltoś, "Alina Szapocznikow," in *Zatrzymać życie. Alina Szapocznikow*, ed. Józef Grabski (Kraków: IRSA, 2004), 83).

32 Meaning the family photographs found after Maria Kuryluk's death that allowed her daughter, Ewa, to learn about the Jewish part of the Kohany family, and subsequently, finding further documents, forced her to search for her biological father. Cf. Ewa Kuryluk, *Goldi* (Warszawa: Twój Styl. Wydawnictwo Książkowe, 2004); Kuryluk, *Feluni. Apoteoza enigmy* [Feluni. The apotheosis of the enigma] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019).

33 From February 2022 – courtesy of Michał Wejroch.

Meanwhile, the circle of 10 small stones arranged on sand poured onto the parquet floor of a Próżna Street apartment was meant to symbolize the artist's family, deceased or murdered in the Second World War. On each stone, Robb-Narbutt wrote the name of one of the dead. Like the crate and the cases, the stones could be observed, but not touched. The idea of creating talismans or amulets from them also alluded to the traditions of Christian relics and the avant-garde's processing of them towards private totemism. This was the direction followed, for example – as Kuryluk mentions in *Art mon amour* – by Picasso, who left for Dora Maar many small objects, including stones, that he had collected during their shared trips to the sea and on which he had drawn her likeness.[34]

The drawings, display cases and small objects can currently be found in Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's preserved studio in the Saska Kępa neighborhood of Warsaw. Critics have called the artist's apartment (and her summer house in the village of Skowieszynek) "her greatest creations"[35] and "one big installation."[36] After Robb-Narbutt's death, the objects – still untouched, unmoved, fossilized – began to interact with dust, with some – as the photos reveal – covered in plastic sheets.

Fantasies of Touching

The sources of the ban on touching found in Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's poems are different from those in her art, much more real, even corporeal, but not always comprehensible. Their metaphorical expression in fact prevents analysis of the texts' haptic role without a knowledge of the biographical context so important in Robb-Narbutt's work. In one such poem, "I tell you about my head" from *It Is It Is Otherwise*, the poet is probably referring to her own experience of migraine, causing extremely strong headaches.[37] Calling it the "tree of good and evil," Robb-Narbutt both encrypts this experience using a pastiche

34 Ewa Kuryluk, *Art mon amour. Szkice o sztuce* [Art mon amour. Sketches about art] (Warszawa: Sic! [n.d.], 184.

35 Jacek Sempoliński, *A me stessto. Wypisy z dzienników 1999–2008* [A me stessto. Extracts from diaries 1999–2008] (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2016), 157–158.

36 From a letter to the author of the article from February 24, 2022.

37 Perhaps it was these, and particularly strong medications, that caused Robb-Narbutt to fall into a coma of unknown etiology. She wrote about it in a poem: "It's all the fault of the southerly wind / in its gusts the rooster crowed three times / Peter betrayed the Lord / the deep-rooted apple tree of paradise / our longing for something unknown / brings coma – very close to death" (Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "To wszystko wina wiatru" [It's all the wind's fault], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie*.

metaphor and weaves a much wider web of the analogy of her privacy with the Bible, one that allows her to live in an un-holy place from which God has departed, leaving individual, painful symbols: the ripped-out intestines of a lamb, a non-burning bush, forbidden fruit eaten for dinner, and above all the paradise garden in Skowiewszynek, in which the protagonists of Robb-Narbutt's poetry lived like Philemon and Baucis or Adam and Eve. Apart from tending to the plants, they are plagued by a sense of the inauthenticity of analogies, or a sense of their peculiar authenticity, reminiscent of carnival, a grotesque reversal of the order of things, the metaphysics of the fairground:

> The blue amid the green of the walnut tree
> reveals a piece of oblivion
> as sweet and light as candy floss
> drawing you into close speculations
> that there is no God
> as Nietzsche exclaimed
> and what of us
> with M bustling around the garden
> leading the service of welcome to plants
> me hidden under the vine
> observing the cosmos of being on earth
> our old dog
> lounging in the sun
> with a gentle growl
> suggesting dreams of existence[38]

Yet the candy floss-like oblivion seems much more real than a purely divine being – like said candy floss, it sticks to the face, melts in the mouth, a fun children's snack with extremely tactile characteristics. The sticky candy floss, as with the cobweb ground in the drawings about embryos, probably fascinates the poet not only because of its physical characteristics, but also its belonging to the culture of the fairground (bazaars and carnivals whose products the poet amassed). Something that glues might prove to be a protective material. In this context, "Stick together a poem" should be read as a manifesto of working with gluey matter:

> Stick together a poem
> from the heavy scent of lilacs

38 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "Błękit pośród zieleni orzecha" [Blue among the green of walnut], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie*.

