

CULTURAL STUDIES APPENDIX

ENGLISH EDITION

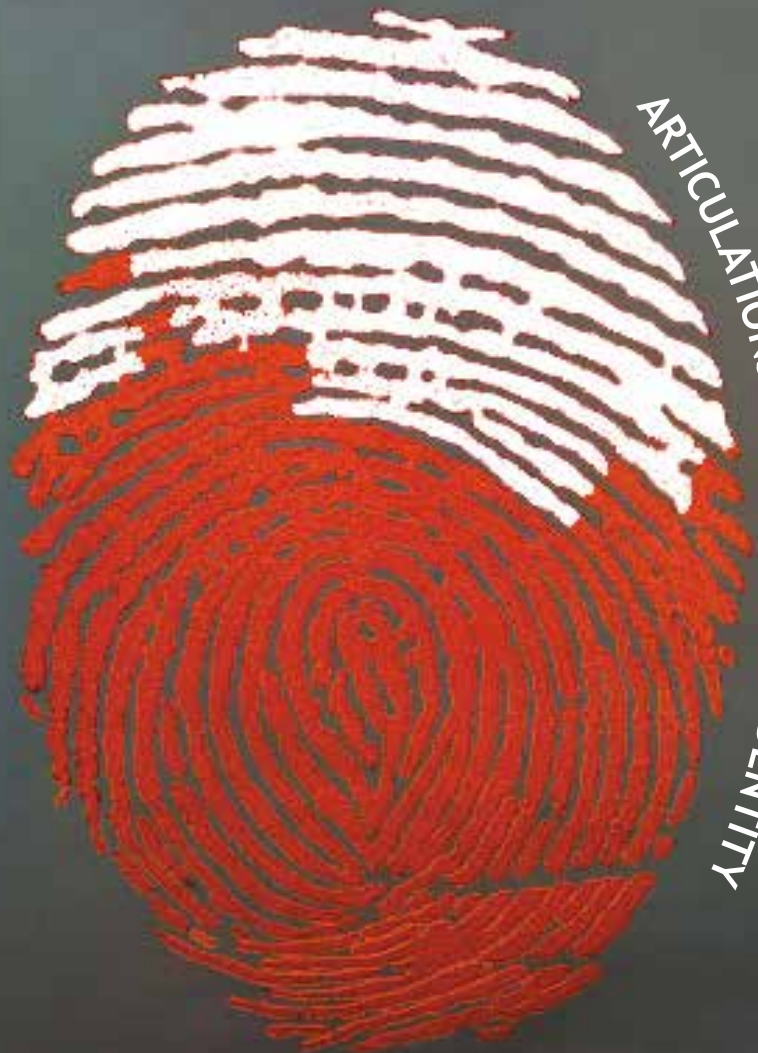


# Załącznik

KULTUROZNAWCZY

2019

№ 2



ARTICULATIONS OF THE POLISH IDENTITY

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## ISSN 2392-2338

The primary version of the journal is an on-line one.

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Wydanie dwóch anglojęzycznych numerów czasopisma „Załącznik Kulturoznawczy” – zadanie finansowane w ramach umowy 850/P-DUN/2018 ze środków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego przeznaczonych na działalność upowszechniającą naukę.



Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego



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## PREFACE

The presented special issue of the „Cultural Studies Appendix” – an academic journal of the Institute of Cultural and Religious Studies at Faculty of Humanities of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw – features translations of various archive articles, which were published in the issues from 2015, 2016 and 2017. The papers featured in the thematic section were taken from the 2/2015 issue.

The main theme of this issue – presented by many original voices – is ‘Articulations of the Polish Identity’, which remains particularly relevant at the moment, since it nearly automatically becomes a part of the process of problematizing Polishness in public and political discourses. This, however, is an issue whose relevance and significance would be difficult to question at any historical moment, even beyond its local dimension. The growing importance of reflection on identity shaped nationally, culturally or ethnically seems to be an increasingly common trend, not only in the West. The ongoing presence of questions about Polishness in social life prompts reflection on the possibility of deepening the perspectives of perceiving various aspects connected with this issue through the lens of cultural studies. The articles collected in the thematic section form a complex whole, allowing the readers – as we believe – to capture the internal diversity of this issue, showing how every original view of these issues is rooted in a specific axiological perspective. At the same time, the presented perspectives can be thought of as a counterbalance to those narratives, which form the dominant discourse of the presentation and expression of Polishness, or in other words, statements whose style is far from radicalism, and instead points to the possibility of addressing the issue of Polishness with diligent and thorough research, as well as distanced, yet, at the same time engaged, scrutiny. We believe that this kind of debate is not only valuable, but also extremely important in our time.

Join us in exploration of issues connected with Polishness and – more broadly – the issue of national identity, by learning more about various internal perspectives of its perception, presented in these studies by Polish authors. We also cordially invite you to read papers published outside the thematic section of this edition of the „Cultural Studies Appendix”.

The Editorial Team





## WHAT IS LANGUAGE NECESSARY FOR? WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR A LANGUAGE?

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The aim of the paper is to sketch the answers to the two questions posed in the title, closely and directly interrelated as they are. I will first take a stance on the relationship between a natural language and animal codes on one hand and other phenomena considered part of culture on the other. I will subsequently present a list and short outlines of qualities comprising the essence of any language, both inherently constitutive and irreducible, responsible first for making the boundary between all the various sets of signals exchanged by various animal species and human speech less of a blurred line and more of a chasm, and secondly – for language being a distinguished and unique entity among other sign systems.

### LANGUAGE FACULTY AS A SINGULARLY HUMAN PHENOMENON

Already at the outset, I must discard a conjecture which pervades contemporary anthropology, neurobiology and primatology, according to which languages used today by the variety of human communities are to have resulted from an evolutionary transformation or development of either various hooting sounds (as posited vocal theories), or expressive gestures (as posited in gestural theories) of the great apes, particularly chimpanzees and orangutans, for some experts claim that their genetic code is 90% identical with the human genome<sup>1</sup>. Hence, I contest the notion that

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<sup>1</sup> For all the various evolutionary theories of the origin of language, see among others: Leakey 1996: 38-138; Pinker 1995; Aitchison 1996; Żywicznyński, Wacewicz 2015.

there existed in the history of speaking beings a protolanguage, used either ca. 4 to 1.5 million years ago by Australopithecus or much later (evolutionary scientists still debate the dating), for as late as in the Palaeolithic Age – i.e. ca 35 thousand years ago – by hominids, supposedly a missing link between animal signals and human language. Various accounts of such protolanguage, claiming for instance that it originally comprised solely names of individuals and events and did not include relation descriptions<sup>2</sup>, or envisioning the order of emergence of various notions in various ages, including those semantically simple and universal<sup>3</sup>, are unscientific in the sense that they are unfalsifiable. Also the relative ease in shifting back the origins of the proto-speech without any linguistic arguments a million years back or several tens of thousands years forward must raise serious doubts. Regrettably, there is no direct pathway leading from observation of material remnants, incl. skulls, skeletons, primitive tools and similar artifacts, to conclusions regarding a phenomenon entirely devoid of physical features, i.e. language.

A significant insight into the structure of human speech enabled the linguists of the 20th and the 21st century to describe its necessary, definitional characteristics, and hence to discover the mechanisms governing its operation. Either a given code does possess the mechanism, causing us to automatically recognize it as a language similar to ours, or it does not feature such machinery and no enhancement entailing additional elements or entire complexes thereof is able to alter that. Let us hark back to a seminal passage from Wilhelm Humboldt's *Über das vergleichende Sprachstudium*, 13, where he considered speech an inherently human phenomenon:

(...) it will prove useless even if we spend thousands and thousands of years to invent it. (...) In order for a human being to understand a *single* word not merely as a sensual impulse, but as an articulated sound referring to a notion,

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<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis was submitted in a book by W. Calvin and D. Bickerton (2001).

<sup>3</sup> C. Goddard, A. Wierzbicka, H. Fabręga Jr. (2013: 60-79), distinguish six stages of such development of the NSM, i.e. Natural Semantic Metalanguage. First conceptual primes, viz. 'hands', 'legs', 'head', 'face' were to have emerged in the second stage of hominid development, ca. 4-3 million years ago, due to their development of upright posture.

the speech has to be completely inherent in the person: all its complexity included (quoted after: Scheler 1987: 3, 42).

A rational stand on the origin of language was adopted by Ferdinand de Saussure (2006), considered the father of modern linguistics. Indeed, he subscribed to the paradoxical principle of concurrent fluidity and stability of language in time and its changeability and immutability in space. He was persuaded that if one wants to learn of the origins of a given idiom, one has to research its contemporary state; thus, he emphasized that the language of our even most distant forefathers did not substantially differ from the languages human communities use today, for both in time and in space, unless a violent disruption occurs, it retains its continuity, even though it constantly undergoes transformation. The general linguistics envisaged by the Genevan scholar was to provide a confirmation that the essence of linguistic phenomena is:

the same everywhere and (...) is has always been the same, so that is completely wrong to believe that problem of the origin of language might be anything other than a problem of the change that it undergoes. It would be another matter altogether if one believed that other forces had once been at work in language of which we can get no inkling from what happens today. However, it would be an arbitrary and unconvincing hypothesis, which would in effect attribute to early humankind faculties or senses inherently different from those that we have today (de Saussure 2006: 105).

There is a striking similarity between the theses by de Saussure and the thoughts of John Lyons, a British linguist younger from the Genevan by almost eighty years, who writes in paragraph 1.7 (bearing a meaningful heading *There are no primitive languages*) of his renown work *Language and Linguistics. An Introduction*:

It is still fairly common to hear laymen talking about primitive languages and even repeating the discredited myth that there are some peoples whose language consists of a couple of hundred words supplemented by gestures. The truth is that every language so far studied, no matter how primitive or uncivilized the society using it might appear to us in other respects, has proved upon investigation to be a complex and highly developed system of communication. Of course, the whole notion of cultural evolution from barbarism to civilization is itself highly questionable. But it is not

for the linguist to pronounce upon its validity. What he can say is that no correlation has yet been discovered between the different stages of cultural development through which societies have passed and the type of language spoken at these states of cultural development. For example, there is no such thing as a Stone Age type of a language; or, as far as its general grammatical structure is concerned, a type of language that is characteristic of food-gathering or pastoral societies, on the one hand, or modern industrial societies, on the other. (...) In the course of the nineteenth century linguists came to realise that, however far back one traced the history of particular languages in the texts that have come down to us, it was impossible to discern in them any signs of evolutionary development from a more primitive to a more advanced state (Lyons 1981: 27-29).

Finally, to conclude this section of my account I will mention the position of Andrzej Bogusławski and Ewa Drzazgowska (2016), the authors of a two-volume work on the history of linguistic thought, who refer to physiological considerations on the origin of language of the post- or neo-Darwinian current as mere conjectures whose 'nature is that of ludicrous anecdotes or misguided speculations' (ibid., Vol. I: 28) and follow in their book the strategy developed by the Société de Linguistique de Paris. In 1866, the society interdicted any debate about the origin of language, deeming it not a serious issue, mainly attracting lunatics and fantasists.

## LANGUAGE – A PREREQUISITE FOR CULTURE

From various textbooks and at times even from original monographs of more scholarly nature, one occasionally learns that language being, as it may, an inherent element of culture is nevertheless one among many, incl. institutions and activities such as dance, painting, crafts and fashion. This is the image especially conjured up by considerations of various typologies of signs, which commonly resort to treating phrases of language as a subset of a shared category, located at the same level as symptoms or indices (such as tracks of an animal on the snow), icons (for instance someone's caricature) and symbols (for instance a white or red flag hoisted on the beach) (see: Bojar 1991: 31; Bobrowski 1998: 43-44; Łuczyński, Maćkowiak 1999: 10-12; Przybylska 2003: 12-18; Grzegorzczkowska 2007: 15-21). To a certain extent, the state of affairs presented above is due to the influential force of the formulation provided in *Course in General Linguistics*, a work conceiving of semiology, i.e.

a newly designed science of signs which was to become a section of general psychology and focus, besides natural language, also on other sign systems (de Saussure 1959: 16). Though the work mentioned entails an indication that the new discipline should be subjected to linguistics, as languages used by people are the most common and the most complex of codes (ibid.: 44), what was imprinted in the minds of a large number of the readers of *Course...* was the appreciation of other semiotic systems on par with human speech.

Original writings by F. de Saussure leave no doubt as to the fact that the scholar considered natural language to be an institution distinguished from among others, of a nature that 'all other human endeavors, with the exception of writing, can only misguide our concept of its essence were we unlucky enough to trust in the value of their analogy' (ibid.: 199). Moreover, he added that whoever sets foot in the domain of language shall be deprived of any juxtapositions and comparisons 'with either celestial or earthly phenomena' (ibid.: 206). For language is the only semiological system which 'has to face the challenge of time' (ibid.: 242), simply because it is a subject to trans-generational transmission.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, a researcher commonly known to have been inspired by de Saussure's thought, in an interview with Georges Charbonnier underscored the fact that the line of demarcation between nature and culture is set not by the presence of instruments, as often pointed out by anthropologists, but of articulate speech. For language is:

(...) the most perfect of all those cultural manifestations which, in one respect or another, constitute systems, and if we want to understand art, religion or law, and perhaps even cooking or the rules of politeness, we must imagine them as being codes formed by articulated signs, following the pattern of linguistic communication (Charbonnier 1969: 151).

In a similar way the relationship between language and other cultural codes was discussed by Roman Jakobson (1971: 698), who advised researchers of various systems of communication not to forget that:

(...) language is for all humanity the primary means of communication and that this hierarchy of communicative devices is necessarily reflected as well in all other, secondary types of human messages and makes them in various ways dependent upon language, namely, on its antecedent acquisition and

on the human usage of patent or latent verbal performances to accompany or interpret any other messages.

Still more emphatically, for in a purely formal manner, the relationship between natural language and other semiotic systems was phrased by Andrzej Bogusławski. In several of his works (Bogusławski 1988; 2013; Bogusławski, Drzazgowska 2016, Vol. I: 18-20), he presented an argument ruling out the existence of any common ground between what is idiomatically called signs by laymen and language expressions that would never be referred by common language users as signs. He also submitted a hypothesis that between signs (such as, for instance, a whistle signaling the departure of a train) and language expressions there is a unidirectional implication, in the sense that a sign, as it is colloquially referred to, is established by virtue of language usage and not the other way around. What is more, the function of signs can also be assumed by isolated elements, such as, say, a black banner hung upon the university gate, signaling the funeral of one of the professors, whereas language expressions owe their existence solely to the oppositions they enter with other units. From such a point of view, any generalization framing language expressions and signs as classes of the same order, as well as those reducing the former to the latter, would inevitably lead to an infinite regress. Thus, Bogusławski's formal argument unequivocally entails that a prerequisite of mankind developing any cultural phenomenon or code, as well as interpreting any fact or matter of affairs in terms of signs, i.e. establishment of any process of semiosis, is the operation of language.

After these considerations, aimed at reminding the reader the real, for grounded in logical reasoning, relationship between the speech and all other intellectual faculties and developments of man, I will now turn to the discussion of the basic properties which are necessary for any language, thus enabling us to distinguish it not only from animal codes, but also from dependant on it secondary semiotic systems used by people to structure the cultural space. At the same time, one has to differentiate between the so called language universals, i.e. properties inherent in every human idiom without exception<sup>4</sup>, from the linguistic qualities discussed here, the latter being determined logically. It is only these that will be the object on my focus

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<sup>4</sup> A list of such universals can be found, among others, in: Hockett 1950: 1-29.

here. The above sets differ in their range. For instance, all languages use sound as the carrier of messages, even though not only is it a superficial element in the process of communication, but, further still, in a specific understanding of the issue, it is entirely alien to the nature of language (de Saussure 2006). The point being that language (*langue*) understood as inherently incorporeal, interpersonal and constituted by a system of oppositions – leaves no room for individual physics-based phenomena. These can only be observed in single acts of speech (*parole*), a manifestation of the speaker's will. In fact, though sound is the most convenient means of transferring meaning, one should not forget that deaf people are perfectly able to communicate using another, i.e. manual and spatial form of expression.

## DOUBLE DIVISION OF LANGUAGE

An infeasible property of a natural language is its double division or – as it is sometimes phrased – its double articulation (from lat. *articulus* – ‘particle’). The quality, logically related to the matter of linear nature of language expressions boils down to the fact that out of a constant flow of speech one can separated units of two kinds: firstly, the bilateral ones, in the sense that they have both the layer of expression and the layer of content; secondly, those that serve to differentiate meanings, their function being therefore diacritical, conveying no meaning by themselves. The issue of double division was most succinctly put in an important statement by a French structuralist, André Martinet (1960: 17-22).

Products of the first division (first especially in terms of hierarchy of importance) share a common quality of significance, but they differ in that they may belong to various subsystems or represent various ranks of expressions. For instance in a phrase: *Oto nasza pływalnia* [‘Here, our swimming pool’] we can single out the predicative segment *oto* [‘here’], distributively operating as a finite form of a verb, and the noun phrase *nasza pływalnia* [‘our swimming pool’]. Both these strings are of bilateral nature. The analyzed whole can also be divided directly into simpler elements, i.e. the words *oto*, *nasza*, *pływalnia*, i.e. at the level of lexical items. Finally, without leaving the domain of the first division we can indicate the smallest units of meaning in the considered example: *oto*, *nasz-*, *-a*, *pływ-*, *-alń-*, *-a*, each of these constituting actualization of the respective original

morphemes<sup>5</sup> (/oto/, /nasz/, /pływ/), word building ones (/alń/ – for forming names of places) and grammar ones (/a/ – feminine singular nominative case ending). In the second division, the string unfolding either in time (in an utterance) or in space (in a written text) we divide into unilateral units, that is phones: *o, t, o, n, a, ś, a, p, ł, y, w, a, l, ń, a*, constituting realizations of specific phonemes (in a written text they are represented by appropriate letters or their combinations).

The double articulation of utterances and hence of language allows for the combinatorial feature of the system, thus ensuring its economy, simultaneously minimizing the user's effort involved in remembering huge amounts of meanings and oppositions they form. Using a relatively small number of particles of signification natural language can construe millions of lexical units; on the other hand, a couple tens of phonemes constitutes the expressive plane for all its bilateral elements. In the aforementioned paper, Jakobson (1971: 707) emphasizes that 'rich repertoire of definitely coded meaningful units (morphemes and words) is made possible through the diaphanous system of their merely differential components devoid of proper meanings (distinctive features, phonemes, and the rules of their combinability)'.

Such a twofold structure, a necessary quality of human speech, can be found in no other semiotic system.

## DOUBLE DEMARCATION IN LANGUAGE

Additionally, any establishment laying claims to the status of natural language has to comprise of two classes of units, i.e. on one hand expressions constituting its vocabulary and on the other – operational units (see: Bogusławski 1978b) responsible for its grammar. Such features ensure the generative and creative character of the code. It is that very quality that enables users to transition from the *langue* – the system of elements stored in the collective memory of a given ethnic community that every language user draws upon – to the *parole*, i.e. individual utterances comprising linear sets of elements selected out of the vocabulary and structured according to grammar by virtue of sender's individual decision. Using the terminology

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<sup>5</sup> At this point Martinet (1960) uses the term 'monem'.



devised by de Saussure's, one could also speak of transferring from the associative (or paradigmatic) to syntagmatic relations. Jakobson, in turn, would phrase the process in terms of alternating between the axis of selection and the axis of combination.

Such double demarcation of language liberates us of the necessity to use ready-made sentences in a limited, though relatively large, class. It is difficult to even imagine such situation in practice. The discussed quality enables language users to benefit from a large but finite number of elements in order to generate infinite number of utterances, each of these being a unique and creative act, regardless whether it is an original poem or, say, the simplest answer to a question.

## PROPORTIONALITY

The number of lexical and operational units of a natural language must be large enough to allow for its proportionality. It is so because the mechanism of human speech is essentially a matter of proportional sets. In the fields of philosophy and linguistics, the feature has been underscored by numerous authors since antiquity<sup>6</sup>. Among them a special mention is due to de Saussure, who claimed that language is nothing more than relations of relations, that it comprises solely oppositions, i.e. differences and identities, that it is a form not substance, its character being algebraic. He expressed a belief that one day it will finally be discovered that the linguistic values and relationships they enter 'can, as a matter of course, be expressed by mathematical formulae' (de Saussure 2006: 143). Independently of de Saussure and in a still more precise manner the essence of linguistic identities was conceived of by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922: theses: 3.141; 4.03; 4.032) and *Philosophische Grammatik* (1989: 297; 315-318). Within the Polish theoretical linguistics, this constitutive feature of language was on numerous occasions greatly emphasized by A. Bogusławski (1993).

The truth that everything in language rests upon proportions transpires in various ways throughout: in the history of any given idiom, in its everyday operation, in the process of speech acquisition by the youngest members

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<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive account of the manner analogy and proportionality have been treated within the linguistic and philosophical thought can be found in: Bogusławski, Drzazgowska 2016, Vol. 1: 356-367.

of any community. Let us choose a random example: the Polish *czytać* ['to read'] is to *czytał* ['he read'] what *biegać* ['to run'] is to *biegał* ['he ran'], what *chwytać* ['to catch'] is to *chwycił* ['he caught'] or *śpiewać* ['to sing'] to *śpiewał* ['he sung']. Between such analogous forms, there are in language, as Jerzy Kuryłowicz would put it, *distances égales* – equal distances (Kuryłowicz 1949). The names such as *ładowarka* ['charger'] or *niszczarka* ['shredder'] were coined according to a regular pattern of the Polish language, that is by complementing the appropriate verb root with a suffix *-arka*, as attested by numerous proportional fours, sixes and eights, etc., thus: *spawać* : *spawarka* ['to weld' : 'welding machine'], *wiercić* : *wiertarka* ['to drill' : 'a drill'], *zamrażać* : *zamrażarka* ['to freeze' ; 'freezer'], *suszyć* : *suszarka* ['to dry' : 'drier'], *ładować* : *ładowarka* ['to charge' : 'charger'], *niszczyć* : *niszczarka* ['to shred' : 'shredder']. The ever more common feminine forms such as *filozofka* [fem. 'philosopher'] and *geolożka* [fem. 'geologist'] are also derived according to the proportional model, embedded in the minds of the speakers. All innovations, both those within the norm and the beyond normal are by their nature analogical. The Poles keep using the incorrect infinitive form *\*wziąć* ['to take'], as they remember words such as *prząść* ['to spin'], *siąść* ['to sit'] and *trząść* ['to shake']. French children, as demonstrated by de Saussure, use an erroneous form of the past tense *je \*venirai*, created from the verb *venir*, for the form conforms to the pervasive proportion, one of many embedded by language in our minds, in this case: *punir* : *punirai*, *partir* : *partirai*, *finir* : *finirai*, *mentir* : *mentirai*, etc. The form *honor*, known from classical Latin, replaced the former nominative *honoris*, for once again the rule of identification applied: *victor* : *victorem* = *orator* : *oratore* = *x* : *honorem*, from which it can be inferred that *x* should be replaced with *honor* (it is a well known example given in: de Saussure 1959: 163), even if it is an analogical and not strictly proportional alignment<sup>7</sup>.

The systemic nature of language, oftentimes defined in academic textbooks in an oversimplified and altogether naive manner, cannot be framed and adequately explained without stating its necessary connection to the rule of proportionality. As mentioned above, natural language does not feature isolated elements. That circumstance distinguishes its units

<sup>7</sup> However, the words *orator* and *victor* have different endings than *honor*; moreover, they refer to people and not abstract notions.

from among other signs originating in other cultural planes. Moreover, the proportionality of language also rules out any analogies with animal signals; otherwise one would have to assume that just like humans, animals are able to perceive the world in terms of differences and identities, hence – also to perform such sophisticated activities as coining of neologisms, word plays and complex logical operations.

Users being aware of the fact that a given system includes proportional patterns makes them perceive specific utterances not as a series of undifferentiated sounds (as is the case for instance with animal sounds, indivisible, as they are, into operational segments), but as a string in which subsequent portions of sound are related to appropriate portions of meaning. The expressions extracted by virtue of differences and identities are concrete language entities, constituting its lexical and morphological subsystems<sup>8</sup>.

In the opening of this section, I submitted that every natural language must include a number of elements large enough to allow for operation of the proportionality requirement. However, de Saussure (2006) himself, though able to capture the essence of the mechanism of speech in such an ingenious manner by conceptualizing it as algebraic systems, was wrong to claim that for a language to come to existence only two forms are needed (for example *ba* and *la*), which would be able to organize all its necessary meanings on either one or the other side of there. The prerequisite number of forms and meanings related thereto cannot be lower than four, as only in such circumstances can one talk about a proportional four (see: Bogusławski 2009).

## MEANS NECESSARY IN A LANGUAGE

I would like to devote the final part of the paper to presenting a short account of language stock of expressions necessary for generating any utterances and other means essential for that purpose.

### 1. Predicative and referential expressions

Speaking – as insightfully demonstrated by John L. Austin (1962), a representative of the British analytical philosophy – is constituted of many

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<sup>8</sup> For more about adequate delimitation of an utterance string see among others: de Saussure 1959: 102-106; Bogusławski 1976, 1978a, 1996.

different activities. However, two of them are absolutely fundamental, that is first of all the act of reference, i.e. the relation between what is being said and the relevant objects in the world, and, secondly, act of predicate (or stating), i.e. ascribing to a given object a series of qualities. In other words, speaking is pointing to objects in the world and characterizing them in terms of something. For instance, in a sentence: *Janek pracuje* ['Janek is working'] we point to a known person, named Janek, and we predicate of him that at the moment of speaking he is in the process of performing some work. Each fulfillment of both these acts requires a set of specialized language devices. On one hand, the speakers must have at their disposal referential or deictic expressions, such as proper names, various pronouns and articles, which enable us to talk not only about the things within the range of the index finger, while on the other – predicative expressions (independent from the above) constituted by various parts of speech. It is not very difficult to imagine a language bereft of a certain class of predicates, like, for instance, what we refer to as nouns, or even more so of what we call conjunctions; however, the distinction between deictic and predicative phrases must be kept, lest there be a threat of destabilization of the speech act. Moreover, it is of no consequence here that there are no pure indices in language – of the kind that would be entirely devoid of any predicative content, as even names are not free of some elementary meaning; it is the dominating position of one of those functions that allows for a clear-cut opposition.

## 2. Expression of the object and meta-object level

Every language, apart from the expressions for representing phenomena of the reality outside the language, must feature means of speaking about speaking, i.e. referring to other occurrences within the very language system<sup>9</sup>. Once again, it is a quality of the kind one would vainly look for in animal codes. Great apes certainly are able to signalize to their caretaker that they desire to receive food, they are however unable to formulate messages as to those very signals. It is a result of the fact, as underscored by A. Bogusławski in his linguistic theory, that animals much like humans

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<sup>9</sup> That property of the language had already been observed in Ancient India, ca. 500 years BC. For the history of considerations of the meta-language see: Bogusławski, Drzazgowska 2006, Vol. II: 486-522.

are in possession of some knowledge about the world, but they are not aware of their own knowledge, for they lack self-reflection.

In a natural language, there is not only the possibility to perform consideration of the system as a whole (that is the nature of my current paper), but also on the various elements of its code (e.g. *The word 'cat' is monosyllabic*) as well as already performed utterances (e.g. *'The word »cat« is monosyllabic' – is a good example of a meta-utterance*). The operations indicated above are performed within the *parole* by virtue of unspecific means; however, in the language itself (*langue*) we can find specialized elements performing metatextual functions. For in the stock of its expressions, an important place is given to units that in terms of their semantics constitute concise one-word commentaries on the speech activities performed at the time. In the Polish language such role is played by particles, the kind of: *raczej* ['rather'], *chyba* ['maybe'], *może* ['perhaps'], *bynajmniej nie*<sup>10</sup> ['not at all'], or a more distinctive meta-texts in the form of: *krótko mówiąc* ['in brief'], *innymi słowy* ['in other words'], *by tak rzec* ['so to speak'] and other similar expressions.

The impulse for researching meta-language within the domain of linguistics was provided by the achievements of great philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly of Alfred Tarski (1933), who, while developing his theory of truth, assumed that knowledge of a given natural language implies the knowledge of its meta-language, which in turns implies the knowledge of its meta-meta-language, i.e. the ability to refer to expressions as the object of current discussion and transferring expressions from object to meta-level while retaining their meaning.

### 3. Means for transferring knowledge and communicating truth

The basic function of the language is the one referred to as symbolic, representative or referential. For various linguistic units are able to represent relevant objects in the reality both within and without the language, as well as all relations between these objects. Whereas all the various realizations of the system in the form of specific utterances serve primarily cognitive function. The main point of using a language in an individual act of speech is

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<sup>10</sup> The three particles of the mentioned series constitute minute stories informing of the speaker's inadequate knowledge to assert whatever follows.

to convey a portion of knowledge to the receiver. Language communication is first and foremost sharing knowledge with interlocutors. Effects such as manifesting one's emotional states, pressurizing the receiver, achieving phatic or poetic goals – all constitute secondary superstructures erected upon the cognitive aspects.

The research on reconstructing the system of simple and universal notions performed in various academic centers upon linguistic material differing fundamentally in terms of structure, provide persuasive arguments that one of the basic *indefinibilia* is a notion related to the Polish verb *wiedzieć, że* \_\_, the French *savoir que* \_\_, the English *know that* \_\_, the Russian *znat' što* \_\_, etc. Bogusławski, having devoted to cognitive aspects of natural language his major works (1998; 2007), points not only to the explanative power of the notion of knowledge (a reflection of the fact that it is a component of a vast majority of compound phrases of various languages), but also to the fact that each meaningful statement possesses an epistemic implication. What it means is that a logical use of a sentence *p* implies that *someone knows that p*.

What is more, every asserted statement, that is one uttered in all seriousness and with the accompanying experience of certainty, additionally one that can be related using an emphatic phrase *ktoś powiedział, że* \_\_ [‘someone said that \_\_’], contains the so-called truth-claim, i.e. a specific attitude of the sender towards the truthful nature of their utterance. This essential element does not exhibit any segmental expression, the fundamental role being played here by prosodic devices, associated predominantly with the cadence intonation. Epistemic implication and truth-claim make speaking without any contact with knowledge and truth – a virtual impossibility.

In a paper suggestively titled *Veredicum laudare necesse est, vitam sustinere non est necesse* Bogusławski (2005) points to the fact that truth has a privileged position within language. It is logically distinguished in relation to goodness (thus also to virtues such as: kindness, mercy, magnanimity) as well as to beauty. He grounds his thesis upon an observation, supported by a logical argument, that complete and irrevocable approval for consciously disseminated untruth is self-contradictory, whereas the same kind of approval of truth does not exhibit any contradictoriness. For whoever approves of untruths uttered by another, cannot at the same time approve

of what from his or her point of view is true, i.e. their own positive evaluation of the falsities expressed. Such asymmetry does not apply to any other values and anti-values.

The linguistic primacy of truth over goodness and beauty finds corroboration in the data gathered within various languages. Cogent examples provided by Bogusławski are a testament to the fact that truth proves strikingly independent of other values. The sentence: *It would be beautiful/good, were it true* is not only perfectly acceptable, but – further still – it is often used, whereas an utterance: *\*It would be true, were it beautiful/good* has to be considered unacceptable.

Speaker's deliberate failure in terms of the truth of his or her utterance results in a creation of an inappropriate and harmful image of a related fragment of reality in the mind of the receiver, which, in turn, is associated with a risk of the latter's willingness to act inadequately. The implications of falsehood are therefore far-reaching both in the practical and the axiological perspective. Entire renouncement of truth within human communication, resulting in a breakdown of mutual trust, would threaten the foundation of language and eventually lead to the annihilation of social life. That is most certainly the reason why there is not a single ethical system which would treat telling the truth and untruth as an indifferent matter.

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In this short article I was able to signal only a selection of aspects related to the issue of necessity within natural language. Recapitulating my considerations, I would like once more to underscore the fact that it is an institution of the sort that cannot be juxtaposed with any other communication system whether in the realm of nature or culture. Even the trivial and – seemingly – purely structural properties of language introduce us directly and irrevocably into the reality of fundamental ontological, epistemological and axiological issues.

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## Summary

The paper marks an attempt to answer two closely interrelated questions: What is a natural language necessary for and, conversely, what is necessary for a language? The first part presents a thesis that there exists a chasm between human speech and animal codes – a chasm which cannot be leveled by explanations of evolutionary nature. A series of ideas of distinguished scholars are referred advocating the logical primacy of language in relation to all other semiotic systems that create the space of culture. In the second part of the article, the inalienable properties of language are discussed, those that determine its essence and, at the same time, the uniqueness with respect to both the animal signals and all other sign systems. These features include: double demarcation, duality, proportionality, the possession of reference and predictive expressions, metalinguistic and metatextual tools, as well as tools for communicating the truth and knowledge of the world.

**Keywords:** linguistics, semiotics, natural language, animal codes, inalienable features of human language

## THE RETURN OF *THE FOREFATHERS' EVE* OR TWO THEATRES

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Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*] had returned to the Polish theatre; it is not accidental that its subsequent stagings coincided with a jubilee of great importance for the Polish culture, celebrated in 2015 under the motto '250 years of public theatre'. It is a reflection on the role, organization and endangerment of public venues that prevailed in the anniversary debates; however, we have not forgotten that the date of the premiere of Józef Bielawski's comedy *Natraci* [*Intruders*], held on November 19<sup>th</sup> 1765 in Warsaw's Opera House, is primarily considered as the moment of creation of the National Theatre. Highlighting that fact in the pages of the May issue of the „Teatr” monthly, several theatre historians and critics even took up polemics with the originators of the official celebrations. I do not want to consider either party's arguments here – the jubilee has passed, the discussion is closed, and all polemical texts remain available on the Theatre Institute's website. What I find more important is that, when leading the 'public or national?' anniversary dispute, the polemicists jointly sketched an intellectual project of the contemporary Polish theatre, increasingly widespread in one of its varieties or branches and, as it seems, more and more exclusive in the other one, with outstanding performances corresponding to it becoming rare and exceptional. The new stagings of *Forefathers' Eve* clearly testify to this, which makes them worth taking a closer look, if it were for this reason alone.

### PUBLIC SPHERE AND COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION

The first branch of the Polish theatre was accurately described by Dariusz Kosiński in the program statement for this year's celebration of the *Rok teatru ważnego* [*Year of Important Theatre*]. Referring to Jürgen Habermas's

well-known concept of the public sphere as a space for free civic debate led in a modern democratic society, he enumerated the most important functions of public theatre:

expanding and strengthening of the public sphere, active participation in public debate not only through speaking out in matters that constitute its subject, but also by introducing new topics and asking new questions, questioning the obvious, undermining the position of hegemony (whoever they are) and, finally, abstracting symptoms, signals, tensions and groups which are still looking for their own language (Kosiński 2015a).

On the other hand, in the text (Kosiński 2015b) he equated the idea of public and critical theatre: 'public theatre is a space of experience and reflection, the core of which is confrontation with the ways of thinking adopted and actualized by the viewers in life'. Public theatre also enters into a dialogue with the past, which is the most interesting to us here, and 'most often refers to the past critically, exposing the hidden presence and power that anachronistic schemes and myths still exercise over today's Poles, or exposing its dark sides'. According to Kosiński, the most general definition of public theatre was: public theatre is one that 'is financed from public funds (...) because of the importance and value it has for social and individual life, as well as for national heritage and culture'. It was at this point that Małgorzata and Marek Piekut (2015) took up a polemic with Kosiński's theses, accusing the author of 'semantic equilibristics'. According to them, Kosiński expanded the meaning of the term 'public' 'to the limit' at the expense of the concept of the 'national', which he subordinated to the former. 'Let us not be afraid of words!' – they called, reminding the cultural and anthropological definition of the nation as Benedict Anderson (2006) formulated it. In relation to us, it would read as follows: 'a voluntary community of Poles and those who consider themselves to be them, limited culturally and linguistically (but not territorially!) and sovereign' (Piekut, Piekut 2015). Anderson (2006) emphasizes the imaginary dimension of the sense of national affiliation, pointing to the fact that its individual members, for the most part, do not know and never get to know one another and yet, together, they 'cultivate in their mind the image of the community', founded primarily on symbols referring to shared experiences. It is the tomb of the unknown soldier – a sign

of sacrifice for homeland, universal in the Western world – that Anderson found to be the most important symbol (ibid.: 9).

The anthropological concept of nations as ‘imagined communities’ was extended by Anderson far beyond the European countries and opposed to deforming nationalism which, in turn, was opposed to racism, based on biological determination and constantly raving about eternal defilement of racial purity (ibid.: 169). Małgorzata and Marek Piekut (2015) also referred to the historical idea of the nation, which they called ‘extended’, reminding us that, in the nineteenth century:

a collective effort of poets and philosophers of the Romanticist era led to the development of a vision of Poland in which everybody, regardless of religion, home language, ethnic or social origin, and therefore all Poles, Ruthenians, i.e. Ukrainians, Jews and Germans, would be vested with citizen rights – in accordance with Joachim Lelewel’s broad programme.

That was an important reminder, for Romanticism is presented nowadays as an era of formation of dangerous nationalisms, becoming the cause of the twentieth-century mass crimes and the basis of today’s chauvinism and exclusion, of which Dariusz Kosiński accused the defenders of the national theatre. Małgorzata and Marek Piekut dismissed that objection and argued that ‘national’ in relation to theatre does not mean self-absorption, sycophancy or bombast.

On the contrary, it means a dispute, polemic, painful admonition. The care for the preservation of tradition requires constant reinterpretation and critical analysis. Could it have been otherwise if the Polish national theatre was created by Wyspiański, Schiller, Witkacy, Horzyca, Kantor, Wierciński, Dejmek, Hubner, Swinarski, Grotowski, Grzegorzewski... the list should be much longer (ibid.).

On the one hand, we have the critical theatre based on Habermas’s concept, occupying an important place in the public sphere; on the other hand, a modernly perceived national theatre, relying on Anderson’s concept of imagined community; a type of theatre which does not remain uncritical towards the community, either. What is, then, the difference between them? To capture it, it is worthwhile to look at specific artistic manifestations. The recent productions of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve* are perfect

for this as we are dealing here with a drama which has shaped the Poles' national imagination like no other; in the past, its important stagings usually became part of the political debate in historical moments crucial for Poland. We also experienced this recently when, after April 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, in response to the Smolensk plane crash followed by national mourning, Paweł Wodziński produced *Mickiewicz. Dziady. Performance* [*Mickiewicz. Forefathers' Eve. A Performance*] in which the traditional division into collaborators and conspirators was replaced by a completely different antagonism: the establishment *versus* the excluded. It is not insignificant that the latest productions of *Forefathers' Eve* which are of our interest were created by directors adopting an avant-garde or even experimental approach to theatre and representing, moreover, the same generation of artists. I mean here Michał Zadara, who staged the first, second and fourth parts of *Forefathers' Eve* at the Polski Theatre in Wrocław, and then directed the third part (and announcing the last part, i.e. *Ustęp* [*Digression*]), and Paweł Passini, who staged his own adaptation of the entire work of Mickiewicz twice: first at the Puppet and Actor Theatre in Opole, then at the Academic Drama Theatre in Brest, Belarus (it should be added that, in 2014, also Radosław Rychcik staged his 'pop-culture' *Forefathers' Eve*).

I am pointing out the artistic and generational affinity of both directors in order to dismiss, straight away, the assumption that the theatre of the imagined community could today only be a traditional drama theatre, created for audiences seeking prestige and entertainment in it and, therefore, not ready for aesthetic risk. Dariusz Kosiński once called such theatre the 'theatre of a cultural city'; the formula appears in his latest comments on the National Theatre in Warsaw. I consider this judgment not entirely fair; for the sake of clarity, however, I would like to point out that Paweł Passini has never worked at the National Theatre in Warsaw but, in spite of that, he remains the creator of the theatre of the imagined community for me – just as Zadara remains the creator of the critical theatre for me. Of course, it would be the most interesting to compare the works of both artists thoroughly; here, I would focus on interviews given by Zadara and Passini during their work on *Forefathers' Eve* or after its opening. I am interested in young Polish directors' manner of thinking about Mickiewicz's drama, what they say about it, and only in the second place how their concepts materialize on stage.

## ZADARA OR *FOREFATHERS' EVE* IN THE CRITICAL THEATRE

In his statements, Zadara constantly emphasises the textual dimension of *Forefathers' Eve*. For him, the romantic arch-drama is a huge collection of words: dialogues, monologues, but also stage directions, comments, prologues, dedications, mottoes and all paratexts, written and intended for reading: silent, loud, on stage. The words of the drama are signs of an alphabet which have specific meanings and can be spoken or sung. The director is sometimes inclined to read these meanings literally, verbatim, regardless of the metaphor – on the one hand, and of the historical transformations of language – on the other. In his correspondence with Professor Maria Prussak, printed in the program booklet of parts I, II and IV of *Forefathers' Eve*, the artist argues with the researcher that the word 'singer' used by Mickiewicz does not mean a man who creates poems – a poet, but one who performs songs. He defends the concept in the pages of the „Teatr” monthly, enumerating those fragments of *Forefathers' Eve* in which Konrad ('a singer for people') and other heroes of the drama sing (Zadara 2015). If they sing, then the word means a singer, like Bob Marley or Bob Dylan whom Zadara mentions. Therefore, the director is interested in linguistic concreteness and, at the same time, the literality of *Forefathers' Eve*, something that Jolanta Kowalska (2014), in the review of the production, called the 'body of the text'. In the work, this body materializes in the form of a hybrid tapeworm of words, and on the stage in the form of a loud, sharp, sometimes overly expressive speech which often turns into chanting or vocalization, blurring the poetic rhythm of the phrase or the accent. It may also transform into the action of characters whose visions or fantasies are explained on stage in a very explicit way (by the number of bottles of wine emptied by the heroes, for instance).

For Zadara, *Forefathers' Eve* is also a text which, apart from Polish language scholars' readings, has never been read thoroughly and thus remains 'a work unknown to Poles' (Cieślak 2014). His concept of staging an 'uncut' *Forefathers' Eve* stems from the conviction that it needs to be presented to Polish audiences with a demonstration of 'what it is really about' (Piekarska 2015). Zadara repeatedly accused Polish culture of being unintellectual, which, in his opinion, manifests itself in the fact – to mention this one only – that we do not know the masterpieces of our literature. We boast that we do but, in fact, instead of reading them by ourselves,

we uncritically accept others people's interpretations of works unknown to us, which makes us live in the sphere of ideological mystifications of literature. Those mystifications have nothing to do with the meaning of our culture's fundamental texts, which is why the director decided to show them to contemporary Poles, staging *Forefathers' Eve* not 'as we imagine it' (Piekarska 2014), but as it was written. In the assumptions of this project, I find a similarity to one of the five principles of Protestantism *sola scriptura* proclaiming that the Scripture is the only source of theological knowledge, rejecting the tradition and authority of the ecclesial exegesis of biblical books in this matter. That principle led to the undermining of certain dogmas of the Catholic Church and the creation of a new current of Christianity. 'In Polish tradition, you do not read. You do not even read the Bible' (ibid.), says the director, wondering like a genuine Protestant how many Polish Catholics have read the Old Testament and know, for example, that there are two versions of the decalogue. Very few, the artist suggests, because we know the Bible from church sermons – and *Forefathers' Eve* from lessons at school.

For the director protesting against the 'traditional Polish unintellectualism', the greatest imposture of *Forefathers' Eve* lies in their martyrological interpretation. The Poles want to read *Forefathers' Eve* as a drama about their historical martyrdom, meanwhile 'it is a drama in which there is not a single word about World War II, concentration and labor camps, Katyn, communism, March 1968 and the Smolensk crash' (Cieślak 2014). I understand this ironic phrase as a provocative critique of known and possible staging and cinematographic allusions, such as those appearing in Tadeusz Konwicki's *Lawa* [*Lava*]. Zadara considers them illegitimate – because they falsify the meaning of the drama – and, in fact, harmful as they consolidate the Poles' irrational convictions about the need to sacrifice for the homeland. 'Someone asked me recently whether I was against what Mickiewicz said in *Forefathers' Eve*: that one must fight and sacrifice themselves for the homeland. The point is that there is nothing like that there. Not even such a question' (Piekarska 2015), the director argues.

This radical judgment serves him to draw equally radical interpretative conclusions. Firstly, he considers the martyrological prison scenes of the third part as a deliberate falsification of history, resulting from the poet's guilty feeling (Mickiewicz 'suffered for show') and, secondly, he excessively reinforces the satirical dimension of the drama. He reads the scene in the Warsaw



parlor in such a way that the criticism is also aimed at the conspirators: 'those who think themselves better than the parlor and see nothing but suffering and conspiracies in Poland' (ibid.). He gives no textual evidence, however, in support of his theses, recalling instead the authority of Witold Gombrowicz and his *Operetka* [*Operetta*] as a total satire: one covering the entirety of the world presented. From this perspective, he concludes that 'Mickiewicz wrote a satire on power, fashion and the form of social behaviors' (ibid.), including the oppositional attitudes which are born, in *Forefathers' Eve*, out of defiance against tsarist repression and genuine compassion for victims of terror. In order to mock the Poles' self-victimization and, broader: to 'attack' some element of the national mentality, the director distorts the meanings of Mickiewicz's work, but does it as if imperceptibly, dressing up the heroes in historical costumes and making them deliver the whole text of the play, which the critics even considered a pietistic approach to the arch-drama. This practice is now a frequent artistic strategy in critical theatre, justified and even recommended in public art as the best tool of subversion, which 'consists in imitating, almost identifying with the subject of criticism, and then subtly shifting meanings. That moment of shifting the meanings is not always perceptible to the spectator. This is not an outright, direct criticism, but a criticism full of ambiguity' (Dziamski 2015).

The consequence of such practice is Zadara's style of staging of *Forefathers' Eve*, based on theatrical travesty which turns satirical scenes (especially the ones involving Novosiltsev) into a farce (the audience laughs aloud at the count's jokes), while the prison and vision scenes reveal the director's clear distance from the characters and states they experience. Zadara, as an interpreter of *Forefathers' Eve*, rationalizes the mystical experiences of Mickiewicz's characters; this is why he diagnoses them with mental illnesses in his interviews and makes them get drunk and clown around on stage. According to the director: 'the improvisation cannot be read directly, [this scene – J.K.] is only a record of a certain rampage', caused by 'isolation', 'cold', 'dampness' and 'dirt' (Cieślak 2015). In another interview, the director calls Konrad a downright 'schizophrenic paranoid' who 'constantly fears being overheard, has delusions, is unable to find common language with anyone' (Piekarska 2014). He also adds that Mickiewicz 'created a dark, complicated hero, full of inner contradictions, which was later used by Polish paranoids, because they felt similarity with Gustaw and Konrad – in the sense

of not being able to cope with reality either' (Cieślak 2014). And finally: 'It does not come as a surprise that the hero considers himself a representative of the nation: it happens to a lot of schizophrenics' (ibid.) – adds the director, making clear allusions to the opinions on some contemporary politicians. By doing this, he nullifies the sense of Konrad's expression, he does not take his internal drama seriously and, as a consequence, destroys the mystery-play or – broader – metaphysical structure of *Forefathers' Eve*. He makes little of the hero's blasphemy and negates the seriousness of the exorcisms which, after all, determine also the fate of another prisoner, Rollison. Referring to the 'anti-scientific ideology' that the Poles are constantly yielding to (e.g. trusting homeopathy or not trusting the findings of the commission investigating the causes of the Smolensk crash [Piekarska 2015]), he considers the exorcism scene to be comedic and this is precisely how he decides to direct it. In fact, he adopts the attitude of the Old Man from Mickiewicz's poem *Romantyczność* [*Romanticism*] ('Trust my eye and hand glass, / I can see nothing around here'), confusing romantic irony with a critical attitude founded on scientific premises, completely alien to the Romanticists.

Zadara simply imputes Jan Śniadecki's mentality to Mickiewicz. He is, therefore, a 'Protestant' who, after having read the Bible on his own, found its prophets mad, inspired with the word by the Holy Spirit – provided that the latter exists – in such a way that the truth they proclaimed became discredited. Let us imagine the faces of the faithful after hearing this exegesis... And yet it was precisely for them that it was conducted. If Zadara staged his *Forefather's Eve* 'uncut', it was also with contemporary Poles in mind; the Poles who, according to the director's conviction, show great reluctance to think and keep reading the play as if it was the Bible, while Konrad, 'suffering for millions', is treated almost like a Messiah. The problem is that Zadara does not try to nuance the interpretation of this character, as did many interpreters before him – also in theatre; with one radical cut, he deprives it of its mind and charisma, and the Poles – of a national hero. A character which has occupied, for almost two hundred years, a central position in their collective imagination and thanks to which, as Anderson would say, they feel they belong to a community. In Zadara's critical 'reading', Konrad can no longer play such a role. Not only because everything he says is a madman's delirium, but also because he is a misfit, rejected by the community. Zadara adopts a transgressive interpretation of Konrad's character, known from

the works of Maria Janion and her students, if it enables him to achieve the overriding goal he set for himself. It is 'anarchizing' *Forefathers' Eve* which, in its interpretation, turns precisely against the community:

The political aspect of *Forefathers' Eve* lies in its wild anarchy. It is a play about individuals who are unable to find their place in the community. Each character has the same problem: they do not match the expectations the world has set for them. Whether it is Gustav, whose love nobody understands, the Virgin who has no one to speak to, or the Priest who is a hermit – they are lonely people unable to communicate with the world. This is a drama about the maladjusted, weirdos, freaks, and misfits. The form of *Forefathers' Eve* in itself is revolutionary. It does not match any drama category, it is unfinished, and incoherent. This work is anti-fascist to the core: against any kind of uniformity and correctness. And this is precisely the drama which lies in the center of the Polish soul. If *Forefathers' Eve* is meant to define Polishness, it is a wild Polishness, rule-breaking, full of horrors and frenzy, erudite and folk and, above all, nonhomogeneous. This is the Polishness I can accept and even celebrate. But does the play reflect the current state of the Polish soul? No. We are observing a desire to unify, impose the solely legitimate Polish traits on everyone. And there is no such thing as a real Pole, just as there is no 'real' forefathers' eve. The nation is a fiction, invented in the nineteenth century, necessary to carry out a certain libertarian project. But not eternal. Even Mickiewicz believed that you are no longer a Pole in heaven (Piekarska 2014).

Therefore, the director's new theatrical reinterpretation of *Forefathers' Eve* is intended to change the definition of Polishness or even Polishness itself. Zadara believes in the existence of the Poles' collective imagination – after all, he speaks about the 'center of the Polish soul' – yet he would like to reorganize it so that the Poles cease to be an imagined community ('the nation is a fiction'), understood as one which defines itself on the basis of what unites it, in order to become a community of a different kind. Namely, one which is defined on the basis of what makes it different: 'different', 'individual', 'heterogeneous', 'inconsistent', 'rule-breaking' – and rational at the same time. What emerges from his speech is a supranational and modernization-oriented, but difficult to grasp (as, in fact, paradoxical) project of rebuilding the concept of community. Zadara speaks quite vaguely and ironically about some 'solely legitimate Polish traits'; he does not criticize Polish mentality or

Polish national defects in his production, though. He does something far more serious: he tackles the dramatic matrix of the Poles' Romanticist spirituality with Konrad at its center and shatters it while constantly emphasizing fidelity to the text. 'Directing means here: activating the spaces suggested by the text' (ibid.), he explains. However, this suggestion applies only to the surface of the text, which is why Zadara's productions drag into infinity, falling apart into separate episodes directed in various conventions. The director constantly exposes the incoherence of the play built up from fragments, fighting shy of merging it into a ritual or excavating a community foundation myth in his production. It is also characteristic that, speaking about the 'political aspect' of *Forefathers' Eve*, he firmly rejects its timeliness in connection with the threat posed by contemporary Russia. He does not take up the theme of the war in Ukraine suggested to him by the interviewer, comparing instead the victims of the tsarist repression to Guantanamo prisoners, and there is a visible consequence in it. He is namely interested in an example of suffering which causes Poles to feel rather guilty (Polish CIA prisons) than harmed. It is also an attempt to build Poles' 'global' consciousness; this goal is served by numerous references to mass culture: Konrad himself is a drunken hippie performing a musical 'show' on imaginary voice synthesizers. The journalist wittily calls the Great Improvisation a 'madman's show'; the director takes it up and the audience rewards it with laughter. Laughter always builds a distance towards the hero and that was precisely the effect Zadara wanted – laughter and boredom – because witchcraft, prayers, visions, or even great poetic improvisations do not work anymore.

### **PASSINI OR FOREFATHERS' EVE IN THE THEATRE OF THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY**

The case is different for Passini, who declared from the very beginning: 'We take *Forefathers' Eve* seriously' (Legierska 2015) and directed relatively short, condensed productions with a ritual structure, a very strong climax, and a well-marked catharsis effect. The topic of reading the drama also returns, which the director called 'precipitous and idiosyncratic' returns also in Passini's pre-opening interviews (Świerczyński 2015). It is precipitous because, due to the archaic rituals presented in *Forefathers' Eve*, 'the text is difficult to understand for a contemporary recipient'; idiosyncratic, because 'Mickiewicz's work holds an immense power' which is not even diminished

by the fact of being a compulsory reading for schools. Passini emphasizes that the text of *Forefathers' Eve* 'becomes engraved in memory' and remains there for a long time. 'There are moments when – even if you have not read the text for some time – the content comes to mind by itself', he explains, highlighting the unique status of the text of *Forefathers' Eve* among other dramas. 'During the work on the play, I felt that I did not know it at all' – he confesses, confirming in a certain way Zadara's opinion on the Poles not knowing their arch-drama... Characteristically, however, he does admit it – pointing, in fact, to the semantic complexity of Mickiewicz's work, which seemed to be clear, even obvious to Zadara. Nevertheless, the next minute he adds: 'At the same time, I still feel as if I was born already knowing this text'. This surprising confession – probably completely unacceptable for the director of the 'uncut' *Forefathers' Eve* – turns out to be crucial for Passini's interpretation.

Let us note that, when talking about the reception of *Forefathers' Eve*, Passini does not assess the state of Poles' mentality or the nature of Polish culture. He does not air general judgments, distancing himself from the subject of criticism; instead, he rather observes himself as a reader and expresses his own thoughts, especially feelings. He says: 'Mickiewicz's work holds an enormous power' and it is not an empty statement, because he has experienced this power himself. He also believes that, as an artist, he will be able to understand where the sense of the primary knowledge of *Forefathers' Eve* (since his birth) comes from and that he can refer to that sensation in the play. He also harbors the belief that, thanks to his artistic practice, the subjective turns to be common as long as he, the director, creates the right conditions for the audience to meet the work – as opposed to confronting it.

*Forefathers' Eve* is, as a story, very difficult to tell in a linear way. This is the way the text is, by nature. However, in my opinion, Mickiewicz designed certain events to be taking place simultaneously, overlapping one another. Hence the necessity of drawing the viewer into the vortex of the story, burying them, so to speak, in its reality. The puppets – about four hundred of them have been made for the production – are a great medium for this. I do not want to reveal too much but, for the purposes of the show, we also eliminated the division into the stage and the audience. All this to make the viewer feel the text and immerse themselves in it (ibid.).

What is striking is the imagery used by Passini who, as early as at the level of commenting, projects the reception of *Forefathers' Eve* as an entrance to the interior of the text, immersion in it, submission to its weight. The words in the play materialize in the form of conventional homunculus puppets which surround the viewers, are put into their hands by the actors, flounder under their feet, and fly over their heads. 'Paweł Passini's *Forefathers' Eve* resembles the biblical journey in the belly of a whale. The viewers get swallowed by theatre for two hours', wrote Jolanta Kowalska (2015) in a review of the production. The director symbolically eliminates the division between the stage and the audience, establishing a community of actors and spectators in the theatre, and condensing time in the theatrical 'belly of the whale', building the effect of simultaneous events, as if he wanted to bring all the heroes of the drama closer to him (and us!). Their spatial and temporal keystone is a ceremony, addressed in the theatre in accordance with its archaic structure and function, but in a modern way: by initiating it, Passini plays electric instruments, even sings at times, but never drowns out Mickiewicz's phrase. Like a real singer, the director extracts musicality out of the fragmentary text; musicality which unifies it in both the literal and the philosophical sense. His *Forefathers' Eve* does not stretch like a line of incoherent story, rising instead into a myth through the theatrical ritual.

The audience in Passini's play becomes part of the theatrical rite which is 'performed' here according to the rule of anamnesis, or reminding, understood in the antiquity as a journey to the sources: of memory, knowledge, power, sanctity, even of speech. In this respect, Passini remains faithful to Mickiewicz: he follows Guślarz (the Sorcerer), not the Priest, who points rather to the goal – salvation – not the divine source. The director is also aware that, for contemporary audience, *Forefathers' Eve* itself is a thing of the past, it has been forgotten and must be rediscovered. In the production, 'the world told by Mickiewicz has already happened, we watch it from the perspective of a ghost séance' – explains Kowalska (2015). The most important ghost is of course Konrad who, in Passini's staging, remains an old artist (the part is played by Bogusław Kierc, actor and poet, once Konrad in the independent, oppositional company NST), trying to awaken with his focused speech – still strong and aware of the textual meanings – the powers of a wizard and demiurge. During the *Great Improvisation*, he stands in front of a huge puppet symbolizing the paralyzed God and speaks on our behalf:

It is on this line that Konrad's metaphysical wrestling in the *Great Improvisation* and Father Piotr's struggle in the exorcism scene will be played out. Such a polarized space proves to be a concise interpretation of the main theme of the play: the conflict between the real (unrecognized) and the false (mummified) sacrum. It is between its poles that a murderous confrontation of wild, magical spirituality, promising access to the deepest mysteries of being, and its mystified counterpart, settling for appearances, will take place. This journey to the original sources of sanctity is already announced by the title of the play, containing the phonetic transcript of the word 'forefathers'. That gesture separated sound from meaning, *melos* from *opsis*, the sensual experience of speech from the act of communication. The production is meant to work in a similar way. Its director would like to suspend the reality of the text and let his whale swim against the flow of time and the history of culture, all the way to a place where life and death, spirit and matter were still a great, cosmic oneness (ibid.).

What draws attention in J. Kowalska's comment is the surprising and, at the same time, crucial sentence about Passini's artistic activities: 'Its director would like to suspend the reality of the text'. It means the exact opposite to what Zadara had in mind, as he was interested in the texture of *Forefathers' Eve*, the material weave of words, artistic arrangement of signs with a specific meaning which should be questioned. For Passini, the text of *Forefathers' Eve* is something like a sorcerer's spell, a composition of words equipped with a unique power of recalling, awakening, activating what is forgotten, dormant, transfixed in contemporary people's consciousness or imagination. He is interested in the spiritual and causative dimension of the text, whose author is Mickiewicz, but it is a deity or, precisely, a national community, that seems to be its original sender. Let us recall the theory of actants acting in the drama according to Anne Ubersfeld's (1999) theory and ask, following the author of *Reading Theatre*, who 'dictates' all the words to the dramatic characters in *Forefathers' Eve*, who is the sender of the drama? In the Opole interpretation of *Forefathers' Eve*, it is an unmoving holiness, symbolized by a huge puppet, that becomes such superior, metaphysical instance through which and to which the whole rite is performed. Angels and devils in *Forefathers' Eve* are not just a theatrical quote, as Zadara wants; they are rather a convention signaling the real dimension of the events and experiences of the heroes of the drama. Passini recognizes it brilliantly, but he is one of those artists who, like Mickiewicz,

take the crisis of the rationalized Western European spirituality very seriously and look for adequate ways of reviving it in theatre. Mickiewicz appealed to the pagan forefathers rite, which was still practiced by the people during his life, using it in the third part to revive the power of the Christian Day of the Dead and play out the whole drama within the scheme of a mystery. Passini, almost two hundred years later, uses the theatre itself to initiate the sacred anamnesis, which he learned from his masters: Artaud, Kantor and Grotowski, although its author's own spirituality is not without influence on the form of this staging either. In his journey towards the sources, Passini chooses *Forefathers' Eve*, perfectly sensing its unique, archetypal dimension. He does not move towards the text like Zadara's rationalist 'Protestant' who decided to sober up the Polish mentality by getting the romantic heroes drunk. Rather, like an imaginary 'cabbalist', he takes as his starting point the unknown but strangely known text, constituting for him a code of access to the transcendent reality summoning him, into which he would like to introduce the viewers. With a word, a gesture, a synchronous movement of the figures surrounding the viewers, he makes reality 'vibrate' but, at the same time, he is aware that Mickiewicz's Romanticist 'spells' do not work on everybody. 'An American or a German does not understand that because they do not have such rites' – explains the director referring, consciously or not, to ideas seen in Zadara, who directed the second part of *Forefathers' Eve* as a pastiche of the American horror film *Blair Witch Project*. 'It is much easier to communicate in this matter with Belarusians who treat *Forefathers' Eve* as their own text, not as a Polish classic' (Świerczyński 2015). A few months later, Passini staged *Forefathers' Eve* in Brest, reaching the very source of the common Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian imagination.

'We take *Forefathers' Eve* seriously. The spells sound in Belarusian exactly as (...) Mickiewicz heard them' (Legierska 2015), said the director in an interview, confirming his previous intuition. Passini's 'seriously' refers, in the first place, to the dramatic speech, and immediately after that, to the spiritual mystery contained in the drama. In his comment, he consciously adopts the point of view of Karusia from *Romanticism*: 'it often happens in our theatre: we have either Mickiewicz in a folklore version or folk rituals mixed with American pop culture. Meanwhile, questions about soothsayers, whisperers, healing and cleansing rituals are taken seriously in Belarus'. Passini, like once Mickiewicz, discovered that reality and built



his own ritual upon it; in Brest, it gained the form of a painful séance of collective memory. In his second staging, it is the Belarusians themselves as a community ('cluster') of people whose traumatic, collective experiences are still waiting to be articulated, who became the primary, metaphysical sender of *Forefathers' Eve*. Passini and his dramaturge Patrycja Dołowy included in *Forefathers' Eve* fragments of memories of the local population, which revolve around World War II with its horrible symbol: the Brest fortress. He did so as early as during the rehearsals for the production, guided by inner intuition of the artist who knows how to listen:

Passini: At the beginning of my work on the production, I asked myself what is really going on during the ceremony. After all, we all know these passages perfectly: the ghosts of children, the virgin and the ghost of an evil master appear successively in the chapel, but what is it about? I look at it with my experience, spiritual path and doubts...

Legierska: And what are the conclusions?

Passini: That somebody's unworked-through, unreleased, illegitimate memory uses us, our bodies, our scripts, our lives to articulate itself. And Mickiewicz says: you have to hear them all, especially those you do not want to hear!

Dołowy: We follow this lead and use the tools that Mickiewicz gives us. Theatre is a rite. What is important and what unites people in Belarus is the awareness of the common land. Different languages and cultures still exist there side by side. We are digging in this play like in the Belarusian soil. Passini: Soil that suffers, bleeds, carries that whole story of having been through an ordeal. This is an important matter for the Belarusians, because it is only now that they are building their identity, constructing awareness of Belarusian literature and poetry, asking themselves what it really means to be a Belarusian? It is amazing that Mickiewicz is important in this process (ibid.).

What Passini experienced in Brest could be called a vivisection of the Belarusians national imagination, carried out on their symbolic grave ('we are digging in the Belarusian soil'), full of collective phantasms. In many respects, it resembles the Poles' national imagination, shaped in the times of Mickiewicz, or rather it constitutes its contemporary variant, not penetrated with a poet's word yet. Thanks to *Forefathers' Eve*, the director entered the very center of a collective identity, constituted on sacrifice, on the sense of having been harmed, but also the feeling of guilt and a great desire

for freedom. An identity which is suppressed, insecure, seeking expression and finding it in poetic drama and theatrical ritual. Passini took the martyrdom of the Belarusians fully seriously, believing that theatre remains a place where historical wounds can be healed and inner consolation achieved. Jarosław Cymerman (2016) writes about the Belarusian *Forefathers' Eve* from Brest:

The forefathers celebration, permitting to confess sins and redeem guilt, encloses the play, the phantoms step out from among the participants of the rite, they are among and perhaps also inside them. The cluster dressed in linen rural costumes with sewn-up red ribbons, the clerical collar and hands with a book hung around the priest's neck, a sailor's coat and black dress, the rhythm of incantations and spells – all that brings to mind productions by Grotowski, Kantor, Gardzienice, as well as Passini's earlier works (mainly *Odpozywanie* [*Requiem*], *Kukła* [*Puppet*] and *Kryjówka* [*The Hideout*]). All this theatrical machinery was set in motion (...) to remind that the formula proposed by Mickiewicz to deal with the experience of evil, suffering and death has not been exhausted at all, and the Phantom haunting the Cluster and the Sorcerer is still there, despite the blessed candle burning, spells and ordination.

Compassion leads to catharsis, but evil does not disappear.

## THE HAND GLASS AND THE SOUL

Zadara's *Forefathers' Eve* and Passini's *Forefathers' Eve* are like two branches of Polish contemporary theatre of the avant-garde origin. The former fully actualizes the project of critical theatre, which was identified with the Polish public stage in the jubilee year 2015 by virtue of important program statements. The latter is what I call the theatre of imagined community, represented today far more seldom and – let us emphasize that again – with nothing to do with theatrical traditionalism. They differ in virtually everything: the approach to Mickiewicz's poetic text, the concept and style of the presentation of the heroes, the approach and understanding of their drama, the artistic attitude (Zadara says 'they', Passini says 'me' or 'us') but, above all, in the attitude towards the community itself. Zadara would like to radically redefine its identity, and even re-establish it in opposition to the old one, by marking quite new landmarks on the map of our collective imagination. Moreover, by constantly emphasizing his rational approach to literature and the world (and criticizing the Polish unintellectualism),

the young director would probably like to turn the imagination itself into a sober, critical judgment of reality: to remove the Romanticist spell from the Polish soul. When it comes to Passini, he follows the footsteps of Grotowski and Kantor, precisely by activating the figures of our collective imagination – first in himself, then in the audience – his intention being to reach the sources of the community's identity. He did that by probing its secrets, setting free its fears, working through collective traumas on the one hand and, on the other, reviving its spiritual layers, treating the code of national symbolism, common to us and the Belarusians, as a code of access to transcendence. I do not conceal that I find the latter of the two theatrical projects much more appealing.

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## Summary

The topic of the essay are two productions of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) in the contemporary Polish theatre. The author compares the productions by two leading directors of the younger generation of avant-garde origin: Michał Zadara and Paweł Passini. He analyses and compares both creators' statements accompanying the opening in order to reconstruct their artistic consciousness. This reconstruction leads to a presentation of two interpretative strategies which correspond to two different directions of development of the Polish contemporary theatre. The author situates Michał Zadara's production in the currently prevailing critical theatre stream while reading Paweł Passini's stagings as an alternative proposal, which he calls the theatre of the imagined community. The author sets his considerations within the context of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of both the National Theatre and the public theatre in Poland.

**Keywords:** critical theatre, national theatre, romanticism, imagined community, subversion, theatre ritual

## ON THE REVIVAL OF THE NEED TO TAKE ROOT – DOROTA MASŁOWSKA’S *ALL’S GOOD BETWEEN US*

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The work by Dorota Masłowska, focused primarily on issues related to contemporary culture and its critical examination, also manifests involvement in the problems of Polish identity in a particular way. This is due to the fact that by making contemporary culture the object of observation and reflection, Masłowska’s texts accentuate its linguistic character. Thus, if the criticism of culture is carried out by revealing what is specific for a national language and what is closed in it, it also leads to statements concerning Polish identity as such. The outlined perspective of reading Masłowska’s works is confirmed by the majority of the few studies published so far with regard to her oeuvre. Such a style of perception of her texts is exemplified by a fragment of Przemysław Czapliński’s (2009), which, in the analysis of the novel *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [UK: *White and Red*; US: *Snow White and Russian Red*; literally: *Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag*], formulates a suggestion that the linguistic and cultural chaos designed by the protagonist’s stream of consciousness can be treated as proof that the Polish identity is saturated with the need to create phantasms of Otherness, searching for an enemy who, as a negative point of reference, would allow for the constitution and consolidation of a safe identity (Czapliński 2009: 271-272). However, the discussion on Masłowska’s work in the context of Polish identity is not only motivated by the fact that the world of her works is strictly situated in Polish realities, nor by the fact that it expresses criticism of Polish culture – it is suggested by the title of the first novel itself and, most emphatically, by numerous references

to the issues I am interested in the drama *Między nami wszystko dobrze* [*All's Good between Us*].