the gentle beauty of meadows
the cloud at the road's end
with the glue
the time of cobweb threads[39]

Most of all, however, Robb-Narbutt expresses the fantasies of capturing the ephemeral using a few phrases about touch that could be called a haptic cluster. These are phrases like "earth touches an angel, an angel touches earth" or "the shadow touches me, I touch the grass – this is life." It may be that in them the poet, a reader of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Lowell, and Walt Whitman, was alluding to Alfred Tennyson's concept of "a touch of earth." As Tadeusz Sławek writes, "Tennyson's *touch of earth* seeks to reconstruct in us an awareness of our most fundamental relationship with the earth, entailing a reciprocity of touching: humans touch earth, the touches humans. As the setting sun approaches the earth it colors with the most beautiful hues (*the low sun makes the colour*, Tennyson writes in the next line). This is the first meaning of *touch*."[40] Robb-Narbutt understands this reciprocity in her own peculiar way – as a means to protect the impermanent, a way of connection impermanent things together – like the stone mandalas on Próżna Street. Her inscription, syntactically similar to phrases inspired by Tennyson, "they are in me, I am in them," denotes a view of the absolute dispersal of her forebears' spirits – in earth, water and air. Krystyna Piotrowska, who co-created the exhibition on Próżna Street with Robb-Narbutt, recalls that the artist "knew scraps of events from the stories about the family told by her mother, fragments too minuscule to be able to reconstruct the fate of individuals. She constructed her own narrative from them. She said that, given the few traces left from her relatives' lives, she had the sense that her family were everywhere and that she had unlimited possibilities to find and recognize them."[41] The conviction that her relatives' remains lingered on in the surrounding world may have led the artist to produce relics from found objects, which would in a certain

39 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "Ulepić wiersz" [Make a poem], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie*.

40 Tadeusz Sławek, "Cienie i rzeczy. Rozważania o dotyku" [Shadows and things. Reflections on touch], in *W przestrzeni dotyku*, ed. Jacek Kurek and Krzysztof Maliszewski (Chorzów: Miejski Dom Kultury "Batory"), accessed March 13, 2022, http://mediummundi.pl/teksty/slawek_cienie.pdf.

41 Krystyna Piotrowska, "Wspomnienie o Krystianie i jej udziale w Projekcie Próżna" [Memories of Krystiana and her participation in the Próżna Project], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 162.

sense enclose this total, intangible organicity of the existence of the dead – working with the hands to lend a form to ideas, which could then become almost equal to or complementary to reality.[42] The traces of this conception are found particularly in Robb-Narbutt's autobiographical prose dedicated to her mother ("The shadow touches me / I touch the grass"), husband ("Me and me and actually Peter Pan"), and family ("There and back"). The prose form, employing vision and supposition, enables the protagonist to imagine physically impossible situations – contact with the spirit of her dying mother, watching her parents on their first date, interlocking hands with her mother and transforming into it and her (the mother and her hand). Especially this final gesture, told in the context of the scene of her death a few paragraphs later, makes a big, almost tactile-seeming impression (despite the counterfactuality).

> I feel that I am becoming you, my hands are changing, on one I have a brown mark like you, we touch each other delicately, both protecting ourselves from pain. At home I pretend nothing is happening, I draw a pink cloud falling to earth, I marvel at the diffuse light – I know you would want that.[43]

As Tadeusz Sławek writes, citing Tennyson, the touch of the earth, reciprocated when walking, is "the disclosure of the essential, fundamental, constitutive addition of earth in man."[44] In Robb-Narbutt's poetry, it is usually hard matter and intangible beings – the spirits of loved ones, human shadows, angels, that touch each other:

> earth touches an angel
> the angel touches earth
> he is plastered with brown clumps
> brought from the field
> two plus two is
> four – reassured

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42 Cathryn Vasseleu presents such a view in the introduction to Jan Švankmajer's *Touching and Imagining. An Introduction to Tactile Art*, arguing that touch unleashes the phenomenological imagination and expands multisensory cognition of reality. Cathryn Vasselau, "Introduction," in Jan Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining. An Introduction to Tactile Art*, XXVI. Quoted in Marta Smolińska, *Haptyczność poszerzona. Zmysł dotyku w sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX wieku i początku XXI wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 94–95.

43 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "Cień dotyka mnie / ja dotykam trawy" [The shadow touches me/I touch the grass], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie*.