This work, commissioned by TR Warszawa and Berlin's Schaubuhne am Lehniner Platz, gained great popularity primarily as a 'score' for theatrical performances<sup>1</sup>, but has not yet become an exhaustive subject of literary attention. The possibility of looking at drama as a literary statement on Polish identity seems interesting because of the feeling that it has a special and specific character, which I will try to demonstrate. I would like to use the categories of lightness and heaviness as the key to capturing this specificity.

The understanding of these categories in the present essay is not based on their complex philosophical conceptualization, but is motivated by a common aesthetic intuition, which requires a link between lightness and the way qualities such as grotesque and comedy exert their influence, and heaviness to be linked with pathos (see: Kierkegaard 1992). In this sense, Masłowska's drama can be described as a strategy of offsetting heaviness with lightness at a very elementary level – we are dealing with overcoming the pathetic style that often accompanies the problematization of national issues through the use of an ironic, ridiculous tone. Of course, this way of expressing oneself about Polish identity has its tradition in literature – I do not undertake a detailed characterization here, but shall only stop at a simplification, indicating a connection between the mocking tone, poetics of the grotesque and the intention to devaluate the national issues, sometimes even the negation of Polishness (see: Kłoskowska 1996: 394-301). As the main representative of this tradition, one should mention Witold Gombrowicz, who, using his own means, formulated critical concepts of Polishness, both in his *Diaries* and in strictly fictional works. A similar way of defining Polishness can be found in the works by Czesław Miłosz, who, sometimes with blunt metaphors, formulated his critical attitude towards the Polish cultural heritage as a tool for shaping mentality (see: Walicki 1985; Majda

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Grzegorz Jarzyna's staging, which was the first theatrical production of the drama, we should also mention the shows directed by Piotr Ratajczak, produced at the Zagłębie Theatre in Sosnowiec, Michał Pabian at the Lubuski Theatre in Zielona Góra, Piotr Waligórski at the A. Fredro Theatre in Gniezno and Andrzej Majczak at the Bagatela Theatre in Krakow.

2005). Meanwhile, I leave aside the issue of the complexity of this idea and the simplifications of the writers' attitudes towards the subject of the nation, which are present in the interpretations. A generalizing look allows me to clarify the specificity of Masłowska's work being of interest to me in this essay. One of the theses of the article is an idea indicating a different way of functionalizing lightness in the texts of this author than in the tradition in which she – because of the aesthetic identity of her works – inscribes herself. Despite being saturated with grotesque, *All's Good between Us*, despite being ridiculous in tone, allows itself to be read as a work leaning towards the opposite pole – thus opening the prospect of surpassing the negation of Polishness as a product imagined and encumbered with false values to look at it as a positive value. The blade of criticism contained in the drama is directed against the devaluing narratives, the intention to reveal their simplistic character is inscribed in it.

The drama *All's Good between Us* is an image of a confrontation of different languages, representing contemporary Polishness, written out to the voices of individual characters – three generations who express themselves in clearly different ways, thus defining their identity. Each of them is subject self-disgrace in the drama – the Old Woman, who expresses the voice of a generation that remembers the time of war, spins her story about the past. The narrative takes on the character of a chaotic, archaic monologue, appearing as a conglomeration of motifs of sentimental character repeated like a mantra. The middle generation, represented by Bożena and Halina, seems to be saturated on the one hand with the fear of a threat in the form of a recurring World War II (the grotesque image of obsessively collecting empty yoghurt cups), and thus in a certain superficial way inscribed in the paradigmatic, romantic Polishness, while on the other hand its mentality is determined by its resentment, founded by a cosmopolitan leaning towards the culture of the West. Its essential component is the mythologization of history, depicted in the drama by the statement of the Radio, whose voice the representatives of the middle generation listen to with excitement.

In the old days, when the world was still governed by divine law, all people in the world were Poles. Everyone was Polish, the German was Polish, the Swede was Polish, the Spaniard was Polish, the Pole was Polish, everyone was Polish, just everyone, everyone, everyone. Poland was a beautiful country at that

time; we had wonderful seas, islands, oceans, a fleet that sailed on them and discovered new continents, also belonging to Poland, among others, was the famous Polish explorer Krzysztof Kolumb, who was later renamed Christopher or some other Chris or Isaac. We were a great power, an oasis of tolerance and multiculturalism, and everyone who did not come here from another country, because back then, as we have already mentioned, there were no other countries, was welcomed with bread... (...) and salt... But the good times for our country ended. First, they took America, Africa, Asia and Australia from us. Polish flags were destroyed and other stripes, stars and other doodles were painted on them, the Polish language was officially changed into false foreign languages, which nobody knows but the people who speak them only so that we Poles would not know and understand it and would feel like the lowest of the low (Masłowska 2010: 113).

The motif of World War II as an important point of reference is completely different in the narration of the youngest generation, represented by the Little Metal Girl – the mythogenic fear of the coming of war appears in her statements as a deviation of the older generations that deserves to be compromised. However, the critical attitude of this character towards the mythological style of reading the past does not lead to the elevation of the Girl's attitude – this is mainly because it is expressed through self-disgracing, infantile language. Moreover, the statements by this protagonist are characterized by a particularly strong cosmopolitanism, reduced to the level of banality, illustrated by the phrase 'I do not want to be a Pole, I want to be a European'.

I decided a long time ago that I am not a Pole, but a European, and I learned Polish from records and cassettes that I have left behind by a Polish cleaning lady. We are not Poles, we are Europeans, we are normal people! (...) Everyone knows that Poland is a stupid country, poor and ugly. Ugly architecture, dark weather, cold temperature, even the animals escaped and hid in the forests. Bad shows on TV, jokes that aren't funny, the president looks like a potato and the prime minister like a squash. The prime minister looks like a squash and the president looks like the prime minister. In France, there's France, America in America, Germany in Germany and even in the Czech Republic, there's the Czech Republic, and only in Poland is there Poland (ibid.: 114-115).



The exaggerated image of the resentful negation of Polishness, can also be found in the statements by the phantom Monika, a virtual heroine:

I was born here as a tiny baby by accident, it was just that my great-great-grandparents, great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins lived here for a long time, of course, thrown here by the winds of fate, all the time longing for the West, where they came from. Apparently, from the beginning I cried a lot, I shook my tiny fists, I wanted to go back to where I came from, to the West, but being a helpless newborn I couldn't even say a word in Polish, let alone book a ticket (there wasn't even an Internet connection in Poland in the seventies). What could I do, no matter what I wanted, I learned Polish and now I speak completely without an accent, and yet I can't remember the meaning of some polysyllabic words to this day, which does not prevent me from speaking them. I must also admit that I am not happy with the water, the air, the landscape, the architecture and the people, who are gloomy, dissatisfied with life and burdened with complexes (ibid.: 108).

The ironic character of the cited words is further emphasized by the fact that they are expressed by a character of double fictional status – an ideal woman, created by the Artist, the director of the screenplay for the film *Koń, który jeździł konno* [*The Horse Who Rode on Horseback*], whose work becomes an object of mockery in the play. The character also shares the narrative of a radical negation of Polishness, manifested in the tendency to complain described by Bogdan Wojciszke (2005).

I cannot write (...) this script, because not only do I eat too much, I drive too much on a quad in the cradle of our civilization, to Egypt to the swimming pool and to New York for shopping, but also when I come back and I want to make a film about contemporary Poland and the excluded, uprooted, the disintegration of ties, poverty, intolerance, destabilization of national identity and other terrible problems, about which Hokelbet wrote very well – I don't know, I haven't read him – but which don't concern me, it's not only that I can't, because I can't, but when I come back from Okęcie to this potato field, where sick systems, sick concepts, sick conflicts and sick relations prevail, and the metro goes *brrrr*, the trams go *vrrr*, the cars go *whoosh*, the polluted slurry goes *gobble gobble gobble*, I also want to live somehow, and I still have to pay off the mortgage for this apartment, which, to be honest, would be better suited for a wine cellar (Masłowska 2010: 111-112).

The young generation presented in the drama represents an attitude that could be, in the words of Ewa Thompson (2006), described as one of the poles of resentment – the fascination with Western culture is accompanied by the lack of respect for one's native culture. Masłowska's drama can be described as a work testifying to the multiple, all-embracing entanglement of Polishness in various forms and faces of resentment at the level of the character of the figure itself. However, the caricatured dimension of these characteristics reveals a critical attitude towards the ways in which they are perceived in society, thus making the drama a statement focusing not so much on the essence of Polish identity as on narratives used to simplify their conceptualization. The optics of resentful auto-narration are also exceeded at the level of the drama's structure. The last part of it can be read as a moment of a peculiar re-evaluation. The scene of confrontation between the Little Metal Girl with the world of her grandmother, this time not only told, but also experienced, which escapes the limits of reality, leads to the representative of the youngest generation expressing a gesture of longing for having roots, which is emphasized by the repeated shouts of 'Bread!'. Bread is a symbol of Polishness in the text – on the one hand, it is an element of the past mentioned by the Old Woman, on the other hand, it is a commodity rejected by the Little Metal Girl, which, according to the cosmopolitan narrative, should be replaced with an analogous product symbolizing the culture of the West. Therefore, the rejection of bread that repeats through the whole text is replaced (in speech) by the desire of it. The 'last word' about Polish identity in the drama is a turn towards respect for the past and the need to take root that emerges from the chaos of self-compromising languages. The cry of the Little Metal Girl that ends the drama, does not seem to differ from the aesthetically dominant poetics of lightness – its repetitiveness and laconic character are associated with the key language strategies for the characters: teasing and chanting. Things happen differently in the theatrical concretization of the text, a performance directed by Grzegorz Jarzyna. The exclamation turns into a scream, which can be treated as a sign of the transition to the aesthetics of heaviness. It is given a clear emotional character, referring to the experience of despair, pain and loss. The scream of Little Metal Girl is accompanied by a counterpoint, i.e. a dance scene taking place in the background, evoking obvious associations with the motif taken from Wyspiański's *Wesele* [*The Wedding*]. The opposition

of the desire to take root with the attitude of passivity gives it a definitely positive character. Jarzyna's spectacle is therefore an interpretation that updates the pro-patriotic (as one could simply define it) potential of Masłowska's drama. This is also thanks to casting Danuta Szaflarska in the role of the Apathetic Old Woman. Szaflarska's acting gives the Old Woman a positive character, thus emphasizing the value of the tradition she represents.

The context speaking to the subtlety of Masłowska's 'patriotic' potential is the film made in 2015 as a recording of the performance. Its creators (and above all the director, Grzegorz Jarzyna) decided to introduce some changes to the performance, 'enriching' it with effects characteristic of film art, thanks to which we can talk about an autonomous work of art (see: Gulda 2015). Leaving aside the issue of the importance of the modification of individual motifs and the ways in which particular scenes are shot, I would like to focus on a significant structural transformation, namely the removal of the last scene of the play in the film version. As a result of this change, Masłowska's work is deprived of the key point of its meaning, which allows itself to be treated as a sign of reversal of the critical perspective outlined in the text. The last words in Jarzyna's film belong, as in the performance, to the Little Metal Girl – however, these are not the emotion-filled shouts of 'bread!', but declarations of hatred towards Polishness expressed in an aggressive tone, summed up in a bitter, ironic 'it's all good between us'. Thanks to the 'amputation' of the last part of Masłowska's text, the film based on the play can be treated more as a 'brilliant satire on Polish struggles with identity' (Kyzioł 2015), a 'witty story about empty forms that create social tissue' (Staszczyszyn 2014), than an ironic, perverse study of Polish auto-narration. The disambiguation of the message is confirmed by the words of critics, such as Jerzy Doroszkiewicz (2015), who in his review of the film mentions the renunciation of Polishness (by the protagonist) in the finale as ballast, and Andrzej Horubała (2015), who identifies the removal of the ending of the play from the film with the gesture of depriving 'Masłowska's grotesque games' of reality (seriously) as a context. Incidentally, the way Jarzyna's accents are arranged in the film results in a kind of visible simplification, creating a hypocritical filter of reality – Masłowska's work begins to function in public opinion as touching upon the problem of the 'exhausted pride' of Poles and framing national identity

as built on national myths. All these features can be found in the drama, but the important thing is in what compositions they occur and what their weight is. The juxtaposition of the performance and the film – two cultural texts, based on the same drama and, above all, on a close mutual relationship – makes it possible to realize the importance of minor shifts.

Coming back to the reflection on Masłowska's drama itself, lightness, which breaks the burden at the level of the ways of dealing with the problem of Polishness, ultimately serves to reveal its importance, to emphasize its value. This leads to the establishment of a 'new burden', the foundation of which is the conviction inscribed in the text that the resentment narratives about Polishness are insufficient as tools to describe its contemporary condition. The work, which can be superficially read as another text stigmatizing Polish vices, becomes a 'rehabilitative' message when seen as a whole – even if only because of its open ending, marked by a leaning towards the search for values. The very fact of leaving space for reflection on the meaning of Polishness, being suspended between the attitude of unambiguous identification and rejection, against the background of radical negative narratives may appear as a sign of positive leaning.

A critical picture of the attitude of Poles towards their own identity in the opinion of the author herself is more of a question, a study of this issue than a diagnosis. In this sense it is a step on the way to the affirmation of Polishness (Baluch 2011: 192).

I am of course not trying to suggest that we are dealing with an innovative phenomenon – that a similar way of using 'light' aesthetic categories was not present in any previously written cultural texts dealing with the issue of Polishness. In the case of the analyzed drama, however, the tension between aesthetic and semantic identity seems to be particularly clear and important from the point of view of reflection on the way the issues of national identity are understood in contemporary Poland. One might think that this issue is additionally illuminated by various critical statements in response to the drama and its staging.

The analysis of the reception of this work leads us to reflection on the transformations of reception styles – the creation of a critical image, the expressive and 'abundant' presence of qualities usually associated with the creation of an aura of irreverent distance do not cause the work to be

rejected by critics with a conservative profile – on the contrary, they lead to the somewhat hasty and simplistic identification of Masłowska’s work with a specific ideological option. Differentiation in the interpretation of the drama and its theatrical incarnations allows to expose a significant problem of insufficiently developed reflection on the function of the means used – some reviewers and critics go in the direction of treating the presence of certain specific aesthetic qualities as the ‘identity determinants’ of a work, without taking into account the question of its intention to use them. In the case of *All’s Good between Us*, this issue is of fundamental importance; its omission may lead to interpretative conclusions marked by a serious omission, e.g. to consider the work primarily as a criticism of Polishness, without noticing its breaking frame, its critical blade directed against simplistic narratives. Thus, a ‘deep’ reading of the drama, taking into account its subtleties, requires exceeding the horizon of identification of given aesthetic means with their traditional ‘sense-forming’ roles.

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## Summary

The article tries to grasp the specifics of Masłowska's works by using the categories of lightness and heaviness. The main subject of analysis is the play *Między nami dobrze jest* [*All's Good between Us*], which treats about Polish national identity via the concept of grotesque. Although the author of the play follows the tradition to critically recognize Polishness (tradition mainly represented by Czesław Miłosz and Witold Gombrowicz), ultimately, she appreciates what have previously seemed to be underestimated. This is mainly due to the tension generated both by the structure of the play and the one caused in the process of its interpretation. The pathos and heaviness usually present in the reflections on topics related to national identity tend to be overcome here by the lightness introduced to the text via irony and grotesque. Moreover, the use of such means does not devalue the problems discussed; on the contrary, they become a key to the new and fresh attempt to redefine Polishness. The article also treats about the relation between the original text of the play and its stage interpretation by Grzegorz Jarzyna – the specificity of presenting the same concepts across different fields of artistic culture.

**Keywords:** Dorota Masłowska, Polish identity, theatre, grotesque.

## GIVE IT BACK TO US, O LORD...

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### 1. FIRST STORY

‘Before your altars we bring a supplication, our free homeland, bless it, O Lord...’. This is the official text of that verse, as I remember it from my childhood, from the Warsaw church on Zbawiciela Square, where at the end of the solemn masses the hymn *Boże, coś Polskę* was sung. Yes, it was always a special moment, all the more so because it established the moment of trial – the mass turned into a patriotic manifestation, into a spectacle lasting several minutes, during which one could show who one was. So I sang clearly and as loudly as possible: ‘our free homeland, give it back to us, O Lord’. And I listened to what other people around me were singing. It was a bit like taking communion, an act that had taken place a few minutes earlier. Technically you weren’t supposed to, technically people bowed their heads in piety, and yet they watched who was taking communion and who was not. Not much could be deduced from this fact – after all, it was not just the sinners who remained in the pews, far from the altar. On the other hand, who sang what was very significant. We already understood these signs well as children. ‘Bless it, O Lord’ pointed out that whoever sang it like that was a coward, choosing the version allowed by censorship or – perhaps even worse – really considered the Polish People’s Republic to be our free homeland, which needed only a blessing for further development. But ‘give it back to us’ – that was something sublime and beautiful. Singing like that, I felt like a patriot of a great cause, a defender of the barricade, because ‘we have Vis guns against Tigers’, we, the liaison officers from Parasol<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The Umbrella – codename of the one of Grey Ranks’ unity, the underground Polish scouts paramilitary organization during the World War II.

The refrain of the sacred song was almost a delight: the thrill of emotions (breaking the ban) was accompanied by sweet certainty of being right, safety of participation in the community, in the fraternity of courageous and righteous people.

The People's Poland singing of *Boże, coś Polskę* was a ritual that brought recognition. A small and fundamental difference in the texts of the two versions became – like a *shibboleth* – a test of identity. The word *shibboleth* appears in the Book of Judges (12,5-6):

The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, 'Let me cross over', the men of Gilead asked him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he replied, 'No', they said, 'All right, say »Shibboleth«. If he said: 'Sibboleth', because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

According to Jacques Derrida, who wove a famous lecture on Paul Celan's poetry around the word *shibboleth*, its particular nature lies in the fact that the meaning of the word here 'matters less than, let us say, its signifying form once it becomes a password, a mark of belonging, the manifestation of an alliance' (Derrida 1994: 21). A similar function was performed by our singing. For the ritual, it was less important whether the participant really wanted to ask God for 'blessing' or for the 'restoration' of the homeland (the difference between the meaning of the first and the second of these words is by no means infinite). The importance of the singing consisted in showing who they were and who they were with, in speaking a secret (because it was not written anywhere) covenant slogan that everyone could understand. It was also recognizable to enemies, to whom one would betray one's own affiliation in this, sometimes risky, way.

The *shibboleth*, said Derrida à propos of Celan's poem *In Eins* [*In One*], constitutes a 'border, a barred passage' like another word – *no pasarán*: 'Rallying cry and sign, clamor and banderoles during the siege of Madrid, three years later, *no pasarán* was a *shibboleth* for the Republican people, for their allies, for the International Brigades' (ibid.: 25). This 'no' said to the fascists – as any 'no' said to a person – reveals the other side of the *shibboleth* – the potency of marking an enemy, and thus also the exclusion, selection. That is why Derrida emphasises that the *shibboleth*



can tragically, contrary to intentions and human will, reverse. It can destroy the sanctity of an alliance formed in the name of the highest values by introducing discriminatory borders or police technology. Perhaps that is the danger lurking in wait for all oppositionists.

Later, during the Solidarity movement, more and more people were singing 'give it back to us'. Perhaps some of us remember well the struggle between the two versions of the chorus, which caused its ending to be blurred for an outside listener. The 'give it back to us' was mixed with the 'bless it', but – especially during martial law – it began to gain advantage, so that it became commonplace. There were more and more people who wanted to mark their presence and mark themselves in this way, cross the barricade, stand behind it, not in front of it and sing their 'no' to the reality of the Polish People's Republic.

It is worth quoting a fragment of the second edition of the history of *Boże, coś Polskę* by Bogdan Zakrzewski, published in 1987. It is worth it, because the twisted style of his narration indirectly – through its twists and turns – pointed to the obvious sense of this struggle, too dangerous for the communist status quo to be presented directly by the author. Zakrzewski (1978: 31) wrote:

After World War II, the hymn, at some point in time, hid in churches. It was often sung with a peculiarly altered chorus with an enunciation that was valid for many people. The contradictions of refrain lessons, which occurred simultaneously among the participants of the masses, were like a testimony to ideological polarizations. There were also official protests in this matter, e.g. on the occasion of pilgrimages to Częstochowa or other indulgence celebrations – against such refrain transformations, which manifested themselves in the words: 'Before your altars we bring a supplication, / our free homeland, give it back to us, O Lord'. In certain years, when the song had to descend into the church 'underground', its life also emphasized the angry worldview protest against the events and orders and ideologies that discriminated against its followers or only religious-political allies. It liberated the singers from the compulsion to obey the orders, as if it eliminated their fears and aroused courage with religious opposition. It simply became – contrary to its semantic climate – almost a song of rebellion (...).

‘Almost’ everything has been said here, but it was not Aesopian language characteristic of ‘certain years’, but a narrative aspiring to scientific discourse, a distanced argument of a folklore researcher – whom Zakrzewski also considered himself to be – and therefore to objectivism that avoided any signs of any other affiliation. It was not a manifestation of community but, on the contrary, a veil, a mask of science that provided the author with security, leaving him, however, with the fame of a historian of a national song, of whom there were not many at that time.

However, the fighting time ended – after 1989, ‘bless it’ returned. Although it sounded the same, it was not the same word as before. It did not have a communist submissiveness, because it returned in glory, just as the ‘free homeland’ returned, just as we returned to Poland. It is a pity that we cannot establish the date, the exact day on which a unanimous ‘bless it’ rang out in all corners of the country, because that would allow us to finally establish when exactly communism ended in Poland. When we crossed the Polish border from a foreign land to manifest for the first time a community of people who agreed to what was already there. In any case, after that I never heard the ‘give it back to us’. Never – until the presidential plane crashed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2010. Since then, not only on the tenth of each month, but also during other demonstrations at the Presidential Palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście, people have been singing, ‘our free homeland, give it back to us, O Lord!’. When I realized it for the first time, I was surprised – my inner child, who once sang like this in the past, in the past epoch was surprised – and I was amazed as a philologist, that this still small difference would mean something definitive again.

## 2. SECOND STORY

The author of the original version of *Boże, coś Polskę* was – as we know – Alojzy Feliński, who in 1816 wrote a work entitled *Hymn na rocznicę ogłoszenia Królestwa Polskiego* [*Hymn for the Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland*]. It was also called *Pieśń narodowa za pomyślność króla* [*The National Song for the Prosperity of the King*]. The hymn praised the merits of Tsar of Russia and King of Poland, Alexander I, called the ‘Angel of Peace’, who under his scepter ‘united two fraternal peoples’. The original chorus was: ‘Before your altars we bring a supplication, save our king, O Lord!’. However, adaptations appeared quickly, and the song, sung in

different versions and to changing melodies, took on a life of its own. From a solemn prayer for the tsar's prosperity, it turned into an anthem to beg for the restoration of a free homeland. The collection *Pieśni ojczyste* [*Songs of the Homeland*] published at the beginning of the November Insurrection, contains different lyrics – a compilation of two verses from Feliński's work and fragments of Antoni Gorecki's *Hymn to God* from 1817. And it is to Gorecki that the work owes its version of the chorus, in which the plea is 'give us back our homeland, O Lord'. However, the song experienced the peak of its popularity during the Warsaw patriotic demonstrations of 1860-1861.

When one reads descriptions of these manifestations today, it is striking, first of all, that they took place most often in the same places as various contemporary parades, congregations and marches. From the Cathedral to Zamkowy Square, Senatorska Street, Krakowskie Przedmieście, Nowy Świat, Krasinski Square and Saski Square (today Piłsudskiego Square), only rarely moving farther out, to special, historically marked places, such as Leszno. It is a natural stage of this city (because it is not Parade Square) and it is the people of Warsaw who choose it when they want to be visible. Secondly, the theatricalization of manifestations from 1860-1861 – the costumes, props, happenings and marches – seems diverse, creative and, of course, familiar. Most of them were funeral manifestations, accompanying the services for the souls of the dead, for those who died in the November Insurrection and for the new heroes who, in the consciousness of the crowds, died from bullets in streets and squares. These events have been reported and analyzed many times. However, it does not hurt to recall that Warsaw became a space of signs: gestures and funeral costumes, balconies adorned in black, banners with the White Eagle, standards and flags, newspapers thrown out onto the street, green branches, wreaths, flower decorations, as well as lit candles and torches (on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1861 a procession from the Pauline Fathers' Church passed with torches, scaring the gendarmes' horses with fire [see: Komar 1970: 36-37]). These signs could be listed for a long time, because – with the ban on attending the theatres, which was unwritten but still in effect – the longer the manifestations lasted, the more tightly they filled the space of a street performance, where everything – every gesture, every word, every piece of matter – became an element of the performance. Thus, a greater difficulty for the police, who were trying to recognize members of this alliance that took the power over the life of the city just by their signs. Behavioral and dress bans were issued, but the case did not end when funeral

dress and patriotic jewellery were banned. It was also necessary to issue more and more detailed instructions for spies and guardians of the peace, which explained how to recognize dangerous elements. Thus, on June 4<sup>th</sup>, writes the demonstration historian Julian Komar, Chief of Police Rozwadowski reissued an announcement prohibiting the wearing of all political badges and distinctive clothing, explaining that:

the municipal authorities consider the following to be clothing different from ordinary clothing: *rogatywka* (*konfederatka*) caps and so called Kościuszko hats, next, *kontusz* and *żupan* coats, as well as waistcoats, stock ties and ties in the color amaranth, and finally colorful shoes and other outfits, characterized by bright colors and uniqueness of the cut, announcing that they will be held responsible for non-compliance with this regulation (ibid.: 154).

It is easy to imagine the embarrassment of a policeman who reads ‘and other clothes’ in this logical way implies that ‘distinctive’ clothes are ‘unusual’ clothes. We can also see his harsh face when, in the middle of this carnival, he examines at the shoes of passers-by and tries to judge which are bright.

Even for the simplest ‘bobby on the beat’ (if you will permit the use of such an anachronism), however, the obvious sign was the singing of patriotic songs, and in this, above all, *Boże, coś Polskę*. The first time it could be heard was on the anniversary of the November Insurrection during a demonstration in front of the Carmelite Church. In Komar’s work, one can read about dozens of subsequent performances in various circumstances, because – as the author writes – ‘*Boże, coś Polskę* was sung universally’. In April-May 1861, the collection *Śpiewy nabożne polskie* [*Polish Religious Songs*] was printed and distributed by agitators during the meetings (ibid.: 19, 88, 140, *passim*). As a result, we know which of the many versions of the song was probably the most popular at the time. The second verse of the chorus was written in the songbook: ‘Homeland, freedom, give them back to us, O Lord’ (*Manifestacje warszawskie...* 1916: 3-4). The penalty for singing such songs in the street was arrest. Later, on Wielopolski’s order, a ban on singing in churches was also issued. It was soon observed that there were ‘spies hanging out among people gathered in the temples, marking with chalk those singing the songs, so they would later know who should be arrested’ (Komar 1970: 150). It can be added that for those ‘exterminating angels’ marking people with chalk sometimes ended badly – some were beaten mercilessly.

The scene that took place in Zamkowy Square is particularly noteworthy in the tradition: a crowd of defenseless demonstrators – among them children and women – kneeling on the pavement, singing *Boże, coś Polskę* to the heavens, and in front of the crowd, Cossacks, ready to charge. Maria Janion referred to this image when she wrote about the Polish messianism of that time, about the national mission of suffering and martyrdom, which was expressed in this song, so different in tone from the jaunty *Warszawianka*. Other commentators also agreed with Janion's opinion that the pleading-prayer hymn best reflected the atmosphere preceding the January Insurrection, that it gave a sense of power to those who put themselves in divine care (Janion 1979: 15-16). Reading the same descriptions today, I have an impression of the significance of another function of this singing – the function of the *shibboleth*. It was a ritual in which not so much the content, but participation itself became a sign – a manifestation of belonging to a community. People sing it to mark themselves, to demonstrate – I am here, with these people and at the same time against the other people who are there – outside the circle of our song. In this way, a covenant was built, a communion often confirmed by blood. And a sacred border was erected between 'us' and 'them', sometimes running between Poles and Poles, between Poles saying 'no' and those who abandoned that 'no'.

This sense of shared singing is best illustrated by the fact that *Boże, coś Polskę* resounded in various temples of Warsaw at the time, including Evangelical-Augsburg churches (which later, for this very reason, were closed just as the Catholic ones), Calvinist churches and synagogues. Catholics used to go to synagogues to sing together with the Jews. Among many such examples, one from April 1861, on the day of the funeral of a sybirak (Polish exile to Siberia) Ksawery Stobnicki:

at about 3 p.m., a crowd of several thousand Poles and Jews gathered (...) in front of the Franciscan church on Senatorska Street, with a group of several hundred young people standing out (...) in white, amaranth, blue and black *konfederatka* caps with feathers. The coffin, decorated with wreaths and tricolor ribbon, was carried all the way on the crowd's shoulders. The funeral ceremony [at the Powązki Cemetery] ended with the singing of *Boże, coś Polskę*. Then they went to the Jewish cemetery, where a crowd of several thousand Jews gathered, allegedly to commemorate the director

of the Rabbinical School, Eisenbaum, who died a few years ago, and who had preached the slogan of equal rights and the unification of Jews with Poles. Rabbi Kramsztyk gave a speech to the gathered about the brotherhood of the two nations and the love of the Homeland (Komar 1979: 116).

Then ‘people threw themselves into each other’s arms, kissed each other, swore brotherly love and readiness for all sacrifices. Once again *Boże, coś Polskę*, was sung together and the mass was moved towards the Castle’ (ibid.).

A Jew who sings a Christian song in his own cemetery together with Poles may seem mad, but the point is that at that time, *Boże, coś Polskę*, remaining a religious song, was not only Christian, nor even only national. It was a sign of fraternity, and its singing brought recognition, an indication of who belonged to the community. It was crossing the old borders and creating a new alliance, where *kontusz* coats and *rogatywka* caps could mean the same chalat coats and yarmulkes – to the concern of the subordinates of Chief of Police Rozwadowski. This is how the international career of this song began, translated into many languages: Belarusian, Ukrainian, Latvian, German and Czech, and later paraphrased in other languages, including Russian (see: Kacnelson 1979: 22-24, 82-85).

‘Bless it, O Lord’ appeared only after Poland regained its independence, during the Second Republic of Poland. It was then that a change was made to the text to emphasize the resurrection of the united homeland after the Partitions. But when, four days ago (it was the tenth of the month), I listened to the sounds of ‘give it back to us, O Lord’ at the Presidential Palace, I was thinking about *shibboleth*. I thought that the meaning of these words is less important than their signifier form. I think that the function of singing ‘give it back to us’ is similar to the one it has always performed, so that the most important thing in it is a separation: to distinguish people from each other and to mark new alliances. And, although sometimes it may seem so, the aim of this ritual (because it is already a ritual) is not a statement that Poland – along with the plane crash – perished or that freedom disappeared at that moment, but building and manifesting a community that can gain political strength. It is also a community with the heroes of the uprisings and victims of the Nazi or Soviet occupation – with those who used to sing the song likewise, and who, in a revolt or misery, told the reality: ‘No’. The singing of ‘give it back to us, O Lord’, is therefore a rite of slaves, intended

to separate, distinguish and unite all those who refuse to accept the Lord's blessing of the present – of what is already there.

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### Summary

The article is a reconstruction of the social history (from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to modern times) of Polish patriotic-religious song *Boże, coś Polskę*, and especially one of its lines that is known and sang in two different versions: ‘our free homeland, bless it, O Lord’ and ‘our free homeland, give it back to us, O Lord’. This small difference between the versions is interpreted by the author in a Derrida's style: as a *shibboleth* – a test of the identity of people singing this song, a password of a secret association and a sign allowing the recognition of a friend from foe. At the same time she points to the permanence of the significant function that is fulfilled in the Polish patriotic ritual by the singing of *Boże, coś Polskę*.

**Keywords:** song, ritual, patriotism, identity, *shibboleth*





## RE-WRITING POLAND – DISCOVERING AND CREATING LOCALNESS

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### 1.

The political-social transformation in Poland occurred in the period when the recovery of state sovereignty was accompanied by two processes. The first one was the construction of supranational community structures, which must be tantamount to voluntary resignation from the part of this sovereignty, and the second one is the resurgence of regionalisms, which may be regarded as a tendency weakening the integrity of the sovereign state and a certain form of its decentralization, including strives for the autonomy of individual provinces – a topic discussed not so long ago in connection with the results of the local government election in Silesia. This second process seems particularly important, because it has released the needs for the self-determination and formation of local identity that were suppressed in the practice of social life in the People's Republic of Poland. This actually refers to the entire country, because – as a result of postwar changes and the complex dynamics of migration, few places or centers have preserved their pre-war identity; as regards large agglomerations, we can say this mainly about Cracow, Poznan and Upper Silesia, but after all, the annihilation of the Jewish minority constituting an inseparable part of the city's community before the war was an important element of change in Cracow, and so was the displacement of the German population in Upper Silesia. There is one thing beyond doubt: the demographic changes that Poles experienced during the postwar period – for example, the need of exiles from the Eastern Borderlands to put down roots in northern and western lands taken away from the Germans – meant the loss of roots

in homelands for large social groups and, at the same time, as a result of the centralistic nationwide ideology, made it difficult for them to put down roots in new places of settlement. It is worth noting that this problem became an important part of experience mainly for those generations that were no longer “newcomers”, but were born in these new areas, treating them naturally as their own ‘place on Earth’. The problem is that this centralistic ‘nationwide’ ideology, which not only suppressed the issues of national minorities existing in the People’s Republic of Poland, but also censored both the memory of lost homelands and attempts to reconstruct all local specificities, made it impossible to conduct a free identity discourse.

In this context, it is worth taking a look at one of the institutions of cultural life in the People’s Republic of Poland: Conventions of Writers of Western and Northern Lands. The last of these conventions took place in Zielona Góra 1970 – further activity was abandoned after Chancellor Willy Brandt and Władysław Gomułka had signed a treaty on the acknowledgement of Polish postwar borders by West Germany. Earlier, however, this annual literary manifestation, attended by otherwise respectable writers, even those expressing opposition against the system, had been aimed not at pointing out the distinctness of regions incorporated into Poland after the war, but by demonstrating their strong roots in Polishness and prove their ongoing re-Polonization in that place. Thus, the aim of separating these lands as an object of special interest was not to indicate their regional specificity, but to highlight the fact that they are an inseparable and undiversified factor of the nationally homogeneous Polish state. This does not mean, however, that these areas were not subject to processes that manifested themselves in a relatively large constellation of works raising the identity issues of communities living here when the dominance of the centralized ideological state disappeared. And it is not a coincidence that one of the magazines created in these areas after 1989 published a text containing Václav Havel’s (1997) words raising problems related to these issues:

I think that the world is slowly overcoming the traditional concept of the national state (...). In my opinion, the gradual overcoming of the national state in its traditional sense should also lead to a new understanding of the term ‘homeland’. We should learn to feel the homeland as it may have been felt in the past – as our piece of ‘the world in general’,

i.e., something that locates us in the world rather than something that tears us away from it.

The same magazine published Yuri Lotman's (1997) reflections:

The occurrence of cultural subcultures characterized by varied constitution and capacity of memory causes a different level of ellipticity of texts circulating in cultural communities and leads to the formation of 'local semiotics'.

Both quotations are fragments of texts published as reprints from the nationwide press in the Provincial Occasional Literary Magazine „Łabuz” issued in Łobez in the years 1995-2010, edited by Leon Zdanowicz (who died in June 2009). From the very beginning, the magazine focused on creating a new identity of the Łobez Land – which, however, was rooted deeply in the past – and on interpreting successive layers of its historical palimpsest. One of the main motifs of materials published in „Łabuz” is the issue of creating local identity. This post-German Pomeranian town, inhabited mainly by newcomers from other regions after the war, could root its tradition only in the past censored until 1989. Only its reconstruction in the magazine became the foundation of 'self-pursuit', i.e., finding historical stability that allowed it to shape its new 'local semiotics'.

## 2.

In 1996, the special award of the Paris monthly „Kultura” was granted to Adam Kwas, Kazimierz Brakoniecki and Krzysztof Czyżewski – editors of regional magazines „Ziemia Kłodzka”, „Borussia” and „Krasnogruda”. In all of these three cases, the Editor promoted two aspects of activity of circles editing those magazines: not only the creation of a new local identity, but also the reconstruction of its cross-border tradition, i.e., the creation of such type of regionalism that is not confined to the borders of the national state and, therefore, attempts to build open and dialogue-based local structures. In the case of „Krasnogruda”, this openness resulted in attempts to re-create the Intermarium in subsequent years – in a manner similar to Andrzej Stasiuk's writings and the editorial activity of the Czarne Publishing House – that were expressed not only in „Krasnogruda”, but also in the Meridian series – a publishing initiative presenting the literature of that area as a whole.

We can risk the thesis that all of the tendencies that appeared in writings and the translation practice of circles attempting to shape 'local semiotics'

constitute the effort of interpreting the cultural palimpsest formed as a result of overlapping political and historical processes. This refers primarily to 'post-German' areas, but also to the entire European macro region forming the Intermarium; an important issue here is the turn towards history as an element shaping local communities above unsteady political borders determined on these lands by international treaties or agreements. The transformations occurring in Europe after 1989, primarily the 'opening' of borders, leads to a specific reconstruction of the areas isolated from one another in the previous period whose local communities became dispersed or were simply annihilated as a result of the events of World War II and subsequent resettlements and migrations. Today, when looking at these areas, we can observe something that I would prefer to define as the revitalization of historical memory, which was suppressed for a long time, among others, due to censorship and the determination of 'taboo' areas, which resulted in breaking the sense of historical continuity. As a result of shifted borders and a specific kind of migration, as well as the emergence of new groups of resettled communities and the blockade of memory work – in the case of Poland, this refers particularly to the memory of the Eastern Borderlands – only after 1989 can we speak of the slow 'self-pursuit' and the creation of identity narrations aimed at putting in order the experiences of the years 1939-1989 by literature (but also by literary, sociological or anthropological studies).

In Poland, this involves the dynamic revitalization of cultural life (including literary life) and the intensification of activity in centers that were previously marginalized. Examples are easy to find: mainly in Upper Silesia, where political and social transformations brought significant changes in the periodical press – within a relatively short time, a constellation of literary or social & cultural magazines emerges here, in which one of the significant motifs is to raise the issue of local distinctness both in the historical aspect and with regard to the current situation; we can notice this by reading such titles as „Opcje”, „Śląsk”, „Fa-art” or „Arkadia”, such literary works as Feliks Netz's *Urodzony w Święto Zmarłych* [*Born in All Souls' Day*], Wojciech Kuczok's *Gnój* [*Dung*], Stefan Szymutko's *Nagrobek ciotki Cili* [*Aunt Cila's Tomb*] or, finally, essays by Henryk Waniek; the same happens in Warmia and Masuria („Borussia”, „Portret”, *Oblicza ojczyzny* [*The Faces of the Homeland*] – an anthology by Wienfried Lipscher and Kazimierz

Brakoniecki) in Pomerania („Pogranicza”, works of Artur D. Liskowacki and Inga Iwasiów) or in Gdynia, which is reflected by the „Bliza” magazine founded by Paweł Huelle. These are not the only phenomena of this kind in Poland. Maybe the most interesting illustration of this process is the literature highlighting the cultural distinctness of Cieszyn Silesia with its dominant Evangelical characteristics – either in Jerzy Pilch’s prose (here the novel *Inne rozkosze* [*Other Delights*] deserves special attention, but it is also worth mentioning fragments of the cycle *Bezpamiętnie utracona leworeczność* [*Irretrievably Lost Left-Handedness*] or the diary published in old „Przekrój”), or the poetry of Jerzy Kronhold or Zbigniew Machej (the volume *Zima w małym mieście na granicy* [*Winter in a Small Border Town*]), and an important supplement that refers to the past is *Opowieści cieszyńskie* [*Cieszyn Stories*] – a publication of Kornel Filipowicz’s selected short stories. The same can be said about a series of Gdańsk publications, such as Paweł Huelle’s novels *Weisser Dawidek* and *Castorp*, Stefan Chwin’s *Hanemann*, an album series *Był sobie Gdańsk* [*There Was A City Called Gdańsk*] prepared by Wojciech Duda, Grzegorz Fortuna, Konrad Nawrocki and Donald Tusk, or Maria Kurecka’s memory book *Niedokończona gawęda* [*An Unfinished Tale*], to name only a few examples. Also Lower Silesia, particularly Wrocław, exposes ‘Gothic letters as sharp as stones’ mentioned in Tadeusz Różewicz’s poem *Kamienni bracia* [*Brothers of Stone*] and seems to create its history anew – whether in Andrzej Zawada’s sketch *Bresław* [*Breslau*], or *Microcosm* – a volume of the history of Wrocław commissioned from British historian Norman Davies.

### 3.

However, commenting upon these literary tendencies at the end of the 1990s, Krzysztof Uniłowski quite perversely highlighted the cognitive evasion accompanying them, which is based on the mechanism of creating identity and respecting its recovery in the cultural context through ‘provincial’ literature. But the experience of this literature is ambiguous. The specificity and safety of the identity of small homelands and entities immersed in it that is described in this literature veils a basic traumatic experience that gave rise to this idyll: the trauma of the deprivation of roots.

To what extent is this allegation justified? After all, the issue of the deprivation of roots was largely exploited by emigration literature,

particularly its Eastern Borderlands' current. Also in domestic literature, this subject area was reflected, although not quite distinctly, in works of writers like Tadeusz Konwicki or Leopold Buczkowski. Jerzy Stempowski correctly diagnosed the latter's works by writing: 'The author juxtaposes the power of memory and faithfulness to the home of which only the key has remained against barbarian destroyers, arsonists and murderers'. Obviously, the issue of deprivation of roots does not become exhausted only with regard to the loss of the Second Polish Republic – for example, in *Lida* by Aleksander Jurewicz or *Dyemtoszczyna* [*Dyemtoschtchina*] by Andrzej Turczyński – but is reflected also in the raising of the issue of annihilation of the multicolor ethnic landscape, which constituted, as Julian Przyboś wrote very suggestively, an integral component of the Polish reality of the Jewish world for centuries. It is interesting to note that Przyboś's recollection was crossed out in the context of the events of 1968; this episode, being undoubtedly one of the significant aspects of the experience of deprivation of roots, actually seems to be still hidden and censored in literary ascertainments. Nevertheless, the annihilation of the Jewish world is expressed in attempts to reconstruct local traditions also in most recent literature – for example in Piotr Szewc's works such as *Zagłada* [*Annihilation*] or *Zmierzchy i poranki* [*Dusks and Mornings*], Anna Bolecka's *Biały kamień* [*The White Stone*] or Paweł Huelle's novel *Weiser Dawidek*.

More importantly, however, the issue of the loss of roots – but also the reconstruction and creation of local identity – appears in a series of books representing the genre of a literary document, particularly in autobiographies or diaries, for example *Kręgi obcości* [*The Circles of Strangeness*] by Michał Głowiński, *Czarny ogród* [*The Black Garden*] by Małgorzata Szejnert, *Kronika z Mazur* [*A Chronicle from Masuria*] by Erwin Kruk or *Wywołane z pamięci* [*Recalled from Memory*] by Piotr Lachmann. Today we can speak of the rising development tendency of historical reportage – not only in the local dimension, as in the case of Szejnert's book, but also in the regional dimension in the broadest sense of this word, as in the case of the reconstruction of the historical and cultural memory of the Intermarium in *Linia powrotu* [*The Return Line*] – a volume of Krzysztof Czyżewski's essays-reportages. Moreover, this reconstruction and creation of localness or regionality undoubtedly carries a note of melancholy, the presence of which is described very aptly

by Czyżewski (2013) with regard to the entire space of Central Europe, but in such a manner that this description fits the areas of various provinces, too:

The traveller going across Central European lands was immersed in a trail of dusk for centuries, and this experience of the end and the resulting void allowed him to feel the community of this civilizational space as a whole. Maybe never before had it emerged as a fulfilled reality. Only the loss of this world and the empty place after it revealed the existence of the whole spiritual continent here. Hence the sadness as if after the loss of something that we have never had.

This spiritual continent obviously has its separate lands, each of which has its unique specificity.

#### 4.

The same happens in Poland, although it was not only its case: the experience of the interwar period across this ‘continent’ was, after all, some kind of preparation for existence and creation of a new identity – a country that did not emerge as a ‘fulfilled reality’ before 1939. The interpenetrating tendencies to reconstruct the ‘spiritual continent’ to which Czyżewski refers, signified by such phenomena as the debate about Central Europe initiated by Milan Kundera, a branch of which was an excellent cycle *Europa środkowa* [*Europe of the Centre*] in „Zeszyty Literackie”, and ascertainments aimed at discovering and creating localness in the literature of this region seem to pave the road to ‘overcoming the traditional sense of the national state’ about which Václav Havel writes. Being interpreted in this context, the aforementioned works by Brakoniecki, Huelle or Kuczok form an interesting collection. In this collection, ‘localness’ acquires its autonomy, or even sovereignty, and becomes a central point of reference in the description of the world, as in the case of Ithaca in Homer’s *Odyssey* or Dublin in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Such a role is also played by Gdańsk in Paweł Huelle’s novel *Castorp* or by Szczecin in Inga Iwasiów’s works *Bambino* and *Ku słońcu* [*Towards the Sun*]. In this dimension, the restoration of localness is the creation of new universalism, where – and the evolution of Kazimierz Brakoniecki’s poetry is a perfect illustration of this – the independent identity of the human being as an irreducible value becomes a central point of reference.

The phenomenon in question is a process that becomes visible only when we try to look at the whole literary output after 1989 from a distance that allows us to see not only, as critics emphasised in the early 1990s, an attempt to discard what Lidia Burska defined as the ‘troublesome heritage’ of Poland (turned into another country – Akslop in Miłosz Biedrzycki’s poem) and ‘forms of memory’ valid until then, but also an effort to perceive the ‘other one’ in oneself, which is the prerequisite for self-determination. Therefore, Przemysław Czapliński (2009) makes the right comment when writing about Mariusz Sieniewicz’s novel *Żydówek nie obsługujemy* [*We Do Not Serve Jewish Women*]:

Thus, identity is not a fact – something that can be attested or proven objectively. It is a performative, which means a created fact: we can be thrown into identity or lose it, but its existence always manifests itself in a relation. Moreover, as a performative, identity is not static, but it acts, changing the human being provided with identity, because it produces the different attitude of other persons. Providing identity triggers the action.

This obviously refers not only to individual protagonists of our literature, but also to literature itself. The regaining of its own independence by literature is the preliminary phase of this action, and the original slogan, though not always stated explicitly, is ‘re-writing Poland’ or ‘Poland needs substitution’. In this phase, the discovery or creation of localness seems to be the starting point for liberation from the context of the ‘great narration’ dictated until now by the tradition of national culture, where ‘Polishness’, being historically determined and abstract at the same time, was the dominant category. It is also a manifestation of attempts to liberate this narration from its ‘politicality’, or, in other words, to introduce elements of the discourse of civil society. Using Gombrowicz’s language, we could call this liberation of the human being in the Pole; here, Gombrowicz’s *Diary* undoubtedly and primarily determines the horizon of searches. In the end, ‘localness’ would serve here as the opening point of the discourse about ‘my Poland’, or ‘my place on Earth’, if we are to refer to the title of the first postwar volume by Julian Przyboś.

Maybe this localness – its recognition and being rooted in it – is a chance for liberation, as in the case of Hubert Klimka-Dobrzaniecki’s prose. In *Wariat* [*The Madman*], nativeness is exceeded. However, relations with



familiarity are not broken. They exist in the memory of the protagonist, who is not homesick. Maybe this is why he departs and packs his things, seeing on the horizon of his experience the future space of freedom not restricted by localness and memories. By his own place, which he does not have, by nostalgia, which does not hold him down, but only promises freedom, by the archived familiarity of the place.

This discovery – or rather renewal – and formation of localness is the creation of an opportunity to feel like a ‘citizen of the world’. In this context, ‘rewriting Poland’ is a real challenge to discover the world as a space for the fulfillment of one’s own personal freedom. Political freedom opens huge possibilities of being free *par excellence*, free in the internal and external space. By resigning from compulsion and from the auto-censorship of the subject, literature opens us to a new, unknown and uncertain world. It reduces the distance between the political-social world and the ‘I’ immersed in the reality of its own desires, wills and places; after all, is it them, not politics and society, that constitute a small local homeland for everyone. However, it is also the curse of freedom: each ‘going out to the world’ with this small rucksack entails a risk arising, among others, from the confrontation of the well-known and inseparably ‘own’ picture of the world with what has been unknown until now, but creates a chance for its enrichment and constant ‘self-pursuit’. Thus, paradoxically, we can say that the regaining of identity is an invitation to transform it. Maybe we can, therefore, regard the end of the history of the Provincial Literary Occasional Magazine „Łabuź” as the symbolic conclusion of this transitional period in the course of most recent Polish literature, the dominant feature of which was the ‘return to oneself’. Now, after the return, literature faces another journey with tracks leading to the unknown, just as Odysseus did after reaching Ithaca.

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## Summary

The article is an attempt to reconstruct a trend in literature after 1989 which focuses on restoring local identity and is often referred to as the 'literature of little homelands'. Various processes occur in this framework, like the reinterpretation of historical phenomena, restoring or creating memory by unlocking areas covered by censorship in the Polish People's Republic. The main task of this trend – which should be regarded as temporary – is to raise questions of identity. This stage should be treated as a preparation for future re-evaluation of this issue as it provides a starting point for taking advantage of those opportunities that were given to literature by the regained political freedom.

**Keywords:** Polish literature after 1989, literature of little homelands, locality, memory, Polish identity

## FAMILY REUNION AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN INVENTED TRADITION

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The objective of this article is to show that the issues pertaining to invented traditions and collective memory, which are widely debated these days, also occur on a micro-level. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1992) described the mechanisms of inventing traditions within larger communities, focusing on states and nations. The same holds true for the studies of collective memory, since they mainly focus on memory in the global, national and local dimension. The subject of research in this article is the ‘First Reunion of the Feret Family’, which was treated as an invented tradition constructed in response to the crisis of post-modern society. With the help of scientific theories from the field of broadly understood research on the past, I am going to attempt to try and present mechanisms and intentions of building tradition and memory in a family, which constitutes a basic social unit.

The analysis of the phenomena and processes taking place during the reunion was made possible thanks to observations carried out by the participant. During the reunion, I observed the reactions of the participants, listened to their comments and watched the emerging relationships between the family members. The collected materials such as the presentation of history, family chronicle and family anthem have all enabled me to analyze the mechanisms of inventing traditions and memory. The analysis of the ‘First Reunion of Feret Family’ will be based on theories established by researchers focusing on collective memory and tradition. The concept of invented traditions, proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) will enable defining the reunion, as well as presenting its structure and objectives. The concept of collective memory introduced by Maurice Halbwachs (1992) will foster understanding of how an invented tradition impacts the organization of the collective memory of a family and

builds its identity. Referring to Jan Assmann's (2011) definition of cultural memory, one should bear in mind how the memory of the past manifests itself in material things and how these 'mementoes of the past' influence the shape of the invented family tradition. Finally, Waldemar Kuligowski's (2007) deliberations on the intersection of tradition and globalization enable reflection on the threats to the family and tradition posed by the contemporary world.

When considering situations where there is a need to create new traditions, Hobsbawm (1992) notes that this process is most likely to occur where there is rapid social change and where value systems and patterns of behavior are weakening. For a researcher, an invented tradition serves as a testimony of a transition and a symptom of problems, and its emergence serves to explain the complicated present. Waldemar Kuligowski (2007) presents episodes where local traditions intersect with global modernity and innovation. The scholar notes that tradition is a positive value that needs to be preserved, but at the same time he sees the need to adapt it to the contemporary world. If globalization is a social change that weakens value systems, it needs to be perceived as a threat to the family. In addition, sociology has put forward a thesis about the crisis of a post-modern family, which results from the gradual assumption of family functions by other institutions. Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004: 215) identify two positions, which explain the dimensions of this family crisis. The first of them speaks not so much about the disappearance of the family, but about a change in its form. The second position concerns the crisis, which threatens the 'foundations of society' since the disintegration of the family stems from an individualistic system, where 'personal happiness supersedes the sense of loyalty and duty'. Thus, the crisis of the family, numerous migrations, distance between relatives, lack of knowledge about the family's past, as well as lack of contact between its members make the post-modern family lose its sense of unity.

### **'THE FIRST REUNION OF THE FERET FAMILY', OR AN INVENTED TRADITION**

Hobsbawm (1992: 1) believes, that tradition is misunderstood, since 'which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented'. He defines an invented tradition as 'set of practices, normally

governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (ibid.). The link between the past and the present is established artificially; however, the past interfering with the present is interpreted in relation to current events. The most important feature of invented traditions is the repetition of certain practices.

The structure of the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' was based on the establishment of a link between past and present. In order to foster the inner unity of the group, the organisers had to teach the participants about the history of the family, their ancestors and their place of origin. Some considerable time was spent on communicating the values that allowed the idea of a reunion as a cultural practice and the identity of the group to be sustainable.

The 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' took place on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2013 in Gościno in West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The event was originated by Krystyna Zielińska, who invited 67 family members to celebrate Easter together. While waiting for the meeting to begin, the participants took a look at the family tree. Everyone was warmly welcomed by the hostess of the reunion and received a pin with the image of the founders of the family and an information brochure containing family history, genealogy, family anthem and lyrics.

## FOSTERING IDENTITY

Hobsbawm (1992) distinguishes three types of invented traditions that foster group identity, instil certain values and conventional ways of behavior, as well as legitimise and strengthen institutions. Wojciech Burszta (2004: 109-113) points out that shaping identity by a group using invented traditions is a conscious and voluntary process. Thus, one of the priorities for the organisers of the family reunion, was undoubtedly the intentional establishment of family unity in a symbolic manner. The first point of the event program was a structured and coherent narrative about the family, which comprised an introduction of all the family members and a presentation of family history using slideshow (fig 1.). At the outset, the photo of Maria and Władysław – the founders of the family who lived in



Fig. 1. Fragment of the slideshow (author's private archive)

Tuszków – was shown<sup>1</sup>. This was followed by a presentation of their children – five brothers. The history and family of each of them was also shared with the guests. By doing so, the family founding myth, the past of the family and all 118 members of the family were presented.

According to Halbwachs (1992), knowledge of the past is essential to maintaining identity. The most important aspect of shaping this knowledge are subjective memories and relationships of individuals (Saryusz-Wolska 2009: 22), which in the case of the reunion became the cornerstone for reconstructing the family's past. While creating the program of the reunion, the originator had to remember the history of the family, based on memories and conversations with Czesław Feret. The stories were written in a chronicle, which was started at that time, and the moment of writing down the history of the family was pictured in a photograph, which was presented during

<sup>1</sup> Before 1951, Tuszków was located within the borders of Poland. It is currently located in Ukraine and is called Zabolottya. It used to be located between lying between Vorokhta and Belz on the river Richytsia.

the reunion. Conversations during the meeting showed how important the knowledge of the family's history is to the participants.

An important step in the process of identification of individuals with the group was the analysis of the family tree. Each participant was obliged to fill in the data regarding the descendants of Władysław Feret. By becoming aware of their common origin, family members found a basis for identification with the group. This function was also performed by the pins with the reunion logo. The image of the founders of the family became the symbol of the reunion, as well as the family, expressing the inner unity of the group, fostering its identity and a sense of belonging. Seeing the pins on the clothes of people who were strangers until moments before, the participants could see the image of their common ancestors. The portrait of Władysław and Maria Feret also became a symbol of the founding myth (fig. 2). The founding of a family, which is a common and ordinary event, was treated as a certain historical moment worthy of immortalization. The presented story has created an idealized image of the family. Traumatic events connected with the war, resettlement and the tragic death of Władysław (see: Bulzacki et al. 2006: 998) were somehow hidden under the banner of remembrance.



Fig. 2. Portrait of Maria and Władysław Feret – logotype of the Reunion (author's private archive)

The founding myth was also present in the anthem, which was written for this occasion, sung to the melody of *Ach, mazurskie, jakie cudne* [*Oh, Masurian, such a beautiful*]. Describing the process of creating identity, Hobsbawm (1992) indicated that state anthems are invented traditions. The Feret family anthem does not comply strictly with formal requirements and does not meet literary criteria. Despite this, the fact that the family has given it the function of a family anthem makes it possible to distinguish the family from other social groups and shape its identity. Referring to the type of invented tradition distinguished by Hobsbawm, the creation of the Feret family anthem is also an example of the strengthening and legitimization of the family institution.

The first words of the hymn explain the origin of the family, followed by a presentation of an abridged history of its ancestors, as well as a description of the characteristic, often humorous, features of each family.

Hey, this beloved Tusków, where the Feret family was born  
From where five brothers went into the world to make their wives happy (...).  
Here in Gościno in the head of Krycha our first reunion was born.  
Take the example, repeat it and invite others to your homes.

The call to other family members featured in the first stanza of the anthem assumes that the reunion is a sign of tightening of the family ties – an act that is worth repeating. Pointing out that certain cultural messages are intentionally treated as worthy of the name of tradition, Edward Shils (1981) noted that it is a dynamic process, since it constantly recreates cultural messages and forms, while bringing about social and cultural change in the lives of citizens. Not only Shils, but also Hobsbawm (1992) and Kuligowski (2007) wrote about the fact that certain products are considered worthy of recording and repeating due to the belief of their age. However, the newly created concept of a family reunion does not refer to old times, patterns or traditions, but creates its own rules, which is a characteristic feature of the concept of an invented tradition. The anthem constitutes this tradition, referring to it as an example, an act worth repeating. The real impact of the lyrics of the anthem is evidenced by the numerous entries of the participants left in the chronicle, among which one can find invitations and hopes for further reunions. ‘Visit us often’, ‘Our door is open to everyone’, ‘When going east to Rzeplin, Lubycza Krolewska, Tusków, Belz and Lviv, don’t forget to visit



Okszów' – these were some of the entries left in the chronicle by the family members. These invitations were confirmed with exact addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. These examples illustrate Shils' (1981) view that tradition brings about social and cultural changes in social life.

## INSTILLING VALUES AND NORMS

According to Hobsbawm (1992), invented traditions are also created in order to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior, as well as conventional behaviors. During the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family', members of the family were persuaded to act in a certain way through an appeal to the family and the Feret 2013 award ceremony.

The presentation of the story of the five brothers and their families ended with an appeal to the family, which reads as follows:

So, Ferets, all of you sitting here – remember:  
 Don't let the kids forget.  
 Send each other greetings and wishes.  
 Invite each other to your weddings.  
 Visit each other.  
 Never allow this bond of ours die.

As a primary group, a family is responsible for primary socialization of its youngest members, which is why the reunion focused a great deal of time on convincing older family members about the need to share knowledge about the past and maintaining family relations. The memory of past events, passed on to the younger generations, is the only way to maintain a group identity. That is why the call on other family members to 'not let the kids forget' was placed as the top of the list of normative behaviors.

Halbwachs (1992: 252) emphasized the role of the older generation in shaping historical awareness among children, pointing out that the family is responsible for the first stage of shaping social memory. The researcher pointed to the important role of grandparents in this process, because 'they pass fragments of their own memories on to their grandchildren during the breaks in the ongoing family life'. Thanks to this process, other family members can get to know the past of the family and common history. This process also took place during the presentation of the history of the Feret family. The information about the death of Władysław Feret presented

during the family reunion served as a basis for outlining a broader context of the operations and attacks of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army on the Polish civilian population. On the other hand, the emigration of ancestors, which resulted from the changes in the Polish border as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945 and the agreement regarding the border change in 1951, enables understanding of the shape of Europe in the aftermath of World War II. The realization that certain historical events have had a real impact on the fate of the family, enriched the family's knowledge of history.

In turn, the call to 'visit each other' is also a message in support of maintaining family ties, which also features a normative image of the family, which is formed at the moment of marriage, it grows and dies (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 186-187). This theory is reflected in the way in which individual families were presented, with key role being played by wedding photographs. The image that dominated the presentation of individual families is a proof of the normative postulate of how the process of its development should be carried out. Wedding photographs were followed by photographs of various sacraments, such as baptism or first communion, which presented the participants the 'fruit' of marriage.

An interesting point in the program was the Feret 2013 awards ceremony (fig. 3), which includes a clear catalogue of normative behaviors. The statuettes were awarded in the following categories: making the family name famous, remembering about wishes and seasonal greetings, honorary representation at the reunion. Family members walked on the red carpet, to the sound of a fanfare, to collect statuettes depicting the founders of the family. The most important award was a statuette for keeping the family ties alive, which was presented to the originator and main organizer of the reunion – Krystyna Zielińska. Thanks to her efforts, everything that she did created a family bond between the participants of the reunion, which served as the foundation for building the identity of the whole family. The award in this category suggests the importance of the desire to keep in touch with family and imposes an informal obligation on the participants to maintain ties and this invented tradition. The most effective tool for this is memory.

## **COLLECTIVE AND CULTURAL MEMORY**

The concept of 'collective memory', which was introduced by Halbwachs (1992), aroused the greatest interest in the 1970s. As some researchers



Fig. 3. Awards ceremony (author's private archive)

claim, Halbwachs has never precisely defined and explained the theoretical foundations of this concept (Gedi, Elam 1996). One can therefore speculate that the issues of communication in her research originate in the blurred category introduced by the precursor. Nowadays, the methodological and terminological diversity in memory research is the result of the interdisciplinary character of this issue and an approach conditioned by individual disciplines. The authors of the book *Modi memorandi* attempt to address the problems of contemporary deliberations on memory. They define collective memory as 'ideas shared by members of a social group about its past; cultural creations created within a memory group' (Saryusz-Wolska, Traba 2014: 346).

The relationship between invented tradition and collective memory in the context of the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' is bilateral, because the invented tradition shapes the memory of the group, and memory is the foundation on which the invented tradition was built. The recollection of the story of the five brothers determined the knowledge and memory of the ancestors and the past of the family. This knowledge was conditioned by the social group itself, which created the image of the past. Individual participants could not have an individual memory of the family's past, because they simply did not witness it. However, the efforts during the reunion created a collective memory of the past. According to Halbwachs (1992), memory is the most effective tool to maintain one's own identity, On the other hand, this identity and the desire to strengthen family ties sparked

during the reunion are the main reasons for maintaining the invented tradition.

The concept of collective memory inspired Jan Assmann (2011), who put forth the notion of ‘cultural memory’, defining it as memory that takes on an external character. In order to preserve the memory of the past, the social group creates material and ritualistic media, which are nowadays referred to as ‘memory media’. Assmann also distinguishes communicative memory, which denotes the images of the past within the family passed down orally to younger generations. With the ‘First Reunion of the Feret Family’, there was a need to consolidate the knowledge and testimonies of people who witnessed history. Czesław’s accounts were written down in the family chronicle, which is the memory medium of the Feret family (fig. 4). Writing down memories and accounts is a symbolic transition of a group from oral to written memory in the context of passing on knowledge about the past. This moment is also a transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory (see: Saryusz-Wolska 2009: 27-31). The chronicle thus serves as an institutional memory medium, which constitutes the foundation of the group’s identity and a proof of family continuity. Thus, the memory of the past must be based on certain institutionalized memory media. Through the production of material memory media, the message of the past is no longer a witness testimony, but an institutional medium.

Referring once again to Shils’ view that traditions are creations considered to be unique and worth preserving because of their alleged age, regardless of whether its connection with the past is continuous, it can be said that the visual references to old prints with writing elements or to incunabula seen in the chronicle were intended to give the reunion participants the impression that they were dealing with something important, something to be treated with respect. At the reunion, it was carefully passed from hand to hand, because everyone was obliged to sign in. Discussions and stress accompanying the choice of words indicated how much importance the participants attached to the chronicle. Thanks to the visual references to the times of old, the awareness of the fact that it may survive for centuries has been sparked among the participants. Even the imitation of the binding placed on its spine, ensures – metaphorically speaking – the material durability of the chronicle. Such beliefs are expressed in the chronicle in the form of entries regarding family ties, traditions and memories. ‘We



Fig. 4. Family chronicle (author's private archive)

take the solemn oath that we will be faithful to the cultivation of family traditions'; 'The Feret family from Wierzbka Górna leaves their mark, promising to keep up the tradition'. Such entries prove that the participants themselves treat the reunion as a tradition, and the awareness of its novelty does not contradict the desire to maintain it. Several statements mention memory, but in different contexts. Some people said that 'the memories of the reunion will be remembered for a long time to come', testifying to the uniqueness of the meeting and the necessity of recalling it. Others promised to 'remember the living Ferets, especially our ancestors'. A good example of the effectiveness of the idea of the reunion was the entry left by nine-year-old Martynka, who pointed out that the most important family value is the memory of it and all forms that will remind about the past and family traditions. The entry reads as follows: 'I'm glad to be a part of the Feret family. I hope one day I will deserve the Feret award for remembering and recalling this great family'.

## MECHANISMS FOR THE CREATION OF INVENTED TRADITION

To sum up, the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' is an invented tradition with a structure based on two pillars. The first one is to create a relationship between the past and the present. Getting to know the past of the family and all its members allowed to start the process of consolidating the group and enabled individuals to identify with the family. The invented tradition promoted values that were necessary to maintain identity and tradition.

The second pillar on which the invented tradition was built is memory. The efforts and activities during the reunion shaped collective memory, since the knowledge of the family's past is based on the way it is presented at the reunion. Memory is also the only way to maintain a new tradition and family ties established thanks to it. This opportunity is complemented by the creation of material memory media such as family chronicles, brochures, pins, genealogical trees, anthems and Feret 2013 awards, since they serve the role of memorabilia of the event that shaped the Feret family. All the interpenetrating functions of the invented tradition were aimed at instilling in the participants a desire to act in accordance with tradition and family values.

Referring to the definition of the invented tradition of Wojciech Burszta (2004: 112-113), one can say that the 'First Reunion of the Feret Family' was a collection of cultural practices 'which express the memory of values, norms, events or figures from the past by way of their repetition and reminding living individuals today, in order to evoke the feeling that they are somehow connected with the history and tradition' of a given group. The modern invented tradition, which was a testimony to the changes and a symptom of the problems of the globalized world, proved to be their solution. In conclusion, let me quote Hobsbawm (1992: 2), who said that in studying the invented traditions, one explores a 'contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant'.

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## Summary

The purpose of this article is to present the functioning of contemporary invented tradition on the example of the Feret's family reunion. The article contains the definitions of tradition, invented tradition, collective memory, cultural memory and memory space. It also describes the relationships between tradition and globalization. The analysis of the reunion depicts a construction of invented tradition and includes its features; it has been based on the family chronicle, the anthem and the presentation of the family's history. This particular invented tradition has built a social identity and composed a response to the problems of the present world.

**Keywords:** collective memory, invented tradition, identity, family reunion





## WHAT TRADITION DO POLES NEED? RE-ENACTMENTS, CELEBRATIONS, PROTESTS, BRAWLS

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The title of my article clearly refers to Jerzy Jedlicki's book *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują?* [*What Civilization Do Poles Need?*], published in 1988 – at the end of the Polish People's Republic. It was a very important publication at the time, since it raised a number of questions about Polish identity over the centuries. The moment of its publication was also crucial – it was not yet very clear how it would happen, but there was a growing certainty that something had to change, because the system was slowly collapsing, the opposition was burning out, the economy breathed its last dying breath. Starting from the 18th century, but often going even farther in time, Jedlicki reconstructed the basic pairs of oppositions that marked the European, but above all Polish discourse on the present and future. He wrote:

The great 19<sup>th</sup>-century dispute about civilization had a certain number of problematic areas, which were distinguished by their names, made up of two opposing concepts at that time. These were oppositions such as: 'nationality and civilization', 'natural and artificial development', 'moral and material progress' (or its equivalent – 'gospel and economy'), 'Slavic lands and the West' and many more (Jedlicki 1988: 12).

This dispute has never been resolved, because it might be impossible to resolve. Its essence is the lack of equivalence between the individual elements of the opposing pairs, and even their incompatibility to a certain extent. On the one hand, this debate features very emotionally charged ideas and values, while on the other hand, there is calculated pragmatism and a rational approach to reality, devoid of illusions, requiring factual calculation and the abandonment of feelings and sentiments. Of course, for

the purposes of this sketch, I decided to sharpen and unify the presented issues, but it does not change the essence of the matter, which can be defined by going back to Jedlicki's book. Presenting the two main tendencies in Polish thinking that were finally formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the author stated:

And from that moment on, we have had two cultural histories. The sacred history of the nation, its songs, prisons and battlegrounds, and the common history of society, the history of sowing and harvesting. There was also the history of political thought, condemned to helpless struggle between the archangelic vision of the past and the future and the harsh reality of a small week of Poles (ibid.: 76).

This discourse took place with varying intensity throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it did not end when independence was regained in 1918, in fact it might have even increased in strength at that time, since it concerned a state that had emerged from political oblivion, with a nation that had to define itself in its somewhat new identity. A nation which had to resolve not only political, legal and economic issues, but also, or perhaps above all, the spiritual shape of the new state, created by the choice of tradition and implemented in social pedagogy. These were all tested by the attitudes and actions of Poles during World War II, which provided arguments to both sides of the dispute when it lasted and when it ended. The period of the Polish People's Republic, however, destroyed all opportunities for a public discourse, pushing it into the 'underground' – into the sphere of debates and choices made in families, among friends, Catholic groups, and then within opposition groups.

This telegraphic reminder is necessary here, since the ongoing choices, attitudes and fervent disputes over world views have their roots in the distant past, which also constituted all the post-war speeches and protests and, above all, was expressed during the August protests of 1980 and in the culture of Solidarity. Therefore, bearing in mind the nigh ancient origins of this dispute, I would like to focus on our current reality, which is closer to our hearts.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there are two different founding myths in Polish culture, with very significant importance of the attitudes towards the past and the choices made on the basis of tradition. One could even say that these aspects constitute the foundation of these myths

– tradition here functions as a text that needs to be read, because depending on the way it is read, it projects the present and the future. The first founding myth concerns the protests of 1980 and the emerging model of the Solidarity culture, which will dominate the thinking, not only among the political opposition, for the whole decade of the 1980s. In the consciousness of many Poles, August 1980 is a breakthrough, the beginning of a large-scale fight against the communist system. On the one hand, this approach reveals little knowledge about earlier opposition activities, and on the other, these earlier activities are treated as a prelude to the August rebellion, which ‘absorbs’ and institutionalizes them in a certain way. It is then that the conviction about the dual character of the Polish community stems from – the sharp divisions between ‘us and them’, which endangers the unity of the community was established in the common consciousness and further emphasized by the opposition culture. This group of ‘us’ was made up by people, who were deprived of the possibility to articulate their feelings, views, and values in the public sphere. If they wanted to stand in the opposition to ‘them’ – the authorities and their supporters – they had to obtain legitimacy that gives social support to the emerging movement, and this was possible primarily by building a universe of symbols, myths, signs of tradition and cultural codes that would be universally understandable and which would not be associated either with the official culture or with the language and codes represented by the authorities. At the same time, there was this tendency to blur differences between individual opposition groups in favor of creating a monolithic model of the nation opposed to those in power.

The search for its own legitimacy took place primarily through references to the Romantic and post-Romantic traditions, and to a lesser extent through elements of other codes derived from Sarmatia political folklore or the language of revolutionary poetry; however, they were also in various ways linked to the mainstream of Romantic origin. An important feature of such an understanding of tradition was its clear ahistorical character, overlapping and co-existence of elements connected with various historical events serving as the foundation of national myths. These aspects of the attitude towards tradition and the choices made at that time were highlighted by Sergiusz Kowalski (1990: 80), who stated that:

Tradition immerses its roots in the pre-communist past, or in more general words – in what was Polish, not ‘communist’. The past is a source of knowledge about what the Polish society really is and was like; tradition conveys the timeless essence of the national community.

This ‘essence’ is fostered in such a way as to emphasize the otherness, difference, strangeness of everything that was proposed by the Polish People’s Republic in the sphere of tradition, myths and values connected with them, and what was really understood in this respect as blurring, destroying, depriving Poles of what has always been our identity. Therefore, the process of choosing tradition by the Solidarity culture is not only a matter of choosing messages and beliefs different from those of the communist regime, but also of reminding, reclaiming, restoring areas of the past, events and related narratives, which were absent from the communist discourse or not pronounced enough, treated as inconvenient, forbidden, doomed to be excluded from social memory. Sergiusz Kowalski aptly summed up this process, stating that ‘building a new society is not creating, but recreating’ (ibid.: 79). The things to be recreated are usually put on the one side of the dispute described by Jerzy Jedlicki – put alongside the sacred history of the nation, its songs, prisons and battlegrounds, while at the same time defining the specificity of the Polish revolution, which does not want to start from the beginning but rather to regain the mythical order lost. It consists of such elements as Polish Catholicism with its proposed ethical canons and often supporting messianic tendencies, the history of the struggle for independence and the idea of an uprising as a way of regaining it, the myth of unity, monolithic nature of the nation, individual and collective attitudes forged into stereotypical scenarios, which are always triggered in a situation of danger. Above all, however, the dominating aspect is the conviction of the recurring events requiring the same attitudes and choices to be made, which obviously makes it impossible to think from a historical standpoint and see what is individual and exceptional, which determines the novelty in the world surrounding Poles, and what determines the ability to react to this reality in a different way than by looking for analogies in what is familiar and already known. One could compare this way of thinking and reacting to history with romantic tendencies to mythologize history, which are most fully expressed in the messianic systems, especially those proposed by Mickiewicz.

The second founding myth was the Round Table debate and the compromise worked out at that time between the existing authorities and opposition groups. Democratic elections and rapidly changing political, social and economic realities in this situation, after a moment of euphoria, caused a sense of loss, chaos and even a certain oppression resulting from the need to undertake a new type of activity. A nation that had so far identified itself primarily through the culture of defeat suddenly had to find itself in a situation of victory, define success, move to the other side of the eternal debate. In this process, it was also necessary to transform the tradition in a way desired for a new type of community. Everything that was so difficult to recover during the decade of the 1980s became, in a way, a ballast that made the transition impossible or difficult at best, so the 1990s were a period of collapse of the Romantic patriotic-independence paradigm, which of course can be seen, for example, in the literature of that time, but which is probably best reflected in the new language of the media – it brought back the Positivist term ‘society’, replacing more and more often the Romantic notion of a ‘nation’, ‘homeland’ disappeared almost completely, while new words started making rounds, such as: ‘transition’, ‘democratization’, ‘market’, ‘marketing’, ‘political correctness’ and so on.

It soon turned out, however, that it was difficult to find these alternative areas of tradition that could become the basis for a new design of Polish spirituality in the broadly understood Polish culture – new design under the banner of political transition, openness towards the world with all its diversity in all areas of life, as well as Polish spirituality in a united Europe. The issue is further exacerbated by the internal political divisions revealed after 1989, as well as the multiplicity of world views, which was pushed away and marginalized in the Solidarity culture in the name of the idea of a common enemy opposed by the national monolith. The dispute about the shape of the new Polish spirituality and the tradition supporting it ran on at least several levels, of which the most spectacular and mediatized are those represented by individual political parties. But its existence is also conditioned by – for example – belonging to various generations, individual experiences of Poles, family tradition, etc., and thus, by different resources of community and individual memory.

Thus, there is an official and party tradition, social performances taking place in the public sphere with great media coverage, as well as a different

tradition, created by smaller communities looking for justifications for their own activity and their own choices in the sphere of values. The well-known phenomenon of appropriating tradition by politics pervasive during the communist era was often accompanied by a phenomenon that some could refer to as tabloidization of the past – its simplification to an extreme extent and focus on event-based presentation with the blurring of all causal and effect relations, deeper reflection or preventing discourse. Thus, we were dealing not so much with a systemic choice of tradition that would serve as a cornerstone of the national cultural canon and foster some kind of identity order that could arise from the ruins of the communist doctrine, but with the multiplicity of choices and their criteria, causing difficulties in communication between Poles and sometimes sharp conflicts between them. One should remember about a certain phenomenon pointed out by Ewa Domańska in her introduction to the Polish translation of Hayden White's essays entitled *Poetics of Historiography Writing*:

Every representation of the past is tainted by ideology, and researchers who point out ideology to others do so not so that they themselves can present the past in a more 'objective' way, but because they hold a different political option or a different worldview (Domańska 2000: 27).

Among the many discourses pertaining to tradition present in Poland today, I would like, for example, to present some of them that I consider most characteristic or particularly strongly present in the collective consciousness. The best way to look at them is through social performances taking place in the public space and symbolic message contained within them.

In this context, it is better to start with the official rituals and celebrations of anniversaries, unveiling of monuments and celebrations of holidays directed by the state authorities. Here we are dealing with a clear and relatively coherent choice of tradition, generally speaking, rooted in independence and patriotism, often repeating and reflecting the models developed in the opposition culture, which is now given a state significance. In this case, the series of traditions is built on the history of the uprisings – from November Insurrection to Warsaw Uprising, the cult of heroes, places, as well as breakthroughs or just important events related to them. This trend also includes workers' protests from the period of the Polish People's Republic, August protests and the period of martial law. These latter events,

as the closest in time and forming the founding myth of contemporary Poland, are particularly important, but they usually do not exist as separate entities, but rather are presented in the context of the long tradition of ‘fighting for independence’ and the long-lasting, praiseworthy attitude of many generations fulfilling the same patriotic duty.

The aim of the celebrations understood in this way is, of course, to gather the community around a specific concept of history – the ‘heritage’, which commands respect of the contemporary citizens, and which is supposed to serve as the root for the present times. It is not without significance, however, that traditional choices are always made from the point of view of the present day and are most often used by politicians to make ad hoc ideological declarations, so in a sense it is not just a specific date, historical figure or event that is important, but the way in which they are presented today – it needs to be useful to us today and it is supposed to be clear and understandable in our everyday lives. As Robert Traba (2009: 28-29) aptly stated:

The elite create signs, symbols and anniversary rituals, which they then try to introduce into common circulation in order to foster unity of the community around them. In this sense, anniversaries are ‘invented’, but at the same time there must be an emotional connection with such a date, which is later perpetuated by regular celebrations. (...) It is natural that certain anniversaries are created from the point of view of the needs of the present day. When one ‘writes’ collective memory, it is a reflection of a certain political and social situation, and not a record of events from the past.

The author points out those choices made officially and the narratives assigned to them must cause controversy, because they usually result from the current political situation, because there is no such thing as ‘objectively important’ events that could be considered important by the general public in an undisputed way. And even if the majority agrees with such choices, there are always controversies surrounding the way they are presented, about the choice of a given narrative, instead of other ones. An example which best illustrates this phenomenon are the celebrations of subsequent anniversaries of the conclusion of the shipyard strikes in 1980. One might wonder whether this is still a matter of tradition and the choices linked to it, or whether it is only a matter of historical policy, which is a completely different field.

A characteristic feature of contemporary anniversary celebrations, which clearly distinguishes them from those of the Polish People's Republic, is that each time they are inscribed in a sacred context, combining patriotic values with religious ones, so characteristic of the Romantic religion of patriotism. The presence of church officials, field masses and the blessing of monuments are inseparable elements of the state celebration, indirectly elevating its contemporary organizers and participants. In this case, we are dealing with references to the Christian faith, to Catholicism as an element which cemented the community, allowed us to survive in times of slavery and defined Polish identity for centuries. It is worth noting, however, that in such a community, on the one hand there is a tendency to define Poles as Catholics, and on the other hand, directly or indirectly, exclude atheists and representatives of other faiths from the community. This in turn contradicts the officially declared pluralism, individual freedom, the European principle of tolerance and the clear separation of state and church.

However, this elevated and official nature, pathos and sacralization as a method of social pedagogy create a large distance between celebrants and other participants, who serve the role of spectators and students, to whose emotions the former group is trying to appeal, trying to convince them to remember the lessons. This distance clearly decreases or completely disappears in other forms of preserving the messages chosen from tradition, such as modern multimedia museums on the one hand, and historical re-enactments on the other. The Warsaw Rising Museum and the of Breakthroughs Centre in Szczecin, are supposed to serve not only the function of storing and presenting national relics, but above all, they are there to create an opportunity to relive the events of the past, and thus to identify emotionally with tradition. Similar aims are served by increasingly popular historical re-enactments, which are a very good example not so much of the fact that modernity is rooted in tradition or that it enters into a debate with it, but of the aforementioned phenomenon of tabloidization of the past. Once, Zdzisław Pietrasik wrote an article entitled *Jaka przeszłość nas czeka?* [*What Kind of Past Awaits Us?*], recalling subsequent examples of such re-enactments: 'Thus, we are in the theatre (sometimes in an operetta) of history, staging »live images« in which nothing unexpected can happen. The history presented in this way increasingly resembles a comic book' (Pietrasik 2005: 28).



Pietrasik also perfectly depicted this close connection between the re-enactment of selected past events and the ongoing election campaign, in which politicians of various options were eager to join the performance, played sentimental and patriotic roles and used proven props, such as the sabre used by Andrzej Lepper. On the one hand, what we are dealing here is a ludic, carnival version of tradition, and on the other, with its appropriation by politics. In both cases, emotions, sentiments and compensation for various inconveniences of everyday life remain the main area of reference, and in the symbolic plane – well-known, perfectly recognizable props from the past, which in fact cease to mean anything, when they are so far removed from their original contexts and arranged in a mosaic, which forms a set for public performances.

A slightly different model of contemporary discourse with tradition can be found in numerous protests, street manifestations and support marches, organized by trade unions, NGOs, groups of employees of specific companies or industries, as well as emerging spontaneously – in a sense – under the influence of events that shock the community. Although such actions are often – more or less officially – inspired or controlled by political groups, they generally seek to create the impression of grass-roots movements, which are the voice of society rather than of the authorities. References to tradition visible in various protests and demonstrations need to be placed in two different circles, referring to both elements of the opposition pairs mentioned by Jedlicki.

On the one hand, there is the phenomenon of creation of a completely new tradition, referring quite loosely and emphasizing the times in Polish history characterized by tolerance, aimed at opening Poland up towards worldwide standards, in a sense ‘civilizing’ Poles and breaking the models, values or attitudes rooted in our collective mentality. Examples include Pride parades, as well as all kinds of demonstrations of solidarity with various minorities, taking place under the banners of tolerance and equal rights. The law enforcement agencies, which are mobilized on such occasions and who are not always able to prevent attacks on such demonstrations anyway, best prove that this is not yet a tradition close to the hearts of the general public in Poland. Rather, it is interpreted as a threat to ‘real’ values that are revealed and defended in various protest actions. On the other hand, the community concentrates around the symbols and codes of the past,

which are considered to be ours – Polish, which nearly always present the Polish identity as endangered with destruction. Once again, we are dealing primarily with references – at various levels – to the sacred history of fighting and martyrdom, but the external enemy is often replaced by the current minister, a company’s board of directors, executive, local or state authorities, and sometimes it can even be found in Brussels, which is synonymous with the European Union.

A broad range of well-known and clearly understandable symbols is used to settle short-term particular disputes and debates between interest groups, a strike to defend jobs is juxtaposed with the series of national uprisings, barricades and burning tires serve as an impromptu redoubts that can be defended, and a battle between merchants from the Palace of Culture and security guards supported by the police turns out to be a contemporary version of the national theatre. This event was reported by Juliusz Ćwieluch (2009: 12):

And thus, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2009 at 7:30 a.m., three rows of women were waiting for the bailiff, while chanting to the bodyguards: Gestapo, Gestapo! They waved Polish flags with black ribbons on them. The tragedy on the Defilad Square was supposed to be the tragedy of all Poles who are oppressed by the state – as if it was an invading force. And should anyone have any doubts that this is not about profits from the sale of jeans, Chinese textiles and shoes, but about free Poland, *Rota* was also sung by the participants, who emphasized the first and middle sentence: ‘We won’t forsake the land we came from’, and ‘Every doorsill shall be a fortress’.

There are many similar examples to be found. They show how the national and state symbolism – flag, emblem, and anthem – are trivialized and abused, to manipulate tradition in response to an immediate need. Roch Sulima (2010: 24) also wrote about ‘ritual as a stolen form’ and its dominance in contemporary culture, especially in this kind of public performances where spectacular gestures, clear symbols and vivid images, which are so eagerly shown in the media, matter the most. This is how the next show is built up. A media spectacle is created, the narration of which determines the way of experiencing what has been recorded by the cameras.

All the rituals derived from Romantic and post-Romantic traditions are performed in the situations of disasters and catastrophes, such as the plane

crash near Smolensk. They have already been analyzed quite thoroughly, which is why I am only pointing them out here. In the event of such a tragic event, a mechanism of tried and proven reactions is immediately triggered, defined at one time by Maria Janion as a culture of defeat. Victims of natural disasters, air accidents or road accidents are elevated, they are turned into martyrs, and the national mourning announced immediately after a dramatic event makes it a national tragedy, which is very easy to juxtapose with other national disasters that permeated our history and that are still present in our collective mythology.

Another kind of social performances – commonly referred to as ‘brawls’ – should be placed on a totally other end of the spectrum. These are, of course, hooligan fans, but this concept also encompasses various kinds of protests that take on the character of a direct street clash, focused on aggression, not on looking for solutions and compromise. Burning tires in front of the parliament building or ministry buildings, and – in the more local examples – in front of the seats of voivodeships or local authorities, aggression directed against the police, regular street battles that take place during protests – these are just some examples of such social spectacles. We are dealing with a mixture of different orders, including symbolic ones, but most of all with a disturbance of the hierarchy of importance and significance of events. These brawls often feature a whole arsenal of patriotic and revolutionary references, signs and symbols, which are mixed with each other and used quite arbitrarily. National colors, noble slogans, lyrics of the national anthem and religious songs appear alongside burning tires, stones, vulgar words and fighting on a regular basis, as a regular scenario of a variety of events. Such events may include both layoffs from a factory that is being shut down or fighting for a raise, as well as completely local, particular disputes based on ambitions, construction of parking lots, bypass roads and so on.

In all the examples mentioned above we are dealing with the tradition of resistance and fighting, which has been constantly present in the Polish consciousness, whose Romantic origins and post-Romantic variants are obvious. This does not mean, however, that nothing changes in the functioning of this paradigm. Everything seems to indicate that it ceases to be alive in the sense of a carrier of values truly professed and recognized by the national community. If it still somehow serves our identity, it is more

like a form or set of clear and simple forms, which are just equally effective in the absence of alternative scenarios of behavior. This paradigm often even replaces the search in the sphere of thinking about our spirituality in the contemporary world. If it is true that the post-modern world is characterized by its unique propensity to forgetting, then in the described cases we would have to deal with forgetting the messages that created the Polish form in the past, or perhaps a little more cautiously – with their invalidation in a completely different historical reality. What remained was the form itself, something like stage decorations, props and roles, played out without thinking about them. At the same time, we are hardly able to create other decorations and write other roles.

A clear answer to the question – what kind of tradition do Poles need? – is thus neither simple nor even possible. It seems that today this concept encompasses a number of issues that are articulated in different ways, but expressed in a very similar way in a familiar and unchanging language that blurs this diversity, sometimes creating the impression that we all speak with one voice, or at least that we should speak in this way. On the one hand, attempts to develop a different narrative – narrative about the past, tradition and the present – are sometimes described as a betrayal of the most sacred national interests, while on the other hand, Stefan Chwin (2010: 2), along with many other thinkers, warns that ‘Poles are united only by pain’. Therefore, we still remain within the scope of the old dispute, and none of the options indicated here fully defines the Polish reality. Each of them is somewhat real and at the same time somewhat false.

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## Summary

The article takes the issues of contemporary understanding of cultural tradition and ways of cultivating culture after the 1989 breakthrough. Two basic thesis were accepted, with reference to Jerzy Jedlicki's book entitled *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują?* [*What Civilization Do Poles Need?*]. Firstly, two tendencies clash in Polish culture – the conservative and the modernizing one, both present for a long time, but crystallized mainly in the nineteenth century. Secondly, the basic circle of tradition referred to in modern Poland remains the Romantic tradition, properly converted and adapted to the reality of modern Poland. It manifests itself both in the official celebrations of national anniversaries, as well as social protests scenarios and all kinds of historical reconstructions. Romantic cultural codes, symbols, gestures and rituals are used on these occasions. The modernization trends in Polish culture come to the fore especially after the Polish accession to the European Union, but their promotion often encounters various forms of resistance, since they are seen as a threat to Polish identity, understood as founded on patriotic and religious values.

**Keywords:** Polish cultural tradition, Romantic tradition, protests, celebrations, rituals.



## POLAND! WHITE-AND-RED!

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I have already expressed my regret several times that I did not discuss the subject of sporting events in the book *Teatra polskie. Historie* (Kosiński 2010; English version: 2019), in which, for 500 pages, I did not deal with anything other than Poland as a performance. This was partly because of the lack of space (the book is nearly monstrous anyway), and also because of the composition, which – as I thought – did not create a convenient space for the presentation of this complex and multi-faceted subject matter. In retrospect, I see that this is one of the most serious mistakes I have made. First, this lack continues and maintains the tradition of the disregard of sporting events by cultural and artistic researchers, who devote their time and energy to analyzing the smallest nuances of prestigious and ‘high’ works and phenomena, easily and lightly omitting popular culture and its products, which effectively influence the world view, habits and cultural ideas of millions. Personally, I believe a false sense of superiority is behind it, and I am very uncomfortable with the fact that I may be suspected of it myself. Second, having already written the book, I came to the conclusion that it was sport events, and more specifically the drama and performances created by fans during the events, that are nowadays an important tool for the performative establishment of a national community, that, in other words, sport spectators are the most mass contemporary national theatre. In this article, I would like to make up for this lack, at least in part.

For someone representing the theatre studies or, as I would prefer to affiliate myself, a drama and performance studies, sport events are a truly fascinating area for many reasons, including theoretical ones. To a large extent they allow, for example, to question the sense of one of the basic theatrical questions: who is the spectator and who is the actor, where is the stage, and where is the audience, at the same time (and in this simultaneity

I see a very important aspect) abolishing the overly simplistic division into spectators (as in theatre) and participants (as in ritual and play). Sport fans are of course spectators (they don't bounce the ball, score goals or jump on skis), but they are also participants and co-creators of the show, sometimes even stealing the show from the alleged main performers.

In Poland, Zbigniew Raszewski once drew attention to the complexity of sporting events. He classified them as 'competitions' and precisely described them as 'seemingly closed' – the participants of the competition are focused on competition and in principle could do without spectators (after all, there are matches that take place with empty stands), but at the same time they do a lot to attract their attention and arouse admiration for their skills. Since Raszewski's time, much has changed in this area, especially in connection with the development of mass sport events governed and organized by television, such as the football league. The appearance of a mass television audience and a real flood of competition transmissions led to a fundamental change in the location, role and function of spectators present in the stands of stadiums, halls or ski jumps. The relations between the different groups of actors in a sport show are much more complex and dynamic today. It is not that athletes are always the most important: sometimes the bigger stars are the coaches (as in the case of José Mourinho), and in many cases, the events in the audience are more important than what happens in the sport arena. It is not only about various excesses, but also about planned performative actions, such as those organized by the Polish champions of football fans, i.e. fans of Lech Poznań. From the perspective of a television spectacle, everything that happens in and around the sport arena creates the material from which the final product is assembled and displayed on TV screens. However, it would be a mistake to think that a television viewer, who is a 'habitat for montage' (to use the term coined by Jerzy Grotowski), resembles theatre audiences of old and their passive attitudes. After all, we all know that this is not the case, and every true supporter has been outraged many times by the incomprehensible complaints of their family and the admonishments to 'behave normally'. The normal state of a spectator-fan is not to watch and admire, but to be in constant activity, which is usually defined by a very theatrical term: experiencing.

This short outline of a very complex and rich theory of the contemporary sport spectacle, waiting for a researcher to take it up, seems to me to be



a necessary introduction to the fundamental topic I want to address, namely the description and analysis of the performances of fans of the Polish national team. For them, the theoretical starting point is the conviction that the activities of supporters are not an addition or background for the athletes' performances, but form an almost autonomous whole, having its own goals and realizing its own meanings and values, to some extent independent of the goals, meanings and values of the competitions. In short, while athletes are keen to win and to show their extraordinary skills, fans are above all striving to establish and at the same time display a community with a special power.

Before I take a closer look at these actions, I have to explain that the primary subjects of my description and analysis in this article are the actions of volleyball fans. Of course, I know that football remains the most popular sport in Poland, but volleyball also enjoys great popularity, and is a clear enough example of this that the phenomenon of mass support for the Polish national team, although relatively new, has almost immediately developed very clear and expressive performative forms, which are a kind of total national theatre. This is related to many factors, among which the specificity of the competition itself plays an important role, leaving the fans a relatively large amount of time at their disposal and taking place in closed halls. These conditions force participants to behave more domestic and civilized, instead of the way that is allowed by open football stadiums. An important feature of volleyball is also the fact that it is a technical and tactical sport, precisely planned in space and basically completely contact-free (if not counting accidental collisions between players, knocks, etc.). As a result, the sport is relatively non-aggressive, furthest from the analogy of war among popular team sports that use a ball. Volleyball is closer to a chessboard than to the battlefield, which also translates into the behavior of fans who show their commitment to good fun rather than actually competing against each other.

As in the case of football, the development of fan performances was also significantly influenced by the development of mass television shows with the Nations League at the forefront. Matches increasingly taking place at a high level give us more opportunities to cheer, and the images of enjoyment in the volleyball halls effectively convince people to join in the fun. Of course, the fact that the Polish volleyball teams have been very successful

on the international arena in recent years is not without significance, but personally I do not think that this is a *sine qua non* condition.

It is probably high time to look into the hall and see what the fans are doing. This is the most important Polish arena of volleyball performances – the Katowice ‘Spodek’ during the Poland-France match. A real demonstration of Polishness – a crowd of thousands of people in national colors singing, what exactly? The repeated chant of ‘Polska! Biało-czerwoni!’ [‘Poland! White-and-red!’] (sung to the well-known melody of *Go West* by the American disco group of 1970s, The Village People) does not carry any meaning or content. It is a kind of oxymoronic addition to a staged view. Here are thousands of Poles dressed in white-and-red clothes and lifting up white-and-red scarves, flags and boards singing words which are a performative self-determination establishing a community of white-and-red: Poland. In a sense, it is an equivalent of another performative performance: the call ‘Tu jest Polska!’ [‘This is Poland!’], known from nationalistic demonstrations, but the fans’ version of it does not have any signs of exclusion, the default response of ‘a tam jej nie ma!’ [‘and it’s not there!’]. On the contrary: Poland is a white-and-red community – a community devoid of any other signs, anything that could introduce diversity. A significant and fruitful shift takes place here: the sign of national affiliation, an element of the invented tradition – white-and-red colors – becomes the core of the process of building identity, around which a radically inclusive community is formed. The placement of the sign at the core means that the national identification established by the mass performance shown above is created in action and through action around a void covered by the sign. The white and red colors that play the function of the hard core of the national community, which according to its followers is both innate and natural, obscure and reveal the fact that it is still something constructed and reconstructed, and thus in fact reveal the lack of supposedly ‘natural’ ethnic roots as the foundation of the traditional understanding of patriotism. The national theatre of the fans is a mass celebration of the nation as a community established in action, i.e. not a pre-legislative and ‘eternal’ community, but a community emerging here and now. As this community, based on current action, it is capable of welcoming anyone who meets the basic condition: to join in the action. Everyone who stands up and sings with the choir ‘Poland! White-and-red!’ becomes a part of the community: the white-and-red, Poland.

The adoption of this preliminary thesis points to the need to look at the action and thus see ‘what people do in the activity of doing it’ (Schechner 2013: 1). By referring to this fundamental task of performance studies I would like to stress strongly that it is precisely the performative methodology that allows, in my opinion, to go beyond the false understanding of performances, representations, dramatization and celebrations related to national identity as an expression of the pre-existing real community. National identity is created in a series of activities that are not its expression, its sign, but a way of existence. Therefore, when investigating actions, we do not analyze the signifier pointing to the signified that exists elsewhere (e.g. in eternity or nature), but we examine the way of existence of elements of reality, which has a dramatic and representative character and exists as a demonstrated action.

The dominant and at the same time fundamental way of establishing a national community of supporters of a national team is, as I have already mentioned, the use of nationality marks as the core function. Particularly important here are the white and red colors dominating in the spectators’ outfits, used also in make-up and even hairstyles. The total domination of these two basic colors is also ensured by the match organizers, who place A4 sheets in white (top rows) and red (bottom rows) on the chairs. At the appropriate moments, on the signal given by the cheer leader (I will say more about this person in a moment), the fans raise the sheets of paper, turning the hall into a great white-and-red whole – the metonymy of Poland made visible.

The second, besides national colors, sign organizing the community is the anthem, recently sung in the same, very characteristic way at volleyball matches. Instead of using a tape recording, an orchestra or a popular singer, *Dąbrowski’s Mazurka* is sung in the volleyball halls by the gathered fans themselves, with an accompanist providing them the appropriate key at the start. As a result, the often painful domination of a professional performance amplified through the sound system over community singing is eliminated. Choral singing of the anthem becomes a total action, activating all those present, linking athletes and fans into one, turning to a third something, which encompasses and subordinates them at the same time. This something is, of course, Poland. Here, it is not marked by a symbolic song, but physically and sensually experienced through participation in a mass choir with a huge, direct, physiological force of influence. Choral

singing transforms the sign placed in the position of the core into a direct experience of Poland as a power created by us – the white-and-red.

In order to strengthen this sense of power, volleyball matches of the Polish national team also created specific permanent performative actions of a quasi-ritual or quasi-magical character. As we have known for a long time, cheering is not only an expression of support for one of the teams, but also a whole series of performative activities aimed at directly influencing the course of events. Rationally speaking, it provides a psychological impact, but from an anthropological point of view, it is hard to doubt that the fans perform the function of sorcerers and shamans, ensuring the favor of the heavens. This element is particularly visible in the case of volleyball – a game in which irrational and random elements play a significant role. As such, volleyball is particularly susceptible to ‘ordering’ reality, which in the case of the Polish national team and its supporters has the character of evoking the power of ancestors, i.e. something that could be considered equivalent to the rituals of possession, in which the spirits of ancestors joining the followers give them special power. This is the character of the next fixed point of the Polish volleyball fans’ performances, namely the choral performance of the song *W stepie szerokim...* [*In the Wide Steppe...*] from the film *Pan Wołodyjowski* [*Fire in the Steppe*], which always takes place when the Polish team is going through hard times, when it loses its spirit and begins to lose. The song started to be sung in slightly different circumstances, initially referring directly to the former coach of the national team – Raul Lozano, who was seen as someone similar to the main hero of the film: Michał Wołodyjowski called ‘a small knight’, because he was brave and noble though not very tall. Quite quickly, however, it gained a pseudo-magical character and became associated with crisis moments in the national team’s play.

A slightly different example of activities from the same group is a chant performed at particularly important moments, with decisive plays. It has a simple text, repeated several times: ‘W górę serca, Polska wygra mecz!’ [‘Lift up your hearts, Poland will win the match’]. The combination of cultural signs is truly breakneck here: a chant using words from a Church text *Sursum Corda* is sung to the tune of *Yellow Submarine* as a sport chant. Perhaps I am pushing the limits of religious sensitivity in this case; however, the call is undoubtedly used in gun, but it is still a reference to the conviction

of the special protection of the unearthly forces, which can ensure Poland's victory.

And it is fun that is a fundamental force in the performance of volleyball fans (and not only). It should be noted that according to the theses of many anthropologists and performers, fun borders on ritual. The fans are certainly having fun, but at the same time, their fun should equally be considered a ritual: repeated according to a certain pattern of action to realize values belonging to 'serious life', in this case: a ritual that confirms and strengthens the values that are important to the community.

Cheering, not ceasing to be fun, has – like a ritual – clear structural patterns and has its own 'priests'. These are the cheer leaders, acting as *didaskalos* and *coryphaeus*, i.e. artists teaching and leading the choir. I consciously use names taken from the tradition of the theatre of ancient Greece, because I am convinced that it is necessary to think about it in this way – as something similar to our sport competitions. Although the means used by modern *coryphaeuses* are not sophisticated (electronic keyboard and drums, simple melodies and gestures), working with the crowd does not allow for the use of complicated and subtle ways of interaction – which does not mean that it is easy. After all, the *coryphaeuses* have to react to the events taking place on the court and in the audience: they have to activate the constant elements of the program, expected by the fans at certain moments, but also keep up with the changing rhythm of the match, and even create tension where it is lacking, providing the fans with stimulus for play when the players deal with weak opponents too easily.

As can be seen, the fan play described here briefly has a carnival character. Here in the separated space and in the separated time, people abandon their everyday roles, transform into so-called liminal figures, with distorted faces and hypertrophic bodies, in order to experience an undifferentiated community. This community can be best described using a term borrowed from Victor Turner – *communitas* – which describes the community experience of being together in a completely egalitarian way, based on a direct and spontaneous relationship of human individuals with each other, linked to an experience of a flow and related to the suspension of the structural human relationships governing everyday life. 'Communitas is a spontaneously generated relationship between equated and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes' (Turner

1975: 202) and as such linked it in a special way to liminality. Carnivalised *communitas* has the character of a world that reverses the values and relations dominating in everyday life, in a sphere extending beyond the distinguished, festive time and place.

Seen from this perspective, the *communitas* of fans of the national team seem to be a reversal of the model of patriotism prevailing in Polish collective life: solemn, sad and suffering patriotism, associated with sacrifice, infected with death, which is considered necessary for victory in the afterlife. The performances of this heavy political patriotism are conflicting, definitely exclusive, based on the 'us' – 'them' opposition and the phantasm of real Poles. They are soaked in aggression and completely devoid of any sense of humor. What is interesting, especially recently, they do not reach for national colors at all, but rather for a messianic reinterpretation of the cross, replacing the happy *Dąbrowski's Mazurka* with the ponderous religious hymn *Boże, coś Polskę*, with the last stanza ('our free homeland, bless it, O Lord!') being, of course, altered into 'our free homeland, give it back to us, O Lord!', as a sign of present Poland not being 'really' free.

In the closed space of the sport hall during the carnival-like fun time, a completely different Poland is established and experienced: joyful and self-confident, turned to the future rather than to the past, a Poland, which does not remember the disasters, but expects victory, responding to a lost with the song 'Nic się nie stało, Polacy, nic się nie stało' ['Nothing really happened, Poles, nothing happened'], which of course can be ridiculed, but which means nothing more than a decisive deletion of the tendency, so typical for our national character, to take on the picturesque figure of an innocent victim suffering for the world. What seems very important to me is that this experience is shared by thousands of people in the halls, by millions sitting in front of the TVs, and that it provides the necessary balance for social health.

It should be strongly emphasized that in the performances of fans, Poland is experienced as a power regardless of the course of events on the pitch, because Poland remains great thanks to the fans and their actions. The singing crowd 'Polska wygra mecz!' ['Poland will win the match!'] establishes this victory regardless of the actual course of the game. 'Poland will win the match', because it is made up of fans – the 'White-and-Red' – and they never give up and deny even the most obvious failures.

What seems very interesting to me is the fact that Polish fans themselves are aware of their role in collective life and that their actions are more important and are often considered at a higher level than the athletes' achievements. This is proven by the unofficial anthem of Polish representative fans circulating on the Internet under the clearly formulated title *Biało-czerwoni (W jedności Polska)* [*The White-and-Red (Poland in Unity)*]. It is at the same time a kind of synthesis of what I have been talking about so far and an example of popular national art, sometimes very clumsy in terms of technique, sometimes even grotesque in this clumsiness, but capturing the changes taking place in the ways of constructing national identity much more precisely than the offerings of high art. Below are the lyrics of this song by Zuzanna Szreder, as translated into English:

After the fights, we know the taste of defeat  
 In sadness, we will survive the absence of the cup  
 With an eagle on our chests, we support you  
 Eventually, the time will come to win

A white-and-red volcano erupts  
 And Poland believes and trusts  
 Let's show the world our claws  
 Let's hear the Polish Mazurka  
 Your fans from the west, north, south and east  
 In unity, they keep watch and watch you together with pride

For Polish dreams, feelings and hearts  
 With an attack of faith, victory is easier  
 There will be days of glory, joy, tears  
 We'll have a swinging ball to celebrate the game<sup>1</sup>.

With all the naivety of these lyrics, it is easy to see that it contains all the elements I have spoken about so far, but in a specific whole, a kind of passage from the present to the future. Today we 'know the taste of defeat'

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<sup>1</sup> Source of the text: [https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,zuzanna\\_szreder,bialo\\_czerwoni.html](https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,zuzanna_szreder,bialo_czerwoni.html) (accessed: 20.05.2019); the corresponding video illustration can also be viewed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOCJD7Rt4UE> (accessed: 20.05.2019).

and we lack a cup, but thanks to the faith of the fans, their unity and pride, in the future it will be possible to have a 'swinging ball' celebrating the days of glory. If this messianic message is juxtaposed with the previously discussed activities of fans (the cinematic effect of such a juxtaposition can be easily found on YouTube), then we can conclude that their carnival-like fun is a performative fulfillment of prophecies and ensuring days of glory already in the here and now. If – as the constantly repeated beliefs state – 'Polish fans are the best in the world', this is a clear sign that the announced and promised eruption of the Polish volcano is already taking place, as confirmed by the present time used in the chorus. Who provides this eruption and tears of joy? Polish fans. The White-and-Red.

What I was able to present here is, of course, only the tip of the iceberg. For a deeper examination, one should first deal with the phenomenon of ski-jumper Adam Małysz – a Polish hero who combines into an extraordinary conglomerate religious elements, the romantic myth of flight and a simple man of the people with all the grotesque of his body and the carnival setting of the discipline he practices. It would also be necessary to deal with much more dangerous behavior of football fans, who consistently build communities organized around conflicts and who increasingly draw on nationalist traditions. It would also be worthwhile to take a closer look at the national performances described above, paying attention to their family aspect (recurring shots of families and parents with children cheering together for 'our team'), as well as the patriarchal background, as even at the matches of the women's representation, the chant is sung as 'Polska. Biało-czerwoni' (masculine plural), and not 'Polska. Biało-czerwone' (feminine plural). All this and many other topics are waiting for their researchers, so perhaps it is worth it to leave the libraries and theatres, and examine what people are doing?



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## Summary

The article attempts to analyze sport performances as the space and tool of producing and establishing national identity. From this perspective the author interprets the performances by the fans of Polish national volleyball team. They are seen as the effective creations of open and joyful patriotism, opposite to the grave, sacrificial and nationalistic patriotism growing out of the paraitualistic postromantic traditions.

**Keywords:** sport performances, national identity, patriotism, sport fans, volleyball matches



## POST-WAR CINEMA AND THE TRAPS OF THE POLISH CONSCIOUSNESS

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I treat my article as a statement not so much on history itself – the recent history and the so-called communist, post-war history – as about our consciousness: the consciousness of people brought up in the Polish People's Republic. In my case, one of the key elements of this consciousness, the place of its concentration, next to family tradition, was the cinema. I will recall two films, made at an interval of 50 years, concerning the complex of collective consciousness. The juxtaposition may seem surprising: *Popiół i diament* [*Ashes and Diamonds*] by Andrzej Wajda and *Wszyscy jesteśmy Chrystusami* [*All of Us Are Christs*] by Marek Koterski.

The complex in question is rooted in a sense of defeat brought about by strangers. This trauma is understandable, but like any illness, it must be treated, since otherwise it will completely poison our public sphere, our imagination and our politics. I am thinking of funereal patriotism, the cult of defeat and attachment to it, of its perverse evocation.

I think of Polish Messianism, deeply rooted if not in Baroque times, then certainly in Romanticism. It seemed that successive generations, working in 1956, 1968, 1976, 1980 and 1989, working effectively for freedom, had weakened this complex. It turned out, however, that it is erupting with a new force.

I shall quote two texts representing different styles – high and low. The first one is a fragment of what constitutes a romantic bible to Poles, the second one is a spontaneous statement by an activist from under the cross at Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, recorded in an étude by Michał Brożonowicz, a student of the Łódź film school, entitled *Mam prawo tu stać* [*I Have the Right to Stand Here*].

Here are the key sentences from Adam Mickiewicz's (1833: 20):

And the Polish nation was crucified and brought into its tomb. And the kings shouted: 'We have killed freedom – we have buried it'. (...) For the Polish nation is not dead! (...) And on the third day, the soul shall return to its body, and the nation shall rise from the dead, and shall free all the nations of Europe from slavery.

This vision of the martyrdom of the nation, associated with the martyrdom of Christ, who brings freedom to the whole world, has been weighing on the Polish consciousness for two hundred years. Twentieth-century critics of this tradition – Czesław Miłosz and Maria Janion – accused it of fostering national idolatry, creating a perverse megalomania of suffering, a cult of deadly sacrifice. Let us add, this means seeing our collective situation always in a worse light than it is. According to this tradition, post-war Poland is presented only in a martyr-like and heroic light, as if the society was composed only of the persecutors and the persecuted.

Here is an authentic voice from the Warsaw street in 2010: 'The Polish nation will block the entrance to the palace, and this traitor, this Russian minion, will not be allowed in at all!' – so called a defender of the cross to a silent man and the camera standing there. The scene resembles a model text, which we can hear today from politicians, and its folk version is represented by the following statement:

Now there will be bloodshed! Now a nation that is divided will spill blood! We will not tolerate murderers who cannot explain the Smolensk catastrophe! You are not a Pole, because you voted for the traitor of the nation! Polish blood will be shed. I am ready to give my life for the President, posthumously, the one who was murdered. Me as a Pole. Who are you? If you're not Polish, you don't belong here!<sup>1</sup>

Here is a street caricature of romantic Messianism, functioning in Poland in 2010. However, I would like to recall a year which is extremely important in the post-war history of Poland. It was important for me because it was the first moment when my, then still childish, national consciousness

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<sup>1</sup> Statement heard on the streets of Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw in May 2010.

began to crystallize. The year was 1956. At the same time as the Soviet Army crushed Budapest, a self-limiting revolution took place in Poland, similar to the later Prague Spring or the Solidarity movement. Workers' self-governments were established in the factories, censorship was relaxed, public life slipped the tight control of the authorities, various associations and clubs were established. In this atmosphere, post-October art was created. It was the only time when movies such as *Kanał* [*The Sewer*], *Eroica* or *Ashes and Diamonds* could be created. (It happened again in the mid-1970s, when an atmosphere reigned in which *Człowiek z marmuru* [*Man of Marble*] could come into being, after waiting twelve years to be produced).

The trend of freedom changes was arrested shortly after 1956. For fear of Russia, Gomułka 'tightened the screw'. However, the process of emancipation could not be reversed, it could only be stopped, sometimes bloodily. From today's perspective, it is clear that the social convulsions of the following decades were the spans of a single bridge that led to democracy. We were not living in Orwell's world – the communist ideology was a camouflage and the dictatorship full of holes. Over time, there was more and more freedom, not less. The time that has passed – the time of my generation's youth, which entered life in the 1970s, was not a lost time.

Polish People's Republic consisted of many enclaves. One of them was the cinema. The Polish school. I learned on the films of this school – Wajda's *Sewer* and *Ashes and Diamonds* or Munk's *Eroica*. These works proposed a bold attitude towards history.

I have an impression that those characters, such as Maciek Chełmicki, the main character in *Ashes and Diamonds*, are leaning towards the future. This leaning, this dynamism, this hope for change was a fascinating feature of the culture of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Munk, Wajda, Has, Kawalerowicz, Konwicki – the cinema of that time was made by people whose very eyes had witnessed the collapse of the world several times. They were of school age when World War II broke out and the young Polish state collapsed like a house of cards. Next, they saw the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. In 1945, liberation came, which had the characteristics of a new captivity; the system that promised peace and social justice, hid crimes instead.

It is interesting that when terror lessened, the young intelligentsia reacted in a paradoxical, modern way. It broke with the prevailing cult

of history, which required too much sacrifice. In 1956 in Warsaw, at his home theatre on Tarczyńska Street, Miron Białoszewski staged a grotesque about the Crusades. The performance ended with a parody of Mayakovsky's slogan about the need to 'ruin the old mare of the past'. 'That was not true', the poet said. The 'old mare of history' should to be 'unsaddled', not ridden anymore. At the STS (Students' Theatre of Satire) in Warsaw, people sang couplets about the homeland:

I've finally found a way to handle you,  
I don't have to think about it anymore:  
always be a pack of cigarettes for me,  
a third class ticket to Koluszki.  
Be a pumpernickel, be a Polopyrina,  
but don't ever be a scar again –  
our dear, priceless homeland!  
(Agnieszka Osiecka, *Inwokacja* [*Invocation*])

History manifested itself to the artists of this generation as a dangerous deity demanding sacrifice. After the experience of Nazism and Stalinism, they no longer wanted to pay homage to this deity. The blade of criticism was directed, on the one hand, against communism, which called for sacrifices in the name of a bright future, but, on the other hand, the romantic tradition was also revised – it also had its roots in totalitarianism.

*Ashes and Diamonds* speak of meaningless death and futile sacrifice. 'I can't kill anymore, I can't hide, I want to live, I have to live...', Maciek repeats. There is no point in expecting the film to provide a reliable historical lecture on the situation of the underground, captured by the Polish and Soviet security services. In 1958, it was not possible. But at secret screenings in Russia, Czechoslovakia or Hungary, the film was admired for something else: for showing a boy from the underground, who was sentenced to death in advance, as someone with whom the viewer sympathizes from start to finish, someone who, regardless of what he does, is simply 'ours', while the 'stranger' turns out to be a communist. Another thing is that if the communist theme was developed, it would turn out to be equally tragic and even more offensive than Maciek's plot.

His death at the rubbish dump is absurd, stripped of sublimity. However, Maciek's tragedy acted as praise for life. The viewers of the time wanted

to believe that the story could be arranged in such a way that it was not necessary to pay a tribute in blood. This cinema treated the sense of defeat.

Young people liked Wajda's film not because it was anti-communist. The shooting of a communist falling into Maciek's arms, who had previously aimed at him; in the sky – victory flares, then Maciek throwing the gun away with disgust – all this was a harbinger of the end of the fight. It was moving and it remains moving to this day: the desire to go beyond history.

The second moving image is a scene with a crucifix upside down in a ruined chapel. Maciek and Krysia, the bartender whom he had met, enter there by accident. The inverted cross is associated with an inevitable sacrifice that makes no sense, is in vain. The lovers talk about how beautiful life could be. We see the protagonists from behind the hanging cross, but they do not pay attention to it, just as they do not pay attention to the solemnity of the chapel when Maciek repairs a broken heel on the altar.

The cinema of that time worked to ensure that Poland would not be the Christ of the Nations. For generation '56, hope lay in democracy, social justice, which at that time was still associated with socialism or with something like the 'third way' – not communist and not capitalist. This idea returned to the Solidarity movement years later.

'Solidarity' was also accompanied by a cross, but it took on a new meaning. It did not represent a nation stretched out on the cross, it was a sign of victory. Both Wajda's 'Solidarity' films, *Man of Marble* and *Człowiek z żelaza* [*Man of Iron*], deal with the messianic theme in a new way, cleansed of the perverse cult of suffering.

Tadeusz Konwicki's *Lawa* [*Lava*] from 1989 was a farewell to Romantic Messianism in Polish cinema. Konwicki allowed himself to be bold: he ended the *misterium* with a happy end. Old Konrad still recites Mickiewicz's introduction to *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*]: 'For what are all of the cruelties of those times compared to what the Polish nation is now suffering, and upon which Europe looks with indifferent eye!' (Mickiewicz 2016: 23). The picture, however, says something else: this nation is no longer suffering.

The human lava glides in a giant May Day parade and pours out in front of the Palace of Culture, where instead of a stand with communist leaders there is an altar and a papal mass. It is a short history of the Polish People's Republic, from communism to Solidarity. Because Solidarity is also a part of the history of the Polish People's Republic. After the drama is over, we see

the gate of the film studio and the crew of *Lava*, the director, the actors. A moment ago they were participants of a national ritual, now they are ordinary passers-by. This is the end of the national complex. In 1989, we were not overwhelmed by romantic fever. There was no revolution. Fortunately! Something casual, normal, secular has happened to us and the country. One could think then that Christ would no longer be the mediator between the person and the nation, but simply between people themselves, in their mutual relations.

The Polish Christ returns in Koterski's film. Adaś Miauczyński, a Polish everyman, takes on the role.

Koterski had already created a parody of the Polish tragic hero in his previous films, from *Dom wariatów* [*The House of Fools*] to *Dzień swira* [*The Day of the Whacko*]. Adaś wants to quit smoking, but he puts it off until the next; he wants to make shelves, but cuts the board a centimeter too short; he wants to talk with his wife, but everything she says seems stupid to him; he wants to make love with her, but she is cold. Perhaps the wife really is terrible, the apartment block is ugly, the refuse chute is noisy and there is a vampire stalking the lifts? However, the true vampire is Miauczyński himself, who does not know how to 'love his neighbor as himself', because he does not consider himself to be worth anything. His aggression comes from a sense of humiliation.

Koterski managed to show how religiousness is intertwined with everyday paranoia. Yes, we are all Christs, because we crucify one another, and everyone plays the role of a sacrifice in front of everyone else. Miauczyński, ruining the life of his wife and son, literally sends them to the cross and pierces them with a spear. At the same time, he is pierced, falls under the cross, his face is wiped with a cloth, he is stripped of his clothes in the drunk tank.

It is hard to imagine a blunter presentation of the fact that the sacred story told by religion and art (Miauczyński is a culture studies scholar), takes place inside of us at the same time, in flats with wall units. The knife from Leonardo's *The Last Supper* is the same kitchen knife that Miauczyński's wife threatens her drunk husband with, and the same one with which Adaś, in a rage, massacres a Christmas tree.

The metaphors of language are made visible in the image. Husband and wife literally growl at each other like a dog and cat. The ruin of our life, which we caused ourselves, takes the form of a giant rubbish dump, where Miauczyński – like Maciek Chełmicki from *Ashes and Diamonds* – imagines



his death. But he is not crushed by history like the other protagonist – he is responsible for his own death.

Koterski can have satisfaction: he overtook and interpreted the Poles' crusade of 2010. Adaś Miauczyński conducts a constant inner dialogue with Christ, once identifying with Him, and then bargaining with Him: help! He is like Poland. He allows himself, in His name, to drink a half liter of vodka as a reward. For him, the cross is a kind of a skeleton key, an excuse for his own weakness, a pathetic cry for mercy. In showing Miauczyński's like as a Passion play, does Koterski not cruelly expose the kitsch of our consciousness? But the director gives us a chance to go beyond paranoia in this film. He introduces a figure that Luis Buñuel himself would not be ashamed of: one Christ helps another Christ to carry the cross. One man helps another. According to the sentence by Albert Camus (2013: 72), from which the title of this underestimated film is taken: 'In that case, as we are all judges, we are guilty before each other, all Christs in our lousy way'.

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### Summary

The article is a reflection on post-war Polish cinema as a representation of Polish mentality. The analysis is based on the following films: Andrzej Wajda's *Popiół i diament* [*Ashes and Diamonds*] and Marek Koterski's *Wszyscy jesteśmy Chrystusami* [*All of Us Are Christs*], whose juxtaposition allows to visualize a complex characteristic for Polish consciousness – mournful patriotism, which is associated with messianism. Artistic artifacts are treated as a complementary element that comment on the social reality of specific historical moments.

**Keywords:** messianism, Andrzej Wajda, Marek Koterski, mournful patriotism, post-war cinema, Polishness



## ON STEFAN ŻEROMSKI'S 'LITTLE POLE' AND KAROL IRZYKOWSKI'S 'TRUE POLAND' – THE REAL DIMENSION OF POLISHNESS IN THE FACE OF THE GREAT WAR

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*Basia* and *A Reminiscence of Adam Żeromski* were inspired by the experience of the loss of a child – Basia Irzykowska dies of kidney disease after a difficult ten-month-long treatment in April 1916, and Adam dies of tuberculosis after a few years of disease in July 1918. What both works have partly in common, is the time of the events being described and the time of writing<sup>1</sup>. They can be categorized as autobiographical writings, and it is worth treating them in accordance with Philippe Lejeune's (2001: 18) ascertainments:

Autobiographies are not object of aesthetic consumption, but social means of interpersonal *understanding*. This understanding has several dimensions: ethical, emotional, referential. The autobiography was created to pass on universal values, sensitivity to the world, unknown experiences – and this within the framework of personal relations, perceived as authentic, non-fictional.

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<sup>1</sup> Three notebooks of Karol Irzykowski's diary, probably included by Zofia Irzykowska under the title *Part IV 'Basia' and Family Matters*, were written from April 9<sup>th</sup> 1916 till October 14<sup>th</sup> 1922, but the essential part of writings dates back to the years 1916-1918 (B. Górka, *Nota wydawnicza*, [in:] Irzykowski 2001: 627). The reminiscence of Adam Żeromski, written in Zakopane in April and May 1919, covers chronologically the period of the son's life from the age of 2 years till a few days after his death connected with his funeral, i.e., from 1901 till August 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 (Z.J. Adamczyk, *Uwagi wydawcy*, [in:] Żeromski 2015: 466-467).

Such a perspective opens the gates of interpretation that are very important for the topic that I bring up here, which is apparently marginal in the narrative of the loss that can be very individualized in the form of - Polishness (see: Okupnik 2012). The object of my interest will not be a comparison of scales of emotional consequences of the loss of a child, but a certain factor that they have in common. Seeking the sense of death of a close person is an inseparable part of the mourning process and, therefore, constitutes a part of the story of the loss. In the texts under analysis, this happens not so much within the scope of the individual road to consolidation (as in the case of epicedia) as through location in a broader structure – the narrative of the loss is almost integrated into the narrative of the community in the key historical moment for it and assumes the form that can be called ‘internarration’ after Reinhart Koselleck. Marc Augé (2004) wrote that the human being lives in many narratives at the same time, and the frame that allows them to be intertwined (‘captured by the other’s story’) may be, for example, emotions and affective relations. However, it is worth treating emotions according to the model of cognitivists and partly constructionists in the categories of universal ability, which may differ according to methods by means of which emotions are produced, felt and expressed and, most importantly, depend both on cultural norms and on individual tendencies, as Barbara Rosenwein (2002) writes. The experience of the loss connecting Żeromski’s and Irzykowski’s narratives involves experiencing strong emotions and the mourning process and, to a varying extent, dictates the need for a story being a ‘fruit of memory and oblivion, the work of composition and decomposition that explains the pressure exerted on the interpretation of the past by the expectation of the future’ (2004: 45). The thing that connects both texts juxtaposed by me is not only their existential genesis, but also their social & cultural and historical context; in both texts ‘the history of an individual becomes crazed (may even tip towards death) because it is absorbed by the great history, for example, as a result of the declaration of war,’ as we read further in *Oblivion*. The experience of loss of a close person has much in common with war. Sigmund Freud (1915) wrote that it involves mainly acceptance and a change of the attitude towards death.

The situation that determines the horizon of the experience of individuals telling about and experiencing the mourning period (recollecting Żeromski

vs. Irzykowski keeping a diary of disease, death and memory practice) and the subjects of their narratives in the world of events (Adam, Basia and their surroundings) is Polishness. This hardly definable Polishness for the needs of this paper will have a formula proposed by Mieczysław Porębski (2002) – exactly as a situation ‘conditional’ upon the existence of a spiritual community that is partly integrated and partly lives in a diaspora, focusing on some historically determined symbols, with which it identifies its lasting and the continuity and dignity of that lasting’. At the same time, this community is ‘situated in the world that is governed by the laws of nature, the laws and cases of history, within or on the edge of situations that arose earlier, co-created it and have formed various relationships and affiliations with it’ (ibid.). In such interpretation, Polishness is something different from a phantasmatic and ideological construct (the collective *ideal I* of the nation) formed in conditions of non-existence of the Polish state and determined by its absence (Sowa 2011: 478; Kolarzowa 2015)<sup>2</sup>, and something connected with the situation of each symbolic identification that results in the existence of national identity and the individual becoming a part of the political order, and the goal is/may be the fulfillment of the national project (Bauman 1992).

According to Marc Augé (2004), life formulated as a narrative is characterized by the fact that the microscale and the macroscale (in the common field of Polishness as being within and towards a symbolic universe) overlap with each other and, at the same time, contain ‘us in themselves, because they create our own version of events and we have our place in it ourselves, however marginal and insignificant it may be, just as thousands and millions of other individuals have their place in their own version that they develop by themselves’. Thus, I treat both juxtaposed texts mainly as a kind of very intimate testimony to the working-out of forms of Polishness in the situation of the Great War. Following Lejeune’s (2001) ascertainments, we can say that this testimony is more authentic, as it is characterized by emotions resulting from the experience of the personal

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<sup>2</sup> The psychoanalytic interpretation is a very tempting perspective in this case, but it remains outside the scope of my actions. It seems, however, that thanks to Jan Sowa or earlier Maria Janion and others, Lacan’s terminology has become a permanent part of Polish human science in the field of research on national identity.

tragedy (not related directly to the war) with which they are connected genetically and formally (due to their autobiographic form). At the same time, these experiences are situated in the war horizon as events dependent on others and, in terms of interpretation, determined by emotions produced by war events. The degree of impregnation with the topic of Polishness is different in Żeromski's and Irzykowski's works – its very presence in narratives of loss seems to be important for the way of thinking about its form.

The specific characteristics of the autobiographic writing (described, among others, by Lejeune [2001] and Czermińska [2000], to mention only the most canonical items) allow us to derive various genealogies of the identity of the subject of this kind of narrative from autobiographical writings. In a very interesting text about Żeromski's diaries from the years 1882-1891, Magdalena Saganiak (2005) showed how experiences of the author of *Popioły* [*Ashes*] translated into his project of Polishness and the idea of love for the Homeland that became a matrix integrating various experiences and marking out his ethical and metaphysical horizon. Then she characterized Żeromski as a writer consciously modeling the fates of his protagonists with regard to national identity understood in this manner – the most distinctive example of using such writing strategy seems to be *Uroda życia* [*The Charm of Life*], which is excellently clarified by Anna Zdanowicz's (2004) interpretation. Krzysztof Stępnik described Żeromski's attitude as the 'father of the nation' and – after the war – a social and political activist, the author of works such as *Snobizm i postęp* [*Snobbism and Progress*]. Mateusz Chmurski (2013) derived the genealogy of Irzykowski's identity as a writer and critic from his early diaries. Differently shaped proportions between individual dimensions of the autobiographic pact (the ethical, emotional and referential approach) in each writer's work are connected with the different way in which each of them arrives at the topic of my interest: Polishness.

## I. 'THE GOLDEN DAYS OF THE FIRST SHIVERS OF FREEDOM, DREAMS OF FREE POLAND'

One of the epithets used most frequently towards Adam Żeromski, which characterized the boy from his youngest years, when he already knew that it was necessary to behave silently when uncles Józef 'Ziuk' Piłsudski

and Stanisław 'Edmund' Wojciechowski spent the night at Żabia 4<sup>3</sup>, with a circulation of „Robotnik” to be distributed in a suitcase, was a characteristic 'little Pole'. Thus, the boy is identified primarily as a Pole by the narrator from the beginning of the story. The diminutive appears in two contexts: in the first one, sketched above, the son is constantly situated within the scope of the writer's political activity and presented as 'involved', as his activeness is stressed several times:

One day, the little Pole acted openly against the representatives of the Moscow authority. He called all Muscovites, gendarmes, soldats and, in general, brutes, aggressors, villains, all phantoms, spectres, ghosts, ugly figures or even concepts by his own word 'Muńka' (Żeromski 2015: 356).

In the second case, this term becomes significant in the context of the boy's fascination with French history and culture, i.e., when being a Pole calls for situating oneself in the world and establishing one's own identity within a larger network of references from the historically and politically determined 'peaking point of Polishness', as Jan Sowa (2011: 373-374) has called it. The choice of France on the map of these references has a political character and refers to Żeromski's sympathies (Stępnik 1997), at the same time being connected with the need to maintain national identity and the independence of the boy functioning in the French education system. Adam is described by the narrator as a politically oriented participant of the father's ideological & political life, who becomes Żeromski's 'only political friend'<sup>4</sup> as a youth. As Jadwiga Zacharska (2005: 106) aptly noted:

the recollections are dominated by the presentation of the child in the perspective of history and towards the idea, not in the circle of family and privacy. They are written by a father who is also an ideologist, an educator and the spiritual leader of the generation. We can read from his eyes that

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<sup>3</sup> Żeromski and his family occupied an official apartment at Żabia Street 4 in the years 1897-1903, when the writer worked as an assistant librarian in the Zamoyski Family Library.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his son dated September 8<sup>th</sup> 1913, Żeromski sends birthday wishes to Adam, at the same time expressing his expectations towards him: 'in Zakopane, you will grow to be a stout Pole and a brave man' (Żeromski 2008: 110; see: Olech 2013: 207-208).

he does not always look at Adam as his son. The role of the writer shapes the father's vision and restricts privacy even in a statement where it seems to be intentional.

The researcher indicates that this results 'from two contradictory directives shaping the text and determining its functions, i.e., utilitarian and poetic (literary), documentary and idealising functions' (ibid.: 102), where the order of facts is subordinated to the order of parenthesis that 'presents the model of a little Pole and the ideal of a young man being prepared for the role of the savior of the Homeland from his earliest years' (ibid.), which has a decisive impact on the composition of *O Adamie Żeromskim wspomnienie* [*A Reminiscence on Adam Żeromski*], its narrative and psychological probability in Adam's creation. At times, however, the perspective of an activist and writer-moralist with a strong political orientation, who gave the novel *Ashes* to the soldiers of the Legions, is replaced with emotions – however, they are intimate rather than fatherly emotions<sup>5</sup>. This can be illustrated by a fragment describing the political awareness of Żeromski-son, an 'undefeated taunter' and 'poignant critic' of 'dignitaries or alleged benefactors of the nation':

These were real toreador's arrows, cast unnoticeably at the back of the stupid bull as it was tossing around on the arena, not knowing where to run. How I loved you, you swift arrows, cast by the subtle hand of my only political friend (Żeromski 2015: 431) .

This suggests that the reminiscence can be included in the formula of a parenetical narrative, as Zacharska indicates, in which Adam becomes the figure and model of a Pole, determined by the love of the Homeland to the highest extent – yet it also presents him as a critical and intellectually independent person in the field of political practice. In order to understand

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<sup>5</sup> M. Głowiński (2013) made an interesting analysis of *A Reminiscence...* in the perspective of poetics, specifying the double style resulting from two tendencies shaping Żeromski's writing (the realistic one and the poetic one) as its characteristic quality and the characteristic feature of the prose of the author of *Ashes* in general. B. Olech (2013) notes that the relationship between Stefan and Adam was determined by three complementary role arrangements: father-son, master-apprentice and partner-partner.



the weight of this loss, we must look at the attitude of Żeromski – the narrator. He reconstructs Adam's biography in a selective way, focusing mainly on things that are significant from the perspective of Polish identity in the face of a specific social & political situation – the text was written in the spring of 1919, when the challenge of building Polish statehood was valid. The internal structure of the work is organized around the tension between the permanent cohesive method of creation of the main protagonist and the non-homogeneous narrative perspective. The narrator oscillates between the detached narrative that avoids speaking in the first person (contrary to what the subtitle announces)<sup>6</sup> and the narrative that allows us to identify him with Żeromski as a writer, moralist and public authority, who assumes a politically undeclared position during the war (Stępnik 1997: 109-113), as well as the narrative having the characteristics of a fatherly narrative, which – paradoxically – occurs most rarely in the text and more frequently in its final parts, which describe the death and burial of the nineteen-year-old (determining an intersubjective space for a common experience, thus triggering the possibility of empathy). These inconsistencies, which were accurately reconstructed by Jadwiga Zacharska, induce us to read *A Reminiscence...* with focus on what was omitted, not fully stated or sometimes even contradicted the details of the writer's biography reconstructed by researchers.<sup>7</sup> They also prompt us to ask a question (going beyond the framework of this sketch) about the real functions of *A Reminiscence...* and its place among such texts as *Wisła* [*The Vistula*] (see: Saganiak 2004), *Początek świata pracy* [*The Beginning of the World of Labour*] or *Projekt Akademii Literatury Polskiej* [*The Academy of Polish Literature Project*], i.e., about its importance within the entirety of ideological and program views of the writer with regard to independence and in the context of the role that he ascribes to himself in the face of current

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<sup>6</sup> The full title of the memoir is: *A Reminiscence on Adam Żeromski by His Father As a Manuscript in 55 Copies, Printed for a Group of Persons Who Showed the Grace of Love, Friendship and Care for the Deceased One.*

<sup>7</sup> An example of the adoption of a specific writing strategy is the omission or distortion of motivations for some situations from Adam's biography, e.g., those concerning the writer's relations with Monika Żeromska (see: Z.J. Adamczyk, *Uwagi wydawcy*, [in:] Żeromski 2015: 465-466).

events. At that time, the generic vastness of Żeromski's writing activity is, according to Krzysztof Stępnik (1997: 137), an expression of 'internal activity, the vitality of free thought and emotions that are a real precondition for the independence of the creative subject in his artistic and ideological arguments'. The narrative about the son becomes an emotional form of attesting Polishness as a project to be fulfilled in a certain social & political situation. It becomes an exceptional testimony confirming the importance and necessity of consolidating the national community. It also indicates the attitude that supports such a project – critical thinking and intellectual independence. At the same time, the narration provoked by the loss becomes a space of self-confirmation of the identity of Żeromski, who, to paraphrase Jacques Derrida (1991: 49), 'responds to the challenge or attribution of what is universal'. This self-confirmation requires the attitude of intellectual engagement and responsibility, but it also involves inherent adventitiousness and particularity as well as emotions. Adam Żeromski dies of tuberculosis in 1918, and as the recollective narration approaches the tragic finale, it gradually becomes permeated by the emotional tone of Żeromski – the father's expression. In the writer's narration, the death of the 'little Pole' was put within a broader structure of sense, namely the Polish identity. This obviously has a therapeutic dimension, as giving sense to the death of a close person is an inseparable element of mourning (di Nola 2006). It can be said that the adventitiousness of Adam's death calls for comforting placement in Żeromski's recollection, but the realness of the personal loss does not allow us to inscribe it simply into a comforting scheme – the order of 'collectivised mortality' is not convincing when the son's peers died for the homeland in various Great War formations (sometimes fighting against one another)<sup>8</sup>. In the face of real necessity of building the Polish state and related challenges (the ethical horizon for those who have survived), Żeromski may be particularly aware of the empty place occupied by boys like Adam, who are endowed with political insight and independent judgement.

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<sup>8</sup> However, Żeromski describes his son as a brave soldier in a scout formation. He perceives Adam simultaneously as the one who would have wanted and should have fought if a disease had not prevented him from doing so (see: Zacharska 2005: 106). Apart from the eagerness of young boys preparing for the war, Żeromski recollects also the difficult situation of soldiers of the dissolved Eastern Legion.

Both Żeromski's wartime attitude and the attitude of Żeromski, who is the narrator of *A Reminiscence*... prove the things that were highlighted by Krzysztof Stępnik and described in the theoretical plan by Zygmunt Bauman; they paradoxically confirm the dignity of Polishness as a project, but require its revision in the practical implementation plan and concrete political actions. Influenced also by his personal tragedy, Żeromski distances himself from independence movements deriving from Romantic tradition that have been cultivated in the circle of the Legions and speaks in favour of a modern project aimed at acting for the benefit of the future independent Poland. In the situation of war breakthrough, Polishness demands a form other than the one developed in different conditions – the past cannot be a matrix for building the future because the stability and transcendence of Polishness is determined through its real cultural and political situation rather than the image construct elaborated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As in the case of fictitious fates of Piotr Rozłucki<sup>9</sup>, Żeromski personalizes Polishness in order to confirm it. The individual death fits into the project of immortal national continuity, but this occurs at a certain (clearly highlighted) expense – the lack of those who will attest this continuity in concrete political actions characterized by intellectual independence and critical thinking. The anxiety and pain brought upon by the son's death can be compensated for in the current political activity, but the author remains aware that there is nobody to assume the burden of building a real national state. In this context, we can interpret *A Reminiscence*... as a work reflecting the dynamics of attestation of Polishness as an ethical postulate and Polishness as a space for its implementation. However, in the second case, it fails to bring the consolation that the project paradoxically requires (full devotion and lack of autonomy) because costs of 'national immortality' must be borne (Bauman 1992). Here, Polishness demands a modern form and a political shape to be constructed, which will be built by Żeromski in his writings in the first years of Poland's independence.