44 Tadeusz Sławek, "Cienie i rzeczy."

he digs a hole
tired he folds his wings
the journey's end[45]

As with her art, Robb-Narbutt attempts to make touching the impossible an absolutely real event. She therefore eschews the idea of *relinquere* typical of Christianity, convinced that man endowed with grace finds the image of God in himself,[46] in favor of the heretical temptation to be able to recognize the spirits of the forefathers everywhere and believing in their touch as an intuitive medium between her longing for the dead and incidental things or events in which their substitutes can be found. Marek Bartelik compared this temptation to the Aboriginal Australian belief in Mimi – spiritual ancestors living in the wilderness.[47] Robb-Narbutt takes readers on a journey through the land of the dead using vivid, sensual description, "gluing together" a text from ideas of colors, tastes and shapes:

> You're standing together on the bridge, you small and fragile, oh, you're wearing that georgette dress. I loved it when you talked about it – just the word "georgette," rustling, a little satiny, but also soft – georgette, I repeat, and see colored stripes – dark blue, a spot of red and sea green, circular at the bottom, top slightly slinky, smooth, short-sleeved, and on top the scarf that Róża brought you.[48]

There is one situation in which the method of contact through imagined touch from words fails. This is the situation of imagining the Warsaw ghetto where the Cytryn sisters (the poet's mother and aunt) found themselves with the twins:

> So often I wanted to look behind the wall and truly touch what happened there – how you could live after that – you gave birth to us, you believed in life after death – you said nothing. Is it like with poetry after the Holocaust. I constantly ask myself whether I, I would be able to get through it. I think my problems with

45 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "ziemia dotyka anioła/ anioł dotyka ziemi" [the earth touches an angel/an angel touches the earth], in Robb-Narbutt, *Cień dotyka mnie.*

46 Roman Mazur SDB, "Relikwie w Biblii" [Relics in the Bible], in *Relikwie. Fundamenty – rzeczywistość – perspektywy*, ed. Szymon Drzyżdżyk, Marek Gilski and Marcin Cholewa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2020), 25.

47 Marek Bartelik, "Krystiana Robb-Narbutt: A Platonic Death" (essay given to the artist's husband by the author). Courtesy of Michał Wejroch.

48 Krystiana Robb-Narbutt, "Tam i z Powrotem."

> starting the day come from the fact that a stone from that side of the wall is stuck in me – is it worth living or not – what a question, says M.[49]

Analyzing Robb-Narbutt's most important artistic confession – "so often I wanted to look behind the wall and truly touch what happened there" – we must ask why the artist wanted to touch this reality. What was touch for her in this situation, if she only knew "scraps" and "fragments?" Why did she care so much about touching the ghetto, not seeing it? Perhaps touch here was something like a *tactus spiritualis*, an intermediary between the subconscious and consciousness,[50] building material reality based on intuition, faith, inspiration, and trust? Touch of the unreal might also have been important because of her growing awareness of the need to create protections for uncertain, dreamed or found experiences, objects and events, as it was to help produce symbols of them in the form of frames, reliquaries, and depictions of sheltering objects such as the mastaba that Robb-Narbutt began to paint in 1979 under the influence of her mother's death, or Kilimanjaro.[51] I assume that the diversity of these depictions, belonging to various cultural orders, need not give the impression of chaos, but together with verbal narratives may create a system of these shelters aiming to rescue memories endangered by nonexistence, usually known only to the artist and associated with both her family history and her personal experiences.

Prenatal Art – Conclusions

"Krystiana often surrounded her drawings with frames. Many women artists have an inclination towards frames […]. Perhaps enclosing and almost hiding the composition in frames is a kind of metaphor for female physiology?"[52] Ewa Kuryluk's intuition seems accurate, although the "enclosing" and "hiding" should be expanded to include the (delimiting, generic, formal) frames of the poems, walls of the crate, stone circles, or even the cupboard with a collection of candles standing in the artist's studio. That which is hidden, meanwhile,

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49 Ibid.

50 Smolińska, "Haptyczność poszerzona," 95.

51 Meaning a cycle of paintings of the island-mountain, which Kinga Kawalerowicz calls "Stones." This was initiated by Robb-Narbutt and Wejroch's trip to the Greek islands of Stromboli, Thira, and Patmos. Kinga Kawalerowicz, "Dokumentalistka małych iluminacji" [A documentarian of small illuminations], in *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt. Rysunki, przedmioty, pracownia*, 63.

52 Kuryluk, "Węgiel, embriony, ptaki," 57.

would be both the murky knowledge about the family gassed at Treblinka and self-knowledge (about illnesses or fears). The lack of distinction between traumas in this case gives Robb-Narbutt's work an affinity with Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of the matrixial gaze, comprising a tangle of affective arousals. An arousal is different from anxiety: "it doesn't alert me to a danger for myself [...] it calls me to transgress my subjective boundaries while it signals that in fact my boundaries have already always been transgressed."[53] Arousals work at the same frequency as the vibrations of the growing womb – protecting a dependent object, they send signals to receptors and trigger a whole bundle of reactions of interest, engagement, and care,[54] which, reaching the surface of the art, make it into a trembling whole, a membrane, practically a skin. One such vibrating structure is the phantom net used by Ettinger in the paintings from the *Euridice* series. A very similar net can be produced in Robb-Narbutt's work by the frames, display cases, poems, and reliquaries, protecting that which is too impermanent or vulnerable to live independently.