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<sup>9</sup> An even stronger confirmation of this situation is the case of Włodzimierz Jasiół, the protagonist of *Charitas* written in the years 1914-1918, particularly because the plot of the novel is situated in the reality of the Great War and can be regarded as the writer's ideological and political commentary regarding war attitudes (see: Stępnik 1997: 122-131).

## II. 'THREE WAYS OF BEHAVING TOWARDS REALITY: BEING IN IT, REMEMBERING IT, AND DEATH'

However, when I look at her photograph, at this high forehead and beautiful and wise eyes, I do not believe that this could die. To me, it is the essential Poland, my true Poland (15.05.1916; Irzykowski 2001: 19).

Today, when I was writing war bulletins from those July days decisive for me – so many dead and so many prisoners of war – the only thing that came to my mind was what happened to Basia at that time. This black and red background of the overall slaughter seems too ordinary to impress me. The microcosmos is as big as the macrocosmos. And the death of such a little child is more tragic to me, or at least makes me sadder than the death of a hundred heroes. Their role as heroes is to die, and in general, when an adult person dies, he dies on his own account, grows up to his fate and can carry it – but here you can feel the extreme wrong and injustice, you would like to hold part of this death and you cannot – and it is actually not death, but one-year torture, imprisonment with tortures and hunger, a slow breakdown of the body and spirit ... does not frighten me any more. What does the war matter to me? And if it is true that Basia has suffered from kidney due to dysentery since the beginning of the war, maybe there is no coincidence and now peace should come. My whole Poland has died – the only one that I knew and truly loved. For me, there is no such Poland where Basia is dead (9.07.1916; *ibid.*: 46).

Żeromski's recollection is dominated by the ethical dimension of the autobiographical part, whereas Karol Irzykowski's diary assumes a completely different form. The difference in the form of writing down the existential experience of the loss of a child results from a different nature of its function. As the title quotation from the diary suggests, it is a form of experiencing reality (and conveying the truth of this experience)<sup>10</sup>, a form of practicing memory (apart from metamemory reflection, it serves as a medium for what Astrid Erll defines as *collected memory*)<sup>11</sup> and a place

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<sup>10</sup> We can repeat after Paweł Rodak (2011: 116-117) that, in a sense, it has a performative dimension (by shaping the experience using a written form).

<sup>11</sup> According to Astrid Erll (2009: 212-213), as opposed to *collective memory*, *collected memory* is a socially and culturally shaped individual memory. See: Assmann 2013: 41-43, 47-51.

of metaphysical reflection: seeking truth about death – a forming existential fact. If Adam Żeromski's biography was inscribed into the symbolic universe of Polishness as a situation demanding identification and confirmation, Polishness as a challenge and moral imperative, Irzykowski adopts a different attitude: he does not project the macroscale onto the microscale, but, just the opposite, the microcosmos of Polishness, which he perceives in his dying daughter, is to him as big as the macrocosmos. Basia is the 'true' Poland – not Poland as an idea, but something real. It can be said that it is as in the case of Gombrowicz, because the opposition 'real-unreal' is significant here (Rodak 2011: 456-457), as long as Basia lives and is remembered, she is situated on the side of reality, concrete facts, everyday life or even the present. It is difficult to understand this identification of Basia with Poland otherwise than in the perspective of Irzykowski's tanatological reflection provoked by a fundamental existential experience – the loss of a child, which is considered in the context of mass 'heroic' death on the fronts of the war being observed by the author of *Pałuba* [*The Hag*] from the perspective of an employee of the Correspondence Office in Kraków, who has access to the latest information and reports. In many points of the diary, Irzykowski consciously clashes the home reality marked with disease and death with the reality of the war, but he is interested mainly in imponderabilia – the things that are apparently least necessary in the understanding and self-understanding process. Basia is real, in contrast to the unreality of the war, which is an impersonal force willing to appropriate the whole experience and subordinate it to unreal things: the macrocosmos, the collective/nation, history or the past. The war would like to 'capture' his narrative and, thereby, soothe the pain and inscribe the loss into the narrative about 'collectivised death', if we wish to refer to Bauman's terminology once again. It seems that those few points of the diary where the topic of Polishness appears contain also a warning against Polishness in which identification with it must involve readiness for death that is justified in advance – death in the name of political will. We can say that Irzykowski objects against modern collectivised death, grieving his loss partly in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century paradigm described by Philippe Ariès (2010: 171) as the hypertrophic excessive care of places of remembrance that is connected with the cult of souvenirs: '19<sup>th</sup>-century death (...) is not a death the human being is afraid of for himself and which treacherously lies in wait for us, but a death that takes loved persons away from us,

a death of other human being'. Irzykowski grieves his loss conventionally: in the mourning process, in a ritualised manner, which is referred to by descriptions of ordering a posthumous mask, frequent visits to the cemetery, taking care of the grave, planning a monument, and subjectively, internally: in the form of a diary entry concerning not only events, but emotions and concerning a more general metaphysical reflection (mainly about memory and death)<sup>12</sup>. Both the first and second form of handling the situation are accompanied by strong emotions, in spite of the fact that the world of masks, roles and social rituals was previously criticized by Irzykowski and by writers that he praised (particularly Nałkowska). The creation of memory establishes an affective minicommunity of mourning, and writing a diary fulfils an autotherapeutic and autoanalytical function<sup>13</sup>, because the loss turns an experienced man into a lonely person. Irzykowski's thought about death whose fragments we can find in the diary is developed in his 1918

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<sup>12</sup> For more about Irzykowski's attitude to death, see: Jakóbczyk 2005: 27-30. In her excellent study devoted to Basia, E. Kraskowska (2008) uses the tools of neopsychoanalysis to show this multidimensionality of experience of the loss, saying about the psychology and the Real and Symbolic ritual of loss. The writing-down of the experience of loss in Irzykowski's diary could also be interpreted in the optics of Freud's differentiation between mourning and melancholia, as the conventional process of becoming reconciled with the loss, when 'there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious' (Freud 1957: 245) and the situation in which 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost' (ibid.). We can say that certain elements of the experience being described by the author of *The Hag* make it closer to Freud described as melancholy, but that would require more profound research. If, in this context, we reflect upon the sense of identifying Basia with Poland in the moments of the most intense pain following the loss, we could regard them as a confirmation of the diagnosis about Irzykowski's state of melancholy – Basia's death is situated in relation to other experiences that become parallel in his narrative (the homeland can also be an object of loss). The patient 'knows whom he has lost, but now what he has lost in him' (ibid.).

<sup>13</sup> Following Paweł Rodak (2011: 44-48), I indicate the auto-analytic function rather than the function of constructing identity, because the experience that is the main subject-matter of the diary – disease and death – seems to become a space both for the construction and deconstruction of the identity of the individual, which could be confirmed by its interpretation in the context of Freudian melancholia.

article for „Maski”: ‘there is also one line that leads into the dark deepness or into the bright height, as some would prefer, and it reminds us that this mask of everyday life in death contains miraculousness that can be understood and felt only by a dying individual or his loved ones’ (Irzykowski 1976: 509). Death turns out to be something that is most real and, at the same time, wonderfully illogical. According to Irzykowski, ascribing some logic to death or inscribing death in other narratives, particularly collective ones (‘the pathos of heroic drill’) is the real cause of the Great War:

Coral philosophy teaches us not to be concerned about death because only a miserable individual dies, but the species, family and homeland live and the individual lives eternally within them, too – in a relevantly modified form. We are eternal because we are a society of corals, who keep growing one upon another and branching off like trees in the ocean of being (ibid.: 509-510).

Collective mortality (constructed in mental space in the name of collective interests) is juxtaposed by Irzykowski with trueness and dignity; in a sense, he touches the Real through death in accordance with Lacan’s terminology. In contrast with heroic boys, Basia’s Polishness is not a result of identification work because she was not aware of the existence of the nation as a symbolic community. Placing Basia in this order and calling her ‘true Poland’, Irzykowski may have been aware of the identification effort himself; at the same time, however, he indicates that death is the field that annuls and almost discriminates this effort. Discrimination is certainly aimed at Polishness, which tries to give sense to death and obscure its wonderful actuality and presence.

On October 20<sup>th</sup> 1916, Irzykowski (2001: 84) writes that ‘we are in a prison confined by death, and there is nothing else except it’, and ‘Basia is the background in which everything (...) happens’ (20.10.1916). The reminiscence of his daughter became a *memento mori* of high existential importance in his life; in the field of war experiences, it is also a personal warning against the depersonalization of the human being subjected to its mechanisms. After Basia’s death, Irzykowski is ready to ‘take part in the war’ not only ‘by pen’, as when he wrote about the relationship between war and aesthetics in 1914 (Irzykowski 1914: 256-260), but also by fighting directly, but he remains independent and aware of the fear and pain that the fact

of confrontation with death involves. At the same time, he declares his readiness for this ultimate confrontation<sup>14</sup>.

For Irzykowski, Basia's death is an opportunity to make a philosophical reflection on war – its background consists of considerations of the modern condition of the entity, particularly its attitude to death in general. Irzykowski objects to such an attitude and does not accept it – he protests against 'collectivised death' – the one that has deprived war of its adequate individual existential dimension. He objects to the appropriation of Basia by the war narrative, including the appropriation of what he called 'national hyenism' (Irzykowski 1980: 595) demanding testimonies of grave and death when criticising Żeromski's novel *Uroda życia* [*The Charm of Life*] in 1913. In this way, he opts for the wonderful potential of presence, individuality and human dignity. It can be fulfilled not by shaping *collective memory*, but by working out *collective memory* – the cultivation of the individual memory of the dead one.

We can say that the reminiscence of Adam Żeromski is subordinated to the social perspective – this broader frame of collective memory, which helps us understand why Żeromski's son is a 'little Pole' in his narrative and Basia is the object of mental and individual memory and why she can be great Poland. In this sense, both texts constitute media of memory culture, but on various levels. The narrative about Adam is aimed at establishing and confirming a model, shaping an attitude and constituting identity by setting a task to be performed – the complement of the situation of Polishness in the material and practical idea connected with the ethical postulate. The authenticity of this model is confirmed by Żeromski – the narrator, and Żeromski – the author of journalistic writings in postwar years. In Irzykowski's diary, the medium of writing allows for intermediation and transposition between the individual memory of Basia and the collective memory, while serving as a warning against the appropriation of the right to the private dimension of Polishness by big narratives that discriminate adventitiousness, presence and life.

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<sup>14</sup> Irzykowski's readiness to take part in the war and potentially die may be interpreted as a symptom of melancholia-related suicidal tendencies (Freud 1957: 250).



Giving testimony to such a difficult personal existential experience that is faced by Żeromski and Irzykowski – writers who are difficult to compare both in the aesthetic and political and ideological dimension<sup>15</sup> – paradoxically involves the need to situate oneself in and towards Polishness once again. This situation is inseparably specified and determined by the experience of the Great War, which seems to confirm researchers' findings about the critical character of the years 1914-1918 (see: Kielak 2001). The experiences of loss, war and Polishness determine also a new co-ordinate system that will specify the situation that Polishness will become for each writer in the independent country.

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<sup>15</sup> Unless the preposition 'towards' is used; after all, the idea of literature developed by Irzykowski, who was younger by one generation, formed polemically, among others, towards Żeromski's works. This was the interpretation to which Sylwia Panek devoted her paper at the conference *Stefan Żeromski wobec tradycji i nowoczesności* [*Stefan Żeromski towards Tradition and Modernity*] that took place in the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw from 19<sup>th</sup> till 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

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## Summary

The article summarizes and compares the two biographical texts by writers who are difficult to compare in terms of aesthetics and political-ideological dimension – fragments of journals by Karol Irzykowski devoted to illness, death and remembrance of his daughter Basia and biographical memory of the dead of tuberculosis son Adam by Stefan Żeromski. The comparative perspective of both narratives of loss is present in their reflection on Polishness, increased in the circumstances of World War I. The analysis and interpretation shows that bearing witness to such a difficult personal existential experience paradoxically involves the necessity of re-positioning in and to Polishness. The memory of Adam Żeromski is subordinated to the social perspective, frame of collective memory, which makes it understandable why in Żeromski's story he is the 'little Pole', and Basia is the subject to psychological and individual memory, collected memory, so she can be called the great Poland. In this sense, both texts are the media of culture of remembrance, which inherently clarifies and determines the experience of the Great War that seems to confirm the researchers' diagnosis of a breakthrough significance of the period 1914-1918, also in the perspective of Polish identity.

**Keywords:** narrative of loss, memory, collective memory, collected memory, World War I, the literature of World War I, Polishness

## WHEN RYLSKI MEETS NABOKOV... (A LITTLE GIRL FROM THE ‘EXCELSIOR’ HOTEL AND THE NYMPHET PHENOMENON)

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Polish writer and literary critic Marek Bieńczyk – while reading *Pupilla* by Katarzyna Przyłuska-Urbanowicz – makes the following observation in a semi-ironic, semi-nostalgic tone:

We are moving further and further away from Stendhal (and so many others), who openly spoke of his love for an ‘incredible nymphet’; fortunately, the prohibitions are being internalized, the Internet and the press are vigilant, and we may hope – on behalf of the children - that presidents will stop stroking children’s heads and kissing them on the cheek when greeting them. The protection of their rights, which has been going on for years, is accompanied by an artistic, and especially literary, impoverishment of the motif of the nymphet; writers have to look for other areas of risk.

However, in literature of the past this motif hit the eyes like a neon sign. Not only Stawrogin, not only Carroll, Petrarca or Byron; when Słowacki describes his mystical ecstasy when seeing a shepherdess from Pornice, it is easier and safer to think about his mystical breakthrough and *Król Duch*, which he will soon begin to write, than about his insatiable, impudent gaze (Bieńczyk 2013: 23; emphasis mine – B.P.J.).

The above statement made by a well-known literary historian and writer serves as a good pretext to return to Eustachy Rylski’s short’ story entitled *Dziewczynka z hotelu ‘Exclesior’* [*A Little Girl from the ‘Excelsior’ Hotel*]. This work, included by the author in the volume *Wyspa* [*An Island*, 2007]

twenty years after it was written<sup>1</sup>, deserves attention for many reasons. First of all, it depicts an ambiguous and intriguing female figure, which is quite rare in Polish prose. To be more precise, the figure of a woman-girl, a nymphet, known from the 1950s as 'lolita', i.e. since the publication of Vladimir Nabokov's scandalous novel<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, the ambiguity of the title character of the short story allowed Rylski to subtly undermine the status of the presented reality, brimming with interpretational consequences. As a result, the seemingly trivial story of an aging man's erotic fascination with a teenage girl – told in a way that presents a range of attitudes, characters and 'gadgets'<sup>3</sup> characteristic of the trivial, everyday life of the People's Republic of Poland – eludes the frames of commonly understood realism, appeals to the reader to review the actions motivating the events and to reach to the treasury of images preserved in the memory of culture. Thirdly, Rylski's story can be considered as a Polish variation on Nabokov's *Lolita*, which makes it even more interesting...

*A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel* has many satirical accents. It can also be interpreted in relation to Charles Taylor's concept of modern identity: as a work about the crisis of subjectivity in a time of devaluation of fundamental values and a loss of the sense of generational community<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the extended version of *A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel* and the title work, the volume also includes the following short stories: *Dworski Zapach* [Courtly Scent] and *Jak granit* [Like Granite].

<sup>2</sup> The English version of *Lolita* by Nabokov was published in Paris in 1955, but it became particularly popular after the American edition (1958) and its subsequent numerous translations.

<sup>3</sup> To name but a few, there are references to the shortage of supplies and motifs such as lemonade in plastic bags, 'superbistor' clothing, bribery, cheap, fake petrol, Russian perfume and 'Brutal' deodorant, MO (civic militia) headquarters, the figure of a holiday animator.

<sup>4</sup> See. Piętka 2013: 13-29. The author of the book looks at the protagonist of *A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel* and sees certain similarities with Kafka's protagonists: 'Man, digested by the system, is only a cog in the great self-propelling bureaucracy machine. Like a machine, he performs the work he hates, every year during the holidays he goes to the same place by the sea, he conducts conversations devoid of any content, he lives with a woman he probably does not love. The accountant is a man burned out, distorted by the system in which he has

These traces, though difficult to ignore, remain on the side-lines when one looks at Rylski's text through the prism of the underage seducer, which we are encouraged to do by the title of the story itself.

The motif of a nymphet with a peculiar name, Inte, focuses the interpreter's attention on existential issues. The main character of the story is a man in his fifties, an accountant on vacation, immersed in marital hell and depressed by the growing dysfunctions of his own body. His mood is determined by a feeling of overwhelming fatigue, burnout, emptiness and impotence, but these states are accompanied by a considerable amount of self-ironic distance. (For example, the protagonist describes the so-called 'transition period' in which he finds himself as a 'descension' period, [Rylski 2007: 26]). Introducing the figure of a 'strange girl' into such a context becomes a way to present the close encounter between youth and maturity (if not old age) - and thus, to a certain extent, to dwell upon Gombrowicz's theme. The use of the phrase 'to a certain extent' seems justified because of the features of the literary construction of Rylski's protagonist, which clearly differentiate the artistic visions of the authors of *Pornography* and *A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel*.

In short, according to Gombrowicz, the opposition between old age and youth translates into a dichotomy of weight and lightness. Youth is the primary source of salvific amorality, 'the divine element in the face of an eliminated God', it is 'the only hope, the only beauty, the only renewal' (Sanavio 1991: 32). This is what the author of *Ferdydurke* said when reflecting about his own work:

What I wanted to show was the crisis of ideology, the same problems, the crisis of the human form, revolution, camouflage... and finally the triumph of youth as an eternal renewal: but not in the sense of *naïveté*, ordinary, natural man, sincere and so on. (...) This does not exist (...). In my opinion, youth is not so naive. But it seems to me that the only thing we have left is youth: the divine element. God has been eliminated. Morality no longer exists. We enter a world in which personality is lost, everything is broken

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lived for such a long time; he cannot be anything more than his profession, his life is deprived of any chance for change. He has become a victim of totalitarianism, which deprives people of their subjectivity, making them shapeless and impersonal masses of multiplicity and identity (...) (ibid.: 26).

down into pieces, but there is always this charm, born at the very core, the ever-renewing biological power of humanity. That is why I put emphasis on this particular subject. Youth becomes the only hope, the only beauty, the only renewal (ibid.: 32).

In the case of the protagonists of *Pornography*, written in the spirit of Nietzsche, the need to ‘immerse in youth’ can hardly be reduced to the desire to satisfy lustful urges or a desire for an imaginative return to the past; youth fascinates the perverse ‘old men’, Fryderyk and Witold, above all as an aesthetic phenomenon and a ‘secret relieving alchemy’, which is the mother of carelessness and primordiality (see: Pawłowska-Jądrzyk 2002: 16-23). The figures of the aging men created by Gombrowicz are those of manipulators who direct situations and events, saturating themselves with the charm of youth.

The story *A Little Girl from the ‘Excelsior’ Hotel* depicts a different type of relationship and thus demands a different interpretation. First of all, the figure of the title character of Eustachy Ryłski’s work – both in terms of internal and external appearance – is marked by an almost phenomenal heterogeneity, constantly balancing between extremes. This feature is most visible in the description of the character’s appearance, presented consistently (which is worth remembering) from the point of view of the main character:

He looked at the girl. She could have been twelve, maybe thirteen years old. There was as much of a child in her as there was of a woman. Her face was small. Her features were complete, her nose, long and narrow, slightly crooked at the end, like in the case of predatory old women from the south. If we add a high forehead and concave cheeks, the whole appeared too ascetic, not in harmony with the rest, affirming life, beauty, youth. But her lips, full and intricately outlined, shiny, blue eyes, shadowed with eyelids with long, seductive eyelashes and thick hair complemented the suspicious austerity of features with an appealing aura of girlhood. Her body was dark, long and thin, with boyish hips, convex, beautifully shaped buttocks. Her legs were thin, but not skinny, as is often the case with girls of this age, with clearly marked thigh and calf muscles. Her hands, on the other hand, were flaccid and thin like ribbons, spread out on the hot sand. Her arms, slightly raised, with protruding collarbones, made her resemble a bird (Ryłski 2007: 11; emphasis mine – B.P.J.).



For the nameless protagonist of the story, who initially succumbs to holiday boredom and the stagnation of a seaside resort, the young temptress appears to combine, in an almost grotesque way, the features of a young girl and an old woman, or as a creature living 'beyond time' (ibid.: 11). The man perceives Inte as a little woman who is both appealing and untrustworthy, her gaze concealing 'a second gaze, truer than the first one' (ibid.: 16). As the plot develops, the antagonistic features of her character are revealed: the girl's nature seems to combine innocence and calculation, sincerity and lies, maturity and childishness (e.g. Inte's statement that her dog Maka 'must have had a go' in the forest because once she gave birth to puppies, another time foxes, and yet another time to a badger...).

When analyzing the presentation of the characters in the story *A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel*, it is worth noting that Rylski used animal motifs, even insect motifs, when describing title character. During their first meeting, Inte draws the man's attention by resembling a dragonfly (ibid.: 5), and then reminds him of a bird (ibid.: 11, 28) or a cat (ibid.: 54, 56). Although comparisons of this kind are not further developed in the text, they are not insignificant from the point of view of the aesthetics of imagination and the position of Rylski's work in the network of intertextual relations, especially when one considers images reflected in various forms of art other than literature, such as paintings or sculptures (e.g. harpies). In addition, animal motifs are sometimes used as symbols of erotic emotions, instincts and passions in cultural texts of certain epochs, which is significant from the point of view of the discussed topic (see: Gutowski 1993: 121-138).

It is worth mentioning that literary critics point to the significant role of 'butterfly' motifs in Vladimir Nabokov's oeuvre, also in *Lolita*. As Teresa Dobrzyńska (2003: 51-52) puts it, the butterfly:

(...) provides an ontological model for the protagonist of the novel and is, in a way, her symbolic *alter ego*: Lolita-the nymphet is an analogy of a pupa transformed into a butterfly, and the Latin word for pupa is *nymph*. This motif is an indication of the metamorphosis, announcing and expressing the changeability of the forms of existence, which defines the dynamics of the plot – aimed at stopping transient things in time. It symbolizes the main message of the novel, presenting the illusion of stability, the fallibility of conclusions and expectations, the possible changeability of things, similar to the change of a butterfly.

Rylski's nymphet, on the other hand, can be seen as a subtle stylization of a mermaid – half-woman, half-bird (according to Greek mythology) or half-woman, half-fish (according to Roman tradition), dangerous for men. Such an interpretation seems justified as, apart from what has already been mentioned, there seems to be a special relationship between Inte and the sea<sup>5</sup> and her extraordinary swimming skills, as well as her role in the tragic development of events. In the final scene of the story, the man, encouraged by Inte to take a swim, drowns after an intimate intercourse on the beach, which also brings to mind another variant of the *femme fatale*<sup>6</sup>: the 19<sup>th</sup> century phantasm of a woman-mantis.

It should be noted, however, that the work also contains motifs that allow us to go beyond this kind of qualification of the title character. The uncommon behavior and peculiar statements made by the underage protagonist of the story (for example when she says that someone is always next to her, even when she is alone, or that she does not know how old she is) create an aura of uniqueness and mystery around her, connecting her with the hidden dimension of existence. (The same is true of the children characters in Henry James's micro-story *The Turn of the Screw* – to refer

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the following dialogue between the two main characters in the story:

'(...) He asked in a different tone:

- Were you sleeping?
- No, I was listening.
- To what?

She looked at him with distraction, shrugging her shoulders, as if surprised that he could ask such a foolish question.

She said emphatically, firmly, categorically:

- To the sea!
- You can't hear it – the man said slowly and hesitated.
- There is no wind, no waves, it is quiet, you can't hear the sea.
- I can hear it, always - she sighed and lowered her head on the sand again' (Rylski 2007: 13-14).

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion of this issue in the context of cinematography in: Hadamik 2003: 114-139. It is worth noting that in the film adaptation of Rylski's short story (1988, directed by Antoni Krauze) Inte is practically devoid of sexual appeal and a demonic aura.

to an outstanding piece of work from the treasury of world literature [see: Budrecki 1959; Janion 2001; Mitosek 2003]). What is more, the Inte's character also introduces the motif of a drowned man into the story (the girl tells the man about the macabre visions of her father-mariner, who supposedly drowned during one of his sailing expeditions). Numerous motifs of this kind, like the picture of a dead seagull brought by a wave (Rylski 2007: 21), anticipate the death of the admirer of the young coquette, and thus serve as a prefiguration in the plot (see: Pawłowska Jądrzyk 2011: 102 et seq.). Such a construction of the story introduces an additional note of anxiety to the work, raises questions concerning the hidden sense of reality, the destiny of man, the purposefulness of fate.

The ending of the story makes the figure of Inte seem particularly unreal. She appears as a mediator of the transition, guiding the man, who is tired of life, into death and, in a way, becoming a guardian of the hidden order which, as we begin to suspect, does indeed exist. In the final scene on the beach, Rylski provides the underage seducer with an attribute well-known from horror literature (e.g. from Edgar Allan Poe's short stories)<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup> See e.g. the following fragment of the famous short story *Ligeia* (Poe 1838): 'For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals --in moments of intense excitement -- that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty -- in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps -- the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth -- the beauty of the fabulous Hourai of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The »strangeness«, however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it -- that something more profound than the well of Democritus -- which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion

with unusual eyes – neither animal nor human – that seem to reflect light coming from an unearthly source:

She looked him in the face. He noticed a certain light reflected in her eyes, like in two mirrors.

The pier? – he thought. But that was impossible, they were behind a barge, the city lights were nowhere to be seen, and stars reflected light in a different way, and besides, there were no stars. But there was light in her eyes, and it was reflected. (...)

– Let's go now – he said with conviction, but he did not move.

The girl did not react to his words. She just looked at him, as if through him, and her eyes became bigger and bigger in the darkness, like the eyes of a cat, when it looks at something attentively, though thoughtlessly, and you stop seeing anything but the eyes, and everything in the cat becomes this one single gaze (Rylski 2007: 53-54; emphasis mine – B.P.J.).

Shortly after this conversation, the man reluctantly agrees to take an evening swim, and finally 'moves to the side of eternal darkness', without losing his sense of security, conditioned by the presence of the girl, or the sensations associated with the closeness of her body, 'still deprived of any signs of femininity'. Dying becomes almost a pleasure for him: it seems that death allows him to possess the beautiful temptress forever, and at the same time to return to the beginning of his own life – escape from the 'tainted world' (see: the motif of stinking water, also important for Tomasz Mann in his famous *Death in Venice*) towards the idylls of childhood.

Mario Vargas Llosa, while looking for an explanation for the scandalous phenomenon of *Lolita* (Nabokov's novel was adorned with the halo of a 'cursed novel', but essentially it was devoid of erotic literality), comes to the conclusion that the story told by the protagonist- narrator Humbert Humbert...

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to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers'. I develop the issue of the relation between the indicated motifs in works with a metaphysical aura in: Pawłowska-Jądrzyk 2011: 127-151.

(...)is scandalous, above all because he himself perceives it and presents it this way, always emphasizing his 'idiocy' and 'monstrosity' (these are his own words). It is precisely this criminal consciousness of the protagonist that gives his adventure an unhealthy and morally unacceptable feature, much more so than the age of his victim, who is only a year younger than Shakespeare's Juliet. His antipathetic and arrogant attitude, the contempt he seems to have for the people around him, including those 'half-mature animals' who are the object of his desire, also contributes to the deepening of his guilt, depriving him of any sympathy on the part of the reader (Llosa 1997: 138; emphasis mine – B.P.J.).

It would be difficult to look for an element of scandal in *A Little Girl from the 'Excelsior' Hotel*, not only because the narrative is conducted in a different way than in the case of Nabokov's *Lolita*. Eustachy Rylski's story provides numerous indications that the erotic adventure with the young girl, whose name means 'nothing' in Swedish, is only a product of the protagonist's imagination, a projection of his desires and fears, intensified by an existential crisis, deteriorating health and the closeness of death. The eroticism of the story, based on the traditional synthesis of Eros and Thanatos, is presented in a transgressive and somewhat amoral way.

Inte is always described from the point of view of the protagonist, we never see her talking to other characters. At the beginning of the peculiar romance the man has a fever and experiences an overwhelming feeling of absence and separation from his surroundings (Rylski 2007: 12)<sup>8</sup>. The story also deals with the problem of illusion and reality, reality and dream, truth and fantasy (see: the man's phantasms connected with the paintings gallery and the get to know each other evening<sup>9</sup>, the significant title of the press

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<sup>8</sup> The same situation occurs in *The Seven Year Itch* by Billy Wilder (1955). See: Durys 2011: 85-86; Llosa 1997: 140-141.

<sup>9</sup> 'At some point the man seemed to see the shadow of the girl from the hotel, cast on the wing of the wide white door, as if it was falling from the corridor. He was pleased with her presence, although he did not expect her here. He did not want the shadow to be real. This form of her presence suited him. After a while he had an impression that she had inaudibly walked through the dance floor and disappeared behind an open window, so he thanked her, with a sly smile, for her generous discretion' (Rylski 2007: 38; emphasis mine – B.P.J.).

article<sup>10</sup> or the press note invented by the hero about discovering the body of a middle-aged man in the sea). In this context, the fact that the girl allegedly lives in a hotel which, as it turns out, does not exist, is of particular importance.

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Eustachy Rylski's story may well be interpreted as an example of psychological prose with clear existential features – as a literary study of alienation, aging and gradual loss of connections with life. There is a temptation to look at the work as discreetly referring to the outstanding achievements of Polish prose (such as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's magical *Tatarak* [*Calamus*])<sup>11</sup> and world prose (such as *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, *Miriam* by Truman Capote and even some of Edgar Allan Poe's works)<sup>12</sup>. The uniqueness of Rylski's story seems to be based on the transformation of various ideas related to the phantasm of a *femme fatale* (including the image of an animal-woman, characteristic of Young

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<sup>10</sup> 'WHAT IS. WHAT MAY BE. WHAT WILL NOT BE' (ibid.: 32).

<sup>11</sup> At first glance, *Calamus* falls into the realistic convention, but it is difficult to grasp the multitude and depth of meanings of this masterpiece of Polish novellarism without seeing its mythical or even irrational elements. One of the interpreters point out the magic atmosphere that prevails the world created by Iwaszkiewicz: '(...) in this seemingly simple work there are many mysterious things (...). Mrs Marta sensed that the price for her inappropriate love would be death. She knew that she was terminally ill, that she would soon die, but at the same time she was convinced that she had cast some terrible spell on the boy: that she had infected him with death. In a magical sense, prevailing throughout the story, she is the cause of the tragedy' (Melkowski 1997: 114-115). On the other hand, Eugenia Łoch (1978: 29-32) sees *Calamus* as the archetype of fatal love and perceives Marta as one of Iwaszkiewicz's *femmes fatales*, just like Malwina from *Brzezina* [*The Birch Wood*], Zdanowska from *Młyn nad Utratą* [*Mill under Utrata*], Ignasia from *Słońce w kuchni* [*Sun in the Kitchen*], and the heroines of the following works: *Matka Joanna od Aniołów* [*Mother Joan of Angels*], *Powrót Prozerpiny* [*Proserpina's Come Back*], *Opowiadanie szwajcarskie* [*Swiss Stories*], *Kochankowie z Marony* [*Lovers from Marona*]. See also: Pawłowska-Jądrzyk 2013: 173-179.

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, Rylski (2009) mentions writers such as Iwaszkiewicz and Capote as his artistic idols.

Poland's art [Gutowski 1993]), the figure of the nymphet and the 'strange child' and introducing them into the caricatured scenery of the reality of the People's Republic of Poland. From the perspective of the broad intertextual context, one can easily see in Inte a 'beautiful temptress', but also an ordinary 'little whore' – something more than a literary manifestation of misogyny, a contemporary crisis of masculinity (see: Melosik 2006) or a battle between the sexes.

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## Summary

The author of the article, interpreting the story of Eustachy Rylski *Dziewczynka z hotelu ‘Exclesior’* [*A Little Girl from the ‘Excelsior’ Hotel*], recalls, among other pieces of art, the famous novel *Lolita* of Vladimir Nabokov. It proves that the uniqueness of the work of the contemporary Polish writer is based on the transformation of various ideas related to the phantasm of the *femme fatale* (including the image of an animal-woman), the figure of the nymphet and the ‘strange child’ and introducing them into the caricatured scenery of the reality of the People’s Republic of Poland. This allows you to read this intriguing story as a literary stage of alienation, aging and gradual loss of connections with life.

**Keywords:** psychological prose, Polish prose, Eustachy Rylski, Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, the motif of the nymphet, *femme fatale*



## MARCH 1968 IN POLISH CINEMATOGRAPHY – *LITTLE ROSE* BY JAN KIDAWA-BŁOŃSKI

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There have not been many film interpretations of the events of March 1968 until now. One of the films that reminded Poles of these tragic events during the last few years is *Różyczka* [*Little Rose*] by Jan Kidawa-Błoński. The emergence of this picture not only refreshed the memory of March 1968, but also, by means of visual references, it recalled archive materials from the period presented by the authors of this film. Before going on to analyze Kidawa-Błoński's work, I will look at two documentaries by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz concerning the same events in order to compare the methods of recalling history and updating experiences.

At the beginning, I am obliged to make a methodological clarification. Because this is not a historical synthesis concerning the events of March 1968, I will describe the understanding of history rather than factography. The fundamentals of this position were determined by Hayden White, who noticed the literariness of a historical work. He indicated the narration as a basic method of ordering and explaining reality. In his further analysis, he made a distinction between historiography and historiophoty, which he defined as the 'representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse' (White 1988: 1193). White's findings lead us to conclude that no presentation of history, whether put down in verbal discourse or recorded on tape, can claim the right to absolute objectivity. This train of thought is also visible when the authorities try to gain control of discourses and manipulate facts by using available media possibilities. This clarification is particularly useful in the interpretation of archive

materials from the period of the People's Republic of Poland. As we know, history was written by those who were in power at the given time<sup>1</sup>.

In her preface to the anthology *Film i historia* [*Film and History*], Iwona Kurz (2008) stressed that the film may refer to historical events, but it also constitutes a historical event in itself – it may have an impact on the formation of collective perceptions. Therefore, it is worth analyzing how the history of March 1968 is interpreted and talked about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and whether, apart from a story of the past, the authors of films tell us something else...

### **WARSZAWA GDAŃSKA STATION (2007)**

Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz's documentary *Dworzec Gdański* [*Warszawa Gdańska Station*] deals with the problem of forced emigrations after the events of March 1968. It presents an old tragedy of people who gathered in Ashkelon (Israel) in 2005. Basically, each of the presented stories could be described according to the following outline: peaceful life in Poland – a state of tension caused by sudden aggression against Jews – pressure from the authorities – decision – departure. This repeatability makes it difficult for the spectator to accept this 'order'. The construction of such a string enhances the feeling of absurdity and arbitrariness of decisions made by the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. The authors of the film focused on accounts of forced emigrants of March 1968. The truth of their message was clashed with the fiction of communist propaganda. The documentary is organized by the poetics of the meeting. The interviews are illustrated with archive materials kept in private collections or acquired from the archives of government services. The hypocrisy of the authorities is very often revealed in this way. Real stories of individual people, presented usually in an emotional manner, were juxtaposed with the cruel and unfair simplifications and slanders of the ruling elite. An example of such juxtaposition is the clash of Gomułka's speech stating that 'this category of Jews will leave our country sooner or later' with the speech of the protagonist showing a written proof that he is longer a citizen of Poland. Similar juxtapositions emphasize the shallowness of the First Secretary's argumentation and make the spectator feel the tragedy of exiles

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the historical view of films, see: Ferro 1988; Rosenstone 1988.

even more intensely. Thus, the main technique used in the film is contrast, emphasized also by the introduction of archive materials (photographs and films) related to the events in question (apart from witnesses' accounts).

The outbreak of anti-Semitic hysteria pushed the protagonists to leave the country, even though they lived peacefully and happily in Poland. The new situation forced them to redefine their identity. One of the protagonists described her feelings concerning her nationality: 'My world was Poland, my life was Poland, my friends were Poles, my fiancé was a Pole. For me, Poland was my nation, my place'. A few similar opinions were presented in the film. The protagonists presented their Polishness, indicating that being a Jew does not rule out calling themselves Poles. They found themselves in a difficult situation overnight and had to reorganize their world. They could not understand why there was no room for them in the country where they and their parents lived. They felt suddenly and painfully that they were Jews in Poland. Earlier this had been for them one of the areas being ignored (as insignificant) in the peaceful everyday reality.

The film *Warszawa Gdańska Station* tells the story of March 1968 events from the perspective of their consequences – the fact that many Poles of Jewish descent left the country. Presenting the consequences, the authors indicate the reason – an increase of national hysteria addressed against Jews. March 1968 was a generational experience. The incidents on the streets of many Polish cities united Poles regardless of origin and social belonging. In spite of this, the prevailing authorities tried to determine the 'order' according to their own measure, attributing the responsibility for the incidents to Jews. This was a case of deliberately roused resentment. One of the main characters of the documentary states: 'I felt that we were alone. Nobody stood up for us'. Someone else remarked that the rhetoric of propaganda had become accepted in society. These statements show that the incidents of March 1968 were critical events. The film shows the loneliness of protagonists, who were suddenly forced to depart and change their attitude to themselves and the environment.

The *Warszawa Gdańska Station* is a silent witness of the tragedy. It is the place around which the events focus. It is where the past meets the present. The film begins with information that the shots were taken in 2005 during Reunion'68 – the meeting of Jewish emigrants from Poland in Ashkelon (Israel). The modern perspective ultimately dominates over the historical

one. It allows us to look at the past. The railway station is a place associated with temporariness. It serves as the border between ‘here’ and ‘there’. For the protagonists of the film, it is also the border between Poland and ‘abroad’ and between ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’. History comes to life in the accounts of the presented persons. Thus, as a part of the film, the *Warszawa Gdańska Station* is a vehicle connecting the contemporary spectator with the tragedy of forced emigrants.

### ***AN ORDINARY MARCH (2008)***

Another film by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz which raises issues related to March 1968 is *Zwyczajny marzec [An Ordinary March]*. It is a documentary made in 2008, thereby referring to the round anniversary of the events. The context of the anniversary is particularly important here, because it serves as a frame: the film begins and ends with photographs of the streets of Warsaw made exactly in March 2008, when archive materials were displayed on wall screens. This technique is used for outlining two perspectives: the historical one and the contemporary one. Similar methods were applied in *Warszawa Gdańska Station*.

The main character of the film is Adam Michnik. He is the person who comments upon archive materials. The rule of contrast that organises *Warszawa Gdańska Station* is a method applied also here. The protagonist’s comments reveal the insincere explanations of the authorities. Apart from that, contrast is also visible in the content of comments.

At first, an archive material presenting a New Year’s Eve ball (1967/1968) and fragments of the staging of Kazimierz Dejmek’s *Dziady [Forefathers’ Eve]* were juxtaposed. Adam Michnik comments upon this: ‘There is the Poland partying in Gomułka’s house and the Poland that applauds Mickiewicz. And these two Polands could not get along. The clash was inevitable’. This statement became the guiding motif of the film organizing the material to be shown to the spectator. The character’s thought was illustrated in a similar vein a few more times – e.g., in the juxtaposition of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Komsomol and a concert of the Rolling Stones. The world colored artificially with studied and forced gestures contrasts with the world of real emotions. Adam Michnik’s comments are often tinted with irony and show a large distance towards presented materials from the archives of services. This makes the spectator feel even more strongly

the absurdity of the situation in which the victims of March 1968 suddenly found themselves.

*Warszawa Gdańska Station* shows anonymous characters whose names are not known to the public opinion. In *An Ordinary March*, the rules are different. The main character and the narrator is Adam Michnik – a well-known personality. Other persons appearing in the documentary are most often non-anonymous characters whose names have recurred in various discourses until now. *An Ordinary March* refers to the fight of the intelligentsia against the system, whereas *Warszawa Gdańska Station* points out the clash of the individual with the political and propaganda machine.

### ‘WHY DID NOT YOU WANT TO WRITE ABOUT THIS, SIRS?’ – *LITTLE ROSE* (2010)

This short quotation from Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve* became the motto of Jan Kidawa-Błoński’s film. The scene presenting the Warsaw Salon in Mickiewicz’s tragedy is well-known. Among guests of the salon, there were also writers. The conversations raised the problem of writing about the contemporary miseries of the nation. What does it have to do with *Little Rose*? It seems that this situation can be referred to tendencies in most recent Polish films, which increasingly often raise issues connected with Polish post-war history. The emergence of films such as the *Little Rose*, *Rewers* [*Reverse*] by Borys Lankosz (2009), *Czarny czwartek* [*Black Thursday*] by Antoni Krauze (2009), *Kret* [*The Mole*] by Rafał Lewandowski (2011) or *Róża* [*Rose*] by Wojciech Smarzowski (2011) may reflect the will to undertake reflections on events from the times of the People’s Republic of Poland. Coping with history is one of the fundamental issues in the construction of identity. As a relatively new medium, the film can open discussions that were pushed aside to the margin of social dialogue for a long time. Katarzyna Taras (2010) notes that *Little Rose* forms part of a string of Polish productions resuming dialogue with history (not History). History told by female characters allows the authors to resign from glorifying the pantheon of heroes. Portraying a woman makes it possible to tell an intimate and close story without unnecessary swank and big words. True heroism begins in the private everyday reality. The problem of entanglement in the security

service world and the operation of ruthless mechanisms of history becomes a tragedy of concrete individuals. 'History becomes flesh' (Taras 2010).

On March 8<sup>th</sup> 2010, in a short statement before the premiere of the film, Jan Kidawa-Błoński noted that the media coverage of the March events was decreasing, even though they were one of the stages of building independent Poland<sup>2</sup>. It is difficult to argue with this opinion. March 1968 was a hot topic on its round 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but later the interest in this issue declined systematically.

'Why did not you want to write about this, Sirs?'. Kidawa-Błoński's film shows that there is much to say about. Thus, the motto induces us to engage in a discussion on painful history, and the film is a perfect medium that can shape public awareness.

There are many indications that *Little Rose* is an important film. It fits into the process of confronting the communist past of Poland. From time to time, vetting processes or the problems of collaboration with the system induce the public opinion to provide new answers to the question in which Poland we want to live. The influence of the past on the present concerns many people – not only those who are entangled in the security service world. The Polish cinema may have released itself from the stigma of historicism, wrongly understood messianism and expiatory tendencies, since its creators found the courage to show history as it is. The Polish cinema slowly makes up for outstanding lessons of history.

Kidawa-Błoński's film shows an excerpt from the history of the People's Republic of Poland by means of individual stories. Being in love with the Security Service agent Roman Rożek (Robert Więckiewicz), Kamila Sakowicz (Magdalena Boczarka) – the main character of the film – becomes a secret collaborator under the pseudonym 'Różyczka' ['Little Rose']. The decision on collaboration changes the woman's life, who remains in relationships with two men till the end – she is torn between passion, love and responsibility. Kamila is a dynamic character. The spectator observes her struggle between two separate worlds. On the one hand, her love of the Security Service agent bound her to the security service world; on the other hand, this circle pushed her towards the world of the intelligentsia.

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<sup>2</sup> This statement can be found in additional materials attached to the DVD with the film.

Until the end, Kamila is an ‘unstuck’ character who seems to create her own space that does not fit into any of the aforementioned worlds at all. Maybe it is the different perception of reality and the filtration of the world through female sensitivity that determines this discomfort. Both the world of agents and the world of the intelligentsia are presented as male worlds in which women rather play the role of comrades, beautiful additions: they do not sit at party meetings or writers’ meetings at the presidential table. Thus, the main character plays an exceptional role in the presented fictional world. She functions as an active person engaged on both sides, which caused her life tragedy. The split resulted in awareness and maturity, which showed the need to support only one of the parties.

Initially, Kamila is presented as a hedonist making the most of life. She likes spending time with a man who attracts her and attends dance parties. By being entangled in the security service world, she is pushed into the world of the intelligentsia, which is partly strange to her. The task entrusted to the agent ‘Little Rose’ slowly ceases to be merely a mission. Kamila notices that she has found herself in a noose. The surveillance of a lecturer and writer is a blow to the structure of the family. At one moment, the girl notices a change within herself – she sees that her relationship with Adam (Andrzej Seweryn) is not only a task, but also a true relation.

The culmination of the events occurs at the moment when Adam Warczewski and Rożek meet. In the film, this was combined with a presentation of March 1968 manifestations at the University of Warsaw. Driving his car, Rożek observes the street turmoil caused by the participation of the militia in the pacification of demonstrating persons. At this point, the spectator watches archival photographs. Suddenly Rożek notices the professor and leads him into a corner. The plot continues simultaneously – the militia and ORMÓ troops beat demonstrators with truncheons, and the agent discloses Little Rose on the side. Warczewski’s worst presumptions prove real.

At this point, it is worth noticing photographs by Piotr Wojtowicz. The intensity of color changes along with the progress of the story being told. The photographer himself recollects: ‘I decided to collide various aesthetics: to start with almost trashy photographs, where the superabundance of colors raises doubts as to the sense of style, then depart from color and use monochromatism and, finally, approach the texture of archival

documentary photographs used in the film' (Taras 2011). This kind of color conception involves a few issues. Firstly, thanks to grading, it was possible to introduce archive materials acquired from the Institute of National Remembrance, the stores of the National Filmotheque and the archives of the Polish Television (Tokarczyk 2010). Archive materials are familiar to spectators, as they have been frequently shown in television broadcasts, reportages and documentaries. They were also included in the film on a par with staged photographs, which made the story even more credible. Seeing the difference between photographs, the spectator notices that 'even if the story is not historical truth, it is probable and credible (...) such a story could have happened on the margin of great historical events' (Taras 2011). Another issue is the presentation of various worlds from which the characters come; non-homogeneous photographs were used for this purpose, too. The colorful world of Kamila's imagination, the security service world and the entanglement of Rożek, as well as the balanced 'English' world of the professor are visible in the photographs. The distinctness of these worlds gradually diminishes as mutual relationships develop between the protagonists. The disclosure of the truth – the identity of Little Rose as a security service agent is connected with gradual monochromatization and the removal of an array of colors from this world.

Later, the silent family tragedy of the protagonists takes place in the professor's apartment. Kamila comes back home. She sees a pair of young people in the lift. The girl is wounded and cries. 'Little Rose' enters the dark apartment. She is busy with the daily bustle. The professor sits still in the dark. On the table, there are papers from Rożek. The woman begins to understand that her secret has come to light. She goes out, leaving her engagement ring. In this sequence, we can notice the characteristic psychological focus on detail. Not a single word goes out of Warczewski's mouth – his state of mind is suggested by details. The ragged world of the protagonists is visible in the shooting method. Rożek's papers, Warczewski's armchair, the engagement ring – these elements are located in one space, but when photographed separately, they show the scattering of the protagonists' worlds.

In this way, great history connects with small history. The national tragedy coincides with the private one. History enters the life of ordinary people. Like Biblical Eve, Kamila gives in to the temptation and then she



tempts herself. The aim of the game is not the pleasure of tasting forbidden fruit, but the unveiling of the truth, gradual acquaintance with life and the acquisition of maturity. Thus, the tragedy occurs on a few levels at the same time – the truth mixes with deceit and hypocrisy. The protagonists' fates are entangled in this struggle.

Although the issues concerning the events of March 1968 are dramatic, they only form a background for the events being narrated. The most important thing is the protagonists' tragedy. It is the protagonist and his story, not the historical narration, that becomes important for the recipient. Such is the nature of a feature film. In this case, however, tracing 'history within history' is a key issue with a cognitive benefit. Iwona Kurz (2010) wrote that 'recalling the loudest historical moments tends to obscure mechanisms and processes here [in *Little Rose* – K.B.], and the chronicle replaces their analysis and interpretation' (see also: Śmiałowski 2010). In my opinion, however, the truth of the protagonists is not concealed by recalling history in this case. Things happen completely the other way – history is uncovered thanks to the protagonists' fates. They make the spectator discover that the tragedy of March 1968 is a real tragedy, not a publicized superficial game. Small history allows us to learn big historical mechanisms. With the protagonists' privacy being shown, the tragedy of March 1968 is the fate of concrete real people, even though film characters accumulate stories of a few persons. Thus, the task of a feature film is not to show reality as straightforwardly as a documentary does<sup>3</sup>. It is, therefore, worth tracing the 'historical crumbs' that can be read in *Little Rose*.

Archive materials play an important role in this picture. Anyone who has already watched, for example, films by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz will easily notice that black-and-white fragments of *Little Rose* are original materials of security services. Recordings are introduced in a very skillful manner. For example, Gomułka's speeches are watched by the protagonists on the television. This technique draws the spectator's attention to the fact of social reception of manipulated information and propaganda contents.

The plot of the film starts in 1967. The spectator initially looks at the world through the eyes of Security Service agents. Kamila and Rożek

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, reservations, genre limitations and other things are mentioned here, too.

watch a propaganda film concerning the six-day war in Israel in an outdoor cinema. The camera shows the reactions of the audience watching a newsreel. The protagonists do not seem to be interested in the material being displayed, but the camera records the reactions of the surrounding people. Some of them express their indignation by commenting upon the evident manipulation of facts. Others accept the material. The camera looks at them through the eyes of Rożek, for whom criticizing the film is tantamount to criticizing the system – an extremely inappropriate conduct that has to be recorded by the agent's vigilant eye. The newsreel being watched by the protagonists is a sign and proof of actual propaganda measures used at that time. Inspiring hatred, creating a public enemy, building stereotypes and recalling concealed resentment – these are the consequences of intense actions aimed at building the image of the authority.

When explaining Warczewski's 'guilt' to 'Little Rose', Roman Rożek uses typical expressions from the then-prevailing phraseology. Calling someone a 'Jew' was a sufficient accusation. Rożek does not interpret facts himself. He uses ready patterns submitted by the authorities. He is not intellectually independent. He accepts entirely false reasons thoughtlessly. He admits that he is not concerned with the truth – the interest of the party is the most important. When Little Rose discovers that Adam Warczewski is not a Jew and explains this to the agent, he openly states that the truth is insignificant. The girl's task is to prove guilt. It is also necessary to note another psychological motivation of Roman Rożek. Most probably, apart from the thoughtless acceptance of the ruling party's argumentation, the protagonist decided to win the trust of his superiors in order to conceal his own identity and protect himself against potential attacks. This interpretation is confirmed by the end of the film, in which Rożek has to leave the country. Maybe the case of Warczewski was supposed to shift the party's attention away from his person.

The mood of the entire society shown in *Warszawa Gdańska Station* is suggested by Kidawa-Błoński's work only in a few scenes. I have already mentioned one of them. The spectator observes people's reaction to the newsreel. Apart from that, agent Rożek finds the star of David painted in red on his car. This matter has its continuation and culmination in the scene when the party identification card is taken away from the agent.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution was to be celebrated very ceremoniously. One of the parts of the celebration was the staging of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* directed by Kazimierz Dejmek. Here, historical matters are treated as a context for the story of the protagonists once again. At first, a poster announcing the premiere of the performance is shown. Later, the spectator watches fragments of the performance through the female protagonist's eyes. These are not archival recordings. We see a theatrical performance and a fragment of *Forefathers' Eve* being played out by the actors. However, this manner of presentation made it possible to show the reaction of the audience – when representatives of the authorities leave the room demonstratively, this meets with ovation from those who received the contents communicated from the scene and understood them. Kamila's interview with the agent after the performance reveals the naive perception of the events by the Security Service. Rożek's questions about possible steered reactions of young people and inspirations flowing from some individual group show the version of the events that the official propaganda subsequently tried to impose in spite of obvious contradictions.

At this point, historical events important for the plot are suspended. For Kamila, it is a time of changes and important decisions. At that moment, she discovers that Rożek does not intend to discover the truth, so she approaches Adam and his family. He makes the final decision on the New Year's Eve ball. It is the same ball attended by the party officials that we can see in *An Ordinary March*. Although we may be surprised by the fact that intellectual Warczewski and low-rank security service agent Rożek are present there, it is important that a confrontation of the protagonists takes place and, at the same time, great history connects with small history once again. The protagonists are listening to Gomułka's address...

Another fragment concerning the events of March 1968 directly refers to street manifestations. As I have already mentioned, the fate of the nation runs parallel to the fate of the characters once again. The status of 'Little Rose' as a security service agent is unmasked in a corner, whereas 'great history' takes place in the street. Before the unmasking takes place, the spectator observes the turmoil and fights of ORMO (Volunteer Reserve of Citizens' Militia) services with young people through Rożek's eyes (or rather through the camera of relevant services). Kamila is not present on the scene – she

sees only the consequences. The most important fact for her is that she has been unmasked.

Another significant issue is the presentation of the wave of intensification of anti-Semitic moods. Warczewski and his family watch a fragment of the speech in which he is accused of being co-responsible for the March 1968 incidents. His mother is desperate. Her behavior resembles the behavior of mothers about which the protagonists of *Warszawa Gdańska Station* talk. The generation that survived the war is aware of the fact that its atrocities may happen again. The experience of the war was the factor that united the generation of protagonists' parents. In both films, the reaction of people from this generation is similar – the protagonists are paralyzed with the thought of repeated persecutions. Adam Warczewski meets with attacks from many sides. He loses his job, the printing of his book is suspended and he has to return the royalties. He also receives calls with threats. Even the taxi driver, unaware of who he is talking to, shouts: 'To Siam!'. The culmination of the intellectual's despair was shown through close-ups and details – the face, the eyeglasses, the returned engagement ring, the barrier. Warczewski's world was turned upside down. He grasps elements of reality only in shreds. It is not only a picture of his mental state, but also a harbinger of the events that will follow soon. Presented as suicide by the authorities, the professor's death (pushing out of the balcony) could be officially justified by the story of Warczewski's love of the female agent. In this context, details are like crime scene photographs.

Another direct consequence of the March 1968 events was a purge within the ruling party. In the film, this motif is represented by Rożek's interview with officers. His collaborators suggest that he acts for private reasons, his actual name is 'Skewer' and he 'went over to the enemy positions'. As a result of these accusations, he is ousted from the party and has to leave the country.

The expatriation warrant affected also Warczewski and his newly-wed wife. The family receives a document stating that these persons are not Polish citizens. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the tragedy. The harbinger that the spectator watched earlier turns into reality. On her way back home, Kamila finds her husband lying dead in the blood-stained snow. The roses left on the stairs indicate that the perpetrator knew about her pseudonym – it might have been Rożek, but this is not certain.

The last scene on the *Warszawa Gdańska Station* summarizes the film. The railway station is a place of changes. The pregnant 'Little Rose' can be treated as a symbol of fate variability. The girl who hesitated between both parties to the (political and moral) conflict has finally become alone. Both men suffered defeat. Thus, at the end of the film, Kamila was still standing at the crossroads. Because of the turns of history and her life choices, Kamila remained 'in between' until the end. After all, as the subtitle of the film suggests, 'every love has its own story'. The story of this love (or rather these loves) clashed against the tragedy of the nation. Finally, it is the woman who wins the battle with history, although it is difficult to talk about the victory and happiness here. Here, an important thing is the triumph of life. Kamila's child is the harbinger of a new generation that will face new challenges. The generation of March 1968 will survive (or has survived) and it does not matter whose child the girl is expecting.

The documentaries by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz highlighted two aspects of March 1968 events. *Warszawa Gdańska Station* presented a story of forced emigrants. *An Ordinary March* shows events from the perspective of the struggle of intellectuals with the system. *Little Rose* seems to bring these two perspectives together. Firstly, it presents the struggle of intellectuals with the limitations of the people's democracy; secondly, the issue of rousing anti-Semitism in society has been raised; thirdly, the entanglement of ordinary people in the security service world has finally been taken into account. Thus, it seems that the film by Kidawa-Błoński brings the dispersed links of history into a whole.

*Little Rose* tells the story of March as it may have been seen by the participants of these events. Privacy clashed against the official sphere. The story of Kamila and the two men with whom she had a relationship shows how easy it is to become entangled in a front-page story and how difficult it is to preserve one's own happiness and control of one's own life. The authors of *Little Rose* assure that there was not a single inspiration for the creation of film characters, although the fates of Kamila and Adam are strikingly similar to the history of Paweł Jasienica. The manner in which the authorities dealt with the professor resembles the case of Zawieyski. It is also impossible to ignore similarities between Adam Warczewski and Stefan Kisielewski. One of them is the statement about 'the dictatorship of dunces', which resulted in a brutal beating and a publication ban. The strength

of the story told lies in its high probability – both with regard to psychology and history.

The protagonists of *Warszawa Gdańska Station* stressed that history is important as long as the risk of its repetition exists. *An Ordinary March* ends with a statement by Adam Michnik: ‘It was an ordinary March. Ordinary and not ordinary. Ordinary, because people existed at that time – they fell in love, married, bore children and finished studies. They often (...) turned their heads and did not want to see that the face of their neighbor or friend has been spat upon. So this is a demand to look and not let anyone be spat upon. Anyone’.

Understood as a historical event – an image of memory recorded at a given moment, *Little Rose* shows that the matters of March 1968 continue to be an unhealed wound. In this sense, the film shows not only history, but also the present. It is a challenge for memory and has a chance for broad reception because it tells a story of ordinary people. The narration oriented towards small history creates an opportunity to present great history in a new manner. Because of this, the film is surprisingly authentic and allows us to think not only about factography, but also about the functioning of the human being in society and the methods of his/her reaction to the current needs.

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## Summary

The article refers to March 1968 events in Polish cinematography. *Różyczka* [*Little Rose*], a film by Jan Kidawa-Błoński, becomes the main material of the analysis. The first part of the article refers to two documentaries by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz that make it easier to interpret many key scenes in the film of Kidawa-Błoński. *Dworzec Gdański* [*Warszawa Gdańska Station*] sheds some light on the final scene of the *Little Rose*. It also shows how dramatically March 1968 events affected the privacy of Polish people. *Zwyczajny marzec* [*An Ordinary March*] presents the struggle of Polish intelligentsia with the system – so it demonstrates what is official. *Little Rose* connects both perspectives – it shows the history from the perspective of ordinary people and does not resign from presenting well-known issues concluded in historical syntheses.

**Keywords:** March 1968, *Różyczka* [*Little Rose*], Jan Kidawa-Błoński, history in the film.





# MUSIC AS A MEANS OF NARRATION IN SELECTED FILMS BY MICHAEL HANEKE (*FUNNY GAMES*, *THE PIANO TEACHER*, *AMOUR*)<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION: ON THE AUDIBLE LANDSCAPE OF CINEMA

*O, you of the feelings  
changing into what? – into an audible landscape.*  
Rainer Maria Rilke, *To Music* (transl. S. Horton)

When Georges, one of the characters in Michael Haneke's *Amour*, makes attempts to catch a pigeon – a street intruder in a model-decorated bourgeois apartment – the viewer is left alone for a good few minutes with a flapping bird and a panting old man. Zygmunt Kałużyński (1998: 97), evoking the pioneer years of the sound film almost one hundred years earlier, wrote in his essay: 'Pigeons would sit on the glass roof of the atelier, interrupting dialogues with their cooing: special officers were on duty to chase the birds away with sticks'. The association of these two points in the history of cinema – situated on the two poles of the sound film – allows us to see Haneke not only as a specialist in 'audience-shocking' stories or a go-to moralist, but as an artist organically connected with the development of cinema and its means of expression. Sound is one of those means, whose special variation is music, which is worth paying special attention in the case of Michael Haneke's films.

<sup>1</sup> The article is a reviewed and abbreviated version of an MA thesis written under the supervision of Professor Katarzyna Taras and defended at the Faculty of Humanities of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

Let us reflect a little more upon the scene with the pigeon being completely devoid of music as it allows us to look at Haneke's ways of narration from the perspective of the method, or the 'technique' applied (Shklovsky 1917). The scene is provocative, in terms of both form (it seems to be falling out of the rhythm of the film, dragging so disproportionately in relation to its whole length that it can irritate and upset the viewer<sup>2</sup>) and content (it sets a trap of interpretative coercion, i.e. the symbolic mode (Umberto Eco's notion), a trap in which, for instance, Tadeusz Sobolewski fell suggesting the relation of the pigeon with the Christian symbolism somewhat too easily)<sup>3</sup>, The provocation is all the more effective that not only has Haneke been labeled as a perfectionist whose tapes are deliberately recorded in every second, but also as a director whose play with the viewer does not assume the equality of both parties, but an intellectual and emotional advantage of one of them, which simply means the viewer is being manipulated by the director. While it is true that some of Haneke's films, including *Funny Games*, may confirm his reputation of a 'manipulator'<sup>4</sup>, such works as *The Piano Teacher* or *Amour* – which may be proved<sup>5</sup>, among other phenomena, by extreme discrepancies in their evaluation – show that things may also take a different course: events and heroes break free from the director's strict control; they become able to self-determine, and the viewer – to confront a cinematic world, which is multidimensional

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<sup>2</sup> 'The worst part of it were the long, even dragging scenes which, instead of delighting, were horribly boring. The apogee of my impatience came when Georges began to hunt a pigeon, no one knows why' (Piechocka, Kortus 2003).

<sup>3</sup> 'The pigeon banging on the walls of the Paris flat also symbolizes the spiritual struggle of modern man after the loss of the former religious compass' (Sobolewski 2012).

<sup>4</sup> 'Excellent knowledge of what the audience expects allows the creator to manipulate their feelings and reactions, making their hopes instantly collapse like a house of cards' (Dudkiewicz 2013).

<sup>5</sup> 'Haneke made one of the most beautiful films about death, but also about the title love' (Błaszczak 2013). 'Pardon my recalcitrance, but I think this film is a festival of sexless obviousities dressed in a thick layer of pseudo-ambitism, additionally covered with unconvincing symbolism. The understatements of the script do not pose questions we would not know. The heroes' decisions give no answers that could lead to honest and new thoughts' (Rezmer 2013).

enough to go beyond the ‘moral anxiety’ understood as a standard way, or the binding “social pedagogy” determining the message<sup>6</sup>.

This achievement of freedom through film events and heroes is largely owed to the music chosen for the films. I mean, above all, the so-called classical music, i.e. music written in past ages, then performed in specific circumstances as well as historical and social contexts (it could be defined, from a modern perspective, as ‘music which has been through an ordeal’ – and I am going to use this expression again as it opens an important gateway for interpretation). Emancipation of music in the Austrian director’s subsequent films, its less and less schematic use, putting it into the ‘shoes’ of a narrator, commentator or analyst of the film events with increasing courage, all confirm even that there is no such person as just one Michael Haneke, dried like a leaf between the pages of the cinematic encyclopedia. He is a living cinema artist who changes and evolves, as does the art he practices.

In this work, I want to analyze the role of music in three films by Haneke: *Funny Games*, *The Piano Teacher* and *Amour*, in order to demonstrate how and why it takes the role of a narrator in the face of the events presented. Doing so either in parallel with a traditional cinema narrator, i.e. the image, or on its own, it reveals those aspects of the story that the eye of the camera does not perceive. I choose precisely those three films by Haneke because, first of all, the director uses there a large number of musical narrative tricks (the recognition of which favors a better insight into the story told on the screen, as well as an in-depth interpretation of the film) and, secondly, because they show how, over a dozen or so years, music’s narrative role has changed in Haneke: towards a more and more profound insight into the lining of the events, a richer commentary on the film action and, lastly, towards the liberation of cinema from the visual surveillance of the camera. This happens to enable the film – like a poem in Andrzej Sosnowski’s work<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ‘– But I do not mean to say that my film is any kind of message. You send messages at a post office, not on the cinema screen (laughs).

– You defend yourself against being labeled as a »moralist«.

– A moralist is a bore, a teacher who thinks he knows everything better’ (Chorostecka, Niedziela 2001).

<sup>7</sup> ‘A poem leaves home and never returns’ (Sosnowski 2003).

– to ‘leave home’: break out from the artist’s guardianship, instead of merely instrumentally serving (an idea, a message, a warning, etc.).

I intend to analyze how the gradual emancipation of music in the studied films influences the emancipation of heroes and events (as the soundtrack is assigned more roles than just ‘illustrating theses’ or ‘showing attitudes’). Sometimes listening to the musical narrator can even change the attitude towards the whole film. I will suggest the possibility of such a situation using the example of *Funny Games* (although the participation of music in this film is small in terms of volume, limited almost exclusively to the first scenes), in which the analysis of the pieces introduced at the beginning – in terms of the cultural order they represent – makes it possible to change the attitude towards the following part of the film. It is precisely music that will lead me to the conclusion that the family subjected to violence is not as ‘innocent’ as it is commonly assumed in discussions about *Funny Games*, and the terror happening to is by no means ‘anonymously’ totalitarian as its source gushes alarmingly close to such institutions as opera or philharmonic. I want to show even more complex changes in the perspective of the perception of the film, using the example of music from *The Piano Teacher* and *Amour* – equally pointing out the significant fact that, when choosing to use the so-called classical music, i.e. one that has existed for centuries and ingrown in the tissue of Western culture (and not composed specially for the film), Haneke broadens the space for possible interpretations of the film, not necessarily consistent with the director’s intentions.

Baroque and post-Romantic music in *Funny Games* and compositions from the era of musical Romanticism in *The Piano Teacher* leave a much stronger ‘semantic echo’ (Lissa 1948) than their purely auditory presence in films. This ‘echo’, carrying extensive senses and meanings, may be even more interesting for the viewer when Michael Haneke uses music as if against its original character, in spite of the context imposing itself, including the stereotypical, well-established rules of the use of musical compositions in commercial cinema<sup>8</sup> (doing this e.g. with a piece by John Zorn, jamming opera arias in *Funny Games*, and with Schubert’s composition sounding in

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<sup>8</sup> Wojciech Kilar said: ‘What I consider as a disgusting form of film music is one that apparently accompanies the film, duplicating other elements of it and drawing its strength from specific, physical screen events. It means that if a horse

the background of the sex shop cabin in *The Piano Teacher*). Thanks to this, Haneke, as if casually, ennobles his works bringing them to higher levels of film art.

In the present work, I will try to show why Michael Haneke's musical narration has a decisive influence on the artistic rank of his films. I will risk the hypothesis that, as much arbitrary power the director loses, so much the film gains in terms of subjectivity of its characters and the depth of the story being told. This does not apply, besides, to the director only because even the composer is unable to control all the meanings generated by the music they create, all the more that, after the editing process and the final meeting of the sound with the image, new levels of meanings arise (Wojciech Kilar spoke in this context about the unconscious, not intended beforehand, and very important influence of music on the action of the film [see: Polony 2005]). According to Michel Foucault, modern subjectivity (the modern 'I') arose from visual subjugation, from the continuous observation that everyone is subjected to. The sad effects of this state of affairs are shown in Haneke's films but, at the same time, the music which appears in them – sometimes inconsistent with the camera's point of view and sometimes even 'plotting' against it – acts as riotous and rebel against the eye supervising the film. Michael Haneke moves away from the public interpretation of his films, letting them live their own life: one of open, artistic works. In my work, I want to show that one of his allies in this strategy is the music used in films and that its emancipation entails the emancipation of the characters and of the entire film reality. From a closing within the frame to an opening towards the world.

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is galloping – we get themed rhythms; if it is a rough sea – we get glissandi on a harp; if it is a love scene, a violin is a must' (Cegieła 1976: 82-83).

## 1. FUNNY GAMES OR MUSIC AS AN INSURANCE COMPANY

Skilful selection of music makes the narrative in Haneke's films start up as if on its own<sup>9</sup>, and we find the story already commenced, under way<sup>10</sup>. with enough speed that the director does not have to explain anything<sup>11</sup>. It has worked out exceptionally well in the opening of *Funny Games* – with the family listening to compositions from a car player. No sooner do the opening credits pass, than the viewer knows quite a lot not only about the heroes and their stable, prosperous life, but also about the fragility of this idyll (it is enough to change the radio channel or disc); not only about the past (not as much personal as cultural), but also about future events; not only about the bare facts, but also about the symbolic order in which these facts are immersed. Every immersion causes – as it has been known from the times of Archimedes – the effect of pushing out, and perhaps the rest of the film is the very thing being pushed out.