As Griselda Pollock wrote about Ettinger's art, "its created aesthetic form resuscitates, on the other side of subjective formation, as an aesthetic dimension now, the potential of the archaic, matrixial stratum of pre-natal becoming-human that has been overlaid by postnatal, hence phallicising fantasy and thought, but which has never been entirely knocked out."[55] In Robb-Narbutt's works, the prenatal phase, that of sheltering and concealing experience, in fact becomes the main and only phase of presenting what is most important in art – objects withdrawn from direct contact with the viewer, associated with pain or trauma. Yet the reason why it is important is because it presents that painful, partly also assumed, untouched by the spectator or reader, experience using a box, cover or hiding place, as well as a poem, material and visual protections that do not so much virtually symbolize a shelter as actually create one. This shelter is not a temporary one, as in a pregnancy, but permanent, and what is being protected is not a simple translation of a growing and dependent being into art, not a visualization or symbolization of a growing fetus; on the contrary, it is a symbolic materialization of the non-living, absent, lost – various dimensions of death. This role of protection – recurrent throughout all the phases and states of matter of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's work – make

53 Bracha L. Ettinger, "Uncanny Awe, Uncanny Compassion and Matrixial Transjectivity beyond Uncanny Anxiety," *FLS*, Volume XXXVIII (2011).

54 Ibid.

55 Griselda Pollock, "Trauma, Time and Painting: Bracha Ettinger and the Matrixial Aesthetic," in *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, ed. Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 29.

it into a kind of maternal womb for memories endangered by non-existence, usually known only to the artist and connected with both her family history and her personal experiences.

One might ask whether Robb-Narbutt's artistic objectives are not too diffuse and non-uniform to mark them on "one matrix," find one system for them, or see them in focus. Such an opportunity seems to come from the artist's psychobiography referred to at the beginning, which absorbed not only fears from the time of the Holocaust and the antisemitism growing in Stalinism and the era of Władysław Gomułka, but particularly childish fears, seeking solutions in peculiar, miniaturized forms, and not in large, detailed narratives. This bitty, fragmentary nature of Robb-Narbutt's activities in fact forces us to see them as a whole, as foreseen by the poem about Thumbelina shut in a matchbox by her father. The expression of the artist regaining her agency seems to be a minor, albeit significant shift – the reason why she decides to create boxes, display cases or poems is probably so that she is not shut inside them, but herself does the shutting.[56]

Translated by Ben Koschalka

56 A remarkable coda to these reflections on shutting out of fear of being shut can be found in one of Aleksandra Zając's illustrations for Tina Oziewicz's book *What Feelings Do When No One's Looking*. It depicts tiny cages and furry creatures working relentlessly to make them, with the caption "Insecurities build cages." Tina Oziewicz and Aleksandra Zając, *What Feelings Do When No One's Looking*, trans. Jennifer Croft (New York: Elsewhere Editions, 2020). With just a slight modification, this is an excellent fit to Robb-Narbutt's works.

Abstract

Marta Tomczok
UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA

Prenatal Defenses. On the Hapticity of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt's Objects, Poems, and Prose

The article analyzes the idea of concealing and hiding painful, personal experiences – including those related to the loss of loved ones in the Holocaust – in the art and poetry of Krystiana Robb-Narbutt (1945–2006). The idea resembles the development of an embryo and later the fetus sheltered by the womb; a being unable to live independently outside the womb finds refuge in it, which gradually becomes more visible until it reaches a state when it is no longer needed and is left behind by the child. In Robb-Narbutt's art, the prenatal stage – the concealing of experience – reaches a state of autonomy, in fact becoming the main and only stage of presenting what is most important in her work: objects withdrawn from direct contact with the recipient and directly connected to some pain, someone's trauma. This stage is important precisely because it presents the painful – partly presumed – experience untouched by the viewer or reader and mediated through a hiding place, a box, or a stash, but also a poem, namely material and visual shelters that do not symbolize a concealment but indeed create it. However, this shelter is not temporary – as in the case of pregnancy – but permanent, and what is protected is not a simple translation of growing and dependent existence into art, nor a visualization or symbolization of a growing fetus. On the contrary, the shelter symbolically materializes the dead, the absent, and the lost, namely various dimensions of death. Present in all stages and states of Robb-Narbutt's work, such shelter makes her art a maternal womb for the memories threatened with non-existence, most often known only to the artist and related to the history of her family and her own, personal experiences.

Keywords

art after the Holocaust, motherhood, Bracha L. Ettinger, miniature, text materiality, hapticity, tactility

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