So, what kind of music do Anna and Georg – the heroes of *Funny Games*, a couple driving with their son Schorsi to their plot by the lake – listen to? The most classic of classical opera arias can be heard from the player: exquisite baroque *Care selve* from the opera *Atalanta* by Georg Friedrich Haendel and *Tu qui santuzza* from the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro

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<sup>9</sup> 'The whole story of *Funny Games* is summarised in the opening credits. A family is travelling by car and playing opera riddles. We hear Mozart, Puccini, and Macagni. Idyllic landscapes can be seen outside the window. All of a sudden, heavy metal explodes. Along with the title on a red background. It's the Naked City band, with John Zorn screaming his saxophone hoarse. Obviously, the goal is not a trivial opposition between bourgeoisie and aggression, but the effect of shake and thrill' (Topolski 2010).

<sup>10</sup> 'Haneke himself is a musical erudite, which he proved compiling the pieces for his following film. Kept down by her mother and oppressed by the system, the *Klavierspielerin* (original title) has to work as a *Piano Teacher* (English title of the book). The temple of tradition, the conservatory, turns out to be a hell on earth, full of mess-ups and Losers (Bernhard). How current is here the dispute between the classical and the modern, i.e. hierarchical tonality and free atonality' (Topolski 2010).

<sup>11</sup> 'I loyally warned you I would not answer any question regarding the interpretation of my films' (Felis 2013).

Mascagni, orchestrated in the lush nineteenth-century fashion<sup>12</sup>. Between Haendel's flowery bombast and Mascagni's post-romantic mannerism, we can situate a piece heard in the film for a moment and somewhat more modest in its expression: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet in A major*; its sophisticated melodicism also refers to the operatic singing tradition<sup>13</sup> and the entire history of European art connected to it.

Of course, if we look at the music by Handel and Mascagni more closely (and it can be assumed that Anna and Georg, playing their 'funny games' and puzzles, are quite knowledgeable on this subject), we will find there a lot more than aesthetic charm. Relatively lesser-known – beyond the milieu of opera lovers – Pietro Mascagni is considered as one of the first representatives of the so-called verism, or late nineteenth and early twentieth century art movement (a continuation of naturalism) that aimed to show“ the social reality along with tensions and problems accompanying it in a 'natural' state. First of all, however, the Italian composer, just like many other verists (including Stanisław Moniuszko, the author of *Halka*), was burdened with certain superficiality and a tendency to condescension in bending, from his heights, over the fate of 'the commons'. Secondly, Mascagni's verism was quite superficial and related rather to the contents of the libretto than to the structure of the composition, which did not go beyond the genre patterns of the previous musical era, and its ambitions were by far different from capturing any social realism<sup>14</sup>. Thirdly, Mascagni's opera unluckily had the misfortune of having been performed in a manner marked with the cliché charm of 'classical music hits'<sup>15</sup>, which is important for its location on the symbolic map of culture.

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<sup>12</sup> '*Cavalleria rusticana* was an instant hit with audiences around the world' (Rye 2003: 460).

<sup>13</sup> 'Mozart exploits the clarinet's mellow quality to the full (...) writing long, aria-like melodies for it' (Rye 2003: 180).

<sup>14</sup> 'Mascagni's realistic aspirations are manifested almost exclusively in the content and in the character of dramatic action; in musical terms, *Cavalleria rusticana* is generally maintained in the traditional conventions of Italian opera' (Kański 1985: 203).

<sup>15</sup> 'Perhaps he was a better composer than it is commonly believed today: his most popular opera *Cavalleria rusticana* is indeed affected by rather superficial

It follows that the family car is carrying the heirs of three centuries of European culture and, if we look at them carefully (expensive car towing a trailer with a yacht and heading towards a plot with a house by a mountain lake) and more critically, we could say that they are bourgeois beneficiaries of the culture of consumption and social conservatism. Their musical erudition (the spouses play riddles about the performances of each piece) does not change the fact that they move around the safe area of art, which is so familiar that it verges on banality or that such art fulfils the role of an aesthetic guide for them.

This game of musical riddles suggests one of several possible interpretations of the title of the film. The game takes place in an atmosphere of merry verbal skirmishes and illustrates the idyll of cordial familiarity combined with economic well-being. But then comes the breakthrough moment: as if somebody's hand changed the song in the player; suddenly the loudspeakers gush with the cacophonous clamor of Naked City's song *Bonehead*, suspended between heavy metal, noise and free jazz. The entrance of this music is as sudden and violent as if it were a physical blow, but its dimension is much deeper than the auditive aggression.

The leader of the Naked City band is a saxophonist John Zorn, who explores the whole area of contemporary music, without division into styles or genres<sup>16</sup>, and who also underlines his own Jewish origin (with its historical background of course) in several projects he directs (including in the Masada group). In such a context, it is difficult to settle for a simple interpretation that even if the goal is not 'opposing bourgeoisie and aggression'; it is simply an effect of 'shake and thrill' (Topolski 2010). The juxtaposition of Zorn's radical artistic philosophy (a synthesis of various currents of musical tradition and extremely modern means of expression) with quite clichéd 'classical music hits' (symbolizing a specific order prevailing in Europe for several centuries) may suggest a collision of orderly existence under a glass bell of media and consumption – with a different reality, stripped like a city

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performing traditions which makes it an easy goal to be pointed out as an example of miserable taste and opera cliché' (Łętowski 1997: 136-137).

<sup>16</sup> 'My musical world is like a little prism. You look through it and it goes off in a million different directions. Since every genre is the same, all musicians should be equally respected' (words of John Zorn quoted after: Niweliński 2011).



in the name of Zorn's band. The scratch which appears due to the music – both on the socio-economic foundation of Europe and on the identity of its inhabitants, funded by Descartes's rational gesture – will turn into a ruinous crack in the scenes to follow.

The sudden changes in the mood and 'direction' of the musical narrative are, moreover, among the basic features of Zorn's creation. The musician refers here to the inspiration with Carl Stalling's motifs, composed to popular cartoons from Warner Bros' 'Looney Tunes' series (their characters include Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Road Runner). These animations owe their incredible vitality, narrative firmness and timeless humor largely to Stalling's music, based on extreme contrasts of tempo and dynamics. They were smoothly assimilated by mass culture as early as in the first half of the twentieth century because they fit the cartoon world, which was grotesque and full of black humor. Zorn, inspired by Stalling's compositions, moves his 'turn-on-a-dime schizophrenia' (as a journalists of the „Rolling Stone” put it<sup>17</sup>) from the safe land of cartoon grotesque into a world dangerously close to human everyday life. It shows how well it matches the mechanical hubbub and informational chaos around us.

In the violent turn of the musical action at the beginning of *Funny Games*, we can therefore experience how the fundamentally cinematic composing technique – first 'taken away' from the cinema by Zorn, and then 'restored' by Haneke where it originally came from – reveals its deeper aspect and changes the music into a specific 'sociological commentary'.

Haneke himself, when asked directly about John Zorn's music, sends us to yet another parodist and ironic context of the artist's work (according to Haneke, Zorn turns out to be a kind of 'über-heavy metal', with all the Nietzschean baggage of the neologism), whose 'over-stress' and noisy 'over-exaltation' match with the form of *Funny Games* as an extremely exaggerated thriller<sup>18</sup>. Zorn's works used in the film are, moreover, accompanied by titles in which we can find examples of irony or pastiche

<sup>17</sup> [www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/the-100-greatest-metal-albums-of-all-time-w486923/naked-city-torture-garden-1990-w487068](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/the-100-greatest-metal-albums-of-all-time-w486923/naked-city-torture-garden-1990-w487068) (accessed: 30.05.2019).

<sup>18</sup> 'I see in John Zorn a kind of über-heavy metal, an extreme and ironic accentuation of that form just as the film is an extreme inflection of the thriller' (Sharrett 2010).

of the heavy-metal convention (*Bonehead*, *Hellraiser*). Remembering the solemn seriousness with which the bourgeois culture celebrates classical music – and, according to Haneke, even appropriates it, overestimating its own merits in the history of culture<sup>19</sup> – we can hear in Zorn’s music sounds of a racy slap in the face of the ‘well-fed bourgeois’.

If we look closely at the initial sequence of the film, however, we see that the piece by John Zorn – unlike those by Mascagni and Handel – is located out of the diegetic sphere (meaning only the viewer, not the characters can hear it), just like a few later actions of two murderers do not necessarily fit in the on-screen *diegesis* (questions addressed directly to the viewer or the rewind of the film action using a television remote control). And since the family did not listen to the first call to repentance, the director sends them a second admonition in the form of two murderers. Michael Haneke’s irony proves here – contrary to ‘moralistic’ appearances – similar to irony practiced by Quentin Tarantino, who does not hesitate to ‘argue’ using human corpses either.

If we treat the initial sequences of *Funny Games*, enriched with music, as a kind of overture to the film – remembering that, from the eighteenth century onwards, the overture contained short motifs taken from the opera to follow, in order to introduce the atmosphere of the main work – we can see that what happens in an abridged form during the first few minutes of the movie, will then be replayed, already in full duration of one and a half hours. The ‘overture’ nature of the initial, musicalized part of the film allows us to ask to what degree all the rest of it is realistic (even if it would be catalogue-like verism taken from Mascagni), and up to what point it is unceremoniously ‘operatic’ (when the studied brutality of the film could be associated with brutality originating from Sergio Leone’s Western-style ‘horse operas’)? Artificially exaggerated both in terms of the outfit and behavior, the characters of the two murderers, seen in the ‘operatic’ context, will prove more than appropriate. We will also begin to suspect their dialogues – written like arias, where harmony or contrasts prevail over the real meaning driving the action forward – of deliberate questioning of the realism of the film (as it is questioned by the elaborately absurd

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Of course, there is a certain irony here in the way that the bourgeoisie has insinuated itself in cultural history’ (Sharrett 2010).

dialogues of the couple of murderers Vincent and Jules from Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*).

A confirmation of the attempt against the realism of the film reality of *Funny Games* comes from the opposite end of the film when, in one of the final scenes, on the boat, just before the murder of the last of their victims, the psychopathic aggressors have a characteristic conversation:

Paul: But isn't fiction real?

Peter: Why?

Paul: Well, you can see it in the movie, right?

Peter: Of course!

This dialogue can be looked at from several perspectives. First of all, as a bitter meta-cinematic joke shared by Haneke<sup>20</sup>, who plays with film conventions all the time (a thriller about a bandit attack, a horror movie – with the atmosphere growing denser as it leads to the inevitable massacre, but also a documentary or a paradocumentary, where the course of criminal events is analyzed in a boring, yet meticulous way<sup>21</sup>) and, at this point, the conversation implies that we, as viewers, are subject to the rules of the media spectacle the moment we contact it, since the medium – according to Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim – is a message. What proves here to be significant is the division, made by the Canadian scholar, into the 'hot' media (which appropriate and control the recipient's emotions more easily) and the 'cold' ones (which do not have the power to do it on their own). McLuhan includes film to the 'hot' media, those which connect with the human senses with 'high resolution' (in other words, just like non-film reality does). According to McLuhan (2003: 31): 'the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance'.

<sup>20</sup> 'An anti-genre film, a parody. The action evolves like a thriller action, it has a structure of a thriller, but the film comments on itself at the same time'. Michael Haneke interview by Serge Toubiana, [www.youtube.com/watch?gl=PL&hl=pl&v=roOl9PvEPjs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=PL&hl=pl&v=roOl9PvEPjs) (accessed: 30.05.2019).

<sup>21</sup> An example could be the crime program *997*, broadcast on Polish Television from 1986 to 2010 and enjoying great popularity during those twenty-four years.

This context allows interpreting the absurd dialogue of the murderers even more boldly: the inhabitant of the civilization of the so-called West is kept in the same illusion of ‘reality’ by its image created by culture (not only its mass variation – as the director suggests through Handel or Mozart presented at the introduction). That state is shown well both by the opening of the film (the high-class family car seems to be equipped with airbags and the ABS system) and by the manner in which the director develops the action giving the viewer hope, every now and then, that the characters will get out of trouble – using the schemes on which the genre cinema is based. The heroes also believe in their safety because they believe in the durability and tightness of the structure in which they were brought up: in the culture whose symbol and peak achievement is the music by Handel or Mozart.

This is also the case of the viewer: they believe in the possibility of saving heroes from the hands of the psychopathic couple because they believe in the structure of the film convention and, more broadly, in the structure of the culture surrounding them. In its – as Peter Sloterdijk metaphorically put it – ‘crystal palace’, which has recently gained a new dimension: globalization. Thanks to the film convention, even in the bloodiest horrors one of the heroes usually manages to stay alive (in this case it would be Anna, who makes the last attempt of salvation on the boat – but the director cuts this thread of hope too). The convention, therefore, promises a guarantee of life, and sticking to the formulaic schemes means – both for the hero and for the viewer identifying with him or her – a license to survive (such a policy taken out has been labeled as a ‘happy end’). In *Funny Games*, Haneke shows that the insurance is double: the viewer is assured that everything is in order by genre patterns, but also by the musical sphere represented by flagship pieces of classical music, thus a highly authoritative voice.

It can be said that the music listened to by the characters extends the false guarantee of security and reliability: it is not only about the phoniness of film conventions, without which we quickly become helpless (suggestive opinions about *Funny Games* posted on film portals testify for the audience’s emotional and intellectual helplessness after those conventions are negated)<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>22</sup> ‘I am a sensitive person and, for some reason, it did not make me reflect, the film is flat, devoid of emotions, and why is it so? because it is so stupid that it hurts. Two psychos play with the viewer and make a fool of them, laughing in their

but about the phoniness of the whole contemporary culture, with its illusion of universal security and the ever-higher price that has to be paid for it. Arguments justifying the necessity of making the transaction and then the increase of the premium rate are provided on an ongoing basis by the media, which are full of reports of all possible attacks, natural disasters and crises<sup>23</sup>.

In this context, we can try to look differently not only at the victims (whose guilt turns out to be ‘inherited’ from the centuries of Western civilization, whereas the sin is somewhat ‘original’, not washed away with any baptism or authentic rite of passage), but also at the couple of murderers. It will then turn out that they are not in the least external envoys, inhuman functionaries of terror, the sources of which we have no chance to know. Despite the rules of a thriller or a horror film, the viewer cannot feel as an innocent victim of violence or identify emotionally with the family in a mortal danger because they also have features which bring them nearer to the criminal couple. Peter and Paul’s aseptic neatness can be perceived as a love for order and cleanliness, reflected in a distorting mirror (behold two perfect housemen) and imposed on us, obviously, by media and cultural patterns.

Peter and Paul may then prove to be envoys of our own conflicted interior (which comes to clean up the mess outside), emissaries of frustration and anger overtaking whole societies. That would mean that they represent us, the viewers, not an external reality of terror and horror<sup>24</sup>. The shadow cast by Peter and Paul – just like the shadow cast on Mozart and Handel by John

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face. My thoughts? A lemon someone wanted and probably managed to snatch money with, mostly from teenagers and pseudo-intellectuals, he wanted to make a drama, and the outcome was a parody of the thriller’. An internet user’s opinion posted on: [www.twojefilm.pl/funny-games/](http://www.twojefilm.pl/funny-games/) (accessed: 30.05.2019).

<sup>23</sup> ‘On the occasion of the premiere of *Funny Games*, the director warned against a false picture of the world presented by the media and blamed them for creating reality instead of describing it, for their tendency to simplification, generalization and relativization. Where he saw it as particularly dangerous was in questions related to violence which, thanks to television, became a subject of entertainment’ (Wolanin 2009).

<sup>24</sup> ‘I turn the viewer into the killers’ accomplice’. Michael Haneke interviewed by Serge Toubiana, op. cit.

Zorn's guitar-saxophone clatter – is a shadow falling from the inside, not from the outside.

Haneke seems to allow the audience to sympathize with the victims (only to mock the viewer and their hopes in the end), but if we constantly follow what the director expects (i.e. if we break the stereotypical view of both film art and reality) and what is suggested by the music introducing us into the film events (that, as users of culture, we come into the world with its original sin and it is not an unchastized one), it may result in a paradoxical comprehension for the two murderers' deeds. These deeds turn out to be not as psychopathically irrational as they may seem. The entire film should then be seen again.

In this context, the boyishly graceful murderers with impeccable manners, brought to life on the screen, deserve a closer look. Certainly (which would please Michael Haneke) they do not appear to be natural born killers – they are the director's construct (a bit 'operatic' in their artificial exaggeration at that). As a comparison, we could evoke a similar couple – in this case, female, not male murderers – assassinating a staid bourgeois family in Claude Chabrol's film *A Judgment in Stone*. The list of similarities between the films by Haneke and Chabrol is, besides, much longer: in the French director's work, the murdered family is at least as well off and – a very significant affinity – at least as fond of classical music which accompanies the climax of the film. In *A Judgment in Stone*, however, the heroines are the most real: they have expressive, credibly portrayed personalities, and both their initial, even childish carelessness and gradually increasing frustration have been cleverly observed in real people.

Of course, Haneke is deliberately allegorical (just like the opening scene with listening to music is: Haendel, Mascagni – good and safety, Zorn – evil and horror), while Chabrol, in line with the style practiced for years, chooses discrete metonymy. The heroines of *A Judgment in Stone*, Sophie and Jeanne, come from a lower social class. Their murderous act against the angelically harmonious but also sinister music of Mozart (the family listens to the opera *Don Giovanni*), referred to entire social groups, shows the destructive power of the 'revolt of the masses' (i.e. the 'triumph of hyperdemocracy' predicted by José Ortega y Gasset). Regardless of the meta-message of both films, Haneke's ideas from *Funny Games* verge on the director's showiness when set against the background of the precisely sketched personality of the protagonists

and Chabrol's observant perception of nuances and half-shades in social relations (Jakub Majmurek wrote about the French director's 'subtle tools of social criticism'<sup>25</sup>).

On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the full title of Mozart's opera is *Il dissoluto punito ossia il Don Giovanni*, which means in English: 'The Libertine Punished, namely Don Giovanni', so Chabrol – who has the haughty bourgeois executed by shooting – could be accused of being too coarsely metaphorical here as well. However, as far as Haneke is concerned, he will soon (*Funny Games* and *The Piano Teacher* are separated by four years) prove his ability to give music a *much* broader narrative competence in a film. This change did not mean cutting off from the past because the director did not give up brilliant ideas verging on recklessness, like the one from *Funny Games*. The bottom line is, however, that he was able to give music – or let it give it to itself – a much more important dimension.

## 2. THE PIANO TEACHER OR MUSIC AS WILL AND REPRESENTATION

Unlike in *Funny Games*, we watch the beginning of *The Piano Teacher* in total silence and darkness, and the first scenes (a strongly separated prologue exposing the fundamental problem of the film: a pathological relationship between the heroine and her mother) are used without music, which is all the more surprising in the context of the title. The latter appears only after a seven-and-a-half-minute introduction. It is only then – as if preceded by dramatic, emotional and physical struggle between the characters – that

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<sup>25</sup> 'The home of a wealthy, snobby, provincial, middle-class family is observed here from the point of view of an illiterate servant (Sandrine Bonnaire). Chabrol perfectly shows here that bourgeois culture is based on distinction and exclusion; middle-class cultural values are values only in so far as they are contrasted with someone who is excluded from participation in them (servants, but also the proletariat or an illegal immigrant). The maid makes friends with a post office employee living quite a hippie-style life, the ex-mistress now rejected by the master of the house. In the ending, both women take a revenge in the world which has cast them aside and, using expensive hunting utensils, they murder the employers' family while the latter are watching a staging of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on TV' (Majmurek 2010).

piano music explodes on the screen with romantic phrases of Frédéric Chopin's *Fantasia* in F minor. This could suggest that the director did precisely the opposite than before: this time, music is not going to anticipate the further development of the action but keep a chronicle of events (largely related to love). However, the way the following works are presented proves that their place in the dramaturgical tissue of the film is not determined permanently. The compositions will become a comment or a deeper analysis in other cases. They can introduce a simple contrast or, alternatively, a complex counterpoint.

That was also the case for the construction of film characters. The opening scene – tersely and explicitly familiarizing the viewer with the pathological relationship between the heroine (played by Isabelle Huppert) and her mother (played by Anne Girardot) and showing the family home as a hell of emotional terror (Haneke, as it is known, is quite clear about his perception of family as a source of suffering<sup>26</sup>) – seems to be musically commented only later, that is – let us emphasize – using works of composers with difficult family experiences. These composers are: Franz Schubert, whose beloved woman, obeying her family's decision, married a baker, Robert Schumann who, as a fifteen-year-old, faced his sister's suicidal death, and later was forced by his mother to study law, against his musical aspirations and Ludwig van Beethoven, whose numerous diseases and sufferings could be caused, according to many researchers, by the so-called congenital syphilis, i.e. one obtained in a genetic heritage.

I deliberately quote facts from the biographies of romanticist composers, whose music builds the action of the film in parallel with the events from the lives of its characters because one of its main threads is precisely the hypothetically suggested interdependence, that is a symbolic bond between the artist's complex psyche (the title piano teacher) and the composers who lived two centuries earlier and whose music is performed by the artist<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> 'I wanted first of all (...) to establish the family as the germinating cell for all conflicts, (...) the everyday site of war in the family is as murderous in its own way, whether between parents and children or wife and husband' (Sharrett 2003).

<sup>27</sup> 'It is difficult to say if there is a correlation between the neurosis of Erika Kohut and what could be called the psychogram of a great composer like Schubert' (Sharrett 2003).



Such a perspective allows us to refrain from treating the relationship ‘film events’ – ‘musical comment’ from the perspective of temporal consequences or cause and effect relationship, and to begin to see a relationship between the action of film and music similar to what exists between semantics and syntax. Music from *The Piano Teacher* can thus be considered as ‘grammar’ which faces a ‘dictionary’ of events or the characters’ emotions, and only when put together, do they form a flexible language of this extraordinary film presenting an – apparently contemporary and, in fact, old as the very humankind – drama of loneliness, domination, non-fulfillment, the schemes of which have been inscribed in the notes of romantic music.

After such an initial recognition, let us take a closer look at how the music from *The Piano Teacher* accompanies the development of the film action or enters into relations with particular events. As the first piece – appearing under the fingers of a playing pianist practicing at a conservatory where Erika Kohut, the title character of the film, teaches piano – we hear Frédéric Chopin’s *Fantasia* in F minor, a work whose creation in October 1841 was commented on in the composer’s letter to Julian Fontana with the famous fragment ‘Today I finished the *Fantasia* – and the sky is beautiful, there’s sadness in my heart – but that’s alright. If it were otherwise, perhaps my existence would be of no worth to anyone. Let us hide ourselves until after death’<sup>28</sup>. Although Michael Haneke chose a fragment of this work due to the fact that its character is typical of the Romantic era, rather than owing to biographical or musicological nuances, it does turn out to be significant in the context of the development of the action in *The Piano Teacher* (we already know about the crisis situation in her family home, and we are about to discover the dark secrets of her work at the conservatory and the heroine’s perverse erotic life). In this way, the music used in the film speaks independently of the director’s intentions.

Chopin’s ‘sadness in his heart’ (Erika Kohut also turns out to be chronically depressed and not very present in her own body; even during sexual contact, her hands hang limp like those of a puppet), is followed by a melancholic sentence: ‘If it were otherwise, perhaps my existence

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted after: <http://pl.chopin.nifc.pl/chopin/genre/detail/id/21> (accessed: 30.05.2019).

would be of no worth to anyone<sup>29</sup> and, finally, the very poetic: ‘Let us hide ourselves until after death’ all turn out to be important for the film. As we find out soon, Erika, who is hiding from her mother, her colleagues from the conservatoire and the circles of Viennese music lovers an extremely important part of her personality which is a penchant for sadomasochistic practices, drastic voyeurism, finding erotic pleasure in humiliating forms of contact, conceals, in fact, what matters most for her, that is the ordinary desire for love hidden under the layer of perversion. The piano teacher hides her true personality and real life from her environment, and in life that she lives officially, in accordance with the commonly accepted social norms, it is getting extremely too late to do anything.

If we look under the lining of Chopin’s *Fantasia* in F minor not from the perspective of the composer’s biography, but considering the type of his work, we also come across facts that appear to be important for the events in Haneke’s film (especially in the context of the norm-defying structure of the composition<sup>30</sup>, to which *Fantasia* owes its vital energy and organic power). Erika’s personality is also built on contradictions (the performer of the soulful music of Johann Sebastian Bach turns out to be a fan of brutal sex; as an authoritative lecturer of the conservatory, she turns

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<sup>29</sup> As the genre scenes shrewdly observed in the Vienna Conservatory suggest us in *The Piano Teacher*, the condition for achieving musical perfection is the arduous path *per aspera ad astra*, full of suffering and repression; it is certainly not the joy of life which stands at the source of the heroine’s pianistic talent. As the director himself states: ‘Vienna is the capital of classical music and is, therefore, the center of something very extraordinary. The music is very beautiful, but like the surroundings can become an instrument of repression’ (Sharrett 2003).

<sup>30</sup> ‘Musicological interpreters of the piece, unaware of this particular principle of the genre, could not cope with the form of the *Fantasia* in F minor for a long time. Niecks found »enthraling strangeness« and »chimerism« of the form in the *Fantasia*. Leichtentritt read the form of the work as »unclear«, affected by »lack of logic and continuity in structure«. For some, it was barely »a series of stunning pictures presented in great exaltation«, »moving before the listener’s imagination at a frantic speed«. For others, a transformed, specifically distorted form of the so-called sonata allegro, rondo, or the result of hybridization of both forms’ (M. Tomaszewski, *Fantazja f-moll*, <http://pl.chopin.nifc.pl/chopin/composition/detail/id/112> [accessed: 30.05.2019]).

back into a daughter hiding her vices and offences from the harsh mother), and the features of her character, which apparently exclude one another, reach the opposite poles of not only professional, but also human morality (the impressive competence of the piano teacher go hand in hand with the tendency to brutal malice, cynical derision, and even acts of mutilating violence). This is due to internal conflicts which have been tearing Erika for so long that they have basically become an irreplaceable part of her psyche and corporality. It does not change the fact that this neurotic forty-year-old, addicted to hard pornography and held back by maternal terror at the emotional level of an unruly student of a secondary school, remains, to a great extent thanks to Isabelle Huppert's creation, a fascinating woman. Huppert penetrates her heroine deeply enough to characterize her in a suggestively brief manner in one of her interviews: 'Erika is someone who denies her body, but her body awakens against her will. She is, in a way, a woman who flees and leaks. And she leaks everything: blood, urine, and vomit. It is a body closed in a corset that is, at the same time, wide open. This duality intrigues' (quoted after: Arata 2011). Chopin based his *Fantasia* in F minor on a similar dialectic of form (including the sonata) and its denial.

I intentionally devote so much attention to the piece which appears in *The Piano Teacher* for only a dozen or so seconds and is essentially irrelevant to the surface layer of the story. First of all, however, I want to point out what serious implications – independent of the director's intentions – arise from the use of romanticist 'music which has been through an ordeal' and, secondly, I want to show how the nuances in the reception of Haneke's film can change depending on the country where it is watched, that is a Polish viewer will naturally be more heavily 'burdened' with Chopin's music (with all its musical, biographical and cultural richness)<sup>31</sup>, while an Austrian will be more heavily 'burdened' with works of the Viennese composers, Schubert

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<sup>31</sup> 'Chopin did not use a quotation in *Fantasia* in F minor. Neither literal, as once in the *Fantasia* in A major with Polish themes, nor approximate, as in the *Scherzo* in B minor with the carol *Lulajże Jezuniu* or in the *Mazurka* in E minor, with the song *Tam na błoniu błyszczą kwiecie*. *Litwinka* appeared in the *Fantasia* in F minor not through a quote, but through an allusion. She is present in the work, but in a discreet way. She has to be heard in it' (M. Tomaszewski, op. cit.).

and Beethoven (with all the aura evoked by that city)<sup>32</sup>. The latter ‘genetic burden’ also applies to Haneke himself, thus all the contexts that the music from *The Piano Teacher* reveals not so much in accordance with or against but, simply, beyond the principle of directing omnipotence, appear to be all the more important.

Since I have shown the scheme according to which music interacts with the film (making it an ‘open work’ that is constantly ready for reinterpretations), I will discuss the following fragments, where music plays an important role, in a more direct relation to the action of the film. The first scene with the music accompanying the protagonists for a longer time is the scene of a home concert, where Erika Kohut meets her future student, Walter Klemmer (a rather likeable character of Walter is the element in which the film differs most from Elfriede Jelinek’s novel after which it was created)<sup>33</sup>. In a duo with another pianist, Erika plays for the guests the *Fugue* from the *Concerto in C major for Two Pianos* by Johann Sebastian Bach. This work, being full of enthusiastic energy, perfectly reflects the mood of the concert (the aura of snobbery does not exclude mutual affection and authentic love for music), also becoming a mirror reflecting Erika’s first conversation with Walter.

A gallant welcome (‘I hope it’s not too forward of me to kiss the hand that plays such Bach’) continues in a conversation where the musical erudition of both creates a thread of understanding between the characters (Walter ‘precociously’ talks about music’, and the fact of being a student of an engineering school does not deprive him of respect for the ‘tradition of recitals’, while Erika can pick up the ironic convention that has nothing to do with the rigid philharmonic canons), but also immediately suggests

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Yes, it can be said that music works in this way, but additionally one must be aware that in the film we are watching specific Austrian realities’ (Sharrett 2003).

<sup>33</sup> ‘Christopher Sharrett: Walter Klemmer seems to be the hero of the film, but then becomes a monster.

Michael Haneke: You need to speak to Elfriede Jelinek [*laughs*]. All kidding aside, this character is actually portrayed much more negatively in the novel than in the film. The novel is written in a very cynical mode. The novel turns him from a rather childish idiot into a fascist asshole. The film tries to make him more interesting and attractive’ (Sharrett 2003).

significant differences. Walter reveals a tendency to provocative disinvolution and breaking conventions ('Now, at best, academics stamp their feet in time to the trumpety-trumps of Bruckner'), while Erika prefers keeping both feet on the ground and more scrupulous university knowledge ('Have you read Adorno on Schumann's *Fantasia* in C Major?') although she also suggests what the dark sources of her pathological family situation may be (Erika: 'It's Schumann, and he's bound to go mad. He knows he is losing his mind. He's being aware of what it means to lose oneself before being completely abandoned'. Walter: 'You talk about things as if it was your life'. Erika: 'Schubert and Schumann are my favorites. Since my father died completely mad in Steinhof asylum, I can talk easily about the twilight of the soul').

Although the undertones of these confessions seem disturbing, the whole scene is maintained in a cordial atmosphere, exactly like the *Fugue* from Bach's *Concerto*, just played. That cheerful atmosphere, contrasted with potentially dark content, can be referred to the basic differences between Bach and Schubert or Schumann, from the perspective of their music and their lives. It is connected with the 'mythical' presence of these composers in the Western tradition and culture. This 'myth' is thoroughly explained through music, which in Bach is mostly bright and clear, while in Schubert or Schumann, prone to dark lyricism and neurotic shiver, and, in Haneke's film, it engulfs the heroes (immersed up to their ears in Vienna's musical milieu) with its cultural shadow. As it soon turns out, Erika's life dramas revolve around family and sexual-emotional problems, and so do the composers' life dramas surrounded with a 'romantic' nimbus. For now, Walter does not know about it, but he is clearly moved by Erika's personality, and when it turns out that he is also performing at the concert (being a science student he possesses a surprising talent for music), he makes a significant decision: instead of playing the planned piano miniature by Schönberg, he states: 'I will play my favorite piece by Schubert: the *Scherzo* from the *Sonata* in A major'.

We can already see how music accompanies the film heroes either directly (anticipating or commenting on their individual steps) or from a cultural distance, making allusions addressed directly to the viewer, who will first think about the 'mythical' Vienna – the city of Beethoven and Freud, but also

of Wolfgang Priklopil – to make their own comparisons and syntheses)<sup>34</sup>. This variability of the musical narrative perspective (especially in the first half of the film because in the second one Haneke leaves more initiative to the camera) and the freedom to switch between various levels of music that functions as the narrator (this applies both to chronology of events and vivisection of personalities) both make *The Piano Teacher* an absolutely unique work in terms of musical narrative.

The most similar effect to the one from *Funny Games* – a radical shortcut, and at the same time a striking shortcut – perhaps is obtained by the director when the lyrical theme of the *Andante* from Schubert's *Piano Trio in E-flat major* accompanies Erika Kohut's visit in a sex shop. A phone call from her mother, full of harsh admonitions addressed to Erika, is a significant prologue to this scene. After a while, we see how three intent musicians rehearse Schubert's piece (the heroine of the film plays the piano), after which the subtle melodic line – after an editing cut in the image sphere, but not in the soundtrack – remains with the heroine when, in a Viennese sex shop full of men, she picks films to watch them in a video booth. The sophisticated lyricism of the violin, cello and piano collides first with the expressions of the men, who watch the only woman in the sex shop, and then with the moans and cries of actors of a porn video watched by Erika. It is only then that the *Andante* dies down, giving in to the pressure of contrasting sounds.

The scene is edited extremely smoothly – with a great sense of time and rhythm of individual takes – thanks to which Schubert's melody comments, in an aesthetically perverse manner, on the duality of Erika's personality<sup>35</sup>. At this point, it is worthwhile to consider the similarities and differences between Haneke's film and Jelinek's book again, yet this time in the context most interesting to us: the use of music in the narrative. In the case of both authors, the mood or emotional expression of the composition tone in not

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<sup>34</sup> 'In the creator's assumption, *The Piano Teacher* is a provocative accusation of the Viennese bourgeoisie. However, it enters on more universal issues. A film shot in the districts and apartments of the Viennese elite might as well be happening in Warsaw or Tokyo' (Arata 2011).

<sup>35</sup> 'In her case, higher feelings are mediated in a pathological relationship with her mother, in music and in pornography. The high and the low, the lofty and the pathological intertwine inseparably in her' (Sobolewski, 2009).

only with the content, but also with the form of their works: in Haneke – with the way of editing the takes and scenes, whereas in Jelinek – with the rhythm of language and the way it ‘enters’ the characters’ heads. The book has a third-person narrative; the narrator turns out to be a very supercilious proxy of the author: descriptions of the heroes’ struggles with fate and their own feelings are presented in a tone of ruthless mockery but, also thanks to the presence of music, we can also notice their sensitivity. Here is an example of such a mixture of tenderness and derision ‘driven’ by the music of Schubert and Schuman: ‘Now the two of them delicately pass across the loose dust of intermediary tones, intermediary worlds, and intermediary realms, for this is where the middle stratum feels at home. Schubert’s descent into madness opens the dance – like the darkening, as Adorno describes it, in Schumann’s *Fantasia* in C Major. It flows into the far distance, into nothingness, yet without wearing the apotheosis of conscious fading’ (Jelinek 2010: 71-72)!

Haneke has certainly more affection than derision for the protagonist, as demonstrated already by the casting decision (in the film, Isabelle Huppert, endowed with subtle beauty, plays a woman who, in the book, is referred to as ‘this shapeless cadaver, this piano teacher, whose profession is as plain as the nose on her face (...) This pathologically twisted joke of a creature (...) clutching her ideals’ [ibid.: 65]), it is the approach to music, however, that matters more for the present work, and it should be noted that both Haneke and Jelinek make use of the way of presence of classical compositions in culture and social myths associated with their composers. In Haneke, we have the subtly lyrical Schubert resounding in a sex shop (and the cinema audience’s stormy response to the drastic realism of the subsequent part of the scene, when Erika sniffs wipes used by masturbating men), while Jelinek explores the contrast between common social health (enjoyed, after all, by enthusiasts of both literature and cinema – equally inclined to pass moral judgments) and the ailments of the artists’ bodies and spirits. Let us look at this passage, for instance:

The fading of Schubert’s, of Schumann’s, life-light is the extreme opposite of what the healthy masses mean when they call a tradition healthy and wallow in it luxuriantly. Health – how disgusting. Health is the transfiguration of *status quo*. The hacks who fill up the playbills for the Philharmonic

Concerts are the most repulsive conformists. Just imagine: They make something like health the chief criterion of important music (ibid.: 72).

But let us go back to the film, as the musical narration clearly thickens in this part. During Erika's visit at the sex shop, Schubert's *Andante* fades out after a few minutes, nonetheless the music leaves the film action only for a moment, because even before Erika leaves one of the booths, another piece by Schubert – the song *Im Dorfe* – breaks through the voices and groans in the film; after the transition, it turns out that the song is being sung by one of the students during a lesson with Erika. From the sex shop, we return to the conservatory as smoothly as we left the concert there (at this moment, Haneke clearly intensifies the visual and musical metaphor of the film, as the moment to introduce us to the heart of the story approaches). A characteristic sounding motif in *Im Dorfe* is a dull rumbling of the piano chords accompanying the tenor's singing, and that rumble is merged – another trick by the director's, this time negligent yet efficient in terms of content – with a knocking on the door. The lesson is suddenly interrupted; it is Walter who enters and, despite Erika's reprimand ('At the Conservatory, no one interrupts lessons!') he declares that he would like to become her student. This is one of the main turning points in the film.

From that moment on, the story of the film is divided into two themes. In one of them, the viewer discovers subsequent episodes from Erika Kohut's secret erotic life (visits at a drive-in cinema, where she masturbates while peeping at couples and acts of self-mutilation in her intimate areas), which have one thing in common: poignant loneliness<sup>36</sup>. In the other one, we observe Walter and the steps he takes to get closer to the woman he is fascinated with. For Erika, this feeling may be the last chance to break free from the sadomasochistic trap and pathological dependence on her mother, nevertheless, we already know how much a possible opening up to love is going to cost her. All the events that we can watch as well as the hidden thoughts and feelings of the characters – are attentively accompanied with music.

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<sup>36</sup> 'Erika cannot bear closeness and physical contact, she is relieved by peeping others and BDSM rituals. The most striking scene is the one in which the piano teacher sits on the edge of a tub to »play« and cut her labia with a razor while her mother potters around across the wall, making dinner' (Arata 2011).



The scene of Walter's entrance examination for the conservatory perfectly illustrates all the nuances of the situation. Before a commission, where Miss Kohut sits too, young Klemmer presents several compositions – in the film, these are edited into one piece against which develops the drama of Erika's hesitation (she knows that Walter's admission will mean further contact with the young man). Klemmer begins with a work by Arnold Schönberg (the *Klavierstücke* op. 33b which he had planned to play at the home recital, but changed his mind after the talk with Erika), and the structure of the composition, rationally cogitated, far removed from romantic exaltation, reflects Walter's nature. Then, the *Klavierstücke* smoothly or, actually, imperceptibly for someone who does not know these works, passes into the *Prelude* No. 5 by Rachmaninov who, in spite of being a contemporary of Schönberg, musically represented rather the previous epoch with its post-romantic baggage of pathos and sentiment. At the beginning the camera observes, alternately, Walter playing and Erika listening yet, from the beginning of Rachmaninov's work, it focuses mainly on Erika's face – as if her facial expression is a kind of score for the music we are hearing. When the young man passes (again, with no cut, as if it was one composition) to the third piece, the *Scherzo* from the *Sonata* in A major by Franz Schubert, the emotions visible on the pianist's face are so strong that they do not leave doubts about two things: firstly, that Walter plays brilliantly and, secondly, that the work touches Erika Kohut much deeper than the questions of technical execution or compositional principles could reach.

A moment later, the committee meeting takes place and all the members express admiration for Klemmer's play – except for Erika who objects, stubbornly multiplying technical objections ('histrionics' breaking the academic rules of the game) and commenting on his decision to join the conservatory with pungent irony ('I feel unable to nurture the artistic temperament or virtuosity of Mr. Klemmer'). We know, of course, that Erika's resistance is due to other reasons (Walter's performance undoubtedly gained her recognition), so when we finally see the name 'Walter Klemmer' on a sheet with the names of admitted candidates – the camera holds up that moment for a long time, celebrates the zoom on the secretary's door – it is a sign of Erika's surrender. A portent of the escalation of her tension and fear, but also of the awakening of hope for fulfillment in love.

This turbulent conflict of erotic desire with fear and guilt comes to the fore in a few moments of the film, resulting with either masochistic reflexes or aggression vented on other people. We see the latter case when Erika catches one of her pupils browsing through porn magazines with his colleagues at a kiosk and then ‘takes revenge’ on him (and, in a way, also on herself) during a lesson at the conservatory. The teacher finds the pretext and foundation for expressing moral outrage in musical principles. She starts by pointing out the student’s mistakes in playing (‘Don’t pick out the inner voices so much! Do you know where the melody is?’), and then redirects her anger, combining both threads: the musical and the sexual one (‘What made you want to study music? Your meagre talent? I assure you it’s not worth it. Take a job playing in a strip joint and stop wasting my time’). However, the scorn shows that even such a surge of ‘moral anxiety’ does not free Erika from feeling guilty (‘Or because all women are bitches for making you a pig?’).

Thus, we see that, in Erika Kohut’s life, music plays the role of a specific moral or ethical counterweight for sinful deeds. But that is not all, as it seems to embrace each level of the piano teacher’s life. When Erika listens to Schubert played by a student, we hear her comment on the part of the score being performed (‘Dreaming of what they don’t have, replenished of good and bad. And next morning, all flown away. And here, the mood switches to irony’) and we know that both the piece and interpretative hints concern her own life. When, after a while, we hear a harmonic change in the piece, it is also accompanied by a keenly seized interpretation (‘That’s the obstinacy of the complacent middle-class’), behind which is the piano teacher’s own life, stuck in the clutches of stiff Viennese bourgeoisie.

Music has so much power that, sometimes, it acts as a guardian of morality (in the first lesson Walter hears a firm: ‘You should forget Schubert. Schönberg is all!’, pronounced in the tone a girl uses to defend herself from undressing during the first date), however sometimes its two-edged blade cuts in the opposite direction. This is shown in one of the key scenes of the film: the one in which Erika sneaks into the locker room and puts broken glass into a student’s pocket to prevent the mutilated girl from playing, although the most important performance in her career is approaching. In the conservatory auditorium, the young pianist is supposed to accompany a tenor singing songs of Franz Schubert; someone has to turn the pages of her score and (unfortunately!) it is Walter who makes a cordial

gesture of help towards the girl. This gesture is so insignificant that only one pair eyes in the auditorium can see it. Erika Kohut's eyes. The couple of students begin to perform the piece. Walter turns the pages, everyone listens but, in the auditorium, there is a pair of ears for which Schubert's music means something more than for the others. Erika Kohut's ears.

In a long shot, the camera stops on Erika's face (Haneke premeditatedly applies static takes, triggering in the viewer a type of focus which differs from the one required by television or popular Hollywood cinema)<sup>37</sup>. Emotions grow in the delicate twitching of her mouth as strongly as almost imperceptibly (Grażyna Arata [2011] has captured the paradoxes of Isabelle Huppert's creation, writing about the 'shocking subtlety of her on-screen interpretation'), when she sees Walter sitting next to the girl (she does not know yet whether she loves him, but is already jealous of him, as if jealousy was a forerunner of love) and hears the song *Der Wegweiser* by Franz Schubert (its narrator, wandering along an unfrequented path to the rhythm of the piano imitating tired steps, finds himself in the snowy mountain wilderness and there, desperate, he desires to die alone). This combination – hope for fulfillment with Walter, threatened at that moment by another woman, and a dramatic song about losing oneself in loneliness – acts like an igniter: Erika suddenly leaves the hall. Then she is alone, with only the camera looking at her; in the locker room, she can commit the extremely low-down trick, which is not only an act of jealousy and vengeance, but also a proof of the causative power of music.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Christopher Sharrett: You seem very interested in the long take. There is a number of static shots in your films (...) the many shots of Erika's face (...). Michael Haneke: Perhaps I can connect this to the issue of television. Television changes our habits of seeing. It accelerates the assimilation of images. Look, for example, at advertising in that medium. The faster something is shown, the less able you are to perceive it as an object occupying a space in physical reality, and the more it becomes something seductive. And the less real the image seems to be, the quicker you buy the commodity it seems to depict. Of course, this type of aesthetic has gained the upper hand in commercial cinema. Television accelerates experience, but one needs time to understand what one sees, which the current media disallows' (Sharrett 2003).

When Erika returns to the auditorium, the tenor is already singing another song by Schubert – *Im Dorfe*, practiced earlier during the lesson, in which the protagonist, wandering through a village at night and listening to dogs bark, mocks the dreams of the residents of the homes he’s passing by because he knows how vain these dreams are. Most of the students in the auditorium might not know the text of the song and thus listen to it carelessly, yet at least one person knew these words well and perceived them very personally: it was Erika Kohut.

In this way, we come to the question of place and meaning of Franz Schubert’s *Winter Journey* song cycle in *The Piano Teacher*. Schubert composed those twenty-four works to the poems by German poet Wilhelm Müller. It is from there that both songs sung in the film come from, and the whole – rooted in culture as a fundamental work about loneliness and search for one’s own life path<sup>38</sup> – was in some way ‘overlaid’, like a cartographic grid, onto a map of film events (I will readdress the way of such ‘overlying’ further on). However, it should be emphasized that Haneke remains ironic and cautious in that procedure, thanks to which the knowledge of neither the cycle nor the correlation itself is necessary when watching the film<sup>39</sup>. At this point, we get back to the possibility, indicated in the first conversation between Erika and Walter (with the words ‘You talk about things as if they were yours’ said as comment on the story of Schuman) – of a timeless spiritual relationship between composers who died two centuries ago and contemporary artists, i.e. imposing psychological types, or even individual

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<sup>38</sup> Numerous references to *Winterreise* can be found in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century art, both literature ( *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann) and cinema (*In the Presence of a Clown* by Ingmar Bergman).

<sup>39</sup> ‘Christopher Sharrett: Schubert’s *Winterreise* seems central to *La Pianiste*. Some have argued that there is a connection between Erika and Schubert’s traveler in that song cycle. This goes back to the broader question as to whether music represents the healthy side of Erika’s psyche or simply assists her repression. Michael Haneke: Of course, the 17<sup>th</sup> song holds a central place in the film, and could be viewed as the motto of Erika and the film itself. The whole cycle establishes the idea of following a path not taken by others, which gives an ironic effect to the film, I think’ (Sharrett 2003).

character traits of Schubert or Beethoven (both of whom spent a large part of their lives in Vienna) onto the protagonists of *The Piano Teacher*<sup>40</sup>.

It is also here that the Polish theme turns out to be useful once again; so is, namely, the book of poetry by Stanisław Barańczak entitled *Winter journey* (published in 1994), where the poet added new texts to existing music of the Schubertian cycle; strictly adhering to its melodic and rhythmic patterns, he created an entirely new quality in terms of content<sup>41</sup>. The concept goes far beyond the paraphrase, despite the rich network of references to the original texts, because in the poetic sphere, Barańczak creates an entirely new quality. In the original, it was an unrequited love that pushed the hero of the song to wander (which was close to Schubert's personal experience), while in the case of Barańczak, the journey has rather religious reasons. Müller's literal winter through the real snow through which the narrator wades, becomes a metaphor for the Polish poet; the bitter frost can be, at choice, an existential or political one (after all, the communism had just ended in Poland at the time of publication). The procedure used by Barańczak is sometimes called 'intersemiotic stylisation' (as music and literature are two separate systems of signs [Hejmej 1999]) or – in accordance with the nomenclature coined already in the nineteenth century – *contrafactum*, i.e. adding new text to pre-existing music (which was a popular practice among medieval and Renaissance artists [Poprawski 2008]).

Sticking to this definition and its historical determinants, it is worthwhile to remind that – while maintaining the complete integrity of music and fidelity to its record – *contrafactum* made it possible to change the means

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<sup>40</sup> 'Of course there is a great sense of mourning in Schubert that is very much part of the milieu of the film. Someone with the tremendous problems borne by Erika may well project them onto an artist of Schubert's very complex sensibility' (Sharrett 2003).

<sup>41</sup> 'The poems contained in this book are, with one exception, original works – not translations of the lyrics by the Romantic poet Wilhelm Müller (...). Although the connection between my works and Schubert's music is more intimate and strict, my ambition was to write lyrics which could be sung to a specific melody and, at the same time, read apart from music, as independent poems'. [www.wydawnictwo5.pl/Podroz-zimowa-Wiersze-do-muzyki-Franza-Schuberta;s,karta,id,174](http://www.wydawnictwo5.pl/Podroz-zimowa-Wiersze-do-muzyki-Franza-Schuberta;s,karta,id,174) (accessed: 30.05.2019).

of expression and the aura of music; in the realities of the Middle Ages or Renaissance, this allowed to transfer it from the sacred to the profane sphere or in the opposite direction. Thanks to that, creators could initiate a sophisticated play with artistic, social or religious conventions, which often provoked outrage and scandal among the audience. Barańczak's book is also close to these characteristics of contrafactum, since, while maintaining the appearance of a contemporary paraphrase submissive towards the original<sup>42</sup>, it firstly questions various stereotypes regarding the approach to old works (including the inviolability of their character) and, secondly, while treating Schubert's compositions with deference, enters into an ironic dispute with Müller's romantic poetry and, in a sense, with the very spirit of Romanticism (which, after one hundred and fifty years, still remains disturbingly alive in the general reception of literature). As Marcin Poprawski (2008) remarked: 'The *Winter Journey* carries Schubert's music from the sphere of the *profane* into the *sacred*, as Barańczak's poems clearly reveal the key tone of prayer which is almost absent in Müller'<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, it might be rightly pointed out that we can understand the question conversely: Schubert's music, treated by connoisseurs as sacred, is broken up by the 'deletion' of the German text and undergoes a particular form of desecration.

Obviously, *The Piano Teacher* is not a contrafactum in this sense (although the film as a text of culture undoubtedly constitutes a system of signs, which makes such a procedure possible)<sup>44</sup>. However, the intersemiotic character of Haneke's work stems from the use of its elements. The film applies certain the features of contrafactum: a change in tone, a multi-level dialogue with the original or, finally, an indecent nature aimed against social rules, which entails a scandalous aura. In the case of *The Piano Teacher*, such aura arose

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<sup>42</sup> '[Barańczak] spreads various thematic allusions throughout the entire cycle, making them a reference which generally matches the atmosphere and mood of Müller's cycle' (Poprawski 2008).

<sup>43</sup> 'This compatibility is easily discernible, but only superficial at the same time: lined with Barańczak's irony, polemics, protest and low evaluation of Müller's poetry! And the similarities by no means serve acceptance here' (Poprawski 2008).

<sup>44</sup> 'Cinematography, like other arts, is a specific system of signs' (Eichenbaum 1972: 60).

around the heroine's obscene preferences and behaviors, the assessment of which – prevalent in the spontaneous reactions by the audience<sup>45</sup>, as well as in numerous reviews and discussions by critics<sup>46</sup> – firstly, pushed the other problems raised by the film into the background and, secondly, led the discussion in the direction of stereotypic culture/nature, human/animal dichotomy<sup>47</sup>.

Expressions of indignation or the eagerly moralizing tone of numerous reviews indicate that the provocative and subversive properties of the contrafactum have been captured (or preserved) particularly well in *The Piano Teacher*. Although the defense of the film and justification of the drastic scenes could be left to the director himself, it is definitely better to look for the explanation inside, not outside the film and let the work defend itself. This is precisely what will happen if, above all, we look at (and listen to) *The Piano Teacher* as a purposeful encounter of two systems of signs or 'overwriting' contemporary cinema images and an extremely drastic history on the music created a century and a half earlier. Such a look allows to see in the film not a picture of pathological relationships – within a family and between a man and a woman – set against the background of oppressive Austrian bourgeoisie (there are significant differences between the film, displaying peculiar understanding<sup>48</sup> even for the worst features of its characters, and Elfriede Jelinek's novel, full of accusatory fury) and not a melodramatic story in obscene realities (although, if indeed it is obscene in the sense proposed by Jean Baudrillard [1990], it casts a significant light

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<sup>45</sup> 'He is sick! – I heard after the festival screening' (Sobolewski 2009). 'To shock the audience and get them interested in the problem, he decided not to avoid obscenity and show Erika's sadomasochistic inclination with the necessary explicitness' (Wolanin 2009).

<sup>46</sup> 'But this is not a refinement, this is a descent into the gutter!' (Kałużyński, Raczek 2001).

<sup>47</sup> 'This is the heroine's problem: the gap between culture, which is her world, and animality, beasthood, hideosity of sex. (...) This is a conflict between the spiritual and the animal part of the human being. Because man is a monster, Sir' (Kałużyński, Raczek 2001).

<sup>48</sup> 'He is sick!' heard by Tadeusz Sobolewski in the cinema hall is, in a way, due to Haneke's approach, far from moral judgment.

into the darkness of the souls of the film characters<sup>49</sup>). Instead, Haneke shows, first of all, a story of revealing the individual human truth which encounters social resistance (especially if the truth in questions concerns a woman) – regardless of whether we are in the nineteenth-century Vienna or in contemporary liberal Europe.

The use of music from two centuries ago and the strangely ‘contrafactual’ adding a new, deliberately drastic and shocking story, shows that Erika’s truth is subsequently disapproved by her mother (treating the woman as if she were a teenager), Walter (who reacts to Erika’s bold exposure with aggression and contempt) and finally the viewers themselves (hence a well-based question whether they are not – as in the case of *Funny Games* – the actual hero of the film).

A good example of ‘adding’ the fate of Erika to existing musical pieces can be found in the scenes presenting the first two lessons taken by Walter with the new piano professor. At the very beginning, she announces decidedly: ‘You should forget Schubert. Schönberg is all!’, which carries a double meaning: firstly, it is meant to temper the young man’s ‘romantic’ gestures directed towards her, and secondly, to direct her own thoughts onto a more ‘Schönbergian’ track: intellectual, meticulous, neatly and clearly structured – as opposed to ‘Schubertian’ emotional notes, carrying too many associations with his biography and love. However, the attempt to purify their relationship, to bring about the student-teacher order, proves ineffective.

The musical alternative – either Schönberg or Schubert – turns out to be the symbolic core of the film events. Soon afterwards, another turn of action takes place: the first act of intimacy between Erika and Walter in the conservatory toilet. This is one of the key scenes of the film, with high emotional intensity<sup>50</sup> (the frame with the compulsive kiss on the floor was selected for the poster promoting the film). Walter seeks a ‘normal’ sexual contact, but Erika cannot overcome her qualms and yields to emotions

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Obscenity (...) contains an element of transgression, provocation, or perversion. It plays on repression, with fantasies of violence’ (Baudrillard 1990: 29).

<sup>50</sup> ‘Awareness of a crippled fate, hidden cynicism and lonely consumption of sexual turn-on, explodes in the film several times, working like dynamite’ (Arata 2011).



typical in such a situation, one could say: ‘Schubertian’ (with the whole romantic baggage of stereotypes following Schubert’s music), which remain within the circle of the socially accepted ‘sexual tonality’<sup>51</sup>. The woman has been reprogrammed (through the prolonged practice of perverse acts) to an extremely sophisticated mode of sexual experience, associated with control, pain, domination, beyond the well-established ‘tonality’ of erotic relationships – and, therefore, ‘Schönbergian’ (Schönberg being one of the precursors of atonality in music)<sup>52</sup>.

In the famous scene from *The Piano Teacher*, we witness therefore, not only an unsuccessful undressing date by the engineering school student (‘since the recital (...) I’ve had you stuck in my mind like a nut on a bolt. I apologize for being so technical’) with a music teacher, immersed in the world of piano masterpieces (with no antidote in the form of a fulfilled performing career)<sup>53</sup>, but also a symbolic encounter of the socially accepted cultural tradition with the avant-garde, revealing its ‘perturbing’ power.

During Walter’s second lesson with Erika – already after the event in the toilet, yet still before any verbal codification of their relationship – against the background of lyrical sounds of the *Andantino* from Schubert’s *Sonata* in A major (thus Schönberg lost the symbolic duel), we observe Erika’s struggle with her desires. She fights, trying to brace herself on her expert knowledge (‘Schubert’s dynamics range from scream to whisper’), as well as the music-driven intuition in digging every recess of the composers’ souls (‘Brahms would say: *con intimissimo sentimento*’). She also possesses another kind of weapon: scorn supported by knowledge (‘Schubert was quite ugly.

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Tonality, tonal music: a term describing the harmonic conventions of most Western music (...) from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Tonal music is music organized around a center, called the »tonic«, and the scale of which the tonic is the principal tone. Also known as »functional harmony« and »common-practice harmony«’ (Cox, Warner 2004: 416).

<sup>52</sup> ‘Atonality, atonal music: describes a wide range of compositional styles that do not rely on the conventions of tonal harmony and, specifically, do not organize pitches around a tonal center’ (Cox, Warner 2004: 408).

<sup>53</sup> ‘Or maybe, Sir, what she searches in sex is the degree of sophistication that she achieves in art, in music? Maybe she is incapable of having ordinary sex – I love you, kiss me, let’s go to bed’ (Kałużyński, Raczek 2001).

Did you know? With your looks, nothing can ever hurt you'). In the end, however, Erika gives Walter a meticulous list of her erotic wishes (it is, in fact, a shocking catalog of sadomasochistic practices), which the young man is not supposed to open until he is alone. In this way of playing out the game of love, Erika Kohut's two personalities meet again. One of them is a lecturer at a conservatory, buried in the catalogs of opuses, strictly respected musical tempos and moods (*allegro, largo, cantabile*), while the other is a pornography fan with her tireless cataloguing of human sexual behaviors, so that every desire can be put on the appropriate shelf in the shop (BDSM, pissing, dogging). Erika transfers the characteristics of both her personalities to the intimate relationship with Walter, giving him a list as precise as the notes in a score and as bulleted as a commercial order. At the end of this scene, Erika orders: 'Now, get stuck in to Schubert. That's all you may do in this room', while Walter returns to the *Andantino*, the subtle melody of which is contrasted with the envelope containing her secret desires, observed by the camera.

Interestingly, it is the last moment when music in *The Piano Teacher* engages so effectively in the narration of the film – until erotic intimacy takes place – and then, when the events already roll by force of emotional inertia (towards the defeat of the heroine, the appearance of Walter's different face and the crash of their affection), the compositions withdraw to the background of the events. The last scene of the film (another static take) is accompanied only by the noise of street traffic surrounding the Viennese conservatory.

Michael Haneke will tell us why the music stops in another film.

### 3. AMOUR, OR WHY THE MUSIC STOPS

An even longer static take, devoid of music, opens the film *Amour*. For a few minutes, the camera watches the audience waiting for a piano recital in a philharmonic, and the couple of the main characters – though played by well-known, well-recognizable actors – may not be spotted by the viewer at all at the first watching of the film. Such a way of putting the viewer's patience to the test is typical of Haneke: the wide-angle take simulates the director's absence and the camera gives an impression of being permanently installed in front of the audience. The case is the same for the audio layer, filled with natural rustles, taps, snatches of voices, the prolonged presence of which

(definitely above the commercial film measure) makes the first chords of Franz Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 1 in C Minor sound even more clearly.

Initially, the *Impromptu* sounds in a diegetic reality: listened by the audience during a concert. The characteristic theme at the beginning of the piece (catchy even to an ear not necessarily armed with musical knowledge) proves itself perfectly as the film's opening theme. After the 'anti-romantic' noise in the prologue, we listen to the 'romantic' melody announcing the further course of action. This also carries a deeper meaning, because – as we remember – in the first take the camera does not 'notice' the protagonists at all: they are just a statistical couple in the crowd (two occupied chairs in the room, two tickets purchased, two items in the box office report after the concert), and only the following events will subsequently present Anne and Georges in an ever-closer perspective – until it reaches its most personal, most intimate level.

This intimacy is related to the reality inside the film (for two hours, we will be watching closely Anne's progressing severe illness of, which leaves her with the right part of her body paralyzed after a stroke and her gradual psychological and physical degradation, but also the Georges's daily sacrifice, who, in spite of his advanced age, keeps looking after his wife), and contexts beyond the film as well. *Amour*, in fact, has been inspired by the fate of the director's 92-year-old aunt who, suffering from an incurable disease, kept asking others to take her life away<sup>54</sup>. Haneke's emotional involvement is confirmed by the fact that some of the furniture and paintings from the couple's Parisian apartment are the director's private property, while the apartment itself is modelled, sometimes with meticulous precision, after his parents' place. Although, of course, the translation of life into a work of art is not that simple<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> 'I told her I could not help her, because firstly, I would go to prison, and secondly, I would not be able to do it – says the director. – Then my aunt tried to commit suicide, but I took her to hospital soon enough. She was angry at me. Why did you do this to me? – she kept asking. Two years later she managed to take her own life. *Amour* is a film for her'. [www.canalplus.pl/film/news-michael-haneke-dedykuje-milosc-ciotce\\_40195](http://www.canalplus.pl/film/news-michael-haneke-dedykuje-milosc-ciotce_40195) (accessed: 30.05.2019).

<sup>55</sup> 'He did not hide that *Amour* was inspired by events from his own life. But although he recreated the apartment belonging to his parents (with details

Nonetheless, Schubert's piano theme opening *Amour* reaches not only into the protagonists' future, but also into their past. First, we find the already familiar solution with the editing cut in the image layer, without interrupting the sound: the *Impromptu* in C minor from the concert goes on, although the characters are returning home, and the phrases of the piano are seamlessly harmonized with the swinging of the bus and the movement of passengers' silhouettes. The stage is edited with similar dexterity as the one from *The Piano Teacher* where Schubert's *Andante* rehearsed at the conservatory accompanies the heroine later in the sex shop, only here it is used much more discreetly, without radically metaphorical ambitions, even though it is just as important for the film. In a few moments, we are suggested how deeply can music be rooted in the consciousness of both Anna and Georges and what an important role it will play in further events.

After they return home, the piece played at the concert still absorbs the characters' attention, although, from the viewer's point of view, it no longer exists in its auditory form (the film reenters the sphere of reality and we can hear, with details, the sounds of home bustle). Between the banal taking off her coat and doing something in the kitchen, Anne says with clear excitement in her voice: 'Weren't those semiquavers in the *presto* incredible? Don't you agree?' (thanks to this we find out that the characters are not just a two elderly music lovers, but they have much more to do with music), to which Georges responds with a question – a rhetorical one, noticing the enthusiasm in his wife's voice – 'You're proud of him, huh?' (which reveals a bond between Anne and the young pianist at the concert). Just like in *The Piano Teacher*, we can observe how Haneke narrates through music in two ways: first, by means of its 'physical' presence, its audibility for the viewer, and secondly, by means of various contexts related to the pieces, which can be placed in the sphere of images, dialogues, or even conjecture – trusting the viewer's cultural knowledge.

On the other hand, there is also a significant difference: the first conversation about music in *The Piano Teacher* – when Erika tells Walter about the fate of Schumann, referring to his own experiences – carries

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like furniture from the 1950s, a stereo set from the 1960s) in the Paris studio, he emphasizes that he is not addressing experiences related to their passing away' (Sadowska 2012a).

a baggage of 'romantic' contexts (contained in the words: 'losing his mind', 'being completely abandoned', 'to lose oneself' and, finally, 'the twilight of the mind') which, as we know, are to be 'reproduced' in the 'here and now' of the film: the dramatic romance which the heroes will soon initiate. Conversely, the first conversation about music in *Amour* does not refer to the romantic roots of Schubert's work at all (we hear the words 'semiquavers' and '*presto*', their dry technical and executive aspect being counterbalanced with the emotional word 'incredible') and takes place not during a talk, sparkling with mutual fascination, between an erotomaniac and a handsome student, but in a stale dwelling of an elderly bourgeois couple.

Not less significantly, in *The Piano Teacher*, after the scene of the home recital where we hear Bach played on two pianos, the music takes over the narrative with increasing audacity, resounding frequently and assisting the development of the action, especially during the first hour of the film. Conversely, in *Amour*, after Schubert's *Impromptu* played at the beginning, the music goes silent for nearly an hour: almost half of the film.

The music stops, it does not mean, however, that the director relieves it from its narrative duties. The effect of music, as a result of its physical, auditory 'absence', becomes more discreet, subtler, distanced from cinematic schemes (just like love mentioned in the title turns out to be far removed from common ideas). It appears, for example, in the form of objects (stereo equipment placed in such a way that it becomes a natural background for several key scenes in the film, or the book about conductor Nicolas Harnoncourt who, in the 1960s, – thus, in the years of both heroes' creative youth! – revolutionized the thinking about music). Even the fact that the part of Anne's student is played by an authentic pianist, Alexandre Tharaud, may have a metaphoric meaning when we know that it is Tharaud who recorded the pieces for the soundtrack of *Amour*. And the soundtrack is a special one, because – unlike in commercial productions – the album does not contain entire tracks, but their snippets: exactly as we hear them during the screening<sup>56</sup>. This is a case of consciously ruined joy of listening, so that

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<sup>56</sup> 'Whoever buys a soundtrack for Michael Haneke's *Amour* before watching the film, may have an impression of a funny mistake having occurred in the director's approach to music. The point is not that the list of works is incomplete, because we

the experience of the suddenly stopping music – which fails to disappear from our head at that moment – can also be achieved after returning home from the cinema. Then, it turns out that we are close to Carl Dahlhaus's reflections on phenomenological aspects of the duration and reception of music, as well as his conviction – important from the point of view of the present work – of the multilevel nature of music, resulting in multilevel reception and interpretation<sup>57</sup>. The title originally invented by Michael Haneke for the film – *The Music Stops* – has consequences which go far beyond the story.

So do also certain musical threads in *Amour*, which seem to refer to the events from the director's previous films (showing similar situations or states, although in a slightly different light). For example, when Anne and Georges are visited by their daughter Eva, we hear – as part of a story of a *tour* during which she and her husband perform John Dowland's music – a story of artistic and erotic perturbations in their relationship. The story of the husband's stormy affair with a violinist, ending in the mistress's attempted suicide, can be perceived as a shadow of the chronicle of amorous accidents from *The Piano Teacher* (the more so as it is Isabelle Huppert that the director cast in the role of Eva; a question arises: to which extent is it Haneke's typical irony?). Meanwhile, Georges listens to his daughter's story with stoic calm, as far from being surprised or outraged by such a turn of events in the 'artistic' marriage as from any moral evaluation.

We know that Eva is a musician too, nonetheless, besides that, her relationship with her parents (specifically with Georges as Anne is already ill and bed-ridden) is rather cold, full of subdued distance instead of spontaneous cordiality. Many critics, as if still longing for the 'old' Haneke,

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find both Schubert and the selection of Beethoven's bagatelles here. Yet, after a short time of playing, each piece in the album is interrupted with a sudden cut or with the words »Turn it off«. (In the working version, the film was entitled *The Music Stops*)' (Gilbey 2012).

<sup>57</sup> 'Dahlhaus also reflects upon the problem of music as an auditive phenomenon, passing in time, considered in the categories of phenomenology. This includes engaging in a critical discussion with Roman Ingarden's concept, undermining his thesis of the single-layer structure of music and claiming that »Just as fruitless an attempt to count the layers is, it cannot be denied that the sentence about single-layeredness is wrong«' (Jarzębska 2009).

present it as a proof that the director's 'claw' of social criticism has not gone blunt<sup>58</sup> and that his passion for revealing bourgeois hypocrisy has not died out<sup>59</sup> but, in the father's conversation with his daughter, we can also see the opposite: trust hidden behind the distance (the same as in the relationship between Georges and Anne), which results in honesty and calm openness<sup>60</sup> – i.e. a relationship opposite to the nature of Erika's relationship with her mother in *the Piano Teacher*. The director showed those two characters ruthlessly and sharply, in a completely different way than Eva and her father are portrayed in *Amour*<sup>61</sup> It is, perhaps, because Haneke looks at her with the eyes of Georges who, in turn, looks at his daughter with the wise eyes of Jean-Louis Trintignant (whose influence on the form of the film went far beyond just great acting)<sup>62</sup>, sitting in a chair behind which stands an old-fashioned, though high-quality music player set.

The set, composed of a CD player, turntable and amplifier (with characteristic needle indicators showing the dynamics) is in fact one of the main characters in the film: its advanced age (it comes from the 1960s) proves that it remembers the heroes' youth, and thus the flowering of their

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<sup>58</sup> 'The daughter of the elderly couple no longer knows the art of proper behavior, either. When she comes to see her parents (which does not happen frequently), she marks her presence with outbursts of narcissistic suffering. She strives to shock her tired father with a face full of reproach, swollen from tears' (Świrek 2012).

<sup>59</sup> 'I think about the moments in which I can sense most falsehood: about the relationships with the daughter typical of Haneke's style: cold and formal, saturated with alienness and kept within the strict framework of the convention with a semblance of mutual openness' (Sadowska 2012a).

<sup>60</sup> 'In a nice way, Haneke makes it clear at the very beginning how important physical closeness used to be in their lives: the daughter mentions the sounds from the parents' bedroom in a conversation with her father'. (Frankowska 2012).

<sup>61</sup> 'The daughter – pressing her father for a »serious talk« about her mother's health and, at the same time, significantly silent after his ironic question: »So, are you taking Mom to your place?«. It is a measure of this outstanding film's great humility that Haneke is not tempted to criticize Eva for her inability to give real aid' (Oleszczyk 2013).

<sup>62</sup> 'It was Trintignant who invented the title. The director fulfilled the request by the actor for whom – as he declares – he invented the part of Georges' (Frankowska 2012).

love (mentioned by their daughter) and their careers as musicians (perhaps not only teachers). On the other hand, the fact that it is still working allows using it to intertwine old-time and contemporary threads, past and present, memory and reality. This was excellently used in the scene when Alexander sends a disc with recordings to his teacher. The album begins with Schubert's *Impromptu* in C minor which we already know; however, after the first few phrases on the piano, Anne firmly says to Georges: 'Turn it off!'

This scene is, perhaps, the key to the whole film. Perhaps the point is that, when turning the recording on, Georges began reading a letter from Alexander, in which he writes about his compassion for Anne's terrible illness – and the woman did not want to combine those two orders, she wanted to devote herself entirely to music and memories related to it. Perhaps the point is that the sounds of a well-known composition (probably it was the teacher who had first presented it to her pupil) made Anne realize that, in her state (a stroke resulting in a paralysis of the right side of the body), she was, actually, no longer the same person who used to play it on the piano. Another reason can be the poignancy and penetrating power of music which touches us deeper than words or physical suffering ever could. In the film, anyway, what matters more than music – which sounds only for a moment – is its sudden stop and the take following it (a model example of the effect described by Siegfried Kracauer [2008] as 'silence charged with tension'<sup>63</sup>). The take – long and static, obviously – shows Anne and Georges sitting still with the CD player turned off. They are both very old.

Schubert's piece, suddenly going silent, appears more or less in the middle of the film (which may also suggest it plays the role of the film's axis), yet, the return of music as a physically present musical narrator takes place a few minutes earlier, on the occasion of a visit that Alexander pays to Anne and Georges. The artist, more or less the same age as the young hero of *The Piano Teacher*, loves Franz Schubert's music just like Walter does ('My whole life revolves around Schubert at the moment'), but although he speaks about it with some exaltation, he has more humility ('I'm developing the sonatas. Not the late ones, I think I still need a couple more years for those'). Like most late works by great masters (e.g. *Die Kunst der Fuge* by Bach or Beethoven's last

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<sup>63</sup> 'The effect is increased when the music suddenly breaks off at the moment of the greatest tension, leaving us alone with the image' (Kracauer 2008).



*String Quartets*), also Schubert's late sonatas are held in exceptional esteem both as extraordinarily mature musical works and philosophical meditations on the essence of music and human life; therefore, it is downright improper for a young, barely debuting artist to engage in them. As if to confirm this rule, Anne asks Alexander to play the piece he performed during a lesson with her when he was a twelve-year-old boy: the *Bagatelle* in D minor by Ludwig van Beethoven.

This relatively simple, cheerful composition performs two functions in the film narration. Firstly, it allows Anne to make a journey in time to when she was still full of vital and artistic strength and, secondly, the piece with its lightness and unpretentiousness removes from the whole scene the burden which would be undoubtedly emphasized by any 'later' piece by Beethoven or Schubert, philosophically brooding on existence. Meanwhile, Haneke plays out Anne's drama differently: the sound of the piano in Beethoven's *Bagatelle* smoothly transitions into the hum of an electric wheelchair, which the woman is learning to drive in the following scene, and the editing of the takes is intentionally a fraction of a second late in relation to music. After a while, the same operation – interweaving sounds from the order of art and order of life, the smooth transition of what is artistically elevated into what is trivially mundane – is repeated, only in the opposite direction, and the noise of the wheelchair in the corridor of the apartment turns into the sound of the piano which Georges plays, sitting alone in the living room. However, the phrases played are completely different: instead of the vigorous *Bagatelle*, we hear a piano rework of Johann Sebastian Bach's serious and reflective choral prelude *Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesus Christ*.

The title 'I call to You, Lord Jesus Christ' says much about the mood and message of the composition, while the fact that it is played by Georges – who displays no signs of religious faith throughout the film – testifies to the depth of Bach's rooting in culture and to the very unobvious position which Haneke's film takes towards the Christian religion and its ideas. To understand the ambiguity of this scene, we need to arm ourselves with the knowledge of the film's ending in which Georges, in the face of Anne's complete collapse (the woman confined to bed loses contact with the world and stops eating), smothers his wife with a pillow. After the murder, Georges arranges for Anne a symbolic funeral ceremony, poignant in its intimacy, after which he lays down on the bed to commit suicide, spread over time, by

starvation. While observing those acts (full of quiet methodical action rather than expressive drama, except for the pillow scene), we should have in mind one of the scenes, taking place immediately after Anne's illness is diagnosed, when she asks her husband not to leave her in case of deterioration (i.e. not to put her in a hospice, for instance) as, in that context, Georges' deeds gain the dimension of a kept promise. Not only the one from the beginning of the film, but also the much earlier one, from the time before the film events – about fidelity and not leaving till death did them part.

Let us now get back to Bach's chorale prelude and the religious thread in the film. If we discard extreme interpretations – both allegations of radical anti-religiousness (mainly rather superficial accusations<sup>64</sup> frequently using the ideologically marked word 'euthanasia'), as well as overeager connotations with Christian symbolism (like the one connecting the pigeon and the 'religious compass', mentioned in the introduction to the present work), we still have quite a large 'in-between' area left to contemplate. What seems the most intriguing in it are the suggested traces of strong and mysterious ties between religion and art (which, in a way, took on the former responsibilities of theology and religious philosophy<sup>65</sup>), as well as observations about love, in which the Christian aspect can be seen from a completely non-doctrinal side<sup>66</sup>. The essence does not lie in whether that

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<sup>64</sup> 'In terms of form and means of artistic production, Michael Haneke's film *Amour* is very simple. In the emotional sphere, it is torture. In the sphere of the message – a real bomb that should be called anti-Christian to the bone' (Gociek 2012).

<sup>65</sup> 'I do not intend to prove that Haneke takes up theological content in his film; even if some people find them, the artist probably did not place them there. However, he practices art at such a high level, searches so uncompromisingly for the truth about man, that the most important issues of a philosophical or theological nature appear in his works in an autonomous manner. They are not, however, an interpretation of a particular religious doctrine or philosophical current' (Jabłońska, Luter 2012).

<sup>66</sup> 'His *Amour* is a bold proposal to step into the very centre of love, which means... into a wound. Because »True love – as Wiesław Myśliwski says in *Traktat o łuskaniu fasoli* [A *Treatise on Shelling Beans*] – is a wound. You can only find it inside yourself when someone else's pain hurts you as your own«. Perhaps, then, there is a justification for the hope that if someone's pain hurts me like it hurts

was the original intention by Michael Haneke (who tends to stall journalists asking about metaphysical aspects in his films<sup>67</sup>, without denying, in the least, the high aspirations of music<sup>68</sup> in them), but in the fact that the use of Bach's choral prelude (like, earlier, Schubert's *Winter Journey*) moves the film into such a wide sphere of contexts, onto a chessboard with so many figures of cultural tropes and topoi that the Austrian director, with all his erudition, would not be able to foresee or consciously compose all of them into the film game.

At least as important as the very use of *Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesus Christ* in the film, is the way in which the piece influences the development of events. Ferruccio Busoni's piano transcription of Bach's piece (composed for organ) is often used in musical education, so Georges, perhaps, used to play it in professional situations; this time, the circumstances are quite different, though. That may affect his performance which suddenly stops. We do not know if Georges is embarrassed by the work he has reached for (bearing a strong religious mark), or overwhelmed by sudden desolation – because here has just seen two faces in a musical mirror from ages ago: his own and the terminally ill Anne's. We only know that the piece falls silent. Again, there is 'silence charged with tension', this time, however, the camera – unlike in Siegfried Kracauer's model example – is somewhere else: in Anne's bedroom; she asks him to continue playing. Her call, however, remains unanswered.

There are two levels which make the scene important for the film. The 'metaphysical' one I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and

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the one who suffers, it becomes a sort of a bridge that leads us to each other?' (Jabłońska, Luter 2012).

<sup>67</sup> 'The pigeon is from there, it appears like a mystical ornament hitherto absent in this director's works; like a sign to be interpreted, disturbing for some, irritating for others. Haneke himself, asked about it, answers simply: »There are a lot of pigeons in Paris«' (Sadowska 2012b).

<sup>68</sup> 'Great music transcends suffering beyond specific causes. *Die Winterreise* transcends misery even in the detailed description of misery. All important artworks, especially those concerned with the darker side of experience, despite whatever despair conveyed, transcend the discomfort of the content in the realization of their form' (Sharrett 2003).

the opposite, quite mundane, related to the heroes' prosy everyday life. It seems that, until the illness, it was Anne who had a more active and dominant role in that marriage – a relationship certainly going far beyond house chores and social conventions<sup>69</sup>. This is visible in small details, voice and gestures, but some of these little things combine with the most important motifs of the film – for example, the command to immediately turn off the player with Alexander's CD or a reminder that Georges would take the cloak in the final, metaphorical scene of the film (when both are already dead, which is manifested in the fact that they simply leave the apartment, yet, they leave it as they used to be before the disease appeared). From a moment, however, after Anne's stroke, her husband takes over the right to mental dominance and gradually begins to take the initiative not only in matters directly related to care. Interrupted Bach's chorale despite his wife's protests, may thus be an expression of the husband's emancipation, who was somewhat 'henpecked' earlier, and is becoming more and more aware not only of the seriousness of the current situation (so he takes on more and more responsibility – to the final boundary at the end of the film) but also, looking back, of the nature of the whole fifty-year-long union.

Georges's transformation may be suggested by another key scene in the film. The man listens to Anne sitting opposite him, at the piano, playing Schubert's *Impromptu* in G flat major. The song is full of joyful energy and, therefore, strongly contrasts with the events we have just seen. Nevertheless, suddenly, Georges turns away, turns off the player behind the seat – and then the music stops and his wife disappears. We are left alone for a long while with the man staring at the lonely piano (Jean-Louis Trintignant's bitter face seems to say: no sentimentalism). The scene is expressive and striking but – although it can be compared to the scene with John Zorn's clamor drowning out the respectable classical piece in *Funny Games* and with Schubert's *Andantino*, moved by the heroine of *The Piano Teacher* from the sophistication of the conservatory into the vulgar realities of the sex shop – it has been shot with such suggestive moderation and poignant

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<sup>69</sup> 'They are like one organism, which can be seen as soon as they appear in the frame. For the first time, we see them in a distant plan in the philharmonic. They sit in the crowd, in the audience, yet they do stand out. There is no doubt that they are together, even when they are not looking at each other' (Frankowska 2012)

laconicism of the means of expression that we remain with an impression that it is not only Georges who has changed. So has Haneke himself<sup>70</sup>.

Besides the basic meanings (brilliantly captured functioning of the mechanisms of memory or the expression of the ‘anti-melancholic’ message of Haneke’s film), Schubert’s *Impromptu* suddenly falling silent can be seen as a proof that it is Georges who now has initiative or even power in the home<sup>71</sup>. And he plucks up courage to stop his wife’s play. It is too late to actually do it in the real world – where Anne no longer moves out of bed, plunged in delirium – so Georges imagines her against the background of the playing disc. It is difficult to judge whether the turning off of the player by Georges is more an expression of taking over the power (not so much over Anne as over the merciless memory) or, more modestly, a declaration of independence (again: not from the other person, but from his own melancholy). However, it can be assumed that the firm gesture fits not only inside the reality of the film – it is also a gesture towards the viewer who, while the music was played, did not realize they were watching only the imaginary Anna at the piano. The sudden silence is like a violent dispelling of illusion. Unmasking of both film heroes’ and cinema viewers’ fantasies and illusions has always been Haneke’s *spécialité de la maison*, although he rarely did it in such an artistically sophisticated way<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> ‘A specific feature of Haneke’s previous films was their explicitness, turning into a kind of attractiveness. (...) In *Amour*, Haneke only once allows himself a scene meant to trigger a predefined reaction of the viewer. At the end of the film, we watch Anne play the piano. A few seconds later, the camera shows Georges, who is sitting in the same room, watching his wife. After a moment, the man turns off the player behind him, and the music stops immediately. Such a simple scene, cumulating emotions, yet still testifies to the Austrian director’s extraordinary skillfulness – devoid of sentimentality, is much more impressive than a thousand images of slow agony which could be used to represent the story’ (Fortuna 2012).

<sup>71</sup> ‘Of all the love relationships in his films, this one seems to be the most »human«, devoid of egoism, based on mutual devotion. But something dark is creeping in here too. Isn’t there something secretly sadistic in Georges’ sacrifice? Some cruel surplus? By refusing to place Anna in a hospice (...), he makes her fully dependent on his help and care. Anna is in his power’ (Majmurek 2012).

<sup>72</sup> ‘I do not know if *Amour* is Haneke’s best film, but it is definitely the subtlest of them’ (Fortuna 2012).

The interpretative gates which the musical narrative leaves in *Amour* are contained in understatements and suggestions. This is because the film – unlike even *The Piano Teacher* – is based on a play of contrasts between music and silence, on the dialectics of sound and silence (according to Carl Dahlhaus, extremely important for music<sup>73</sup>), which Haneke deftly placed in common realities. It allows the viewer (as the plot itself is truly ‘simple’) to probe the subsequent meanings both ‘inside’ the story being told (in the events and heroes’ behaviors), and ‘outside’ it, in the cultural tropes found.

As for the latter, meta-film sphere, it is particularly interesting that the same chorale prelude *Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesus Christ* by Bach was used by Andrei Tarkovsky in his film *Solaris*, based on Stanisław Lem’s novel. The first association is a tribute to the Russian director whose approach to editing music in the film (its ‘natural’ presence – as a sound from the world, the content essence of events, and not their formal framework) certainly influenced Haneke.

However, when we look at both films more closely, it turns out that both share the key motif of loss of a loved one (in *Solaris* it has already happened: astronaut Kelvin travels to an alien planet after the death of his wife Harey, while in *Amour* it is happening before our eyes) and their – supernatural – return. In Tarkovsky’s film, Harey’s resurrection or, in fact, her carnal hologram, is owed to the ocean which occupies the entire planet Solaris and evinces quite deific abilities. In Haneke’s work, Anne’s ‘resurrection’ happens through Schubert’s music: its subliminal waves have access to Georges’s memory and imagination. Interestingly, neither Kelvin nor Georges accepts such a solution: they destroy what seems to be the salvation from death: the phantasms of Harey and Anne planted to them. They both know that their beloved ones, seized from the embrace of death, are dummies, products of longing and memories, not real women. Death irreversibly confirmed the truth of their lives. This is precisely where Bach appears with all the Christian background and its central figure: Jesus Christ, who died to live. In *Solaris*, Kelvin says: ‘You love that which you can lose’; in *Amour*, Georges turns off the music to make the false Anne disappear.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘The keynote of all his considerations was the deep conviction that we only see a specific problem when it is presented in opposites’ (Jarzębska 2009).

Bach's chorale prelude appears in various places of Tarkovsky's film, even as a background for credits, and is played in its original arrangement for a pipe organ, thus it sounds dignified and lofty, tightly filling the space. The impression of tightness is enhanced by the suggestive arrangement by Eduard Artemiev in which electronic sound effects create the background for the organ. Their specific thickening evokes an atmosphere of a metaphysical mystery (additionally enhanced by the camerawork, especially in the scenes when the main character returns to the house by the pond and familiar terrestrial landscapes seem to drop the mask of reality and enter the symbolic sphere), which helps to see theological or even Gnostic tropes in Tarkovsky's work. While it is true that such motifs can be found in Lem's novel as well<sup>74</sup>, the writer's style in *Solaris*, despite the science-fiction convention, is closer to the style of a psychological novel. However, Tarkovsky's use of Bach's chorale – moreover, in Artemiev's version, processed for a 'mystical' sound – is not only a radical breakup with Lem's convention (incidentally, the list of the Polish writer's allegations against the Russian director was long), but also the abandonment of modest psychological realism – even in the face of the 'miracles' worked by the Solarian ocean – in favor of sublime spirituality.

Against such background, the piano adaptation of Bach's chorale in Haneke's film turns out to be all the more discreet and the fact that the sounds do not come from off-camera but – in the ephemeral, fragile form – from under the hero's fingers, testifies both to the completely different position of the film towards the religious and philosophical tradition and to a difference in the language chosen by the Austrian director.

Haneke seems to be paying homage to Tarkovsky, however, he is questioning his work. Apparently, in *Amour* he does not reach such sublimation of spiritual experiences as the Russian director but, in fact, he

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<sup>74</sup> 'So how does the Solarian Ocean reappear to them? As a germ of a handicapped or crippled God whose possibilities and abilities overwhelm his consciousness and rationality. Or as a God of great potential, but the psyche of a small child; a child who meets all the conditions to grow up. We can see, then, that the new understanding of the Ocean has already exceeded the strictly scientific scheme. It is conceived rather as a being from two paradigms: the natural and the theological one at the same time' (Dobkowski 2001).

may be going even further, where the arbitrary tone of truths of faith or epoch-making works of art falls silent in the face of an individual, humble human truth. In *Amour*, Bach's choral prelude tells us the same thing as in *Solaris* and, at the same time, thanks to significant directing corrections, it speaks from another source, in a different language.

This language is also spoken by the music in the scene in which it obtains a poignantly human dimension: when Georges sings the song *Sur le Pont d'Avignon* with his wife. The voice of the dementia-ridden, aphasic woman can barely capture the melody of the song, breaking in an almost literal sense, and yet we can see, for the last time, a flash of joy on Anne's face. This is her last touch with reality: the melody of a children's song about dancing on the bridge, which – just like human life – stops short in the middle of the river<sup>75</sup>.

After the scene of singing, half an hour still remains to the end of the film. Still, neither Schubert nor Beethoven will be heard any more. The piano in the living room and the old-fashioned *hi-fi* set behind the armchair will be silent. Michael Haneke involuntarily and strictly follows Krzysztof Komeda's *creed* according to which there should rather be too little music in the film than too much. The children's song is the last thing music has to say in *Amour*.

## EPILOGUE: ON RECIPROCITY

*now that the interior surrounds us  
like the most practiced of distances*

Rainer Maria Rilke, *To Music* (transl. S. Horton)

According to my analysis, music in Michael Haneke's films can be considered in three basic contexts. These are:

1. Connections of music with the events and ideas presented in the film.
2. Connections of music in different films by the Austrian director.

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<sup>75</sup> Pont Saint-Bénézet (Eng. Bridge of Saint Benedict), also known as the Pont d'Avignon – a medieval bridge over the Rhône river in Avignon (Provence, France), preserved partially. Tradition has it that the bridge was not completed and never reached the other bank.



### 3. Connections between music in Haneke's films and music in works by other directors.

In each of the films I have developed on, these three kinds of connections can be found in varying degrees, yet they always expand the interpretation framework and inspire the viewer to an active, intellectually engaged reception of the work. Observing the changes in the use of the works between individual films, one can conclude that the director himself has been inspired, through music (which has accompanied him since childhood and was his first educational choice)<sup>76</sup>, to change his style or approach to the film matter, including the compositions used, throughout his career<sup>77</sup>. These changes are visible at all three levels of the presence of music in his films. Let us summarize them briefly.

When it comes to the relationship between music and the film in which we hear it, in *Funny Games* music was conceived as a kind of overture (announcing the course of events, concisely portraying the characters and suggesting important introductory assumptions). In *The Piano Teacher*, it accompanies, closely and persistently, the development of events (for which it is either an extra comment or a counterpoint allowing the viewer a different view) and vigilantly assists the characters (deepening the insight into their motivations and actions). In *Amour*, in turn, it remains constantly present in the film, yet, it's presence is quite special: less 'bodily', i.e. through the sound being heard (which very often falls silent), and more 'spiritual': as silence after a stopped sound (turning out to be a very significant silence).

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<sup>76</sup> 'I always wanted to be a musician, preferably a composer or conductor. I did not have enough talent though' (Felis 2013).

<sup>77</sup> 'You can see that, for some time, he [Haneke – M.W.] has been looking for new means of expression, afraid that his style will otherwise solidify into a mannerism. It was already very visible in the *White Ribbon*. *Amour* is Haneke's most »classic« film. There are no »strategic viewer-confusing« techniques known from his previous works. From the beginning, the camera clearly outlines the action space (a bourgeois apartment) and precisely describes the characters. There is a prevalence of static takes shot without camera motion, shot-countershot editing, means which allow the actors, the characters they impersonate and their emotions to »resound«' (Majmurek 2012).

As far as the relations between the three films are concerned, it is clearly visible from the perspective of music how Haneke changes his approach to the film created (at the level of narrative history, as well as insight into the characters' psyche), abandoning the excess of arbitrariness and director's power. While the music at the beginning of *Funny Games* – the security built by Handel and Mascagni and abruptly ruined by John Zorn – results in a rapid course of the subsequent action and, in a way, 'toughens' the customs (of the murderers-heroes and the director abusing the viewer alike), the music in *The Piano Teacher* – like Schubert's *Andantino*, accompanying the heroine in a porn cabin – softens both the course of action and the customs. What disappears in the process is also the former haughty look – present in the director's earlier films – of a prosecutor (finding guilt) or a surgeon (finding degeneration)<sup>78</sup>, no longer possible in such a broad field of associations and emotions as the one opened up by the music of Schubert or Chopin. Music contains the 'romantic' matrix of Erika Kohut's behaviors, her personality at odds with life – and, in this sense, music is one of the main heroes of *The Piano Teacher*<sup>79</sup>.

The emancipation of music from the director-demiurge can be seen even more clearly in *Amour* where works by classical composers – as if in contrast or even in a polemic with *The Piano Teacher* – appear much less frequently. Both the ephemeral presence and the ambiguous silence of music in this film suggest transferring the story being told above the dimension of serving any preconceived idea or message<sup>80</sup>. Haneke did not try to 'direct' the natural old age wrinkles on the faces, the hunched silhouettes of Emmanuelle Riva

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<sup>78</sup> 'Haneke always puts himself above his own characters, playing out their deviations, fears or cruelties not to get to know his characters better, but to prove to the viewer that he has long seen through them all – and that he was not mistaken in his grim diagnosis' (Oleszczyk 2009).

<sup>79</sup> 'In Haneke's film, the music is not just an illustration of the plot: it is the real subject of the story' (Arata 2011).

<sup>80</sup> 'Haneke is a master of subliminal insinuation which sometimes swells into questionable historiosophy (like in *White Ribbon*), in *Amour*, however, it serves a sober suggestion that we are watching a couple with their own past, a certain set of memories, wounds and claims provisionally seen off which are a *sine qua non* of any coexistence' (Oleszczyk 2013).

and Jean-Louis Trintignant, nor the presence of Bach's choral prelude. It appears in the physical (or audible) space of the film only for several seconds, yet it 'continues' at a deeper level. The ending of *Amour*, like the final scene of *The Piano Teacher*, has no background music at all, but the two heroes' preparations – after their death already – to leave the apartment, the banal washing of the last dishes to leave things in order, or taking their coats off a hanger, carries a special 'echo of meaning' of the music we heard earlier.

What we 'heard earlier' turns out to be important not only within the film or the director's previous works, but also in the context of the world cinematography classics. Bach's choral prelude in *Amour* is a kind of 'posthumous correspondence' between Michael Haneke and Andrei Tarkovsky, who used the same piece in *Solaris*. As a film, *Solaris* is missed in many aspects of technique and adaptation<sup>81</sup>, which does not change the fact that, knowing the contexts of the use of Bach's composition by Tarkovsky, we can better understand Haneke's motivations: metaphysics 'should' be equally inadmissible in the sci-fi reality of a space station and the apartment of the heroes of *Amour*, typical inhabitants of Western European big cities, agnostics or religiously indifferent people. In addition, Tarkovsky's *Solaris* was filmed under the watchful eye of the Soviet regime, hostile towards religion, which confers on Bach's *Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesus Christ* a metaphorical dimension also beyond the film itself. Hearing the same choral prelude in Haneke's *Amour*, one should keep in mind to which extent this music 'has been through an ordeal'.

Looking for a formal key by which music can penetrate deep into the film, I have pointed out, in the present work, the features bringing *The Piano Teacher* near a contrafactum (i.e. a kind of 'translation' of music into the language of film). They are noticeable when the music follows the characters' thoughts and feelings or the changing dramaturgy of events (just like, for example, in Miloš Forman's *Amadeus*, with its violently

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<sup>81</sup> 'Tarkovsky (...), disregarding Lem's protests, which he reduced to the misunderstanding of the essence of filmmaking and creative transformation, was unable to realize that the on-screen version of *Solaris* means – at the level of staging logic and direct reading – the adapter's intellectual fiasco which could not be remedied by pronouncing adages like »clarity is not the most important thing«' (Garbicz 2000: 488).

glooming ending, after Mozart is commissioned to write the *Requiem*), but also when it introduces elements of contrast and irony (like in Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract*, where the director remains faithful to the realities of the old era while striking them with a pastiche of baroque music composed by Michael Nyman).

This is not the case for *Amour* where the intensity of most of the formal means of expression is reduced and the director turns the brilliance of his skills into discretion (or perhaps he just becomes brilliantly discreet). Music appears here only as an organic element of the film diegesis, interwoven between events, activities, objects so much that none of the works gets an opportunity to resound in a 'satisfactory' way. This strategy of Haneke's interestingly corresponds to Bohdan Pocij's (1994) thesis that, thanks to music, the film approaches its 'nature', which – according to the author – is 'gravitating downwards, towards naturalism, down to the level of (...) pre-art'. For their endearingly natural life, compositions pay with what usually serves to pay for life: with fragile mortality.

We become familiar with the fate of the heroes of *Amour* from the perspective of a camera showing their everyday life up close, but also from the perspective of Beethoven's or Schubert's works which – unlike the camera and the entire cinematic skillset – are neither external to the film history (since they sound 'there' in the Paris apartment or in the characters' memory) nor to the viewer (since they had two centuries to penetrate the cultural and social fabric and 'get into our heads'). What comes from afar, from the history of music, is heard in the cinema viewer's thoughts and emotions, and what the viewer considers as their own, personal, turns out to be present in distant notes, written a long time ago. The Austrian director certainly knows the poem devoted to that topic and written by Austrian poet Rilke.

In the three films I have discussed, Michael Haneke gradually emancipates music from the position of a narrator acting inside the film to the position of a meta-narrator speaking outside of it: in a shared cultural memory and in every viewer's head. Through the use of music, the director enlivens the film story, gives it the naturalness of real life, but also does the opposite: using film art, he enlivens compositions from centuries ago, triggering their creative possibilities and causative power. As Carl Dahlhaus (1988: 283) noted: 'The history of the impact of music (...) is not »external« to the works

themselves, but penetrates their essence, which should, therefore, be understood as historically variable'. Haneke, a would-be musician who happily returns to scores and instruments as a director, knows that well. This fulfilled, cordial reciprocity of music and film art is, perhaps, Michael Haneke's greatest achievement.

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## Summary

The author of the article analyzes the narrative role of music in Michael Haneke's films. In terms of content, three movies are discussed: *Funny Games* (1997), *The Piano Teacher* (2001) and *Amour* (2012). The selection of films was made on the basis of diversified musical plot devices used there. Additionally, these films show how role of music evolve over the years into more profound view inside events horizon, full-bodied commentary to film's action and liberation from optical invigilation of camera. The goal of this paper is to show why narrative resource has crucial impact on artistic weight of Haneke's films. The director renounces interpretation of his films by giving them their own life – the life of the open work. The article rises the argument that music supports the strategy of director. Moreover, it indicates that emancipation of the music entails the emancipation of heroes and diegetic reality.

**Keywords:** Michael Haneke, *Funny Games*, *The Piano Teacher*, *Amour*, film score, film narrative



# CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES AND THEIR ROLE IN CREATIVE ECONOMY

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## INTRODUCTION – THE SUBJECTS OF CREATIVE ECONOMY

Creative economy is the part of the economic system that develops under the dominant influence of culture and its resources. The goods that are created in such economy, which may be defined as creative goods, are characterized by relatively high cultural value, but they also have the ability to generate economic value. This means that they can be purchased and sold on the market. Accordingly, the activities that result in the creation of such goods are called the creative sector, the culture sector, creative industries or culture industries (see: Stachowiak 2015). This is the effect of the economization of culture, advancing since mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which involves associating economic significance with cultural phenomena.

Creative economy is a sphere that comes into existence at the intersection of two parts of the society: economy and culture. The two parts are essentially different, thus the phenomena taking place within them are of dual nature. An artist, from the perspective of culture, is a creator of works of art, which are objects of specific aesthetic and artist value. From the economic perspective - he is an entrepreneur or worker who creates specific goods that are later released on the market and bought by consumers. At the same time, he is an element of the culture of a given society and a part of the economic system. Depending on the situation, he also has other features. Because of this, creative economy is characterized by economic-cultural duality (Stachowiak 2017), which is why elements of the economy may have, depending on the situation, economic or cultural properties.

The subjects that function in creative economy are – regardless of their organizational form – active participants of economic processes, and their decisions and activities have economic effects. The dualistic, economic-cultural nature of creative economy means that those subjects also function in the sphere of culture. David Throsby identifies, among others, the following categories of subjects in creative economy: cultural workers (both creators and assisting and administrative personnel), private for-profit companies, private non-profit organizations, public cultural institutions, art schools, state and local government agencies associated with culture and international organizations, such as UNESCO as well as consumers and recipients of culture (Throsby 2010: 23-24). Depending on the economic structure of a given region or country and depending on the specificity of culture, the above subjects may play different roles. In economically and institutionally developed countries, a whole system of connections develops between creators and recipients, with non-government organizations, private companies or cultural institutions acting as intermediaries. They may also play different roles, e.g. cultural institutions may act as redistributors, if they decide on the allocation of public funds to specific cultural projects (as is the case with the Polish Film Institute in cinematography). This, however, places them in the role of the producer – they allocate funds, while at the same time judging the cultural value of a project. In some cases, cultural institutions may play the role of creators, if they engage in a creative process. Thus, it seems that, instead of drawing a list of all possible types of subjects, it is better to define them through the prism of the respective roles they play. After all, their role determines their place in economy. Accordingly, from the perspective of main economic processes, namely production, consumption and distribution, as well as considering the role played in the production and dissemination of cultural and economic values, the main types of subjects in creative economy are the following: (1) creators and producers, (2) recipients and (3) cultural intermediaries. Insofar as the first two groups of subjects were thoroughly researched, the significance of cultural intermediaries has been noted only recently. Accordingly, this article will focus specifically on them. I will present here two main approaches defining cultural intermediaries and then, I will show their role as gatekeepers in creative economy.

## WHO ARE CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES? REVIEW OF MAIN VIEWS

Cultural intermediaries are a specific and very crucial category of subjects in creative economy. They play an important role, especially in the dissemination of creative goods and serve as a bridge between creators and producers on the one hand and recipients and consumers on the other hand. The bridge, however, is of a specific type. In traditional economy, the main role of intermediaries is to match sellers with buyers. Intermediaries are most often associated with such forms of activity as employment agencies, financial or insurance brokerage or real estate agencies. Cultural intermediaries, on the other hand, not only match sellers with buyers, facilitating the flow of goods, but are also engaged in the development of the final value of goods. This concerns, in particular, the cultural value of goods, which is the sum of semiotic (including symbolic), aesthetic, artistic and historical values, and authenticity (see: Thorsby 2011). Thus, cultural intermediaries are a link in the chain of values that adds something to the already existing goods. They are hard to classify under one of the main processes taking place in economy – although they mediate between creators and recipients, and as such play a role in the distribution of creative goods, their activities very often extend to the sphere of production and even consumption. It does not make things easier that the concept of cultural intermediaries has not been ultimately defined: in the literature, it has three main meanings, namely: (1) individuals or groups who play the role of a medium between cultures, (2) a set of professions supposed to transfer cultural values in a society, (3) individuals or groups engaged in the transfer of creative goods and cultural values between creators and recipients.

In the first of the above definitions, a cultural intermediary is a connecting link or a medium between various cultural groups, e.g. between national cultures, ethnical groups, etc. The intermediary role is associated with the transfer of content of cultural values from one culture to another. Such intermediary knows and understands both cultural contexts and to some extent translates one content into another. An example is an immigrant who has lived in a non-native culture long enough to fluently use the language and a number of other cultural codes. This way, the values and attitudes typical of a native culture are transferred to the current place of residence, which is another culture. Analogously, the transfer may be in the opposite

direction – such immigrants adopt certain values and attitudes from the environment in which they live. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri analyzed in this way the role of Jewish intellectuals in the development of Renaissance in Italy (Ruderman, Veltri 2004). However, the concept of cultural intermediaries is relatively rarely used in this sense in social research (Durrer, Miles 2009).

The other meaning of the concept of cultural intermediaries is linked with the works of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his book *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. It contains sections discussing new professions that developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century societies, which were supposed to mediate between the works of art and culture and the masses, a process that involves changing the form and social rank of those works. Although it is impossible to summarize Bourdieu's complex concept in a couple of sentences, the main message of the *Distinction* basically reads that participation in culture is entangled in differences between social classes, which means that social and cultural stratifications are concurrent, and social differences coincide with cultural choices. The natural consumers of high culture are social elites, whereas lower classes are influenced by culture produced at a mass scale. 'Because of this, a specific social rank is reflected in the cultural value of consumer goods and undertaken practices. The position in social hierarchy is thus closely related to the position of cultural products hierarchically arranged in the order of their legitimacy' (Strzyckowski 2009: 196). In this situation, the dependencies between the 'educational capital' and the 'cultural capital' are also quite distinct. Those who visit museums and art galleries or can recognize classical composers – and so, are able to properly receive and participate in the 'legitimate culture' – in most cases are better educated. They are a minority, and consequently, the majority of the society cannot participate in their culture. As a result, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new professions developed – including cultural intermediaries – as a part of the 'new petit bourgeois'. They make it possible to create 'average' or 'middle-brow culture', which, generally speaking, is a popularized and simplified version of the 'legitimate culture', available through such processes to broader audiences. 'This middle-brow culture (*culture moyenne*) owes some of its charm, in the eyes of the middle classes who are its main consumers, to the references to legitimate culture it contains (...) to give the impression of bringing legitimate culture within

the reach of all' (Bourdieu 1984: 323). Such references are 'film »adaptations« of classic drama and literature, »popular arrangements« of classical music or »orchestral« versions of popular tunes, vocal interpretations of classics in a style evocative of scout choruses or angelic choirs' (ibid.).

Bourdieu explains how such culture is created and disseminated:

New cultural intermediaries (the most typical of whom are the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalists-writers) have invented the whole series of genres half-way between legitimate culture and mass production ('letters', 'essays', 'eye-witness accounts') (ibid. 325-326).

Evidently, cultural intermediaries have a completely different character here than in the first meaning of the term. First of all, the legitimate culture referred to here is associated with artistic activity and art, such as literature, music or stage arts. Secondly, mediation is one-way: from legitimate culture to specific recipients, and not vice versa. Thirdly, there is a major difference in the size of the 'populations' between which the intermediaries are situated, since Bourdieu often refers to mass media and mass production. Thus, cultural intermediaries 'translate' from few-to-many: from a small group of creators to a much larger group of recipients. In connection with this, Bourdieu lists specific professions from the category of cultural intermediaries. He writes:

The new petit bourgeois comes into its own in all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relation, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services. These include the various jobs in medical and health assistance (marriage guidance, sex therapy, dietetics, vocation guidance, pediatric advice etc.) and in cultural production and organization (youth leaders, play leaders, tutors and monitors, radio and TV producers and presenters, magazine journalists), which have expanded considerably in recent years (ibid.: 359).

He also calls them '»need merchants«, sellers of symbolic goods and services who always sell themselves as models and as guarantors of the value of their products, and who sell so well because they believe in what they sell' (ibid. 365).

Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews (2014) note that although the concept of cultural intermediaries plays a relatively minor role in Bourdieu's analyses, it has become important in Anglo-Saxon sociological concepts. They significantly broadened the scope of the term, resulting in the development of the third meaning of cultural intermediaries as subjects engaged in the transfer of cultural values, especially between creators and recipients, but also within the respective internal fields of creators themselves or recipients themselves. Because of this broadening of the scope, cultural intermediaries became – according to David Hesmondhalgh (2002: 53) – one of the most unclear concepts, the more so that it resulted from relatively casual and sometimes improper interpretations of Bourdieu's ideas (see: Smith Maguire, Matthews 2014: 54; Negus 2002: 502). One could say that it was decontextualized, as a result of which only the term remained in use, but its original meaning was changed or replaced with a new one. For many researchers, it may be practically justified, because the category of cultural intermediaries is analytically useful, and the changed or new meaning makes it possible to distance oneself from the leftist-critical provenience of Bourdieu's thought. According to Hesmondhalgh, the new meaning was formed in the early 1990s. In the book on production in culture – *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production* edited by Paul du Gay – popular and influential in English speaking circles, one of the authors, Sean Nixon, extended the category of cultural intermediaries to include practically all the subjects engaged in the circulation of cultural goods and values: they are all the persons and/or organization that move symbols and their meanings, or, more broadly – the cultural value, from one place to another (Nixon 1997: 181). For Nixon, the same as for Bourdieu, the most obvious example of cultural intermediation is the advertising industry, whose significance and global market significantly increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Advertising is often the part of communication that is supposed to provide persuasive information on goods to potential recipients or customers. To this end, it uses a wide range of cultural symbols and codes, often strongly entangled in semantic networks functioning in a society. At the same time, it is a link between the seller and a potential buyer. Evidently, unlike the former two meanings, such cultural mediation is neither a bridge between cultures nor between the legitimate and popular cultures, but rather, it is a transmission channel for almost every possible cultural form. Due to the very broad scope

of the concept of cultural intermediary, Hesmondhalgh (2002: 53) suggests to replace the ambiguous term with more specific ones, such as 'creative manager', 'creator of symbols' or 'creative practitioner'.

Regardless of the problems with the clarity of the term, it is difficult to question the role of cultural intermediaries in contemporary creative economy. In a work on the role of entrepreneurship in the culture industry<sup>1</sup>, Charlie Leadbeater and Kate Oakley (1999: 45) characterize the significance of cultural intermediaries for creative economy in the following way:

[They] will be vital to fill in the 'missing middle' in the British cultural industries. Cultural intermediaries seek and promote new talent, circulate ideas and trends, put people in touch with one another, set up venues and provide access to the market. Cultural intermediaries are often former content producers who have moved on: rock singers turned managers; actors turned promoters; television programmer makers turned commissioning editors. They oil the wheels of cultural industries. In Silicon Valley, this role (...) is played by venture capitals. Cultural intermediaries are far less formal and far less powerful than venture capitalists, but like venture capitalists they are deal makers: in essence they take the local talent to a wider commercial market. Thriving cultural sector needs not just creative producers but effective intermediaries as well. Promoting these intermediaries should become a goal of public policy.

This shows the role of cultural intermediaries as links in the chain of cultural production, with a focus on their economic significance and the ability to generate economic value through their activity. Thus, the significance of intermediaries involves the provision of means to create market goods out of cultural activity. Accordingly, they connect cultural artifacts with the market, which means that the products of culture may be bought and sold, and that they may yield profit to the creators. However, importantly, cultural intermediaries do not only play the simple, logistic role of product suppliers to the market. They participate in the circulation

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the work significantly influenced the development of the creative sector policy in the UK in the late 1990s, especially the reports and documents developed by the British Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which later became the model for similar instruments in other countries.

of not so much goods as of cultural values – they rely on semiotic cultural codes, which they often modify and adapt to market requirements. Thus, both cultural competencies and knowledge of economic realities enable them to play the economic role.

The significance of cultural intermediaries for creative economy and the specificity of their operation have been the subject of numerous studies, each of them emphasizing their fundamental nature for the circulation of cultural values and creative goods (see: Negus 2002; Wright 2005; De Propriis, Mwaura 2013; Smith Maguire, Matthews 2014; Jakob, van Heur 2015; O'Connor 2015; Taylor 2015). Chris Gibson (2015: 477) believes that science and scholars also play the role of cultural intermediaries – by studying the creative industry and its processes, they generate knowledge that is later transferred to the society through publications or lectures. Also, they often act as experts, helping to develop public policies. In this educational and expert dimension, they become the ‘promoters’ of creative economy. Thus, in this sense, this text and its author also play the role of a cultural intermediary.

Norma Rantisi and Deborah Leslie (2015) suggest moreover that education in general is of intermediary nature and it promotes not only the functioning of creative economy but also its development. After all, the artistic education system is an important link in the circulation of not only knowledge but also cultural values. In developed societies, it is complex and specialist. For example, in Montreal, Canada, the National Circus School (École Nationale de Cirque) has existed since 1981, with the status of a public higher school. The school in Montreal is the background for the circus art popular in the city, and in particular for the world-famous Cirque du Soleil founded in 1984. Cirque du Soleil is a unique combination of street art and business. The project is a large-scale one, with more than four thousand people from over forty countries working on the development of performances, annual revenue in excess of 810 million USD and over 20% in margin (profit). There is a similar artistic school in Poland, too – the National School of Circus Art (Państwowa Szkoła Sztuki Cyrkowej) in Julinek near Warsaw, which continues the traditions of a circus school founded in these buildings 1960s.

Apart from education, the role of cultural intermediaries is played by creative industries, such as the advertising industry (McFall 2002; Hodges 2006; Moor 2008), the media industry (Hesmondhalgh 2006; Smith Maguire,



Matthews 2010) or its sections, like journalism (Negus 1997). Also, many individuals or organizations implement the functions of cultural mediation in specific creative activities, such as talent agencies in film or music industries, or in stage arts (Martel 2010: 114-122), regional film commissions in film industry (Foster, Manning, Terkla 2015), independent artistic craftsmen (Schultz 2015), fashion designers (Skov 2002) or industrial designers (Vinodrai 2015). Cultural intermediaries are key links in industries with highly developed and complex production networks, such as film industry (Scott 2005; De Propriis, Hypponen 2007) or music industry (Gałuszka 2009; Watson 2015). Interestingly, in the latter case, despite growing digitization of music production and popularity of virtual intermediaries such as YouTube, these are the real rather than virtual intermediaries who matter, if one is interested in at least minimum commercial success (Hracs 2015). Some authors suggest that even consumers may play the role of intermediaries. An example is the Japanese manga, whose fans undertake to translate, edit and disseminate the comic book outside Japan, without the official consent of copyright owners (Lee 2012). Thus, the question asked by Maguire and Matthews seems reasonable: haven't we all become cultural intermediaries?

Answering yes to this question will result in too expansive understanding of the term of cultural intermediaries. Accordingly, I propose to limit it to the following two meanings:

1. Cultural mediation as a role (the broader meaning) involving intermediation in the circulation of cultural values. Those values are linked with creative goods, so it is often mediation in the circulation of goods. Intermediary subjects need not to be (and often are not) specialized in mediation. Accordingly, the roles of cultural mediation involve: matching creators (sellers) with recipients (buyers), (b) passing on cultural values or (c) modifying cultural values. It should be noted that the role of cultural mediation may be either intentional or coincidental. Metaphorically speaking, it can be compared to the role of the bee that gathers pollen from some plants moves it to other plants and pollinates them. Insofar as bees do it instinctively, cultural intermediaries often act intentionally.
2. Cultural intermediaries as a specialist subject (the narrower meaning) – may be an individual or organization (e.g. company,

NGO), specializing in an activity, where cultural mediation is one of the main areas of operation or the source of livelihood or income.

According to this definition, intermediaries may be involved in all the main economic processes (production, distribution, consumption), but their main role involves production and distribution. Cultural intermediaries may operate on the market, if they intend to generate profit (e.g. talent agencies) or outside the market – if their activity is autotelic, i.e. aimed at achieving social missions or other universal values (art schools, fans).

## **CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES AS GATEKEEPERS**

The concept of gatekeeping has existed in social sciences since the late 1940s, when the social psychologist Kurt Lewin concluded, on the basis of his research, that in all kinds of social situations, the flow of information is always uneven and incomplete (Goban-Klas 2001: 58-59). This flow is governed by a whole series of barriers called gates, controlled by specific individuals or organizations that act as gatekeepers who pass on some information and keep other. In this sense, gatekeeping is the process of reducing a huge amount of information and transforming it into a limited number of messages that reach recipients in the process of social communication (Shoemaker, Vos 2009: 1). In large and developed societies, cultural communication is based to a large extent on various kinds of media, making them central to contemporary public life. The selection process not only determines which information will be supplied to the recipients but also what their content will be. Since symbolic culture is mainly semiotic and linked with the creation, transmission, reception and interpretation of various kinds of content, the process of the content selection may be called cultural selection. It involves filtering and transforming content and transmitting it through relevant media or channels.

With respect to the culture industry, especially popular culture, Paul Hirsch (1972) proposed a model of cultural production that included, among other things, the selection process. Hirsch's model was based on his pioneering studies on the production structure in music industry, where he analyzed the process of filtration and selection of songs or records that would become commercially successful (Hirsch 1969) – his studies later inspired research into the economics of the culture industry and creative industry (see: Caves 2006). Hirsch's approach was also based on the systemic

approach developing at that time in the theory of organization, which defined cultural production as a process in which few from the original, total number of creators are selected in subsequent stages of the process, whose work finally reaches the consumers (tab. 1). In the first stage, cultural intermediaries are individuals or companies that hunt for talented artists or promising creators and try to determine their creative potential. Such intermediaries are, for example, talent agencies, publishing houses or record companies. They provide creators with financial aid, technical assistance, distribution networks and other resources they have in order to create a specific product and put it on the market. TV shows, e.g. *Poland's Got Talent*, may also act as such gatekeepers.

The second stage involves surrogate consumers who purchase a finished product (song, film or TV program) and deliver it to the end recipient. This group includes radio and TV stations, newspaper publishers etc. Surrogate consumers also make a selection, this time of finished products, making them available to broader audiences. Accordingly, they do not generate goods but instead, through selection, influence the value of specific goods, creating a system of evaluation, such as hit lists, reviews, etc. Thus, they have a substantial role in the added value chain, sometimes influencing the market success or failure of specific creative goods, or strengthening their position, e.g. by frequently playing a certain song or film. They have an important say in determining the final cultural value of creative goods and strongly affect their durability (ibid.: 274). Sometimes events, instead of subjects, play the selective role, as is suggested by studies on such events as festivals or fairs that function as a 'gate' between the creator and the recipient (Moeran, Pedersen 2011).

Despite numerous organizational and technological changes that have since taken place in the music industry and other creative industries, Hirsch's model is still relevant, as was proven, among others by Gabriel Rossman (2012). He analyzed the process of dissemination of songs in a society (by analogy to the innovation diffusion process), how they become popular and what the role of the radio is in the process. One of his main conclusions was that, despite dynamic development of digital media in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the traditional radio still plays a key role for musicians on their way to commercial success. Also, the role of the cultural selection mechanism, crucial for the entire music industry,

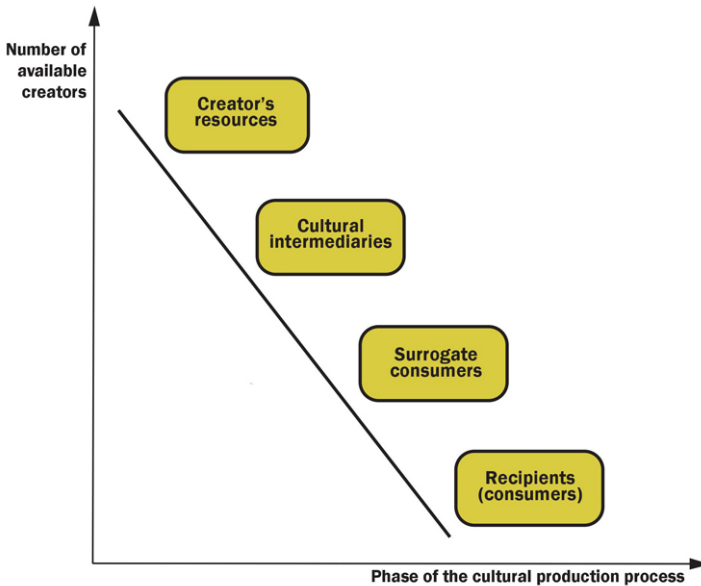


Chart 1. Hirsch's cultural selection model

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: Hirsch 1972

is very well visible. Rossman observes that selection in cultural production is often very restrictive. A small fraction of active creators is noticed by cultural intermediaries and even fewer of them are promoted by surrogate consumers. Very few of those who pass beyond that point actually become successful among end recipients, as was already suggested by Hirsch and as is illustrated by the steepness of the line in the chart 1.

Because of the selection mechanisms, subjects such as cultural gatekeepers play a crucial role in creative economy, as it is up to them to decide which creative goods will be published and will reach the recipients. From the economic perspective, gatekeepers reduce the transaction costs of acquiring information on the quality of goods and their evaluation. They also reduce risk and uncertainty at various stages of the value chain associated with the evaluation of the potential of specific ideas or projects to become commercially successful (UNDP/UNCTAD 2010: 85). In the case of visual arts, a gatekeeper may be an art gallery manager who decides whose

work he will exhibit. In the case of the media, the same role is performed by the editor-in-chief, who selects articles to the next issue of a newspaper or a news program on the TV or radio. Not only individuals but also specialist agencies, such as talent agencies, may play this role. It should also be noted that currently, the role of gatekeepers in creative industries is changing due to the development of the Internet and digital media, which enable creators to instantly publish their work without the agency of intermediaries. There are a number of tools available, such as social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), video sites (e.g. YouTube), online art galleries (e.g. Digart) or blogs (Szultka 2012: 44). Both intuition and some voices in the discussion (Shoemaker, Vos 2009; Benghozi, Paris 2016) suggest that the role of the selection mechanism will be diminishing as the Internet becomes more and more popular in the modern information society. According to this line of thinking, the Internet enables unlimited, cost-free and almost instantaneous delivery of works and universal access to them. Thus, there is no need for subjects who would be selecting the content to be put into circulation – the creators and recipients decide for themselves. On the other hand, this does not seem to be happening in practice and the selection mechanism - instead of disappearing – is still present, though in an evolving form. The result of the evolution is a new type of selection - technological selection, which exists alongside the traditional selection. In this case, gatekeepers are not people or organizations directly, but rather technological tools, such as search engines that index the content available through the Internet. They determine what information will reach us and in what form. It should be noted, however, that technologies are produced by man and they serve his purposes. Magdalena Szpunar (2013: 61) rightly observes:

The logic of search engines is predefined by their creators. This logic relies on the commercial order, and reliable presentation of information is secondary to profit generation. According to surveys, 73% of respondents declare that the information browsers provide them with is accurate and credible, and 66% believe that search engines are a reliable and objective source of information.

According to Richard E. Caves (2006: 537-539), cultural gatekeepers are a critical element of the value chain in the production of simple creative goods. Production of such goods often involves one creator and

one cultural intermediary, who adapts a work to market requirements and then distributes it among recipients, sometimes with the help of other intermediaries. However, this seemingly simple relationship involves, according to Caves, significant organizational challenges. The reason for this is threefold. First, there are many creators on the market, often too many. Accordingly, a cultural mediator must play the role of a gatekeeper, picking some and rejecting others. Secondly, combining the effects of an artist's creative contribution with economic operations of a gatekeeper may have different organizational forms. A subject who plays the role of a cultural intermediary may either only represent a creator or he may partner with him, this way acquiring more impact on the final shape of a work as well as additional rights, e.g. to distribution. Also, he may employ an artist and have major control over the entire creative process and its effects. Thirdly, creative activity tends to agglomerate in certain locations. This trend, however, depends on how the relations between an artist and a cultural intermediary (gatekeeper) are organized and managed. Thus, the selection mechanism is dependent on location processes.

The location element of the cultural selection mechanism involves spatial consequences of the functioning processes of creative economy. It transpires that geographic proximity plays a major role in ensuring the position of creators, which in turn determines their commercial success. This entails proximity to gatekeepers and social networks connecting creators and producers. Elizabeth Currid-Halkett (2007: 130-132) showed empirically the role of geographic proximity in reputation building processes in the creative clusters of New York. According to her, creators experience high levels of uncertainty, both in terms of the stability of employment and predictability of demand for their work. In this situation, geographic proximity of cultural gatekeepers plays a key role and becomes one of the main factors in their location in the environment – they act as magnets that attract creators. Since the cultural and economic value of creative goods is the subject of constant negotiation, as a result of the value circulation mechanism, and at the same time, these are mainly gatekeepers who determine that value, then, not surprisingly, contact with gatekeepers is decisive for creators. Moreover, with these contacts, creators climb the ladder of recognition and popularity, which is crucial both for artistic and commercial success. Gatekeepers, who in a way also serve as information filters, have a huge impact on what is

said about a given creator and how it is said. According to Currid-Halkett, gatekeepers create so-called local buzz, i.e. circulation of gossip, informal information that comprises the media image of an artist. Also Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger and Sarah Zukin (2005), who surveyed fashion industry and new media creators and workers, underline the importance of contacts with cultural gatekeepers. They also emphasize the fact that temporariness of employment and ephemeral character of artistic reputation mean that these contacts are virtually mandatory for creative workers. These factors lead to the formation of creative clusters. They involve the advantages of agglomerations associated with the development of trust-based bonds and accumulation of social capital. Apart from that, such agglomerations have three more types of advantages. These are: a specialist labor market, knowledge flow and a large number of business environment institutions (Stachowiak, Tomczak 2015: 67-70). Accordingly, the cultural selection mechanism promotes the formation of clusters. This is confirmed, among other things, by research conducted by Barbara Heebels and Irina van Aalst (2010) in two creative clusters in Berlin: in Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg districts, respectively. The entrepreneurs and creators located there highlighted the special role of cultural gatekeepers in the early stages of their activity. Contacts with them and their spatial proximity enabled development of social networks and the building of reputation and brand in urban creative communities. Thanks to gatekeepers, more and more creators are attracted to such areas, causing their transformation into a cluster. Indirectly, the selection mechanism also influences the innovative character of an agglomeration, since selection plays an important role in the diffusion of information (Rogers 1983: 144-145). The selection mechanism determines which innovation will be distributed and which will be contained. It should be noted that in creative economy, apart from classical product, technology, organization or process innovations, there are also 'soft innovations', such as aesthetic, semiotic or artistic innovations (Stoneman 2010). Even Hirsch (1972) noticed the selective role of mass media and called them the 'institutional regulators of innovation'.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural intermediaries are a group of subjects specific of creative economy. Their specificity involves, among other things, the fact that they often

participate in the creation of goods. However, they rarely do it indirectly. Creative goods are the effect of the work of individual creators or their groups, and may include: a song, a novel, a poem, a picture, a sculpture or a graphic sign. Their value is primarily the function of knowledge, skills, competencies, talent and creativity of their authors, which constitute their cultural capital resources. The size of the capital depends to a large extent on artistic or specialist education. Creators with relevant education reach a market where they or their products are noticed by the so-called cultural intermediaries. These are, among others: talent agencies, art galleries or art dealers who help the creators build the reputation that will increase the market value of their goods. Often, they also help distribute the goods made by creators. Accordingly, the qualifications of such cultural intermediaries are no less important than those of creators. They make a selection and decide which artists or goods should be broadly circulated. This, in turn, often determines commercial success on the market.

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## Summary

The paper presents the role that cultural intermediaries play in creative economy. Cultural intermediaries are a specific and very important category of subjects in creative economy. They play a key role especially in the dissemination of creative goods. They also serve as intermediaries between creators and producers. However, they are involved not only in connecting sellers with buyers, but also in shaping the final value of goods. Therefore, cultural intermediaries can play a threefold role in creative economy. They can be: (1) individuals or groups acting as a medium between cultures; (2) a set of professions transferring cultural values to the society; (3) individuals or groups involved in the transfer of creative and cultural goods, cultural values between creators and audience.

**Keywords:** cultural intermediaries, creative economy, creative industries

# MAPPING THE CREATIVE SECTORS. IN SEARCH OF DEFINITIONS AND METHOD

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## INTRODUCTION

In September 2015, right before the 40<sup>th</sup> edition of the Polish Film Festival, Wojciech Szczurek, the Mayor of Gdynia, ceremoniously opened the Gdynia Film Centre: an impressive, bright building at Grunwaldzki Square, located right next to the freshly renovated Musical Theatre. The Gdynia Film Centre was constructed within several months only. It accommodates a three-theatre art-house cinema complex, the Gdynia Film School, the Pomeranian Film Foundation in Gdynia (the Festival's organizer), along with a restaurant, a café and a book store. A year earlier, the host of the city, whilst setting up the cornerstone, the Mayor said: 'Thanks to the Polish Film Festival, a love for cinema was born here, a love with many faces. Thanks to the artists, new ideas were born: workshops, and later the Gdynia Film School. A new film milieu came into being here. This became possible thanks to people who added new ideas to this chain'.

The Polish Film Festival was transferred from Gdansk to Gdynia in 1987, against the will and the desire of the film milieu that justly interpreted this decision as a punishment for excessive political activity. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Gdansk festivals became a venue for unrestrained debate about socio-political issues. Screenings of legendary documentaries such as *Robotnicy '80* [*Workmen '80*] and *Chłopi '81* [*Peasants '81*] were memorable events. Lech Wałęsa and other members of the opposition were invited to the Polish Film Festival. After the Festival's reactivation in 1984 (between 1982 and 1983, the Festival was suspended), the authorities decided that parting with Gdansk would be better for the film milieu.

However, after 1989, Gdynia – always considered the less impressive part of the Tri-City agglomeration – has gradually started to change its face. The local government authorities treated the prestigious event as an opportunity for a thorough change of the city's image. Along with co-financing Festival, the city started to pursue a number of cultural investments: in infrastructure, as well as 'soft' projects, i.e. prestigious cultural and educational events (e.g. Open'er Music Festival, Gdynia Literary Prize). Together with commissioning the first multiplex, Silver Screen (nowadays Multikino), the Polish Film Festival opened onto the public. Subsequent cinemas and institutions of culture gradually expanded the Festival space<sup>1</sup>. In 2000, approx. 800 accreditations were issued for the Festival; in 2014, there were as many as 2,600. The organizers estimate that approx. 2,500–3,000 people come to Gdynia for the Festival, and up to 4,000 people to the entire Tri-City. In 2014, the number of viewers participating in all events of the Festival amounted to 47,000, i.e. approx. eight times more than fifteen years ago (Wróblewska ed. 2015: 291). In 2016, the attendance figures reached 60,000 for the first time. The Gdynia Film Centre, opened in 2015 and having three cinemas at its disposal, did not manage to reduce the crowds: tickets were sold out for the majority of festival screenings. Therefore, the more cinema facilities and festival premises, the greater the interest in the Festival.

In 2005, the Pomeranian Film Foundation in Gdynia, a non-governmental institution, was set up by the city, the local government of the Pomeranian Province and the Association of Polish Filmmakers, which is the first organizer of the Festival. The main task of the Foundation was organization of the Polish Film Festival, yet it quickly turned out that this initiative did not exhaust its potential. Its president and simultaneously the Festival's director, Leszek Kopeć, opened the Pomeranian Film Workshops – a paid film directing course which primarily attracts artists from Pomerania, and in particular Gdynia. The consequence of this successful (and still functioning today) idea was a bold initiative undertaken by the city

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the Polish Film Festival was described in detail in Wróblewska ed. 2015, also available online: <http://www.sfp.pl/filmzwidokiemnamorze> (accessed: 15.07.2019).

authorities, the management board of the Foundation and film-makers, i.e. the Gdynia Film School (GFS).

The GFS, established in 2010, is a two-year post-secondary school with a practical curriculum in film directing, prepared by Professor Robert Gliński<sup>2</sup>. It is interesting to note that education in the School is free of charge, yet the selection process is quite demanding. Similarly as in the case of workshops, applicants to the GFS are primarily from northern Poland, especially the Tri-City. Simultaneously, the city made a significant contribution to the creation of a series of documentary and feature films devoted to the history and the present-times of Gdynia. In 2009, the local government authorities set up the Gdynia Film Fund (one of the so-called regional film funds) located at the municipal institution of culture: the Gdynia Cultural Centre. The Fund financially supports films that are related to the city with respect to theme, location or production. The Mayor of Gdynia said in one of the interviews that:

Cultural spaces build the value of the city. Yet out of various disciplines of culture, film does it to the fullest degree. Polish Film Festival, the Pomeranian Film Foundation, the Pomeranian Film Workshops and subsequently the Gdynia Film School are the elements that create the city's film map. Simultaneously, all of them have contributed to the development of film production in the city. Film in Gdynia is developing most fully, most broadly and this has its roots in the Festival. The film milieu is growing rapidly in Gdynia, and therefore creating a location for it is a necessity. An entire array of cultural institutions was set up in the centre of Gdynia: the Film Centre, the Musical Theatre, the Naval Museum, and the Museum of the City of Gdynia. In the modern world, the public space which is created around such institutions is an important element. I am hoping that the events that are organized there will make use of such space in the fullest manner (Wróblewska ed. 2015: 288).

Nowadays, the 'Films from Gdynia' section is a fixed point in the Festival's program. It was established to present films made in Gdynia and devoted to Gdynia. Some are produced by companies or non-governmental organizations set up in the city or by persons related to the city (studios:

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<sup>2</sup> Information about the School is presented on the website: [www.gsf.pl](http://www.gsf.pl) (accessed: 15.07.2019), section: 'About School'.

Biały Smok Production, Maj Film Produkcja Filmowa, MWM Art Film art group).

However, it must be noted that support for cinematography is only a part of the city's cultural strategy, pursued consistently since the 1990s. Gdynia was the first city in Poland to travel the road of transformation of a post-industrial city into a so-called creative city<sup>3</sup>. Establishment of the Film School, growth of the Festival or incorporation of film production companies may be directly linked to the municipal policy, yet in the case of cinema investments, such direct relation is hard to find, even though the growth of film culture and popularity of cinemas in Gdynia is definitely affected by the most important Polish film festival and the atmosphere of positive snobbery pervading it. The section 'Gdynia for Children', which has been organized in an extended form since 2004, attracts from eight to ten thousand young viewers every year<sup>4</sup>.

The Mayor of Gdynia, when talking about subsequent film investments, used the term 'chain'. Thus, the city authorities see the subsequent film investments and enterprises as a cause-and-effect sequence, taking place in a perspective that is extended in time. The film micro-industry which has been developing in Gdynia for the last several years is nothing else but a network of mutual connections among entities that create it, focused on a small surface area. With the aim of preparing a dynamic, full description of such industry, an attractive research tool may be used: mapping of creative industries. I would like to present the idea of mapping and the methods applied as part of it below.

The mapping concept was prepared for the first time in Poland by British Council in 2010 in the form of report entitled *Mapping of Creative Industries: A Toolkit*. Rafał Kasprzak, one of the leading researchers of creative industries in Poland, was responsible for the substantive consultation of the report. In the preface to the study, its authors claim:

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<sup>3</sup> The process of transforming post-industrial cities into creative ones in Poland was described for the first time by Monika Smoleń (2003). The author presents examples of such road in the case of British cities, e.g. Glasgow or Birmingham, as well as Rotterdam.

<sup>4</sup> Data from the Pomeranian Film Foundation.



Development strategies are needed to unleash the creative potential of all to respond to the far-reaching cultural, economic, social and technological shifts that we are living through. In this context the concept of ‘the creative and cultural economy’ is growing around the globe as the interface between culture, economics and technology. Our world is increasingly dominated by images, sounds, symbols and ideas that are creating new jobs, wealth and new culture. The UK has been a leader in the development of this agenda, not just as a driver of the economy but also promoting social inclusion, diversity and development (BOP Consulting 2010: 9).

The science devoted to creative industries belongs to economics of culture which, as a scientific sub-discipline, grew and developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries (United Kingdom, United States and Australia). This is probably the origin of the educational mission of the British Council formulated at the beginning.

Before moving on to the idea of mapping, it is worth taking a look at key terms around which this paper is built.

## CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

The concept of creative sectors, creative industries or industries of culture is already well-known in Poland. The first Polish publications about industries of culture and culture economics encompassing also issues of definition, appeared at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The breakthrough doctoral dissertation of Monika Smoleń (2003) from the Jagiellonian University contained not only a recapitulation of the evolution of key terms, but also the first study on the foundations of the theory of creative cities. At the same time, other works were published at the Jagiellonian University devoted to the culture economics and the first publications of the Gdansk Institute for Market Economics, which devotes a lot of attention to creative industries today (Szomburg ed. 2002). In the next years, definitions of culture industries and creative industries were quoted and discussed in books published by the National Cultural Centre as part of the ‘Kultura się liczy!’ (‘Culture – It counts!’) series, which today forms the cornerstone of the library collection of every researcher exploring the relations between culture and economics (see: Towse 2010; Florida 2019; Thorsby 2011; Gwóźdź ed. 2010). Such researcher may also use numerous valuable expert reports, commissioned in the recent years by the National Cultural Centre, the Ministry of Culture and

National Heritage and local governments, as well as works of other Polish researchers (including Dorota Ilczuk, Rafał Kasprzak, Tadeusz Strykiewicz, Jacek Purchla, Jerzy Hausner, Krzysztof Stachowiak, Andrzej Klasik). Thus, it is pointless to reiterate several existing definitions of creative industries and their classifications. Instead of it, a simple, yet effective theory of one of the most outstanding economists of culture, David Throsby (2001: 211) may be used:

(...) in practice the application of the word 'industry' to art and culture does focus attention on the economic processes by which cultural goods and services are made, marketed, distributed and sold to consumers. The term 'cultural industry' in the contemporary usage does indeed carry with it a sense of the economic potential of cultural production to generate output, employment and revenue and to satisfy the demands of consumers, whatever other nobler purpose may be served by the activities of artists and by the exercise of the tastes of connoisseurs. Indeed many within the cultural sector, including presumably those artists whose objective functions contain some component of economic gain, welcome the idea that cultural activity makes a significant contribution to the economy. The argument here is that if culture in general and the arts in particular are to be seen as important, especially in policy terms in a world where economists are kings, they need to establish their economic credentials; what better way to do this than by cultivating the image of art as industry, bigger (in the Australian case, at least) than beer and footwear.

In his most popular book, *Economics and Culture*, David Throsby classifies creative industries according to the theory of concentric circles. A circle focused around the core of creative ideas expands when the ideas merge with subsequent outlays on production. In the centre of the circle, in the smallest, innermost circle, there are traditional creative arts: music, dance, theatre, literature, visual arts, craftsmanship, and modern audiovisual arts. The second circle – let us call it central – are these industries where the production also encompasses these types of services and products that are not strictly related to culture. These are commodities that are created as part of such industry; these are products of culture and others. The central circle includes: publication of books and magazines, television, radio, newspapers and film. The outer circle is made up by industries that in principle operate outside of the sphere of culture, yet some of their products

carry certain cultural content. This circle includes advertisement, which requires creative contribution, tourism, due to the fact that some of its segments are built on a cultural basis, as well as architectural services, as architecture is meant to contain certain symbols or messages. It is worth adding that in the book *The Economics of Cultural Policy*, published a few years later, Throsby, under the impact of experiences and consultations, reformulated the model of culture industries into a new one, with four circles.

In Polish publications, the key term ‘creative industry’ is translated in two ways. Authors interchangeably use terms ‘przemysły kultury’ (‘industries of culture’) and ‘przemysły kreatywne’ (‘creative industries’), intuitively assigning the first of them to Throsby’s internal circles. In the United Kingdom, the term ‘creative industries’ is understood as ‘these industries that have their source in individual creativity, skills and talent, and which show a potential for creating welfare and places of work by generating and using intellectual property’ (Kukołowicz 2011). These are: advertising, antiques market, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, film, computer and video games (interactive leisure software), music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.

## THE MAPPING IDEA

Explaining the term ‘mapping’ turns out to be much more difficult issue. ‘One of the methods that has been developed to help countries, regions and cities start thinking about the value of creative industries is »mapping« claim the authors of the *Mapping of Creative Industries* report. ‘Pioneered in Britain in the late 1990s, mapping extends well beyond the production of actual maps. It is shorthand for a whole series of analytic methods for collecting and presenting information on the range and scope of the creative industries. Mapping is intended especially to give an overview of the industries’ economic value, particularly in places where relatively little is known about them’ (BOP Consulting 2010: 11). The authors of the report drew attention to the fact that very often the location, size and needs of creative sectors are little known, whereas mapping is the first step to address this. However, the mapping process cannot be considered in isolation; it lies at the centre of a series of other issues: political, economic and practical (ibid.: 25).

Persons with various qualifications should be involved in the mapping of creative industries: from specialists in specific industries, through analysts, economists, culture experts, up to economic geographers. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used for this purpose. Six main building blocks include: literature review, analysis of official government data, industry-specific studies, analysis of non-governmental data, directories of businesses and case studies. Determining the value of creative sectors in global economy is possible by analyzing all available data pertaining to employment, number and size of creative companies, volume of export, gross value added and the composition of the workforce (ibid.: 40-48). British public institutions, popularizing the idea of mapping, focus primarily on goals. The basic goal of mapping is to raise the profile of the creative industries. Mapping tends to boost social awareness (currently slight in Europe) about the prominence of the economic aspect of culture. It allows for formulating a common framework of reference, useful in the discussion about creative industries and this, in turn, introduces the subject matter of creative industries to the political and economic discourse. According to the authors of the above-mentioned report, mapping may also be a valuable tool in creative class lobbying. All these lofty ideals are overshadowed by one basic: to expand knowledge about this sphere of economy, still insufficiently analyzed.

Creative industries are a diversified and quickly changing group. Sometimes, in favorable spatial conditions, such industries unite into clusters, and each of them faces its own problems. The idea of mapping also highlights the value of such analysis for planning: creative industries are facing a number of challenges, for example finding space for work at an affordable price, obtaining access to quick, broad-band Internet and finding properly qualified employees. Mapping allows for determining the needs of creative industries and preparing solutions that allow for satisfying them (ibid.: 26-28).

Therefore, the discussion above may be summed up with a statement that the mapping of creative industries consists in a potentially most thorough description, based on available data, of cultural industries and 'culture-related' industries in a given area.

## DEFINITION-RELATED PROBLEMS

Sole use of the term ‘mapping’ raises certain reservations with respect to its preciseness. Krzysztof Stachowiak, economic geographer from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan who examines clusters of creative industries, as well as puts theoretical knowledge and scientific findings in order in this respect, claims that:

From the geographical point of view, the sole term ‘mapowanie’ is a quite unlucky translation of the English term, used a bit unfortunately in the original. It was used in the British Council’s study in this form and earlier it was also used by the British DCMS [Department for Culture, Media & Sport – A.W.], for example in a document *Creative Industries Mapping Document*. Mapping is, in principle, a cartographic activity consisting in a simple transfer of items onto the map. In Polish language, the term which has been used for centuries is ‘kartowanie’. Whereas ‘mapping’ that appears in the works of British Council and DCMS, is the diagnosis of the status of the creative industry. The main method for preparing such diagnosis is a statistical description, which is used for numerical examination of the distribution of the analyzed feature in the entire population. Various indices were used for such description, e.g. number of entities of the creative industry, number of employees, added value, etc. Next to statistical description, there are also methods for estimating the values that are popular in culture economics<sup>5</sup>.

Stachowiak thoroughly analyzed the methods of describing the creative industry. In his article he draws attention to the fact that ‘studies on various aspects of the creative industry are conducted with the use of various methodological methods, sometimes quite sophisticated. They render bulky, yet dismembered, knowledge. However, there is relatively little synthesis of what we know about the creative industry. This is probably the result of methodological pluralism, consisting in application of both qualitative and quantitative methods in studies’ (Stachowiak 2015: 32). Having analyzed scientific texts in the area of culture economics, author notices that in the studies on creative sectors, a multi-disciplinary approach is dominant, which primarily consists of economic, sociological, geographic, cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Author’s own interview with Krzysztof Stachowiak. See also: Stachowiak, Tomczak 2015.

studies, as well as studies deriving from many other scientific disciplines. Scientific knowledge about the creative sector is primarily descriptive and information-type knowledge, whereas in the practical aspect, it is predominantly open, which results from the fact that the majority of studies or reports are commissioned by public institutions, striving for systematizing of knowledge about the world in which they operate (*ibid.*: 29-30). Creative industry researchers primarily use statistical data deriving from offices and institutions, non-governmental organizations, own studies, literature and, to a large extent, archives and websites. In studies on creative industries, such factors as: employment rate, number of institutions ranked according to internal divisions (e.g. institutions of culture, non-profit organizations), economic value (e.g. import, export), location and other factors characteristic for a given industry (e.g. the so-called box office in the film industry) are used most frequently (*ibid.*: 25-28).

Mapping in the approach of British Council (and thus the entire British 'culture resort') is thus a spatially limited study on the functioning of a creative industry, strongly oriented regionally. The Peter Higgs' and Stuart Cunningham's (2008) article, referenced a number of times (also in the above-listed studies), emphasizes numerous difficulties which are encountered by analysts who are trying to calculate the value of the sector (value of services, value of impact of digital technologies, etc.).

It is impossible not to agree with Stachowiak's remark pertaining to the accuracy of the term 'mapping'. Therefore, even though it has to be treated quite conventionally, mapping may be an efficient research method (and a didactic one in the teaching of culture management), allowing for perceiving invisible relations between culture and economy and for understanding the market power of culture. It is also necessary to draw attention to the diversity of methods which may be used for diagnosing the creative sectors. Studies on creative sectors, by their nature interdisciplinary, allow certain liberty in choosing the methodology, depending on the fact whether they are carried out by culture experts or economists. Nevertheless, use of hard statistical data without presenting a broader cultural background and without understanding the conditions in which cultural activity develops in a given area, may offer an incomplete picture of the phenomenon. The best example is Gdynia, referred to at the beginning of the article: the micro-scale of the film industry in the city may discourage

a researcher who is guided by such criteria as the number of companies, number of films produced annually and box office results. Yet on the other hand, creating a map of companies from the creative sector and related industries (such as the media, theatre, performative arts) will show close relations, which have been created by individual segments of the micro-industry. What is more, the dominant role of state institutions will also become visible on the map, which obviously results from strong interference of city authorities in development of the industry (and in principle dominant, causative role of the local government).

When preparing a catalogue of most optimal methods for mapping, in my opinion, it is necessary to pay special attention to the tools in the area of strategic management and strategic analysis. It is due to specific causes that culture economics reaches to strategic analysis for tools to describe a cultural policy, managing cultural projects or marketing processes (e.g. the commonly applied, also in didactic practice, SWOT analysis). A certain 'softness' of strategic management, its multiple aspects, reaching in the diagnosis of reality for cultural, social or global factors seems to privilege the method of strategic analysis in culture economics, including mapping.

Use of a simple and attractive tool, which consists in setting out an economic path, seems particularly useful for this goal. An economic path is a set of complementary operations reflecting the complete process of creation of a product or a service, consisting of separate stages, often performed by companies deriving from various sectors. As noted by Grażyna Gierszewska and Maria Romanowska (2009: 134), if we can find a company examined by us on an economic path, it may turn out that it operates simultaneously in several units of such path. A strategic analysis is usually applied in order to define the flow of money and the value of individual sectors, yet it is also ideal for recognizing the elements of a given sector. For example, the economic path of a feature film production may contain such elements as: financing institutions (public, private, non-governmental, etc.), industry companies and related companies, companies involved in services, production and distribution, cinemas, organizations handling promotion of culture, banks and other financing institutions (voluntarily or compulsorily) publications and many other entities.

Analysis of the so-called value chain may also turn out to be useful. Every industry is a unit in a value chain of economy, whereas every company forms

a unit of the chain consisting of – in reference to the terminology from the area of strategic management – suppliers of a company, a company and its recipients. To put it simply, a value chain may be described as a road from the suppliers, through the company and distributors, up to the buyers (ibid.: 135). In case of the publishing market, this will be a chain from the authors, through publishing houses and companies cooperating with them, wholesale stores, stores and other retail points, up to the customers.

These two simple methods of strategic analysis may turn out to be useful in understanding the economic principles governing cultural industries; they are also easily applicable in the process of creating maps of creative sectors.

## RECAPITULATION

If one was to create a map of the film industry in Gdynia, it would be necessary to locate the following entities on it:

- central and public type institutions: City Office, Local Government of the Pomeranian Province, Agency for Gdynia Development (administrator of the Gdynia Film Centre);
- cinemas (Helios, Multikino, GFC);
- organizers of events promoting film culture and film education (headed by the Pomeranian Film Foundation in Gdynia and the Gdynia Cultural Centre);
- film producers stationed in Gdynia and companies offering film services.

Furthermore, the map would also have to include entities operating in related sectors, that is:

- local media, actively informing about the film culture;
- municipal theatres, which collaborate with the milieu of film-makers within the scope of rental of premises, props, set designs, costumes, as well as jointly create some items from the programme of film events;
- local printing shops, copying business and companies providing services in the area of ‘hard’ marketing;
- primary, middle and secondary schools, post-secondary schools with which organizers of cultural events collaborate;
- equipment rental companies (stages, lights, outdoor screens, mobile toilets) for film events, in particular for the festival and for filming.



Subsequently, it would be necessary to estimate the actual size of every group, number of entities actively operating in a given area and try to determine certain numerical data: results of the local box office (unfortunately, large cinema networks do not offer such data as of 2010; box office is calculated on the basis of distributors' data), number of films produced in the city, number of cultural events related to Gdynia, number of educational events, etc. Simultaneously, it is necessary to determine if mapping should not include, due to territorial peculiarity, the entire Tri-City. In Gdansk, a local film milieu is being formed which, even though small now, seems to be growing rapidly and is active in searching for projects and funds to implement them.

Summing this discussion up, it is necessary to consider Krzysztof Stachowiak's reservation pertaining to the misleading term 'mapping' justified. This type of analysis primarily consists in a potentially most comprehensive outlook on the industry of culture and showing its relations with other sectors. Importantly, it is also a very attractive mode of education in the area of cultural economics. Mapping of creative industries as such generates creativity of thinking, expands knowledge about the modern culture and allows for more thorough understanding of economic processes generated by it in a given region. As a matter of fact, it puts the creative industries 'inside out' in order to better understand the core of culture economics.

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## Summary

The author discusses a new method, rarely used in Poland so far – a method of mapping cultural industries and creative industries. The concept of creative industry mapping is founded on the Anglo-Saxon ground and goes beyond the usual plotting of maps. This method enables countries, regions and cities to estimate the value of creative sectors. It is based on determining a set of analytical methods for collecting and presenting information on the scale and the scope of the creative industries. In mapping, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used, as well as such sources of knowledge as literature review, analysis of official government data, industry specific studies, analysis of data from non-governmental sources, analysis of business directories and case studies. Mapping may be a valuable tool in lobbying

the creative class, but its main purpose is to expand the knowledge about this sector of economy, which is still insufficiently analyzed.

The author contemplates and analyzes not only mapping as a way to describe the dynamic sectors of culture, but also the very definition of creative sector mapping, outlining the opinion and comments of Krzysztof Stachowiak, a researcher of problems of concentration of cultural industries. The description of the film industry currently growing in Gdynia serves as the frame for the article and the ways in which this mini-industry may be described using the principles of creative industry mapping.

**Keywords:** creative industry, cultural industry, mapping, mapping, film industry, audiovisual industry, film, Gdynia, film festival, film culture, film production, cinema, strategic analysis.



# STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF MARTYRDOM MUSEUM AND SITE OF MEMORY: EXAMPLE OF THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM IN OŚWIĘCIM

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‘Management of a site of memory’ is a new term that does not enjoy favorable reception in all academic circles. Doubts related to justifiability of the use of the term ‘management of memory and a site of memory’ may evoke associations with trauma management, which, due to obvious reasons, is unacceptable. In the discussion on management of a sites of memory<sup>1</sup>, their timeless nature is primarily emphasized: as the Holocaust symbols, they simultaneously constitute a warning against future acts of genocide, growing extremism and indifference to the tragedy of countries engulfed by war. The site of memory issues are predominantly tackled from the point of view of their educational significance: the so-called pedagogy of a site of memory. Nevertheless, one cannot forget that sites of memory, forming an indispensable element of shaping the national identity, are embedded in a specific reality and are often related to concrete material remnants. Alicja Kędziora (2012: 106-108) emphasizes that management of memory boils down to the management of a sites of memory, not only immaterial cultural heritage, but also its material dimension located in a specific ‘musealized space of culture’ fulfilling the functions of remembering about the past:

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘sites of memory’ (*lieux de mémoire*) was introduced in 1984 by French researcher Pierre Nora. It was also used by Hagen Schulze, Etienne Francis, Jan and Alaida Assmann and Andrzej Szpociński.

'Sites of memory do not exist in a vacuum, [but] in specific socio-economic conditions, they co-create a cultural space and only as such they may be fully accepted and understood'. Therefore, it is very important to analyze a sites of memory also with respect to their management in a manner that ensures complete fulfilment of functions imposed on them. Management of sites of memory is related to the management of museums or institutions of culture in general. Given the specific nature of a sites of memory after former concentration and extermination camps, administering them is additionally extended to activities that solidify the dimension of authenticity of the post-camp areas. According to Kędziora, 'The time of settlements with the past resulted in escalation of the meaning of the discussed concept, and its unique career makes one wonder about the benefits resulting from its use also in such new discipline as culture management' (ibid.: 110). Andrzej Szpociński (2008: 11) ventures a thesis that the source of such great success of the term 'sites of memory' in the modern times is sensitization of the culture of our times, also in its historical aspect, with respect to the spatial and visual dimensions.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (ABMM) is a unique site of memory. Its exceptional nature is testified by the fact that in 1979 the area of the former Nazi-German concentration and extermination camp was entered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This place sends a message via the authenticity and preservation of remnants after the former camp: thanks to this, people may confront their own history, identity and the present times. The ABMM report for 2016 features information about yet another record number of persons who visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: 2,053,000 persons (Sawicki 2007: 2).

In relation to the high number of visitors, the Museum introduced mandatory on-line booking for organized groups and individual persons<sup>2</sup>. This type of system does not allow tourist offices to organize visits at the Museum at most popular times. Visits are distributed over all the available times, also in the afternoons. The booking system is analyzed and improved on an ongoing basis. At the present moment, the dates of visits may be booked even a year in advance. As of March 2017, the area of the former camp

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<sup>2</sup> [visit.auschwitz.org](http://visit.auschwitz.org) (accessed: 28.02.17).

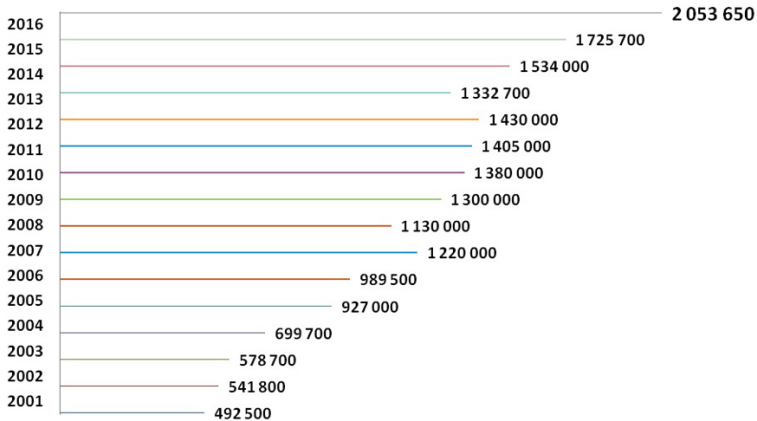


Chart 1. Number of visitors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum between 2001 and 2016

Source: Annual reports of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

has been open to visitors as early as 7.30 a.m. (Sawicki 2007: 3). Furthermore, there are 286 teachers/guides at the Museum who speak nineteen languages in total. It must be emphasized that no other museum in the world hires guides who speak so many languages<sup>3</sup>. What is the ‘secret’ of the ABMM? Is recognition of a site as the international symbol of the Holocaust sufficient to guarantee its success in terms of numbers of visitors? How has it been possible to logistically manage one of the largest facilities in the world protected by the UNESCO Convention?

Following the resource and competence concept that derives from economy (introduced to literature by Edith Penrose [1959]), all strategies built by organizations and institutions should rely on internal advantages of such institutions. According to this concept, reliance on features characteristic of a given institution guarantees its operation in an extended period of time (Śliwa 2011: 17). In the case of the ABMM, such ‘guarantor for the institution’s existence’ does not have to be searched for far and

<sup>3</sup> <http://auschwitz.org/muzeum/aktualnosci/nowy-system-rezerwacji-online-w-muzeum-auschwitz,1673.html> (accessed: 28.02.2019).

wide. Its primary advantage is the authenticity of the site of memory: the presence of post-camp infrastructure. It may be perversely concluded that in line with such claims, all sites of memory are 'privileged' on account of their historical location. It is a fact that out of all sites of memory after the former concentration and extermination camps, most facilities from the time of operation of the camp have remained in the area of the former KL Auschwitz-Birkenau: this is the location least affected by the passage of time and human interference. Another difficulty in managing memory – related to the camp infrastructure and the specific nature of sites of memory which are, simultaneously, cemeteries – is the aesthetics of the space, the question about justifiability of presenting content and artefacts with the use of media that exceed the borders of authenticity (multi-media technologies). It is not easy to convince international stakeholders about the significance of personal confrontation of man with a site where the modern times have not exerted their impact. Piotr M.A. Cywiński (2012: 90:97), Director of the ABMM, offers several examples:

Some see Auschwitz as a place where the multi-media, interaction and attractions should mark their presence. Others want more reconstruction; somebody proposed life-size dummies, e.g. SS-men with dogs or guards standing in watch towers and blinding the passers-by with light. There are numerous proposals of this type. The question is, what is Auschwitz today (...). Memory is a timeless factor, yet it has to be experienced in an authentic Site. Understanding and awareness may attain much more here than in front of a television screen or pages of a book. Therefore, authenticity is something that should be protected and presented. Such protection and presentation are the major task of persons who take care of Auschwitz today. Authenticity is the paradigm of a Site of Memory. Every one.

Such down-to-earth and consistent standpoint of Director Cywiński makes it possible for incorporating the issue of preserving authenticity of a site of memory into a broader plan of strategies, the aim of which is also working out the identity of a cultural institution:

A cultural institution should, first of all, have an identity specified and developed with its stakeholders, i.e. it should know what it is striving for, how it is operating, and it should build a network of relations with the public and



the local environment around this identity. (...) It would be ideal if a cultural institution offered both the impression of rooting, as well as the possibility of rebuilding identity in a manner that corresponds to the changes in the surrounding world. Obviously, this is a huge challenge for a cultural institution (Krajewski 2011: 34-35).

Summing up, it is necessary to combine the aforementioned 'rooting' with the concept of preserving authenticity of a site of memory, whereas as far as 'rebuilding identity' to measure up to the modernity and changes in the surrounding world is concerned, it is possible, without doubt, to show the concept of a new main exhibition in the ABMM<sup>4</sup>, developed in the course of two and a half years in a very thorough manner, with the assistance of experts and with the use of knowledge about the profile of visitors. The new exhibition will be opened for visitors in three parts between 2021 and 2025. Such extended time of implementation results from gradual deployment of subsequent points of the schedule, in order not to restrict the possibility of visiting the institution. In line with the adopted assumptions, the exhibition cannot be only educational and historical in nature; that is why an interdisciplinary task team for the New Main Exhibition was set up (this is worth emphasizing, due to the fact that not every museum embraces the necessity of collaboration of this type), which is composed of a teacher, a historian, a documentalist and architects<sup>5</sup>. The ability for collaboration of people specializing in various areas at one project is particularly important for efficient management of a cultural institution and it is clearly perceptible in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. Katarzyna Barańska (2013: 212), discussing the issue of management from the humanistic perspective, draws attention to the fact that teams of employees of a cultural institution usually struggle with internal difficulties: 'Exchange of theoretical thought and experiences from the realm of the so-called good practice usually takes place »in own groups«: conferences for conservators, didacticians or curators are organized

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<sup>4</sup> Its first general conceptual premises were prepared by Professor Waław Długoborski and senior curators Teresa Świebocka and Teresa Zbrzeska. In July 2007, the project was adopted by the International Auschwitz Council.

<sup>5</sup> Information procured due to the kindness of Alicja Białecka, proxy for the New Main Exhibition in the ABMM.

separately. Everybody is afraid to step outside their area of expertise or admit somebody from outside »the industry« to it'.

According to the recommended organizational outline of museum facilities:

(...) irrespective of the type of supervision held, the structure of functioning of a modern museum should rely on the so-called task cube, which consists of cooperation of three divisions of a museum: care for collections (curatorship, conservation, documentation); performance of programs-projects (organization of exhibitions, designing, education, publications, public relations, marketing); administration (HR, financial and accounting division, legal servicing, development division, investment and renovation division, protection, division for servicing visitors and users of collections, maintenance of order). Each of the three divisions of a museum should be managed by an expert in a given area: a museologist, at least a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree expert; a museologist with additional training in education, PR or marketing; a specialist in management with economic, legal or technical education (Folga-Januszewska 2008: 37).

Collaboration among such divisions is indispensable; they cannot operate as separate units. The administration division, responsible for investments and renovations, should not function as a separate entity due to the fact that its activities also directly refer to the division responsible for taking care of the collections.

Mieczysław Porębski noted that 'an ideal museum is primarily a well-organized museum'. He explained that maintaining proper proportions in the implementation of tasks between substantive employees and administrative and technical employees is of utmost importance. Barańska (2013: 167, 211-212) pursues this thought and stresses the fact that in the strategy of management of every project, it is necessary to draw attention not only to proper distribution of tasks and settlement of effects of work, but in an equal degree, it is also vital to build the employee team, which relies on multiple areas of expertise (content-related, conservation, education). A good example for implementing such postulates are teams appointed in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for the preparation of the New Main Exhibition, as well as the Master Plan for Preservation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial. A thirty-person 'team' was set up for project implementation, including: monument conservators, construction

engineers of various specializations, craftsmen, chemists, lawyers, financial experts and accountants<sup>6</sup>. This testifies to maturity in planning the strategy of key projects based on an interdisciplinary team.

One of the main pillars of the strategic plan of the ABMM is also protection of collections and conservation of architectural post-camp remnants. Many facilities prepare a strategic plan pertaining to collections. Such strategic plan covers only the main issues, such as the characteristics of collections, stock-taking and documentation, studies, preservation of collections and their management, as well as setting up new collections. In the first place, attention is focused on such aspects as:

- scope of the museum's collections;
- core of collections;
- response to the question about the function of the collections with respect to the public;
- response to the question about the manner in which the collections differ from collections of other museums (Czaj et al. 2007: 39-40).

The conservation strategy of immobile items in the ABMM is so complex that it deserves a separate analysis. Continuing with the issues specifically related to project management, it is definitely necessary to mention the unprecedented enterprise, i.e. the Master Plan for Preservation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial<sup>7</sup>, established in 2009, and the Perpetual Fund of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, extended in the subsequent years onto eighteen Memory Pillars. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation<sup>8</sup> collaborates with thirty-six countries, two cities and<sup>9</sup> individual benefactors. In 2016, the fund-raising activities of the Foundation were supported by

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<sup>6</sup> Information received due to the kindness of Anna Łopuska from the Conservation Division of the ABMM, the coordinator of the Master Plan for Preservation.

<sup>7</sup> Its implementation started in June 2012.

<sup>8</sup> The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was set up in 2009 in order to manage the Perpetual Fund. The annual interest from the Fund amounts to EUR 4-5 million, which allows for performance of conservation projects.

<sup>9</sup> [www.fundacja.auschwitz.org/index.php/darczyncy/panstwa](http://www.fundacja.auschwitz.org/index.php/darczyncy/panstwa) (accessed: 28.02.2019).

Ronald S. Lauder who<sup>10</sup> established the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Committee. Every annual report of the ABMM features specific amounts assigned to tasks scheduled for a given year, which testifies to the transparency in the flow of finances. This is the first institution of this type in the world which has worked out such an excellent project of protecting the heritage, also engaging other countries and individuals from all over the world in it. In order to understand the scale of the enterprise, it must be remembered that the protection area covers approx. twenty hectares of the former Auschwitz I camp and 171 hectares of Birkenau. There are 155 buildings on this area, 300 ruins (including gas chambers and crematoria, relics of barracks), water supply networks and drainage ditches, roads, thirteen kilometers of fences with over three thousands of concrete poles and thousands of post-camp movables and archival artefacts presented at exhibitions and stored in warehouses<sup>11</sup>. Low vegetation and tree stands are also subject to ongoing conservation, including twenty hectares of forest.

Nobody has to be convinced about under-financing of Polish museums. Museums located in the area of former concentration and extermination camps experience it particularly painfully as their surface areas are much more extensive than typical historical museums. In the above-quoted publication, *Nowoczesne zarządzanie muzeum [Modern Management of a Museum]*, Herman Aarts and Kees Plaisier present definition of a museum as an enterprise:

Museum is a non-profit institution, yet managed like an enterprise, which offers such products as exhibitions or projects for schools. The enterprise's products are sold to generate profit, whereas the basis for the financing of a museum is a subsidy from the state budget. Receipts from customers, i.e. persons visiting the facility, cover only a small portion of the costs of operation. The state subsidizes museums as part of cultural policy, aimed to emphasize their participation in culture and their role in preserving the cultural heritage (Czaj et al. 2007: 16).

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald S. Lauder is an American businessman and philanthropist, chairman of the World Jewish Congress and founder of the Lauder Foundation, as well as member of the International Auschwitz Council since 2012.

<sup>11</sup> [www.fundacja.auschwitz.org/index.php/aktualnosci/32-globalny-plan-konserwacji-rozpoczety](http://www.fundacja.auschwitz.org/index.php/aktualnosci/32-globalny-plan-konserwacji-rozpoczety) (access: 28.02.2019).

This definition does not fully match the ABMM, which is a martyrdom museum and cannot collect fees from visitors for admission to the post-camp area, so in this case, we cannot speak about typical 'receipts from customers'. The table below presents the sources of financing of the ABMM in individual years, starting from 2006 when the Museum presented its report on operation for the first time to the public. In 2006, the subsidy of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (for ongoing and property expenses) in the amount of PLN 10.3 million slightly exceeded the total of the Museum's own revenues (PLN 10.2 million). It is interesting to note that in the course of time, the Museum's own revenues (59.2%) exceeded the subsidies from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (25.6%) almost twice.

An important element in the management strategy are also strategic partnerships, skillful collaboration and contacts with international, domestic and local institutions, as well as public administration (broad range of collaboration is shown in the table of financing sources above). The ABMM, in the course of many years of its operation, has significantly expanded this type of communication channel, exchange of experiences and inter-organizational support. Special attention should be paid to the International Auschwitz Council operating by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, established in 1990 by means of the ruling of the Minister of Culture and Art. The Council is an international opinion-making and advisory body consisting of a number of experts and authorities; it offers an excellent realm for the exchange of thoughts, experiences and proposals. During the meetings of the Council, there has always been a place for representatives of other sites of memory: Płaszów, Sobibór, Majdanek, Treblinka and Stutthof. Apart from the IAC, the Museum Council, the Council of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and the Council of the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust also operate by the Museum. In the opinion of the author of this paper, the success of the ABMM consists in building durable and productive relations with institutions, authorities and experts, thanks to which the power of the message is even stronger and the range of impact is still growing around the world. This is also a proof for the efficiency of the management strategy based on collaboration in the team.

*Table 1. Sources of financing of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (in millions PLN)*

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Museum's own revenues	10.2	11.5	13	16.2	20.2	22.3	24.8	26.7	28.6	33.4	39.5
Subsidy of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	10.3	11	12.7	11.6	11.2	11	15.7	15.3	14.7	16.7	17.1
Earmarked funds of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage	-	-	-	-	9.6	4.2	0.7	3	4.1	3.9	2.5
Funds procured from abroad	0.266	0.754	1.5	0.6	0.4	-	-	-	-	2.4	-
Subsidy as part of the European Infrastructure and Environment Operational Programme	-	-	-	2.5	3.1	1.2	6.5	1.9	2.2	-	-
EU programs	-	-	-	-	-	6.9	4.1	4.2	-	-	1.3
The Auschwitz-Birkenau Victims Memorial Foundation	-	-	-	0.1	0.6	0.3	1.8	2.1	2.2	0.079	0.032
Volkswagen and the International Auschwitz Committee	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.2	0.3	-

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.2	5.9
National Institute for Museums and Public Collections (NIMOZ)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.015	-

Source: Author's own study based on statistical data available in annual reports of the ABMM (period 2006-2016)

Building efficient external communication in cultural institutions is possible thanks to the application of the following principles:

- simplicity of message;
- specificity (facts, events, which the visitors can directly relate to their own lives);
- reliability;
- emotions (nostalgia, memories, identification);
- stories (Stocki 2001: 170-172).

The document that combines all these points is the afore-mentioned annual report, presenting the most important events, plans, studies, current tasks and the statistics of visitors starting from 2006. The report is also supplemented with transparent reports pertaining to the financing of the Museum and the operation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. It is also a nod to the Museum's employees: it emphasizes their work for the sake of heritage protection: 'This report is a tale of people who chose their own answer to that question. They have given of their time, their strength, emotions and their hopes to grapple responsibly from day to day with this dreadful Place of Truth' (*Report of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for 2014*: 4)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> All annual reports from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum activity since 2006 are available on the website: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/museum-reports/> (accessed: 13.02.2019).

Katarzyna Barańska (2013: 209) notices that in the recent years, many museums decided to present a strategy of operation or mission on their websites. Unfortunately, specialist nature of such information and specific language result in the fact that the recipient is not given interesting information pertaining to the operation of a given facility. However, the presentation of the ABMM report has excited great interest, both in Poland and abroad. In relation to this, the Museum decided to present the so-called international voices of support in every edition, testifying to the necessity of existence of a document available for everybody and simultaneously convincing the representatives and employees of the Museum that following the direction they have chosen, they receive increasing international support. 'I am convinced that offering information in such form also to the societies outside of Poland about the activities of a museum institution will contribute to solidifying memory about the tragedy and the victims of WWII on an international scale', said Tomas Bertelman, the Ambassador of Sweden (*Report of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for 2007*: 5). Pascal Couchepin, the then president of the Swiss Confederation, spoke in a similar tone: 'It was with satisfaction that I noticed a stable increase in the number of visitors, as well as development of educational projects and progress in scientific research. Apart from it, the fact that you are currently preparing the new main exhibition shows that the Museum is continually ready for accepting new challenges' (*Report of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for 2008*: 7). What was the original purpose for cyclical publication of the report? The Museum's Director, Piotr M.A. Cywiński wrote:

For the first time in its history, the institution that safeguards one of the most important places on earth is presenting an annual report on its activities, in this form, to you. Our main task is, obviously, to protect and conserve the original camp relics, to conduct scholarly research, and to develop educational programs. The needs are vast. World events show how little our civilization has learned, in sum, from its past. This is why I want to introduce you to the people who make up this Museum: the preservationists, historians, educators, and specialists in museum practice. The image of this place in the nearest future depends on their commitment, expertise and dedication (*Report of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for 2006*: 4).



Another important element in the strategy of museum management, which is worth mentioning when referring to the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, is building relations with the visitors or, more broadly, with the audience:

[For the ABMM it is of vital importance – note by A.P.] to build an agreement among all persons who influence the functioning of the museum, i.e. not only the visitors, but also other institutions which may support [us]. The strategic plan has to specify the groups of the public on the museum intends to focus its activities, and the manner in which it plans to achieve it, what classes and events are planned for them. In the case of larger museums, the strategic plan should include a separate outline pertaining to the communication with recipients of the museum offer. The strategic plan has to specify which additional activities may be used to procure a greater and more diverse audience, which classes and events would induce people to visit the museum and what kind of work to attract visitors forms a part of the museum mission (ibid.: 44).

An example of activities of this type is inclusion of the history of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau in the form of two virtual exhibitions in the Google Cultural Institute project (since October 2012). As part of the platform, seventeen institutions from the whole world collaborate together; they undertook the task of presenting the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the use of digitalized archival materials. This also allows for more reliable preparation of presentations for school classes by students and teachers. In the recent years, social networking sites became an additional communication channel. According to the annual report for 2014, Facebook profile [www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial](http://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial) was the first profile of this type where the number of followers exceeded 100,000. In 2016, the number grew to 230,000. The profile, prepared in several languages, reaches the recipients all over the world. Over thirty thousand people observe the museum's account on Twitter and on Instagram, the number of followers is at 22,000. In 2016, the website [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org) had over forty three million visits (Sawicki 2017: 3). It is difficult not to mention here the e-learning platform addressed to people who cannot visit the site of memory in person or simply wish to expand their knowledge about the history of the camp at home.

When discussing the issue of relations with the society and the potential recipients of the museum offer, it is also necessary to mention the so-called stakeholders. This term may also include institutions on which the Museum exerts impact and which influence the Museum. In other words, there is a close relation between them (for example as in the case of permanent partnerships and inter-organizational collaboration). It is possible to distinguish four categories of stakeholders:

- social environment, public administration bodies and institutions with which the museum maintains contacts in the broadest meaning of the word<sup>13</sup>;
- the public, consisting of representatives of target groups and persons visiting the museum individually, students and employees of other institutions;
- sponsors: institutions and private persons offering material support (Perpetual Capital, 18 Pillars of Memory and other benefactors);
- employees of the museum (existence of the museum is in their interest, they are also indispensable for proper operation of the facility) (Czaj et al. 2007: 30-31).

Analysis of types of stakeholders may be used to show the position which a museum occupies on the market, and the level of performance of mutual expectations in the museum – recipient relation. Studies of this type are not, however, a common element in the management of heritage and Polish cultural institutions. Only few museums can show the annual level of visitors in their seats:

Nowadays participation in culture in Poland is not, and should be, an important category. The problem of the majority of cultural institutions is primarily the fact that they have very limited knowledge on who their customers are and who uses their services. (...) First of all, few institutions collect any sort of studies in Poland. The ones that perform analyses of this

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<sup>13</sup> As an example, the following aforementioned institutions may be listed: International Auschwitz Council, Centre for Dialogue and Prayer, International Youth Meeting Centre in Auschwitz, International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the Yad Vashem. The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre and the Terezin Memorial, Centre of the Council of Europe, the Jagiellonian University, the Pedagogical University in Kraków and a number of others.

type on their own will are few and far between. (...) There is no in-depth characteristics of the audience, no information about its needs, expectations and how it evaluates the activities of the institution (...) (Krajewski 2001: 37).

Every year, the ABMM carries out detailed statistical studies pertaining to visitors – the annual report features breakdowns of visitors divided into age categories or country of origin. Use of knowledge about the target group translates to a change in the mode of guiding in the area of the former camp (since 2012) or the concept of the completely new main exhibition, adjusted to the modern recipient. The ABMM has also made practical use of the knowledge about visitors by making a free bus available that runs between Auschwitz I and Birkenau, determining the above-mentioned new regulations for booking the visit and issuing a publication that allows for preparation for the visit at the site of memory and directing the teachers' attention to the fact how necessary it is to have a recapitulating conversation that puts the strong emotional experiences after the end of the visit at the Museum in order (Białecka et al. 2013).

In 2016, the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust for the first time prepared an English-language seminar *History – Memory – Responsibility* for a professional group of journalists. This was related not only to the response to the social need of popularizing knowledge about the Holocaust, but also an important element of managing the site of memory, i.e. preventing and counter-acting manipulation, instrumentalization and other problems related to the collaboration with the media. The above-mentioned seminar was attended by journalists from Australia, France, Israel, Germany, United States, Sweden and Great Britain. Participants included correspondents of largest international press agencies working in Poland. It is well known that the media are a source of many opportunities for cultural institutions, and they perform marketing and promotion functions. However, they also tend to be a source of negation and falsification of history by the use of the term 'Polish concentration camps'. A well-managed facility not only monitors the situation in a number of dimensions of the modern world, but also participates in the discourse, and does not shun away from responses and reactions. The employees of the ABMM have designed and made a 'Remember' application available

in sixteen languages<sup>14</sup>, which supports both journalists and other persons interested in issues related to the Holocaust, so that they do not make the above-listed and other mistakes. The project was created in collaboration between the Museum and FCB Warsaw and with the support of PKO Bank Polski, Mint Media and Macroscope.

A definition formulated by Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges says that organizations are networks of collective activities undertaken as an attempt of shaping the world and people. Barańska (2013: 168), following this trail of thought, sums up that ‘management is the establishment of ties’. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum has developed, in the course of years, a stable tie with the world of the media, at the same time proving that a site of memory is not a dead space, frozen in time, but a living history, to which people still return, a history that exerts impact on the formation of modernity. Journalists from all over the world can use the [prasa.auschwitz.org](http://prasa.auschwitz.org) website which, apart from information related to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, also features current news and regulations pertaining to photographing and filming at the site of memory. In 2016, over one hundred and fifty film crews from all over the world worked in the area of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum on documentary productions (*Report of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for 2014*: 44).

A number of publications, theories and studies were published about the management strategy, yet using them is not a condition sufficient for effective management and long-term planning in such multi-dimensional place as the ABMM. Cywiński emphasizes that it is impossible to ‘grow accustomed’ to managing sites of memory, even if one performs such obligations for a number of years with equal commitment:

Auschwitz surpasses you. In every sense. A young man wishes to grow up to what he should do, to what awaits him, to challenges of his life. You cannot grow up to Auschwitz. Grow mature for it. (...) Every manager comprehends the space of his management. He chooses adequate tools for the tasks and a relevant tactic. It is impossible to comprehend Auschwitz. It is hard to manage something that you are never going to comprehend (Cywiński 2012: 41).

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<sup>14</sup> [correctmistakes.auschwitz.org](http://correctmistakes.auschwitz.org) (accessed: 11.02.2019).

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**Summary**

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, located in the territory of the former Nazi concentration camp, is an example of what a French historian, Pierre Nora, called ‘a site of memory’ (*lieu de mémoire*) – a place which serves to commemorate and symbolize the greatest genocide and the tragedy of the twentieth century, that is the Holocaust. Hence, management of an institution like this has to include both market-based, as well as ethical factors. Moreover, since the Museum uses many elements of the original concentration camp’s infrastructure, the question arises whether it should aim to preserve the authenticity of this site, or rather follow the main trends in museology (digitization, wide multimedia environment etc.). The author analyses the management strategy of the Museum by taking the statistical data, its educational offer, as well as the currently realized projects and programs into account.

**Keywords:** Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, site of memory, martyrdom museum, cultural management

# STRATEGIES IN CULTURAL (NON-)INSTITUTIONS. CASE STUDY OF ZAMEK CIESZYN

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## FOREWORD

Organizational strategies of the cultural industries are a poorly explored topic of academic deliberations, however, the number of publications concerning this issue is constantly growing. This is probably due to the growing importance of cultural industries, and also more broadly – the creative industry, in the economy and in the society. In social sciences, culture and creativity are more and more often perceived as the backbone of modern development. The issue of strategies in these industries is particularly interesting as their organizations are different than enterprises<sup>1</sup>. Because of this, all kinds of research, both theoretical and practical, are strongly needed as they help understand the specific nature of organizational management in cultural and creative industries, and grasp a full picture of the research area. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to present organizational strategies in the cultural industries based on the example of the cultural (non-)institution of Zamek Cieszyn, which combines the best elements of non-profit organizations and for-profit ones. Before the case study is done, the article describes and characterizes organizational strategies in cultural industries.

The article is both theoretical and empirical. Based on a critical analysis of literature, I present theoretical hypotheses, which I later verify in the case

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<sup>1</sup> An enterprise is an organized set on non-material and material components used to conduct economic activity.

study. I use the following tools in the case study: semi-structured in-depth interview, analysis of materials provided by the organizations in question and publicly available information.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES – FOREWORD

Strategy is probably the most frequently used term in the context of organizational management. It is believed that, without a strategy, it is difficult for an organization to achieve its goals and develop. However, it is hard to find an explicit answer to the question of what the strategy is in the literature on the subject. Krzysztof Obłój (2014: 24) writes that ‘the strategy theory is like a carpet woven from sometimes contrary – but at times complementary – main concepts’ that include: theories of planning, evolution, position and resources (see: Gierszewska, Romanowska 2017: 12-15; Sopińska 2010: 24-57; Romanowska 2009: 11-13; Stańczyk-Hugiet 2012: 164).

According to the planning strategy theory, the managerial personnel is capable of freely and rationally developing a strategic plan (Obłój 2014: 24). Strategies are thus understood as a set of planning decisions taken on the basis of a detailed analysis of an organization’s environment as well as its strengths and weaknesses (the classical tool of the planning theory is the SWOT analysis)<sup>2</sup>, which are supposed to ensure the achievement of certain goals (Romanowska 2009: 12). The evolutionary theory was developed in opposition to the planning theory. It assumes that strategy is developed through an informal process of searching for a model that emerges from the exploration of new options and repeating established solutions (Obłój 2014: 25). A strategy emerges with the passage of time, and it is a combination of plans and changes (Stańczyk-Hugiet 2012: 164). The ability to learn and improve is important, as it is the only way for an organization to be successful (Romanowska 2009: 12).

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<sup>2</sup> SWOT analysis – the name is an acronym of the following words: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The SWOT analysis involves analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of an organization and the opportunities and threats associated with its environment.



Another concept is the position theory, where the strategy is associated with the organization's position in the competitive environment<sup>3</sup>, which determines the strategic advantages it may achieve. Here, the focus is on developing a competition strategy, rather than on setting the direction and pace for an organization's development. The strategy is developed from the perspective of the competitive environment, rather than the organization's internal resources. The latter perspective characterizes the resource theory, which assumes that the success of an organization depends on the quality of its resources, especially the intangible ones (ibid.: 12-13). The resources that an organization has are more important than the conditions of the industry (Oblój 2014: 25). However, Maria Romanowska (2006: 93-96) claims that the success of an organization does not depend so much on resources as on the ability to manage them. She proposed four resource strategy models:

- 'rich dilettante', i.e. an organization that owns resources but cannot manage them;
- 'lord of the treasures', i.e. an organization that owns resources and competently manages them
- 'errand boy', i.e. an organization that neither owns resources nor has the ability to use or manage the resources of others;
- 'business architect', i.e. an organization that does not own resources but has extensive abilities to use and manage the resources of others.

Romanowska (2006: 96) believes that 'one can be successful without owning resources (»the business architect«), but one cannot be successful without the ability to manage resources, even if one owns extensive resources (»rich dilettante«)'. It is important to have access to resources and be able to manage them, rather than only own them. Thus, organizational strategy should also be regarded from the perspective of a network (Stańczyk-Hugiet 2012: 166). Organizations should maintain and develop relations with other organizations and individuals in order to create, protect and capture the created values (Lewicka, Zakrzewska-Bielawska 2016: 109). Relations are an important source of competitive advantage in the dynamically changing world. Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry J. Nalebuff (1996) identify two

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<sup>3</sup> The competitive environment consists of all the entities that cooperate or compete with an organization, i.e. the existing and potential competitors, suppliers, buyers and producers of substitutes.

strategies, depending on the engagement of organizations in a network of relations: the strategy of independence and the strategy of involvement in a cooperative network. The first means that an organization does not establish relations with other organizations or individuals. The latter means that an organization establishes various relations and through cooperation, it increases its own competitive position compared to organizations that are not members of a network.

Each of the above theories has its supporters, critics, assumptions, tool box and limitations. These theories are partly contradictory and partly complementary. I believe that, in practice, it is hard to identify only one theory that an organization applies in its strategic approach. In organizations, there is usually one dominant approach, more or less consciously combined with other approaches (e.g. the evolutionary theory of strategy may be dominant, mixed with elements of the resource theory). Generally speaking, there are three approaches to strategy development in an organization: the first approach – ‘outside-in’ means that a strategy is market oriented. The chances and threats that exist in the organization’s environment determine its goals and strategies. In the second approach – ‘inside-out’, the opposite perspective is applied. The strategy is determined by the resources that an organization owns or has access to. In this case, the strengths and weaknesses of an organization define its goals and strategies. The third approach integrates the former two, the strategy being the resultant of organization’s strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats associated with its environment.

In the traditional approach, strategy is the effect of work preceded by a strategic analysis and strategy designing. The document, once ready, is submitted for implementation, and strategy changes take place only in the subsequent period, once again preceded by strategic analyses and strategy designing. In a contemporary approach, strategy is understood as a constant and dynamic process that never ends. Strategy is a dynamic process of overcoming difficulties that an organization encounters in the course of its development (Romanowska 2009: 17, 19).

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

One of the basic concepts in management theory is the organization, which is 'a group of people working together in a structured and coordinated fashion to achieve a set of goals' (Griffin 2015: 4). Most simply, organizations may be divided into for-profit and non-profit. The goal of for-profit organizations is to maximize the value, and the profit is shared between owners or reinvested in further development of an organization in order to ensure its value growth in the future. On the other hand, the goal of non-profit organizations is to achieve a mission and create non-commercial products. It is not their goal to generate profit, which, however, does not mean that they cannot be profitable. Profit generated by them is not shared between the owners, but instead, it is reinvested in the organizations' development. Heerad Sabeti (2012) notes that such division is oversimplified as modern organizations are hard to classify as one or the other type. In the area of culture, examples are easy to find. It is worth noting here the study by Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych Ę (Kubecka, Białek-Graczyk 2016) and the book *Kultura i rozwój. Analizy, rekomendacje, studia przypadków* [Culture and Development. Analysis, Recommendations, Case Studies; Hausner et al. 2016]. Both publications highlight cultural initiatives / cultural non-institutions that frequently stay outside the domain of formal culture, but at the same time cannot be defined as non-profit organizations, and as such are impossible to classify. Meanwhile, these initiatives promote institutional governance in culture and socio-economic development. This means that there exist a hybrid organization, which H. Sabeti (2012) calls for-benefit enterprises, and Justyna Szumniak-Samolej (2015; 2016) – enterprises built around a social and/or environmental mission. Hybrid organizations combine elements typical of for-profit organizations (e.g. focus on the effectiveness of activities) with typical elements of non-profit organization (e.g. focus on the achievement of a mission). In the cultural industries, there all the three types of organizations: non-profit, hybrid and for-profit, the latter type being the least common. Considering the above circumstances, description of the strategies of cultural industries organizations is an interesting topic that requires both theoretical and empirical exploration.

Organizational strategies in the cultural industries are increasingly frequently discussed by academics and practitioners, however, this area

still remains relatively underdeveloped. Mateusz Lewandowski (2014: 62) notes that the methods and tools taken from the strategic management area are increasingly popular in Polish cultural institutions. Strategic management tools are also used to describe cultural industries (e.g. in academic publications), one example being Anna Wróblewska's (2013: 242-265) study on the feature film production industry in Poland.

M. Lewandowski (2014: 62-63) identifies the following areas of research concerning strategic management in Polish cultural institutions: (1) mission development and strategic management process in museums, (2) strategy and strategic management from the perspective of practitioners managing cultural institutions, (3) marketing strategies in the art and philharmonic industries, and (4) strategy typologies and characteristics of the strategic management process in cultural institutions. The latter area is discussed by Lidia Varbanova (2012), who, based on an in-depth analysis of the literature on the subject, proposed typologies of various organizational strategies in the cultural industries: main organizational strategies, product-market (program-market) strategies and competition strategies (table 1). General strategies determine the directions of organizational development and concern the entire organization. Product-market (program-market) strategies focus on the paths of product (program) and market development. An organization may focus on the existing markets and products (programs) by applying the penetration strategy, or it may develop new products (programs) and/or markets. The purpose of the competition strategy is to create, strengthen and maintain competitive advantage, which means to strengthen the organization's position in the industry compared to other operators. It should be noted that organizations should have and implement each type of strategy and that they may implement several strategies simultaneously. For example, an organization may implement both innovation strategies and strategies for the development of contract networks (general strategies) as well as cost leadership strategies in one industry and quality leadership strategies in another (competition strategies).

In her book, L. Varbanova (2012: 121) also defines organizational strategies in the cultural industries as 'system of approaches, methods and tools for the evaluation of and choice between alternative(s) to achieve the mission and priority long-term goals in the most effective way, given external and internal influencing forces and considering organization's resources and capacity,

as well as its innovative, entrepreneurial and creative potential'. In this definition, strategy is perceived as the resultant of external conditions and the strengths and weaknesses of an organization. Having and implementing a strategy is crucial for the achievement of goals and making the best use of an organization's internal potential.

Table 1. Typology of organizational strategies in cultural industries

Main organizational strategies	Strategies determining the directions followed by an organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation Strategy</li> <li>• Spin-off (Outsourcing) Strategy</li> <li>• Privatization Strategy</li> <li>• Capacity-building Strategy</li> <li>• Survival Strategy</li> <li>• Liquidation (Bankruptcy) Strategy</li> <li>• Integration Strategy</li> <li>• Partnership Strategy</li> <li>• Creative Cluster Strategy</li> <li>• Co-production Strategy</li> <li>• Networking Strategy</li> <li>• Lobbying strategy</li> </ul>
Product (programme-) market strategies	Development strategies associated with different risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Penetration Strategy</li> <li>• Market Development Strategy</li> <li>• Product (Programme) Development Strategy</li> <li>• Diversification Strategy</li> </ul>
Competitive strategies	Strategies that are supposed to help achieve, strengthen and maintain competitive advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost Leadership Strategy</li> <li>• Differentiation Strategy</li> <li>• Product (Programme) Focus strategy</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: Varbanova 2012

Chis Bilton (2007: 91 et seq.), using the creative strategy concept, identifies three approaches to its development: (1) 'heroic' model, (2) adhocracy, and (3) posthocracy. In the 'heroic' model of creative strategy, the leader occupies the most important position. Based on his experience, ability to analyze market trends and creativity, he identifies the unique competitive advantage and creates the strategy. In adhocracy, according to the assumptions of the evolution theory, the strategy is developed collectively and gradually,

and the future strategy emerges from current activities. In a world of chaos and dominance of apparently unrelated events, it is crucial to recognize weak signals and ‘invisible’ regularities, and an order emerges from seemingly random and unorganized interactions (Hartley et al. 2013: 28-29). Adhocracy in strategic management does not mean simple acceptance of chaos and uncertainty, but it involves a bottom-up process of strategy development, meaning that the strategy emerges from action and operational decisions. The third approach is posthocracy, where unpredictability of the environment is so great that planning becomes impossible. Decisions are based on the decision-maker’s emotions, *ego* and personality, and their rationality is evaluated *ex post*. The types proposed by C. Bilton are confirmed by Martyna Śliwa (2011: 211), who claims that Polish cultural institutions have varying understanding of the strategy: ‘from traditional, where the leader makes most decisions and leads the team towards the achievement of his strategic vision to a style based on the development of the strategic vision of an institution in dialogue with employees, and leaving significant creative freedom to the team’. The traditional approach corresponds to the ‘heroic’ model of creative strategy, and the latter – to adhocracy. M. Śliwa (ibid.: 212) also claims that there is no such thing as one general strategy implemented by all the cultural institutions in Poland as every institution creates its own strategy, taking into account the environmental conditions and its own strengths and weaknesses, which confirms previous deliberations on various strategies and is coherent with the definition of organizational strategy in cultural institutions proposed by L. Varbanova (2012).

Martyna Śliwa also notes that managers of Polish cultural institutions are confronted with major unpredictability of the environment<sup>4</sup> and have limited impact on most decision taken in the public sphere, in the broad meaning of the term, that directly affect their organizations (Śliwa 2011: 212). Organizations that operate in the public sphere, also in cultural industries, are forced to pursue a public mission, which influences their goals and strategies. As a result, the goals of non-profit organizations are different than those

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<sup>4</sup> Uncertainty of the environment is quite thoroughly discussed in the literature on the subject. Thus, considering the limited size of this article, I decided not to describe the situation here. More on this issue may be found in: Bērziņš 2012: 10-11; Caves 2000: 2-3; Hesmondhalgh 2013: 26-28.

of for-profit organizations, and the means for their achievement also differ. Also, authorities of various levels often express, directly or indirectly, their expectations of those organizations and the methods for pursuing the public mission. As a result, the environment in cultural industries is complex, and political factors are important for the functioning of organizations in those industries. Central and local authorities have a major impact on the directions of cultural policies and institutional governance in cultural industries, thus strongly affecting the goals of organizations. The question is, then, how independent are cultural industry organizations in determining their own missions and goals? This is hard to determine, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that cultural industry organizations are at least partly 'incapacitated' in their strategic decision making (e.g. legal limitations to conducting economic activity or different plans of the owners)<sup>5</sup>. Another obstacle to creating and implementing a strategy is the need to reconcile the goals of various stakeholder groups (i.e. individuals, groups or organizations within or outside an organization), whose interests are linked with the management of an organization and may directly or indirectly affect its operation. Stakeholders influence an organization, but are also influenced by it (Wachowiak 2013: 46). In the case of cultural industry organizations, the number of stakeholders is much higher than in the case of for-profit organizations (see: Gawęł 2012), and satisfying their needs is a much greater challenge (see: Williams, Lewis 2008). Various stakeholder groups have different, often contradictory interests, and the job of organization managers is to develop and implement a strategy in such a way as to satisfy the aspirations of each of those groups. Accordingly, managers have to balance between various interests and compromise, which limits their freedom to make strategic decisions.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting here that, in the case of some for-profit organizations, the ability to make strategic decisions is also limited. This is the case with, for example, subsidiaries that are totally dependent on parent companies. Strategies are developed by the parent company, and the subsidiaries are supposed to implement them.

## ZAMEK CIESZYN – STRATEGY OF A CULTURAL (NON-)INSTITUTION<sup>6</sup>

Zamek Cieszyn was founded in 2011<sup>7</sup> as a municipal budgetary unit, but since 2011, it has been a local government cultural institution co-managed by the City of Cieszyn and Silesian Voivodship. The goal of Zamek Cieszyn is to ‘develop innovative entrepreneurship through the use of design’, which is understood as an effective tool ‘to increase the competitiveness of companies, institutions, towns and regions’<sup>8</sup>. With this goal, the activity of Zamek Cieszyn focuses on three areas: design, entrepreneurship and tourism. Services offered in the designing area are mainly addressed to designers, and they include: workshops and training sessions, counseling for self-employed business owners and counseling/assistance in project implementation. The services offered in the entrepreneurship area are addressed to the business and they include: training sessions held by the Zamek personnel, customer-tailored training held by outsourced experts, counseling/assistance in project implementation and corporate events. Moreover, both groups offer rental of exhibition space and offices. Zamek Cieszyn also organizes transfer to design fairs and festivals. In the tourism area, services include accommodation, tours of the castle hill, workshops in traditional and artistic craft, and events<sup>9</sup>. The services provided by Zamek Cieszyn are partly free of charge and partly provided on commercial terms. The budget of Zamek Cieszyn consists of grants from the Town Office and

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<sup>6</sup> The case study was developed on the basis of interviews with the employees of Zamek Cieszyn, the materials provided by them as well as publicly available information. Interviews were conducted by Patryk Dziurski (Collegium of Management and Finance, SGH Warsaw School of Economics) and Mikołaj Lewicki (Warsaw University, Institute of Sociology) in June and July of 2015 for the needs of the research project *Culture and Development* financed from the Program of the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage 2015 – Culture Observatory.

<sup>7</sup> Until 2011, Zamek Cieszyn was called Śląski Zamek Sztuki i Przedsiębiorczości (Silesian Castle of Culture and Entrepreneurship).

<sup>8</sup> *Projektujemy możliwości*, <http://www.zamekcieszyn.pl/pl/artukul/projektujemy-mozliwosci-199> (accessed: 30.10.2019).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.zamekcieszyn.pl/pl/artukul/oferta-200> (accessed: 30.10.2019).



Silesian Voivodeship ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of the budget), external financing, (e.g. EU projects;  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the budget) and revenue from economic activity ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of the budget).

Zamek Cieszyn combines tradition and modernity. It makes a link with tradition and history directly through its name and location on the castle hill, and indirectly through protection and promotion of traditional craftsmanship. At the same time, the activity of Zamek Cieszyn focuses on modern designing. It sets the direction for design development in Poland by promoting the designing of services, public space and social changes. Ewa Gołębiowska (2011: 157), the director of Zamek Cieszyn, notes that 'combining history, tradition and identity with designing and modern technologies' constitutes Zamek's strength.

Zamek Cieszyn is a local government cultural institution, but, looking at its activity, it is hardly a typical cultural institution. One of the respondents says: 'We are an unusual cultural institution' (respondent 1). She also says that she and her team would like to be called 'an inspiring place' rather than treated as a traditional institution or house of culture. According to newspapers, the employees of Zamek Cieszyn call it a 'company', meaning that there is 'a certain goal, community of action, vision, (...) strategy of action. (...) We do not necessarily mean a company in the sense of the goal being for-profit economic activity, but rather in the sense of effective actions aimed at achieving a certain goal' (respondent 1). Another respondent adds: 'We [the employees of Zamek Cieszyn – P.D.] always have the mission at the back of our heads. Sometimes, we can do a thing that is not exactly financially profitable (...); there are actions that will yield profit only after some time, and not always *stricte* financial, sometimes it will rather be a change in mentality, or setting the ground for some other solutions' (respondent 2). Zamek Cieszyn combines pursuit of the public mission with economic activity, being a hybrid organization that unites the best elements of for-profit and non-profit organizations.

At Zamek Cieszyn, the strategy is seen as a dynamic process of overcoming challenges in the process of development (modern approach). Its employees identify numerous problems that need to be solved in order to be able to implement projects and develop. They also note that long-term planning is difficult, especially in terms of finances, which makes operation and organizational management more complicated. Ewa Gołębiowska (2011: 150) undoubtedly is a strong leader, but – as she herself declares in one

of the interviews – the process of creating, implementing and even controlling the implementation of strategy requires major involvement of the employees.

In Zamek Cieszyn, the strategy is seen partly through the prism of the resource-based theory, which is why the strategy development process is inside-out. All kinds of resources are important: both tangible (financial resources and buildings), and intangible (knowledge and skills, relations, reputation and image, strong brand and effective management system). However, intangible resources are more important, especially knowledge, skills and relations. The director of Zamek Cieszyn states that ‘an institution needs a good, strong backbone, a fixed team’ (ibid.: 151). One of the respondents believes the same: ‘we need to have a crew, the most important thing is to compile a team and to develop it and create bonds within it’ (respondent 1).

An important intangible resource of Zamek Cieszyn are relations, which were created and used even before its foundation as well as during its operation. The interviewees stressed the fact that it was possible to create Zamek Cieszyn thanks to the help and engagement of personnel of the Cieszyn Town Office and Marshal’s Office. After its creation, various relations were and still are intensively used in order to gain knowledge and skills required to pursue the mission (e.g. outsourcing experts). It should be noted, however, that currently, the team of Zamek Cieszyn has extensive knowledge and skills that enable the development of training and counseling services. Also, Zamek Cieszyn acts as a cooperation animator, which means that its actions make it possible to create and strengthen relations between other individuals and organizations. Such initiative includes: the Entrepreneurs Club, Silesian Design Cluster and business breakfasts. The institution’s large network is also useful in daily activity, to help entrepreneurs, designers and other design centers, as one of the respondents notes: ‘You can always call us and ask, where to find this or that specialist. If we can help, we share phone numbers or other contact details’ (respondent 1). This means that Zamek Cieszyn implements a strategy called by Brandenburger and Nalebuff the strategy of entanglement in a cooperative network or the strategy of creating a network of contacts, according to the typology proposed by Varbanova. Zamek Cieszyn creates various relations that it uses in the course of its development and makes available to its other partners.

It is difficult to define the resource strategy of Zamek Cieszyn. On the one hand, it has its own resources (tangible, i.e. buildings and funds,

and intangible, i.e. knowledge, skills and relations), but – on the other hand – it successfully uses outsourced resources (mainly intangible, i.e. knowledge and skills). This means that Zamek Cieszyn has a well-developed skill of managing not only its own, but also outsourced resources. Thus, its resource strategy is positioned between the ‘lord of the treasures’ strategy and that of the ‘business architect’, but in my opinion, it is closer to the former of the two options.

It also seems that Zamek Cieszyn applies an innovation strategy that, in this case, involves expanding the scope of designing services (not only product designing but also service, public space and social change designing), which stimulates the growth of effectiveness. It seems that the product-market strategy of Zamek Cieszyn is the product development strategy. This means that it releases new products on its existing markets.

The last issue I would like to discuss is the impact of stakeholders on the creation and implementation of the strategy. Zamek Cieszyn has to cope with the expectations of various stakeholders. For example, the interests of the institutions’ owners – the voivodeship authorities, who want to increase the presence of Zamek Cieszyn outside the Śląsk Cieszyński area, are contrary to those of the municipal authorities, who expect the institution to be more present in Cieszyn. Creating and implementing a strategy with such contradictory expectations is a very difficult task, besides, there are the expectations of other groups: the designers community, residents of Cieszyn, entrepreneurs, partners and employees, which may be different and mutually excluding. A strategy is created and developed as a result of a compromise, and not on the basis of individual decisions of Zamek Cieszyn employees, which confirms my former remarks.

## CONCLUSIONS

The above deliberations lead to two conclusions. First of all, creating and implementing a strategy is a difficult task for cultural industry organizations. However, I would not say that it is more difficult for them than for for-profit organizations. The strategic management process is specific for every type of organization, and those who create and implement a strategy face different challenges. This leads to the other conclusion, namely that the process of creating and implementing a strategy in cultural industry organizations is influenced the most by the following factors: the goals

of an organization (other than those in for-profit organizations), the need to manage contradictory activities, such as exploration and exploitation<sup>10</sup>, the need to reconcile the expectations of various stakeholder groups and unpredictability of the environment and political factors.

Research concerning cultural industry organization strategies should be continued, as this area is still insufficiently explored. I believe, however, that future research should focus not only on strategy but also on the entire strategic management process, which would show the full picture of the actual situation. Also, it seems desirable that future research takes into consideration the conditions presented by me, in order to confirm, reject or supplement them.

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<sup>10</sup> The issue of managing contradictory activities, such as exploration and exploitation, was not discussed in this article, but I think this is an everyday challenge in cultural and creative industries, thus affecting the process of creating and implementing a strategy. See: Knight, Harvey 2015; Wu, Wu 2016.

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### Summary

The aim of this article is to present organizational strategies in cultural industries, based on the example of a cultural (non-)institution Zamek Cieszyn. Zamek Cieszyn is an unusual institution, because it combines the best elements of for-profit organisations with those of non-profit organizations. It applies the best managerial practices in cultural industries. The author uses an appropriate methodology. The research method is

a critical analysis of academic literature (desk research) and the case study method. In the article, the author presents theoretical hypotheses which are then empirically verified in the case study. To sum up, developing and implementing organizational strategies in the cultural industries is a difficult task because it is affected by the following factors: organizations' goals are different than the goals of for-profit organizations, the need to manage complexity, the need to reconcile different expectations of stakeholders, unpredictability of the environment and influence of political factors.

**Keywords:** cultural industries, strategy, cultural institution, strategic management





## THEMATIC TELEVISION CHANNELS IN POLAND IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND DOMINANCE OF NEW MEDIA<sup>1</sup>

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What is a thematic channel? In what way does it differ from a thematic program? Barbara Turowska, Director of the Monitoring Department of the National Broadcasting Council, notes that the correct terms are ‘television program’ and ‘program’. In fact, the Broadcasting Act of December 29<sup>th</sup> 1992 defines a ‘program’ as a ‘structured set of broadcasts, commercial communications or other broadcasts disseminated in their entirety, in a way that enables simultaneous reception by the recipients in the arrangement established by the broadcaster’, however, this nomenclature has not been adopted by the Polish community – there is a lack of cohesion in this field even among the employees of the above-mentioned institution<sup>2</sup>. The industry dictionaries are equally unhelpful with solving this issue – the new edition of *Słownik terminologii medialnej* [*The Dictionary of Media Terminology*] reads, on the one hand, that a channel is a ‘standard frequency range used for broadcasting a single television program’, but on the other hand, it also claims that ‘a program is a synonym for a radio and television broadcast’, as well as a ‘separate radio and television program unit’ and a ‘component

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<sup>1</sup> The article is an abridged and edited version of a bachelor’s thesis written under the direction of Dr. Anna Wróblewska and defended at the Faculty of Humanities of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> An example of this is the *Strategia Regulacyjna na lata 2014-2016* [*Regulatory Strategy for 2014-2016*] document, where the notions of ‘channel’ and ‘program’ are used interchangeably. [http://www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/\\_public/Portals/0/konsultacje/strategia-regulacyjna-krajowej-rady-radiofonii-i-telewizji-na-lata-2014-2016.pdf](http://www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/Portals/0/konsultacje/strategia-regulacyjna-krajowej-rady-radiofonii-i-telewizji-na-lata-2014-2016.pdf) (accessed: 3.11.2019).

of the programming' (Bartoszcze 2006: 136). It seems that the word 'program' has been used to describe sets of broadcasts from the same radio broadcasters (every listener of 'Trójka' knows the slogan 'Trójka – the Third Programme of the Polish Radio'), but in the context of television it means the content broadcast by a given channel. This creates a pattern, in which the programme is broadcast by the channel – for example „Wiadomości” are broadcast by TVP1. When we add that in many publications, in particular those concerning audience, we can find the word 'station' (Kurdupski 2015) used to denote the same concept, is not difficult to see that a proper differentiation can be problematic. For the purpose of this paper I will assume that the term for a separate frequency band is a 'channel', which is why the title of this paper features 'thematic channels', not 'thematic programs'. The word 'channel' was also used throughout the majority of the sources used, which is why it seems to be the most appropriate word and will be used in the following section, with the exception of quotations.

## 1. WAYS OF CATEGORIZING THEMATIC CHANNELS

According to the report published by „Telekabel” monthly (*Tematyczne vs uniwersalne* 2017: 7), in April 2017 there were over two hundred and forty Polish language television channels. Some of the divisions or attempts to systematize the market, which will be presented in this paper, were based on Nielsen's studies. Nielsen is a leading international company operating on the Polish market, providing services in the field of audience measurement. Nielsen slowly built its position by signing contracts with new channels, advertising houses and advertisers, and finally won a tender for cooperation with TVP in 2011 (*TVP wymienia TNS OBOP...* 2011). Currently, the company collects data for all the most important entities on the Polish market.

Below, you may find a division of thematic channels according to the most important criteria.

### 1.1. LICENSE TYPE

The first criterion for studying thematic channels is, in my opinion, their license. The Polish body responsible for issuing broadcasting licenses is the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT); however, as the Director of the Regulatory Department of this institution, Krzysztof Zalewski, noted, in order to broadcast a signal that can be received in our country these days,

there is no need to have a Polish license<sup>3</sup>, obtaining it in another European country is sufficient. The open market, unfortunately, complicates the issue of control. Not only does the Broadcasting Council have no real influence on the content broadcast in these channels or even on the length of advertising blocks (Sadurski 2014), the institution is also unable to create a full list of channels available in Poland. This fact shows how complicated the system of regulation of thematic channels is at the current time.

These days<sup>4</sup>, ninety-six satellite channels and twenty-three terrestrial channels – a total of one hundred and nineteen channels, have licenses to broadcast in Poland. The List of television licenses<sup>5</sup> maintained by the KRRiT lists two types of ‘programme character’ – universal (or, in other words, general) and specialized. In addition, specialized channels have additional characteristics, with individual subtypes listed below in italics. There is no ready-made and complete list of such types to choose from, which enables each new channel to avoid fitting into an existing mould – instead, each broadcaster, can propose a new category. Krzysztof Zalewski admits that it is up to the broadcaster to decide the type of specialization they want to pursue<sup>6</sup>.

The above-mentioned list includes eighty-six specialized channels – eleven terrestrial programs and seventy-five digital programs. The most popular characteristic in the studied group is *music* channels. This category was selected by twelve stations, while five additional ones went with the related *music and entertainment* type. The second most frequently chosen characteristic is the *sports* channel (twelve channels). We should also add *entertainment, recreation and sports* channel, which gives a total of thirteen, or more than ten percent of the total pool. Eight applicants selected the *film* type, while four others selected a similar *documentary* type. Due to the significant representation with five channels each, the *entertainment and information and news* channels should also be noted here.

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s own interview with Krzysztof Zalewski conducted on the May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017.

<sup>4</sup> As of the May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.krrit.gov.pl/dla-nadawcow-i-operatorow/koncesje/wykaz-koncesji-i-decyzji/> (accessed: 2.06.2019).

<sup>6</sup> Author’s own interview with Krzysztof Zalewski.

Some types of programs target specific age or gender groups – six of them are intended for children, one for children, youth and their parents, and two for women. NEXT MAN 3D should also be added to this group, since its summary says that it is a *business programme for men*, which means that the target group is in this case complemented by a profile of interest of the intended audience, as well as Super Polsat – *intended for people with disabilities*.

We should note that target groups are very broad and after adding them together, they basically represent the whole society. It is worth thinking about why they are so broad. Looking at the list of characteristics, one can get the impression that these channels have not fully taken advantage of the opportunities offered by thematic television – after all, we could expect a better, more specific characteristics, for example a channel ‘addressed to children aged 4-6’. The ignorance of the applicants is certainly not to blame here. Daniel Reszka (2016: 12), Vice-President of VIMN, a corporation operating a number of channels for children centered on the Nickelodeon brand, stated in a statement for the „Telekabel” monthly that the lack of such categorization in the application submitted to the National Broadcasting Council probably only proves that broadcasters do not want to narrow down their opportunities. Ultimately, after being added to the List in question, the broadcaster should broadcast what they have committed to, and invariably broadcast at least 70% of the content conforming to the chosen profile – in such a diverse market, nobody can be sure of the success of their plans.

## 1.2. THEMATIC SEGMENTS

Audience measurement studies are now the driving force behind the entire industry. Elżbieta Gorajewska (Marciniak 2016: 29), Managing Director of Nielsen Audience Measurement, compares them to a currency that allows TV stations to value their services. The list of thematic channel division systems cannot therefore lack the scheme used by this company.

Nielsen divides the broadcasting market into ten segments, which it assigns channels to base on their main theme – in the case of nine segments; it is a specific, precise theme, with the tenth – universal – category. In the annual study of market shares of these segments, an additional distinction is made between all audiences over four years of age (the so-called 4+ group)

and cable TV audiences. The result is provided in the form of an SHR+ variable, which denotes the average audience share of all viewers over a given period of time;<sup>7</sup> in other words, the result means the percentage of viewers of a selected segment among all people who were in front of their TVs at a given time.

It should not be forgotten that Nielsen does not only study channels licensed by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). As I have already pointed out, in mid-2017 the group of the latter stations numbered about one hundred and thirty, while Nielsen had already included more than thirty more in its study carried out a year earlier (Marciniak 2016: 29). The position of the channel in the company's ranking translates into financial results, therefore broadcasters, even those who did not apply for a Polish license, apply to participate in the study.

While in the case of the National Broadcasting Council everyone can propose their own profile, in the case of Nielsen's ranking it would not make any sense. To facilitate the clear presentation of the results, the numerous channels had to be divided into as few segments as possible with clear characteristics. There are ten segments, including: *TV series, information, children's, sports, film, travel and history, music, entertainment and lifestyle, non-thematic* (universal) channels, as well as *others*. Let us take a look at how their viewership in the 4+ group has changed over the last few years.

Table 1. Shares of thematic channel segments in the audience market in Poland (in percent)

Segment name	Year 2007	Year 2015	Year 2017
TV series	1.09	3.86	3.92
Information	8.05	8.41	8.76
For children	2.91	4.69	4.69
Sportive	1.23	2.74	1.94
Film	0.92	3.22	3.62
Travel and history	1.64	4.00	4.32
Music	0.95	2.25	2.02

<sup>7</sup> TVP Advertising Office website, [www.brtvp.pl/16615065/slownik-tv](http://www.brtvp.pl/16615065/slownik-tv) (accessed: 18.09.2019).

Segment name	Year 2007	Year 2015	Year 2017
Entertainment and lifestyle	1.21	5.67	5.94
Non-thematic	80.15	61.41	60.51
Other	1.85	3.89	4.27

Source: Author's own compilation based on articles: Polska przed telewizorem, „Telekabel” 2016, No. 5, p. 19; Nasycony kanałami, „Telekabel” 2017, No. 4, p. 25.

The figures in the table show a huge leap between 2007, when analogue signals were still being broadcast, and 2015, when digital terrestrial television was already available. What is immediately noticeable at a glance is the enormous, nearly twenty-point drop in the audience of non-thematic (universal) channels. The issue of development of thematic channels in 2015-2017 is very interesting – let us note here that the only two thematic segments that recorded a decrease in audience in that period were *sports* and *music* channels, while *children's* channels remained at the same level. This should not come as a surprise, especially when it comes to music channels. In a survey conducted for the *Screen Lovers* blog, which included experts – heads of distribution and managers of TV stations, as many as a quarter of the respondents found that there were too many music channels (Kowalczyk 2017b). The remaining five segments, on the other hand, recorded an increase in viewership.

### 1.3. TV SIGNAL SOURCE

Although ordinary viewers usually do not think about how the source of the signal affects their habits related to television, it is still one of the most important factors that determines the contact with TV.

The broadest, and at the same time the most traditional division of TV signal sources includes satellite, cable and terrestrial television. To illustrate the percentages of the share of particular sources in Poland, Nielsen AC divides the market into several types of households – namely satellite, cable and terrestrial households. Of course, more and more often we have to deal with the situation in which the audiences use many signal sources. This relatively simple scheme will allow us to show how much television market research is now advanced and standardized (Marciniak 2016: 29).

In the era of digital terrestrial television, the signal of which reaches almost the entire territory of the country, anyone who decides to buy satellite television or popular cable TV set becomes the recipient of several

sources of signal. Many people have received a TV package when purchasing broadband, and the trend of combining several services, including television, in one package is getting increasingly popular<sup>8</sup>.

According to AC Nielsen, 34.8% of all households receiving TV signals in Poland in 2016 were terrestrial households. Their number has been growing steadily since 2012, but has still not reached the number of satellite households, which account for 35.6%. Satellite reception remains the most common in Poland, although its advantage has never been as small as these days. The open question is whether there will be a change on the top in the near future. Although a large part of experts predict an increase in the share of terrestrial households in their forecasts for 2017, there are also those who believe that the boom related to new multiplexes is already a history and that the market situation will soon stabilize (Kowalczyk 2017a). The survey shows the lowest percentage of cable households – cable TV providers have been constantly losing out to the competition since the launch of the digital terrestrial television network in Poland.

It is striking that, despite such large market developments over the last few years, including the revolutionary digital switchover, the research breakdowns by source type as well as the percentage proportions between specific types of households remain unchanged. Like in in 2012, each of the ways of receiving TV broadcasts holds a third of the market share.

Table 2. TV household types in Poland in 2012-2016

Household type	Market share in percent				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Satellite	37.9	36.7	35.3	36.1	35.6
Cable	32.6	33.0	31.0	30.1	29.6
Terrestrial	29.5	30.3	33.8	33.8	34.8

Source: Nasycony kanałami, „Telekabel” 2017, No. 4, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> An example of this is the SmartDom offer, where users can combine services such as TV, telephone, broadband, electricity, insurance and monitoring to get additional discounts.

#### 1.4. MEDIA GROUPS

Although the TV market gets more and more fragmented from year to year and the representatives of existing channels often have to endure the view of decreasing viewership, it does not mean that owning TV stations is no longer profitable. People have long realized that the losses of one programme can be compensated for by the profits of other ones. It works as follows – there is a main channel, usually universal, with a long tradition, with satellite programs set up around it. They are often specialized, thus facilitating increasing the audience thanks to easier targeting. This phenomenon occurs not only in satellite and cable networks, but also in the open band, in public multiplexes. As Krzysztof Zalewski admits:

This was the policy of the National Broadcasting Council; they did not want to supplement the offer with universal channels, instead going for specialized ones. Due to costs, the programming is set up in such a way that one runs premieres and others for example show re-runs. Channels also share licenses for broadcasting films and programs, etc.<sup>9</sup>

These days, the production of television content has become very cheap, hence the widespread practice of creating new programs. As Grzegorz Miecugow describes:

Making TV programs is becoming cheaper, especially if the channels are based on existing teams. TVs like TVN maintains the weather editorial office, so you only need to expand it a little and you can run a separate programme – TVN Meteo (today it is known as Meteo Active, because it's more in vogue these days)<sup>10</sup>.

The vast majority of thematic channels licensed by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) belong to eight entities, each of which offers at least three channels. These were Telewizja Polsat, ASTRO, ITI Neovision, Kino Polska, Michał Winnicki, Eska TV, Telewizja Polska, as well as TVN. Let us add that among these entities, only three meet the requirements of a universal media group, based on the model indicated above: a universal

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<sup>9</sup> Author's own interview with Krzysztof Zalewski.

<sup>10</sup> Author's own interview with Grzegorz Miecugow, conducted on the September 4<sup>th</sup> 2015.



channel plus thematic channels. These are: Polsat, TVN and Telewizja Polska. In 2016, they controlled the market with a market share of 69.34% (*Zmiany w udziałach oglądalności...* 2017: 30), and in July 2017, their offer included sixteen of the twenty-five most popular thematic channels (Kurdupski 2017), nine of which were in the top ten of the ranking. Many things suggest that, despite the changes, these three entities will continue to dominate the market in the years to come, as they have done up to now.

### 1.5. FINANCING

After 1989 television in Poland was shifted onto the path towards the free market, which meant that every single broadcaster (partially even the public broadcaster<sup>11</sup>) needed to ensure their own further existence by generating income in a variety of ways.

Krzysztof Zalewski notes that the traditional television model is based on two main methods of financing: advertising funds or fees from operators or consumers<sup>12</sup>. In the first one, the TV station earns money by selling its airtime to advertisers, in the second one – by sharing its content. Until recently, this meant simply making one's signal available to one of the cable or satellite network operators, but these days a whole other spectrum of possibilities is available to broadcasters.

What has changed the current situation is, to a large extent, the connection between the world of television and the Internet. This applies primarily to the change in perception of the so-called VOD (Video on Demand) and other such facilities by the broadly understood television industry.

Derek Compare (2016: 337) wrote about the strategies of the TV stations in the 1980s, claiming, that 'television's primary goal is selling potential audiences to advertisers, not selling products to consumers'. In the age of VHS tapes, television was not interested in publishing its greatest hits so that viewers could watch them at a convenient time. The viewers were supposed to wait for the content they wanted to see, while watching advertising blocks as well, so that the stations could generate revenues.

<sup>11</sup> Article 31(1) of the Act of December 29<sup>th</sup> 1992 divides the revenues of a public broadcaster into four groups: subscription, trade in broadcasting rights and licenses, advertising and sponsored broadcasts, as well as other sources.

<sup>12</sup> Author's own interview with Krzysztof Zalewski.

However, as a result of the change in the process of creating and selling TV content, the old divisions between producers and production groups on the one hand, and distribution networks on the other, have disappeared<sup>13</sup>. Currently, they are often two separate departments of one large company, which takes care of comprehensive use of the production potential at each stage of sales process. In other words, if somebody wanted to watch the next (or previous) episode of a series produced by a given station or get acquainted with other content produced by said station, it would be better if they had a legal, comfortable source at their disposal, and thus the station would still earn money. Today, several of the largest TV stations in the U.S. are enormous conglomerates, which bring together film and TV format production companies, cable networks, music, book and magazine publishers, not to mention numerous different ways of distributing content on the Internet and in various on-line platforms. Similar trends can also be observed on the Polish market. Carlos Ortega (2016: 39), Executive Vice President of FOX International Channels, says that growth will be based on the integration of services driven by television brands. Let us add that all three of the largest Polish media groups mentioned above have their own VOD services linked with their digital platforms, thanks to which they can expand the number of ways they can use to reach their viewers, interrupting *on-line* content with advertisements or charging one-time fees for the possibility of watching them. Alicja Jaskiernia (2016: 72) aptly summed up the modern TV business, claiming that ‘the stream of the greatest profits flows to the companies involved in providing the content of broadcasts, and not in their production’. It is therefore clear that there are currently more than just two main ways of financing television. New possibilities go hand in hand with every new way of receiving TV content.

## 2. VIEWERSHIP

The single channel viewership rate sparks the imagination of those responsible for creating television content, as it is easiest to deduce from it whether what they do is appreciated by the viewers.

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<sup>13</sup> See: section 3.3 of this paper.

The fact that only three out of the fifteen most popular thematic channels in 2007 were ranked in 2016 proves how far the Polish thematic channels have come in the last few years. These were TVN24, Polsat2 and TVN Style.

The following table shows the fifteen most popular thematic channels in 2007 and 2016 respectively; those that reached a viewership of half a percent are marked with dark color, while asterisks are shown next to those available on digital terrestrial multiplexes.

Table 3. Ranking of 15 most frequently watched thematic channels in Poland in 2007 and 2016 with their market share (in percent)

No.	2007		2016	
1	TVN24	2.98	TVN24	3.81
2	Jetix	0.72	TVP INFO	3.26
3	Cartoon Network	0.63	TTV*	1.60
4	Polsat 2	0.61	Polsat2	1.52
5	MiniMini	0.61	TVP Seriale	1.48
6	VIVA Polska	0.53	Polsat News	1.11
7	Eurosport	0.50	TVP Rozrywka*	1.09
8	Polsat Sport	0.47	Stopklatka TV*	1.00
9	Discovery Channel	0.44	TVP ABC*	0.92
10	AXN	0.41	Polo TV*	0.83
11	TVN Style	0.36	FOCUS TV*	0.81
12	TVN Turbo	0.33	Nickelodeon	0.76
13	MTV Polska	0.26	ATM Rozrywka*	0.71
14	Animal Planet	0.23	TVN Style	0.70
15	National Geographic	0.23	TVP Historia*	0.60

Source: Author's own compilation based on Nielsen AC data provided in: Raport – kanały tematyczne, „Telekabel” 2016, No. 5, p. 20; Raport – kanały tematyczne, „Telekabel” 2017, No. 4, p. 26.

What conclusions can we draw from the analysis of the table? The first of them will undoubtedly be the dominance of TVN24, which has been able to keep the leading position for many years. In this respect, it is one of the few exceptions. We can certainly also appreciate the way in which the various thematic channels are performing on the audience market. Back in 2007, only the seven largest stations had market shares above 0.5%, in 2016 it was twenty stations (including all shown in the table). This proves that despite

the progressing fragmentation of the market, good quality programming can reach the mass audience and gain recognition. The table also shows another important trend: a large number of channels available for everyone on terrestrial television. In 2016, up to eight of the top fifteen were given as a present for subscribers on free multiplexes. As I have already pointed out, more than one third of households still only have access to this form of broadcasting; the table therefore emphasizes that this group of consumers must not be underestimated under any circumstances.

This short list of channels is also an interesting cross-section of the audience's needs: the first two places are taken by channels belonging to the main players in the market – TVN and TVP, both are *information* channels, and these two are followed by another channel, whose KRRiT license describes its profile as *information, journalism and educational*<sup>14</sup>, and in addition, a significant percentage of viewership was achieved by *film, children's* and *entertainment* channels. Is this what the audiences expect from contemporary television? Important news mixed with a lot of entertainment? It is certainly very possible.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE RECEPTION OF AUDIO-VISUAL CONTENT

Changes in television are inevitable if it does not want to become just a relic of the past. Let us try to answer the question whether television in its classic form, such as the one known to Poles in the 1960s, would be a competitive medium today? Not on any account. Grzegorz Miecugow described it aptly:

There is no way that the times of old [Polish – Ł.B.] television will ever return, where people turned on their – rather rare – TV sets, gathered around the TV and watched a broadcast, which could not be understood by seventy-five percent of them, such as *Kabaret Starszych Panów*. To this day, public television boasts that this is the best show ever made. But if the average viewer had anything else to choose from in 1965, they would have chosen anything else, because that entertainment was simply at a level unattainable for those three quarters of the population<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> National Broadcasting Council license no. 465/2011-T.

<sup>15</sup> Author's own interview with Grzegorz Miecugow.

Nowadays, it is not enough to broadcast ‘anything else’, because there are a large number of stations broadcasting the most varied content in the unencrypted band only. Even television from several years ago, with landscape dominated by the ‘Big Four’ – TVP1, TVP2, TVN and Polsat, gaining more than half of the market share every month, and often reaching 75% (*TVN w górę...* 2007), looks archaic. This change cannot be undone. Broadcasters can no longer just serve ‘any’ content, they need to meet the tastes of specific audiences, have a specific offer, hence the growing popularity of thematic channels. The latter are attempts of broadcasters to win over and keep their viewers – who are more conscious, have specific requirements and want them to be satisfied. However, thematic channels are not the only way to attract valuable customers. Let us try to look at other forms, selected from among the most popular ones.

### 3.1. VCRS, DVD PLAYERS, HOME VIDEO SYSTEMS

Attempts to gain an audience for a variety of content started in the broadly understood West in the mid-1990s with the appearance of the first VCRs. What was this revolutionary technical leap often overlooked today<sup>16</sup>, all about? Every VCR owner could watch what they wanted to watch at their leisure, at home. Before the introduction of VCRs, this was impossible. It also radically changed the audience’s approach to television – at that time, viewers had to remember broadcast time – using a statement from that period, the reality was ‘the viewer’s total dependence on the programming timetable – if you’re late, you don’t watch’ (Szulczewski 1972: 196).

Since then, over the next two or three decades, every new invention in the home video category has been just an upgrade, a face-lift of the same model. At first, at the pioneering stage of the development of this segment, the video cassettes were inconvenient to use, they contained only several dozens of minutes of programming and had to be rewound, and after a dozen or so playbacks the quality started getting significantly worse. Then there appeared the huge laserdisc, boasting the size of a vinyl LP, followed by technologically similar, but much smaller in size – CDs, DVDs and finally Blu-ray.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Despite the ubiquity and unique qualities of home video technology, it has been sorely understudies in the academy’ (Compare 2006: 336).

This way of watching content, despite being strongly linked to television, was for a long time mainly an ‘extension of the film industry’ (Compare 2006: 337) since it mostly used film facilities, not television production studios or broadcasting stations. This is one of the examples of how strongly television is connected with other ways of watching their content. Two worlds – cinema and television – became thus linked with each other. Initially, it was the world of cinema that saw a great threat in the simple access to content offered by television without the need to go to the screening. The results of the audience and attendance survey, however, spoke for themselves and led to a change in this belief: ‘it has since become its [the film industry – Ł.B.] most crucial technology, fostering new markets for their products and providing the majority of their revenue since late 1980s’ (ibid.).

Television content was not popular on the home video market until technology allowed for relatively cheap and good quality collections, such as whole seasons of TV series on DVD. From buying one’s favorite TV series on DVD to be able to watch it at one’s own convenience, there is only one step away buying access to the platform offering access to TV series’ episodes.

The development of the DVD market meant that the audiences began to associate themselves even more closely with their favorite content, since they could actually ‘own it’, instead of just being able to watch it. This model, although theoretically distant from the ‘traditional’ way of functioning of television, began to bring significant profits already at the turn of the millennium and increased its market share year by year. In this situation, some publishers went with a middle ground between setting the content free beyond their control area and a universal programming, in which each type of programme has its own representation in the station. Said middle ground is thematic channels.

### 3.2. SMART TV, HYBRID TV, ON-DEMAND SERVICES

Although today the two most important media – television and the Internet – are often presented as antagonists (Lemańska 2017), the fact is that there is an exchange of ideas between them. Traditional content providers have long ago recognized the potential of new technologies linked to the global network to increase their spheres of influence. Sharing and making the content available on a new level was beneficial to them in two ways: first, they could reach a growing audience themselves – including age groups most valued

by advertisers, and second, they limited the possibilities for new entities to pop up, thus limiting their potential competition.

A natural step in the process of television development<sup>17</sup> seems to be the creation of services and devices connected to TV sets, which, however, did not broadcast programs continuously, according to a programming timetable, but instead offered the possibility of viewing them without the possibility of recording them on a physical medium, using the streaming technology. It is a development of the idea of a brick and mortar rental store<sup>18</sup>.

It is worth noting that VOD services are available to users in two main ways: first, as a website, which can be opened via a browser on a desktop computer or tablet with broadband access, second, as another function of TV sets (either directly or via a set-top box). The first of the above mentioned methods does not require a TV, but this does not mean that it makes it impossible to watch TV programming, which is more and more often available directly on-line (Kaźmierska 2016). The second method involves access to specific applications directly on the TV set, such as YouTube (researchers call it a 'closed system' [Zalewski et al. 2013: 5]), or to all the on-line content (in the case of the so-called open systems). This technical division is the key to understanding the difference between hybrid TV and *Smart TV*. According to the EBU (the European Broadcasting Union, which brings together more than half a hundred public broadcasters from all over the continent), the notion of hybrid TV is valid only if the user has access to the resources of the entire network. The name 'Smart TV' is reserved for devices with access to television applications specifically designed for the relevant model of a given manufacturer (ibid.: 6), where what the user ultimately sees is the responsibility of the manufacturer<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The separation from the traditional television model was clearly seen in the famous slogan used by the American broadcaster: 'It's not TV, it's HBO'.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most famous case of this type of company is Netflix, which started its on-line operations only after renting DVDs for ten years.

<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that 'Smart TV' became a customary name for products by various manufacturers, it is actually a product of Samsung. Other manufacturers have similar systems with different names; however, they have not been adopted by the general public to such extent.

Initially, VOD services offered content produced by others for TV stations, but quite quickly the direction in which the next changes were to follow was becoming apparent: When will the viewer's finally be able to view the content at any time? Who is going to wait for the content to be included in the programming? The opinion that the future of television will be limited to the creation of programs that will be shown by someone else became quite popular at the time. Based on interviews with employees of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, Jostein Gripsrud (2004: 214) stated that television 'was to become primarily a producer of good programs, and its role as a distributor and composer of a schedule of certain mix od programs was expected to lose importance'. In retrospect, we can see that he was partly right – in fact, today's TV stations create more content than ever before, the emphasis is also on the quality of television<sup>20</sup>, but the role of its distributor is still of great importance. Paradoxically, this is due to the falling number of people sitting in front of their TVs – media conglomerates are trying to keep the audience and don't let them go to the competition.

Returning to the issue of on-demand services, it quickly turned out that they do not have to be limited to the role of an intermediary and can create unique content on their own, which radically changed the situation of old-style broadcasters. One of the first signs of change was HBO's introduction of a new product to its offer – the HBO on Demand service, launched in the USA in 2001, which appeared in Poland seven years later, initially under the HBO Digital brand. The service offered access to content created for the HBO and Cinemax channels (which belonged to the HBO Group). It was not a VOD offer, but a VOD subscription addressed only to subscribers of the regular HBO channel, available via a TV set-top box. From the very beginning, the users could choose between HBO productions – feature films, documentaries, concerts, as well as TV series available in packages containing several episodes each. Every week, about a hundred programs were waiting for their audience (Nietrzpiel 2010). The new product was very popular. HBO management followed suit and introduced the audience to the HBO GO website in the holiday season of 2010 – it is worth mentioning

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<sup>20</sup> The notion of quality TV is of interest to Polish researchers, see: Major 2012



that Poland was the second country in the world, after the USA, where the service was launched.

Let us also note that until the creation of the websites, which themselves created the content they shared, the model was as follows – the TV created a programme, which was then presented to its audience in a traditional or more modern form (via VHS, DVD or VOD platform). The year 2013 was a breakthrough in this respect, when Netflix, HBO GO's rival on the VOD platform market, started producing TV series with quality comparable to that of traditional television and even higher<sup>21</sup>. In Poland, the company entered the market officially in the first weeks of 2016, gaining great interest (Kozłowski 2016) on the spot (although some of its customers accused the website of having a very limited offer in Polish). While HBO created programs for its television channels, treating other ways of reaching the audience as secondary, Netflix has no such channels. The supply chain was significantly shorter – why pay for creating content when we can do it ourselves? The efforts to lower cost and optimize profits were previously used the other way around. In 2013, the KRRiT team noted that VOD services related to large advertising market players (mainly satellite platform operators, large cable networks and terrestrial TV broadcasters) dominate the Polish market (Zalewski et al. 2013: 12).

It is not possible to talk about television without mentioning platforms such as HBO GO or Netflix, although their impact on our market is still hardly significant – these global players have to compete with a whole range of more or less native websites, largely belonging to TV station owners. Krzysztof Zalewski considers larger investments in Polish production to be the key to increasing market share.<sup>22</sup> Poles are very fond of Polish content, including older and cult productions, which may lead the audience to use the services of domestic providers for a long time. Not all big players disregard local content – one of the youngest VOD websites in our country, ShowMax, seems to understand that such an offer can attract the Polish audience. From the very beginning, the website has been advertising with productions such as the satirical *Ucho prezesa* [*The Chairman's Ear*], as well

<sup>21</sup> *House of Cards*, a Netflix TV series, won three Emmy Awards in its first year, and was nominated in three more categories.

<sup>22</sup> Author's own interview with Krzysztof Zalewski.

as films such as *Pitbull* or *Planeta singli* [*The Singles' Planet*]. Although it belongs to the South African Naspers group, it also plans to offer production created by Poles (Każmierska 2017).

As it has already been mentioned, the services related to television channels have a very strong position on the market. Ipla.tv, which offers Polsat programs, Player.pl, which belongs to the TVN Group, as well as vod.tvp.pl, which belongs to the national broadcaster, are all websites with millions of users (Wojtas 2017). They bring huge profits and also make it easier to reach new types of audiences, often even people who were not previously interested in television. For example, ipla.tv offers access to eighty television channels, as well as thousands of broadcasts. For a long time now, it has not been a niche form of entertainment, which is increasingly often used by broadcasters.

## CONCLUSIONS

Will the connection with the Internet be the future of television? If nothing unpredictable happens – definitely yes. The change of perception of television is taking place before our very eyes – it is difficult to expect that somebody who has had access to a laptop, tablet and a smartphone from an early age, and somebody who is accustomed to jumping between windows in search of interesting content, to sit politely in front of the TV and wait for a broadcast. At the turn of the millennium Wiesław Godzic (2001: 177) predicted: ‘The ‘new’ digital way of watching television is not yet fully recognized and understood, and for a long time we will apply – mentally and behaviorally – the models that we know from our previous contacts with the silver screen’. It is very possible that the time mentioned by the Polish researcher has come to an end. While the elderly still devote a lot of time to watching television in the traditional, linear way, like in the times when a statistical viewer spent more than 80% of their time in front of their TV watching the ‘Big Four’, the young generations approach TV with a set of specific requirements.

What is the future of thematic channels in this complex landscape? What role will they play in the complex television market? It is difficult to give a clear answer to these questions. However, it is very possible that in the near future the number of channels – which is currently too inflated, will be radically reduced. Experts’ opinions regarding their future vary. Some, like

Maciej Mrozowski, claim that they will survive both off-line and on-line, while others, like Adam Stefanik, director of Superstacja, foresee their rapid demise (Szeliga 2016).

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## Summary

The article considers a broad topic of thematic channels on the Polish market. Thematic channels, increasingly popular and obtaining more and more media coverage, fit well into the landscape of television, gaining a large audience and changing the way television is perceived by Poles. The author proposes various ways of categorizing thematic channels, because of their license types, thematic segments, television signal sources, media groups and financing methods. The author also provides information on station viewership. He also focuses on alternative ways of watching audio-visual content (videotapes, DVD players, home video systems, smart TVs, hybrid TVs, on-demand services), and defines how they have influenced the shape of contemporary television as well as the development of thematic channels.

**Keywords:** thematic television channels, TV, Polish television market, media groups, viewership data, viewership, terrestrial television, cable TV, satellite TV



## ‘I THINK I WILL DIE’

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### 1.

The first photograph<sup>1</sup> – a sunny October day. Trees on the horizon, blurred, hazy. A meadow – lush, dense, unmown; thistles, various species of grasses. Probably still warm, from the sun, despite it being October – still alive. Maybe it still smells like meadows in late summer; maybe there is still some vibrant life among the tiny leaves. Maybe it would be possible to hide in these tall grasses, huddle down in the soft blades, when it is so difficult to stay on

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<sup>1</sup> The photograph was published in: Jeffrey 2008 and 2009: 250. Reprinted thanks to courtesy of TAIWPN Universitas.

one's feet. Touch the hard ground, make sure it is there. What does it feel like, the earth, the bottom of the October meadow – is it still soft, damp, or already overgrown with wheatgrass roots, dry, autumnal? Hard or loose?

Is it easy to dig a hole in it? And what is underneath the meadow? A layer of black earth, clay mud, stones, sand. Mouse burrows, mole arteries. White threads of meadow mycelium, nests of gravedigger beetles, tangled roots. Cold.

How big should the hole be to fit eight people in it?

## 2.

The hand in the middle of the frame touches the ground, looking for support. Other hands wander around in search of warmth, traces of life, the closeness of skin – one rolled up in a fist, another hidden under a headscarf, in a pocket, in the folds of a sweater, on the shoulder of the person standing nearby, on the neck, in the spot where you can feel the pulsation of blood. Gentle gestures to make sure that the heart is still beating, that the skin on the stomach is still warm and soft, the lining in the pocket so familiar, and the hand of the wooden cane still provides support. Nothing else can be done, only the hands are allowed to venture on these small, almost imperceptible journeys.

Nothing can be done anymore – one can only wait: so they are standing, seven on the right side of the frame and the woman in the middle, on the grass, as if she had sunk to the ground.

'Jews just before the execution'. Just before? What does it mean 'just before'? Seconds? Three minutes? Twenty breaths of the girl who put her hand on her stomach, fifty beats of pulse of the woman with her hand on her neck?

What else needs to be done – ask them to stand in a line? Have them dig the pit? Let them go and shoot them in the back? Or maybe play some other sophisticated joke just to kill time?

How long have they been waiting? How are they waiting? They do not believe in death, nobody believes, but just in case it is better to freeze and not raise your eyes. So they stand, frozen, so as not to touch, not to rock the unimaginable despair, the instinct that makes you scream and run away – because then everything will be lost. But for now, maybe they can still make it, maybe the decision will be changed, maybe something, someone,



at the last moment... Freeze, not to feel too much – and if so just this pulsating piece of skin, just the warmth of a thin woolen coat, the lively softness of the hair.

They are waiting, still on the side of life, on the side of air, but already anxious, already dead in their immobility. The woman who is squatting in the grass is already waiting on the side of death, on the side of earth, and yet still alive in a wild gesture, she breaks out of the stillness of the others. She is already dying, although the shot has not been fired yet. She is already sinking to the bottom, under the ground. The most vivid in the photo and yet the most dead.

Her face: a scratch on her cheek, a strand of hair from under her headscarf. Her face: a mole over her right eyebrow. Her face: lips, eyes, gaze. Her gaze: there are no words.

### 3.

The second photo – black smoke on the horizon. The road, soldiers’ helmets, burning children. Napalm burns. The skin, hair, nails, bones. The children are running, running away, barefoot, burning asphalt, faster, faster – to throw off one’s clothes, throw off one’s skin. Two on the left: the youngest boy turning around towards the wall of smoke, the older boy’s face torn with a cry. Two on the right: a girl who does not have the strength to run anymore and a little boy – at least he has someone to hold his hand. In the middle – a naked nine-year-old girl, a featherless chick, hands like broken wings, like the loose arms of a doll, patches of light, burnt skin. She is running. Between the screams, before she catches another draught of burning air, she repeats: ‘Nong qua! Nong qua!’ – ‘Too hot! Too hot!’

Somewhere up in the air, in the smoke, outside the frame, the roar of plane engines. One of them had dropped napalm bombs on the road a few seconds earlier, where the smoke is coming from. The pilot made a mistake – he thought they were partisans.

### 4.

On the next frame of the same film the girl is standing with her back turned in a wet spot – a moment ago one of the journalists poured water on her. A little girl with braided hair: one could easily imagine her playing in a puddle on a hot day, if it was not for the soldiers around her, if it was not

for the cameras and microphones, if it was not for the smoke. If it was not for her back – the burnt skin coming off like peeling paint. In a moment, Nick Ut, the author of the photograph<sup>2</sup>, a Vietnamese photographer working for Associated Press, will take all the burned children to a hospital and make sure that she is well looked after. Before the photographer takes the girl in his arms and carefully carries her to his car, the nine-year-old will say to her brother (the first one on the left side of the frame): ‘I think I’ll die’.

The girl’s name is Kim Phúc. Nick Ut photographed her on 8 June 1972 near the village of Trang Bang, on the motorway leading from Saigon to the border with Cambodia<sup>3</sup>.

## 5.

The first photograph does not have a next frame. If it had, if we could imagine the possible versions of the next frame – they would differ only in the rhythm of the shooting, the arrangement of the fallen bodies. The woman on the grass does not have a name. Her signature is a yellow patch on her clothes. The photographer is unknown. His signature: ‘Juden kurz vor der Erschiessung’. Near Kiev, October 1941.

Time:

First photo – between life and death.

Second photo – from death to life.

Place:

First photo – between air and earth.

Second photo – between fire and water.

## 6.

The first photograph – a shred of space, a scrap of time, an ash petal. People photographed at the last moment, torn out of the ground in the last moment. Seven faces caught out of focus, their profiles drawn with a blurred line. And the one in the middle, sharp and invisible at the same time – how can we

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<sup>2</sup> For the original version of Nick Ut’s photograph see: [http://zalacznik.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/2016\\_fotoesej2.szczypiorska.pdf](http://zalacznik.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/2016_fotoesej2.szczypiorska.pdf) (accessed: 27.12.2019).

<sup>3</sup> Some of the details of Kim Phuc’s story are presented after: Dąbrowski 2009: 75.

see her, when it is so difficult to look at her, so difficult to answer her gaze? We can slowly tame the frame. We can try – one look at the photograph, then another. Every time it is the same: the eyes are wandering around the ellipse which marks the limits of sharpness, the gaze is circling around, for a fraction of a second it slips down the middle of the frame, to her face – to look but not to see, to look but not to see. The safe edges of the photograph: a meadow – is the clump on the left a dragon flower? And the dark spot on the right the shadow of the crown of a tree outside the frame? Maybe a cloud? And the trees on the horizon – what kind of trees are they? The shaggy dog next to the soldier’s leg is dangerously close to the woman’s face, so the gaze quickly moves upwards: buttons of the uniform, the buckle of a belt, and in his left hand? Is that a helmet? A motorcycle helmet? The absurdity of considering such details directs one’s gaze to the other side of the photo (in order to safely avoid the centre of the frame, one has to move one’s gaze upwards, looking away for a moment). On the right: those standing, unimportant details – a comb in the hair, the folds of warm stockings, wrinkled trousers.

Behind the bright coat of the first woman on the right, the eyes find a moment of rest, a safe hiding place, far away from her, far from her gaze – a narrow strip of the frame, where the eyes can rest. Hide behind their backs, far from her, far from those she is looking at. Two white dots – one of them is a speck on the negative, it diverts our attention to the technical process, the print, allows us to withdraw from the frame, escape from the October sun.

## 7.

The face of the girl from the second photo is somewhat easier to tame, it smoothly surrenders to the eyes. It is easier to turn it into paper, a photo that can be soothed with a gaze, calmed. You can look at it, polish the painful bumps, the wounding edges with your eyes, until it becomes smooth, matt, silent. Then you can touch the photo, wrap it in words. Moving – yes; shocking – yes; tearing – yes; terrifying – yes, yes, yes. The context helps – the girl is running towards rescue, towards water, towards the photographer who will save her life. This soothes us, it does not draw us into the frame, does not throw us on the road between the rice fields, into the sticky ash of smoke, into the burnt air, into the high, glassy squeal: ‘Nong qua!’. It does not require

intervention. In a way, it justifies the vulgar comfort of looking at children screaming in pain from the perspective of one's own armchair. The smell of napalm ('Nothing else in the world smells like that – said Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* – I love the smell of napalm in the morning'), the shreds of burnt skin and the scream remain in the frame.

It is a photograph that makes us aware that when we look at a photo it is not only through the eyes of the photographer – we look from inside him, identify with him. And with what he will do in a moment, just after. On 8 June 1972, a girl was running towards Nick Ut. In the photo she is running, over and over again, in the direction of whoever is looking. Uh... – we breathe with relief, following the traces of her bare feet on the asphalt – she is running to an adult who will help, who will behave decently. The soothing order of the world, the movement from suffering to salvation, from fire to water, for a moment we forget that just before Nick Ut pressed the shutter of the camera, someone else pressed the button opening the bombshell.

A different perspective on how to perceive this photograph is presented in a documentary film shot between the two frames by Nick Ut. The film shows running children, exhausted, shocked, as if surprised – in color and movement it looks less dramatic than in a black-and-white photo. After watching the film for the first time, one scene from the few-minutes sequence is particularly memorable, a small gesture by a soldier or a journalist who gives the child some water from a water bottle – the way he holds his hand, the way he supports the girl's shaking chin so that she can take another sip.

This touching, barely noticeable gesture allows us to forget why the children had to run for such a long time, passing by soldiers, passing by the cameraman who ignored them when they were running, waving their hands, helplessly trying to tell him something, cry it out, explain. Or another scene: the cameramen film a woman who can barely stand on her feet, carrying an unconscious child, with shreds of burnt skin peeling off his body. She is moving with obvious effort, they are filming, the child slips from her hands, they are framing, she corrects the weight, they fine-tune the close-up. She is grieving, crying and moves on. They are filming. *I Am a Cameraman* – wrote Douglas Dunn:

They suffer, and I catch only the surface.  
The rest is inexpressible, beyond

What can be recorded. You can't be them.  
If they'd talk to you, you might guess  
What pain is like though they might spit on you.

And then:

Truth is known only to its victims.  
All else is photographs – a documentary.

Christopher Isherwood, in his essay *A Berlin Diary*, to which, as Piotr Sommer notes, Dunn's poem refers, wrote a well-known sentence: 'I am a camera with its shutters open, quite passive, recording, not thinking' (Isherwood 1972: 11). Dunn's poem also corresponds to W.H. Auden's poem *I Am Not a Camera*:

Instructive it may be to peer through lenses:  
each time we do, though, we should apologize  
to the remote or the small for intruding  
upon their quiddities.

And then:

Flash-backs falsify the Past:  
they forget  
the remembering Present.

Who was the woman carrying the inert child? What was her name? What story did she leave behind, behind the curtain of smoke that divided her life, her time 'before' and 'after'? For the viewer, she is only a flash, a figure of pure despair. Chocking disbelief that what is hanging in shreds from the child's legs are not torn tights, but his skin.

8.

'Even if the photographed person is completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory – or, indeed, precisely because of this – that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten' – wrote Giorgio Agamben (2007: 25).

The first photograph – it does not make things easier, it does not slow down, it does not get silenced. One does not even have to look at it anymore – it is there, it grows into the eyes, it lives under the eyelids like a map of grey

spots. One does not even have to remember it anymore – it is still there, just like the rhythm of a poem when we forget the lyrics.

The unwanted, uninvited memory of the first photo is like an optical successor image – only that the real afterimage is a world in complementary, reversed colors. So maybe this is a photographic afterimage – a negative one instead of positive? No, it is rather a picture that reverses meaning. We tend to remember those fragments which are less loaded with meaning: we see, at the bottom of the eye, with photographic accuracy, a clump of thistles, single mulleins, the contour of a group of people, the outlines of trees, the white hand of one of the women, the dog's black nose. We could draw them 'with our eyelids closed', describe them from memory, hoping that transcribed, translated into human language we will finally be able to bring them back to where they should be – the photograph paper. They are willing to retreat – these people, these mulleins, this meadow and the shaggy dog, ready to leave from under our eyelids, our eyes, fly away like a butterfly to a paper meadow.

The centre of the frame, the woman, her gesture, her face is a completely different picture: frayed, inconsistent, sometimes transparent. The least pronounced, but the most stubborn, rooted, not eager to negotiate.

So we return to the photo. What for? So that we can get used to it? Name it? Make her go away? So that we are able to look at the photo without wanting to escape, without wandering around the meadow behind the back of the remaining seven, without pretending that the centre of the frame is empty?

To get used to her proximity, examine the narrow frame around her. A dent in the texture of the meadow, the background behind her head, the pattern on the skirt of the woman standing behind her. Closer: several layers of clothing, a rolled up sleeve. Still closer: a scarf on her head, a strand of hair. Still closer: a scratch on her cheek, a drawing of bent eyebrows, her lips as if she could not swallow the air. And here we go: her eyes, her eyes, her gaze.

'It is not possible to even *imagine* one's death. It seems unreal. It is the most unreal thing' – wrote Elias Canetti (2007: 67).

Her gaze: she believes in death.

Her faith: it is contagious.

**9.**

Under the October sun, in this photograph, death is not unreal. Under this sun, death is nothing new. Nothing new for reason, but not for – everyone knows, nobody believes. She seems to believe. This fraction of a second, a snapshot of a photograph, captured the gaze that is looking at death. It is her death, her own personal death, death for her alone – death of her face, her scratched cheek, the strand of hair falling from under her headscarf, death of her lips, her left hand touching the ground, sliding underground. Death, in defiance of which she is collecting all the bits and pieces of life falling apart, the effort of a weak body, the courage of a stubborn gaze. Her own death is the reality, the reality of this photograph.

**10.**

From the perspective of the viewer, the shocking unreality of this photo strikes from beyond the frame, from what Barthes describes as the ‘hidden field’. The photographer seems the most unreal element in this picture. Who was this German soldier? An amateur with a camera? A professional in uniform? This picture differs from other German photographs taken after the invasion of the East – images of dead horses, field kitchens, derailed trains. This carefully composed frame, with the texture of a lush meadow is not merely a snapshot documenting the achievements of the German army. Why did he photograph her, this woman slipping onto the grass? Did her gesture seem moving to him? Funny? Did he want to leave a trace of her? To see her through the lens, so that at least for a moment it was not real? What was he aware of and what did he not know? Who pressed the shutter? An amused sadist who later put the camera down and reached for the gun? Someone who was not able to do anything for her, so this was all he could do? Whatever his intentions, he did a lot – he left her face, her image, the last one, perhaps the only one.

He left two traces of himself (what happened to him, did he survive the war?). One is the signature on the back of the photo: ‘Jews just before the execution’. The cold horror of this sentence is shocking, the incomprehensible nonchalance of the phrase ‘just before’. The second trace is his gaze, this spot – the place where he was standing, in the tall grass, under the October sun. The place from which he looked at the scene, at her, at them, at their yellow patches, at the trees on the horizon. The tramped grass

in the spot where he stood when it was ‘all over’. The place from which he took the picture and from which we look at it today – the trampled grass, at the level of his eyes. Perhaps this is also the reason why it is so difficult to look at this photograph, at the woman. The reason why the gaze falters, withers, dies. Standing in the photographer’s place, in the grass, in the thymus and snapdragon, we look at the scene from the level of his eyes, that precisely adjusted the focus through the camera’s viewfinder and then repeated this gesture – setting the rear sight and the bead on the barrel of the gun.

This is not a photo you can experiment with, that you can unpack, break down into elements, open to imagination. It needs to be gently touched, described with careful words, if any can be found. But perhaps the perception of the photo would change if the history of these eight people, her history, had a different ending? If there was no signature, if not for the incomprehensible ‘just before’?

## 11.

Meanwhile, a few frames later: the meadow – opened, closed. Some confusion on the surface, regrouping in the clumps of grass. The gaps and crevices are quickly covered by wheatgrass – fearless and ubiquitous, it instantly replenishes the open spaces and intertwines the torn roots. Immediately afterwards, the mulleins – regain their torn abutments, the snapdragons – entrench in their former positions, the broken thistle grows into the ground, the thyme crawls on top.

The day after: the sun is shining at the same angle.

The day after: *A Clear Day and No Memories* by Wallace Stevens:

Today the air is clear of everything.  
 It has no knowledge except of nothingness  
 And it flows over us without meanings,  
 As if none of us had ever been here before  
 And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,  
 This invisible activity, this sense.



## 12.

‘Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention. (...) The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene’ – as Susan Sontag (2005: 8) observes.

If we were to reformulate Sontag’s observation, we would note that photography is an act of non-intervention in another sense – in the simplest sense, the most moving experience of a viewer looking at a photograph. You cannot put your hand into the frame, you cannot, like Gulliver, grab the eight people, together with their shaggy dog, and take them away ‘just before’.

Looking at a photograph is a mixture of illusions. The perspective of the photographer – his ‘here’ and ‘not-here’, being inside the situation and at the same time outside – leaves a margin of freedom, a margin of choice. You can do a lot, you can do less, you can do even less, or you can do nothing. The perspective of a viewer looking at a picture is voiceless – we are not able to do anything, we do not have a choice.

Film has no words of its own.  
It is a silent waste of things happening.  
Without us, when it is too late to help

– wrote Douglas Dunn (*I Am a Cameraman*). To be condemned to look, to lend a place in memory. The perspective of an observer from behind a thick window, the perspective of a diver descending into the strange underwater world in a safe suit is always the fate of the viewer; sometimes: the choice of a photographer.

## 13.

Looking at the photos of people photographed at the last moment, ‘just before’, ‘just after’, on the borderline – is like accompanying someone in dying. But real death, someone else’s death, finally ends, and then you have to go out, breathe in the living air, glue your memory together, live. The photographic ‘just before’ stretches over years, over the gazes, becomes and continues, it never ends as long as there is the photograph. It is not a process, it is not an experience, it is a repetition of one event, a stoppage in time, an incomprehensible paradox, a bad dream.

Susan Sontag (2005: 15) writes about the photographs from Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, which she saw as a 12-year old girl: ‘They were only

photographs – of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying’. And further on: ‘Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw these photographs (...) and after’.

#### 14.

Something is still crying – and it does not want to stop. The images in the photographs – they do not want to leave.

It is not *really* happening, that is obvious. It is *not happening* at all – again, that is obvious. But memory is not logical, there are frames that cannot be removed from behind our eyelids, even though (or maybe because) it is so difficult to look at them. There are photographs which, contrary to the logic of events (it was a long time ago, it has already happened), contrary to logic in general (it is just a photo, it is only paper), demand something, want something.

Agamben (2007: 27) wrote about ‘the exigency that animates every photograph and grasps the real that is always in process of being lost, in order to render it possible once again’.

Photographs that do not want to leave: everyone has their own private set of frames, their own slideshow – behind closed eyes.

What does Regina Fisz’s photo want? How can we look at it? Among the other photographs presenting the victims of the Kielce pogrom, among the images of tangled hands and legs, lashed stomachs, bruised faces – this photo, which in a sense is the least drastic, hurts the most.

A young woman murdered together with her several weeks old son, buried, exhumed after a few days. She is lying on the floor, on black and white chessboard tiles. Her hands are lying on her chest, her eyes are closed, her black hair is loosened, a delicate face, with no signs of death. Regina Fisz is asleep. A baby is cuddled up on her stomach. If you look at the photo from a different angle, turn the frame vertical, Regina’s body, her frozen gestures, folds of fabric that look as if they had been carefully draped – all this reminds us of one of the paintings of Madonna. Regina Fisz – you cannot look at the picture without hearing the following words: ‘I came up to the chauffeur

and told him that we had some Jews and we wanted to take them out and kill them. The chauffeur agreed, but demanded payment of a thousand zlotys, so I said: »That’s ok« (Gross: 2008: 162).

What does the photograph of little Anne Frank want? It is not scary, not cruel, not ‘just before’, not even a war picture from 1941, but a picture taken with her sister, Margot. An ordinary childhood photo: ‘Anne, Margot and Kathi, the maid’ from 1929. It is impossible to look at it without thinking about the mass graves in Bergen-Belsen, where the bodies of Anna and Margot were thrown, together with the other victims of the typhus epidemic, a month before the liberation of the camp. How can we look at her photographs, at a twenty-second documentary film, the only one in which we can see her face if only for a short moment, without thinking about the words 15-year-old Anne wrote in her diary ten days before her arrest: ‘It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart’ (Frank 2001: 333).

What do the photographs from Auschwitz, described by Georges Didi-Hubermann, want? The four photographs taken by Alex, a Hungarian Jew whose surname remains unknown. Chaotic, not framed, taken with a camera smuggled into the camp in a double bottom of a soup pot, on a piece of film that was later taken outside in a tube of toothpaste.

These photos: two taken from inside the gas chamber, just after it has been emptied, and two made with a camera hidden in the hand or underneath the clothes. The first two: burning of the corpses, and this sentence: ‘Once the pits had been emptied and the ashes taken to the ash depot, they were piled up in man-high heaps’ (Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, quoted after: Didi-Huberman 2008: 9). Two more: naked women just before entering the gas chamber, and the sentence: ‘The most horrendous moment was the opening of the gas chamber, that unbearable vision: people, pressed like basalt, compact blocks of stone’ (Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, quoted after: Didi-Huberman 2008: 39). What do these four photographs want, when it is impossible to even cry over them, to say anything, when the only thing we feel is cold bewilderment, the absurd triviality – Is that where the trees grew? Was it summer? Is that possible?

What does Didi-Huberman (2008: 3) want when he writes:

In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves. We must attempt to imagine the hell that Auschwitz was in the summer of 1944. Let not invoke the unimaginable. Let us not shelter ourselves by saying that we cannot, that we could not by any means, imagine it to the very end. We *are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable. It is a response that we must offer, as a debt to the words and images that certain prisoners snatched, for us, from the harrowing Real of their experience. So let us not invoke the unimaginable. How harder was it for the prisoners to rip from the camps those few shreds of which now we are trustees, charged with sustaining them simply by looking at them.

Is that what the photographs want? Is that what Agamben means when he writes: ‘this person, this face demands a name’? You have to *imagine* – take *their* place? Be *there*? On the meadow near Kiev? In the smoke on the highway to Cambodia? On the chessboard floor at the Kielce police station? In Frankfurt, on the terrace of the Frank family house, look into the eyes of the little girls? In Auschwitz? Take off your clothes before entering the gas chamber? Stand above a burning pit in which the corpses are glowing, the hair is melting, the skin is cracking? Take on their names for a moment? Lend them your own? Imagine something against which the entire body, all the senses are defending themselves?

‘We *are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable’.

To close one’s eyes, have no imagination.

## 15.

‘Photographs testify to all those lost names, like a Book of Life that the new angel of the apocalypse – the angel of photography – holds in his hands at the end of all days, that is, every day’ – wrote Agamben (2007: 27).

Who is this? – we ask when looking at old photographs.

‘Whose face is this’ – wrote Jerzy Ficowski in a poem *Dedykacja* [*Dedication*]:

We need to introduce ourselves  
to these times as quickly as possible  
and let it be known  
by what names  
we had known each other.

Photographs signed and not signed – this distinction is very important in private photography, family tradition, in merging the collective memory. The ritual of signing photographs is a gesture of transferring the deposit of memory, fulfilling an obligation towards the deceased. In her book *Z pamięci* [*From Memory*], Maria Iwaszkiewicz (2005: 257) writes about this ritual, recalling her family album: ‘In the last years before his death, Father wrote the names of the people he photographed. I would not be able to say who was on them, because those people lived at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century’.

According to Agamben’s (2007: 35) requirement to keep the distant past alive (‘that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten’), name is a metaphor, something that lasts longer than the body. The name is memory, it is marked with the gaze that it creates, which – as Agamben wrote – restores the validity of reality plunging into non-existence.

Does it matter what was the name of the woman in the first photo? It is important – from the point of view of personal, private memory. Very important – from the perspective of the Jewish tradition, in which preserving and remembering the name of the deceased is a religious imperative. But the requirement of memory, which Agamben writes about, has nothing to do with the name of the woman in the first photo. Which name is it out of the one and a half million Jews murdered in Ukraine during the Second World War? Which name is it from among the names of those buried in two thousand mass graves? What was her name? Chaja, Estera, Gołda? Rojza, Małka, Sara?

Would knowing her name make the memory of her easier, more complete? Is the feeling of commitment to her, to her gaze, stronger, more personal, precisely because she is deprived of everything, deprived of her name, defenseless?

Agamben mentions the ‘certainly pretentious’ dedication that Edgar Aubert wrote on the back of his photograph given to Proust. The dedication is a quotation from Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sonnet *A Superscription*: ‘Look at my face: my name is Might Have Been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell’ (quoted after: Agamben 2007: 27).

The names of all the anonymous.

## 16.

The name of the dead man. His face, his story, his memory.

‘So long as I do not know his name perhaps I may still forget him, time will obliterate it, this picture. But his name, it is a nail that will be hammered into me and never come out again. It has the power to recall this forever, it will always come back and stand before me’ – says Paul, the hero of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque (1975: 101), when he hesitates over the body of a French soldier whether to look into his documents, wonders whether he wants to know his name. Sent on a night patrol, Paul is stuck in a bomb crater, unable to get out because of the thick fire of the bullets. When another soldier slips into the hollow of the crater, Paul without hesitation stabs him with a knife. He is then forced to accompany the dying man. From a reflex: ‘I want to stop his mouth, stuff it with earth, stab him again’ (ibid.: 97), to the look in his eyes: ‘the eyes cry out, yell, all the life is gathered together in them for one tremendous effort to flee, gathered together there in a dreadful terror of death, of me’ (ibid.: 98). From a readiness to throw himself at the wounded man knife in hand ‘if he stirs’, to giving him water from the bottom of the crater and dressing him with bandages. Paul looks at the process of dying, which is his doing, he is the perpetrator. ‘This is the first time I have killed with my hands, whom I can see close at hand, whose death is my doing’ (ibid.: 99). When the wounded man dies, Paul reaches for his military pocket book – he reaches out and then hesitates. The dead man’s wallet slips out of his hands, letters and photographs fall out: ‘There are portraits of a woman and a little girl, small amateur photographs taken against an ivy-clad wall’ (ibid.: 101). Paul tries to save himself by thinking about sending money to the widow and the child: ‘So I open the book and read slowly: Gerard Duval, composer. With the dead man’s pencil I write the address on an envelope, then swiftly thrust everything back into his tunic. I have killed the printer, Gerard Duval. I must be a printer, I think confusedly, be a printer, printer’ (ibid.).

Paul plays a game with memory, on the verge of risk – should he know his name? Enter deeper into the circle that already connects and will always connect them? Or withdraw, walk past the dead man on tiptoes? If he does not learn it now, he will never know.

‘This dead man is bound up with my life, therefore I must do everything, promise everything in order to save myself’ (ibid.). The dead man is a threat.

In the ambivalence of Paul’s feelings, in the way he speaks of the French soldier, one can hear the distant echo of the prohibitions and orders related to the taboo associated with the dead. As Freud (2001: 63) observed: ‘One of the most puzzling, but at the same time instructive, usages in connection with mourning is the prohibition against uttering the name of the dead person. [It seems that saying the name is like a spell that would make the deceased come back]<sup>4</sup>. Paul wants it and does not want it at the same time. Or maybe he wants the name to forget it? To put Gerard Duval in the album of war memories, to give him a form and a proper measure, so that he does not develop into an amorphous autonomous creation, attacking his memory, depriving it of the possibility of defense.

To give a name, describe, photograph – send it back to the archives.

Maybe Franz Kafka was right when he said that: ‘We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds’? That his stories were ‘a way of shutting my eyes’ (quoted after: Barthes 1982: 53)?

It seems that Paul quickly forgets and consciously registers this process: ‘I think no more of the dead man, he is of no consequence to me now’.

He calms down by saying his *own* name: ‘»No foolishness now, Paul... Quiet, Paul, quiet... then you will be saved, Paul«. When I use my Christian name it works as though someone else spoke to me, it has more power’ (Remarque 1975: 102).

## 17.

Paul also calms himself in a different way:

The dead man might have had thirty more years of life if only I had impressed the way back to our trench more sharply on my memory. If only he had run two yards farther to the left, he might now be sitting in the trench over there and writing a fresh letter to his wife. But I will get no further that way; for that is the fate of all of us: if Kemmerich’s leg had been six inches to the right: if Haie Westhus had bent his back three inches further forward (ibid.: 100).

What is that? Half a meter to the left, two steps to the right? Higher, lower? Closer, further?

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<sup>4</sup> The bracketed fragment is missing in the English translation of the Freud’s work (editor’s note).

People photographed on the borderline, on the edge – with a trace of nightmare on their faces, with a trace of something that eludes words, casual and unimaginable, common and sublime, something like the Under Toad in *The World According to Garp* by John Irving – a threat that comes suddenly, appears in the crevice between fragile stability and the unpredictable, the ‘treacherous whirlwind’, the ‘Under Toad’ for little Walt Garp.

Garp tried to imagine it with him. Would it ever surface? Did it ever float? Or was it always down under, slimy and bloated and ever-watchful for ankles its coated tongue could snare? The vile Under Toad. (...) Long after the monster was clarified for Walt (‘Undertow, dummy, not Under Toad!’ Duncan had howled), Garp and Helen evoked the beast as a way of referring to their own sense of danger (Irving 1978: 337).

After little Walt’s death, Duncan reminded Helen and Garp how the boy had asked whether the Under Toad was green or brown. ‘Both Garp and Duncan laughed. But it was neither green nor brown, Garp thought. It was me. It was Helen. It was the color of bad weather. It was the size of an automobile’ (ibid.).

The Under Toad, Benjamin’s hunchbacked dwarf, chance, necessity. Sometimes it has the face of a pilot who mistakenly dropped a bomb with napalm, sometimes the face of a photographer. For Regina Fisz, it had the face of her neighbors, for Anne Frank, the uniform of Grüne Polizei. Gerard Duval met him in a bomb crater. For Franus Kemmerich it had the voice of a buzzing bullet, for Private Tella from *The Red Thin Line* – the whirr of a machine gun. What was it for the woman from the first photo, who was it – we do not even know that about her.

What about the rest of them? And everyone else? How many times did we manage to escape?

Again, Remarque (1975: 8-9):

Often we lay aside the cards and look about us. One of us will say: ‘Well, boys...’ Or ‘It was a near thing that time...’ And for a moment we fall silent. There is in each of us a feeling of constraint. We are all sensible of it; it needs no words to communicate it. It might easily have happened that we should not be sitting here on our boxes today; it came damn near to that. And so



everything is new and brave, red poppies and good food, cigarettes and summer breeze.

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## Summary

This paper makes an attempt to reflect on the relation between photography and death – it consists issues connected to the perception of photos representing people in extreme situations, between life and death. It raises

the problem of the role and the status of the photographer – an observer and witness of the human suffering. The article also addresses issues related to ethical contexts of the photojournalist's work (photography versus intervention) and to ethical requirements of keeping the memory of those that were captured in terminal situations as well as to ethical dilemmas of viewers positioned as witnesses.

**Keywords:** photography, death, gaze, Holocaust, Kim Phuc, intervention, witness, memory

## REPLACING THE BODY WITH A PAINTING. TRYING TO CATCH THE PATH OF THINGS FROM MATTER TO MEMORY

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### THE SORROWFULNESS OF THINGS

For seven years now, I have studied the relationship between people and things. I have documented several hundred stories of human-thing relations. I have had a number of meetings with people of different ages, representing different backgrounds and world views<sup>1</sup>. In this way, an archive was created containing photographs of things and audio recordings of conversations and monologues reporting on the relationships between owners and their things, which I call:

- anthropomorphized and personified – including toys, artifacts and ecofacts which have not been made or meant to serve as toys but have become them according to the intention of the owner, for example a pestle-like club for mixing cake batter becomes a doll during the war, a rock is a friend and confidant of a lonely person;
- sentimental – souvenirs, fetishes, artifacts and ecofacts evoking associations with important moments in the life of the owner;

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<sup>1</sup> My interlocutors included, among others, residents of retirement homes, residents of day homes for the mentally handicapped, artists (mainly writers, translators, plastic artists), housewives, representatives of many professions: accountants, foresters, kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, theatre instructors, salesmen, etc.

- those that make the dead present – for example a typewriter, a cane and a radio make someone’s father present, contact with specific objects gives a sense of contact with those who are absent;
- documenting the passage of time, events, emotional states;
- remembered – no longer existing as matter, but only as its images in memory;
- still existing but doomed to destruction, to be destroyed intentionally by the owners.

What touches me, hurts me, what is interesting in the thing and its relationship with the human? I can assume that each thing has a certain human dimension in it because of its presence in the human world. This means that the world of things is a *theatrum* which reflects the world of what is human. I am interested in what is human – that is what I want to do in my work. However, I choose the thing to be the protagonist of my works – rooted in the documentary. Why would I do that? Because I consider the sense of tragedy caused by the images of things to be equally – if not more – moving than that manifested directly by human fate and the mortal body. The tragedy of the thing seems to be that it extends someone’s or something’s life by just a few steps. A thing that is experienced by its owner becomes their representative, but also each thing that perpetuates the past eventually dies. But before the matter is destroyed and disintegrated, it remembers, symbolizes, makes present. Speaking about the spiritual through the material, about the living through the dead, treating the thing as a protagonist more often visible in the matter of the work than the human themselves – as an equal protagonist – I can talk about it without the pathos resulting from the directness of the representations.

## **HUMAN-THING RELATIONS EXAMPLES FROM THE ARCHIVE**

Thirty years ago, a wooden bead was a dog, walked on a thread-leash, groomed with a tooth brush, bathed and fed regularly. The bead’s name is Sonia. I use the word ‘is’ instead of ‘was’, because the owner, who was allergic to fur and for whom the bead took the place of a dog when she was a child, still calls it that. Today the bead is no longer ‘animalized’, but is still treated with attention, as evidenced by the way it is stored – in a decorative box with a soft lining.



Fig. 1. Bracelet-fork. Archive documenting human relations (photography by the author)

The bracelet used to be a fork, which in turn used to be a comb, which also served as a tool for pulling out noodles cooked in a kettle. World War II generated absurd conglomerates of applications of things: ‘We combed our hair with a fork and cooked noodles in a kettle’, mentions the first owner of the fork. ‘If one of us – there were four of us – didn’t comb her hair in time, she had to wait until another one pulled all the pasta out of the kettle with our comb. When the kettle stopped being a noodle pot, that’s when you just water on the tea<sup>2</sup>. The bracelet made from a fork belongs to the woman’s granddaughter today.

Soaps belonging to the translator of theatre plays take part in a ritual dictated by her obsessive-compulsive disorder. Each of the forty-two soaps is used to wash only one of the forty-two parts into which the translator symbolically divides her body. There are soaps used only on Tuesdays, only on Thursdays, only on Saturdays. The fact that a bar of soap belongs to a specific day of the week determines its taste: some taste like Sunday, others like Wednesday. Being assigned to specific days of the week can also determine the constantly changing shape of soaps. The translator’s relationship with soap mixes disease with poetry.

Dried, used tea bags on which notes are made about dates, times of day and events adjacent to the tea drinking are a kind of a diary. Used tea bags,

<sup>2</sup> The quote comes from the statement by the granddaughter of the first owner of the fork.



Fig. 2. On the left: tea bags-notebooks. On the right: a fragment of the work *People with Whom I Drank Tea* (own technique) (photography by the author)

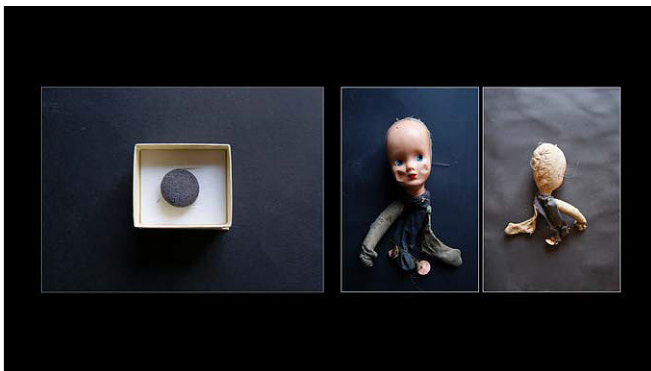


Fig. 3. The button from a dead mother's coat. A doll hugged in a tomb. Archive documenting human-thing relations (photography by the author)

emptied of the old tea leaves and filled with photos of people with whom one drank tea, become an aesthetic document of meetings.

The navy-blue button belongs to a ninety-six-year-old woman. When she was nine years old, she turned it in her fingers at her mother's funeral. The woman claims that touching the button ripped from her late mother's coat helped her to survive difficult moments, not just those associated with the death of a loved one. A similar supportive function was served by a doll hugged by a girl who, together with her sisters and mother, waited out

a bombardment during World War II in one of the tombs of the Kielce cemetery.

The empty cabbage roll jar has imprisoned the painter's 'demon' for twelve years now. The photograph placed in the jar shows the artist's face from the period when she was 'possessed', i.e. she led an intense life with an unbearable emotional amplitude. Closing the image in a jar was then a symbolic end of a certain stage, a sign of stabilization. Today, when the painter needs stimulation, nourishment for her work, an emotional eruption, she lightly unscrews the lid of the jar. The jar 'with the demon' can be called an inspirational force regulator.

## THINGS DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION

In my research, on which my artistic works are based, I pay special attention to things that end up as matter and begin to live as memory, thus moving from massive matter to ephemeral image. This group includes:

- toys which, despite sentiment, should be disposed of, because it is not appropriate for an adult to have them;
- various things belonging to deceased relatives; these things are destroyed for various reasons, the most common being the desire to be cut off from the pain associated with the passing of a loved one;
- things whose destruction is a symbolic break with the past or liberation from an undesirable relationship.

I've watched the owners part with these things. Regardless of whether these partings were carried out by throwing, burning, or burying in the ground, they usually took place with the participation of emotions, followed by cycles of memories focused around the destroyed things. Reminiscences appeared long after their dematerialization, showing great strength and frequency, regardless of whether the owner looked at the things just before parting with them or rather preferred to remember them as they had seen them before.

Collecting memories of things that no longer exist or were about to cease to exist, I began to search for a method of depicting the path from matter to memory. I was looking for a medium capable of documenting things, proving their existence, shape, texture, color, type of matter they were made of, and at the same time a medium reaching deeper than photography or film recording. This is why I decided to scan a group of things doomed to destruction using X-rays in a computed tomograph scan.

## TOMOGRAPHICS<sup>3</sup> OF THINGS

The tomography scans included various types of old toys and other things connected with the childhood of their owners; things from the dead – their bags, suitcases, shoes, bags with clothes, shelves with trinkets the configurations of which had not been changed in the slightest way when put into the CT scanner; things constituting equipment for old houses and flats (abandoned by the owners for various reasons); things that once belonged to old partners, spouses, friends of the owners.

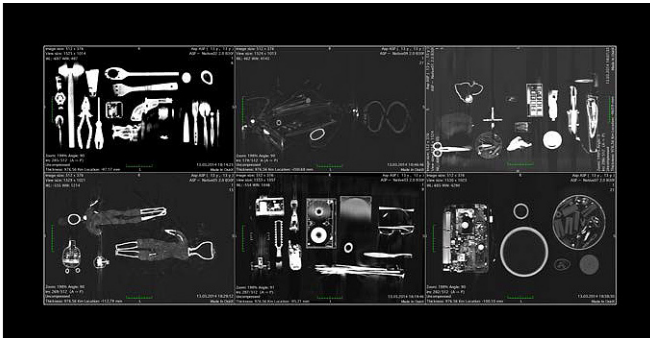


Fig. 4. Things doomed to destruction. Tomograms. Author of the tomographics: Bronka Nowicka



Fig. 5. 3D reconstruction of scanned items. Tomograms. Author of the tomographics: Bronka Nowicka

<sup>3</sup> ‘Tomographics’ – a neologism I created for the purpose of describing the static images acquired through the appropriate processing of CT scans.



For several reasons, the images of things obtained through computed tomography seemed to me adequate for building a narrative about both the existing matter and its memory. Thanks to CT software, a three-dimensional reconstruction of the scanned object can be obtained from every matrix scan of matter, both organic and inorganic. These images speak not only to the appearance of things, but also to the reality of their existence, confirmed by examination with a medical device. Thanks to the CT scanner, it is possible to precisely determine all sizes of the examined object, and also – on the basis of the characteristics of the obtained image – to distinguish the types of matter which make up the object: plastic, wood, metal, paper, etc.

What was important to me was that an image of a thing generated by a CT scanner never loses its documentary value. Documentation, a reference to real life, seems to me to be particularly important when the resulting artistic works concern the human condition.

The X-rays penetrate through matter. The penetration capabilities of the device make it possible to stratify every image of matter obtained by means of the device. Thanks to the possibility of stripping the image of successive layers, I could build associations connected with the degradation of memories, the process of forgetting.

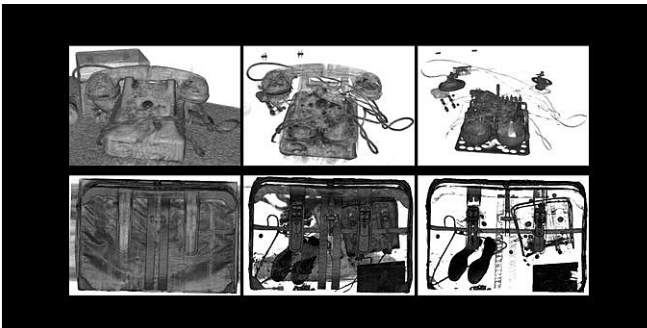
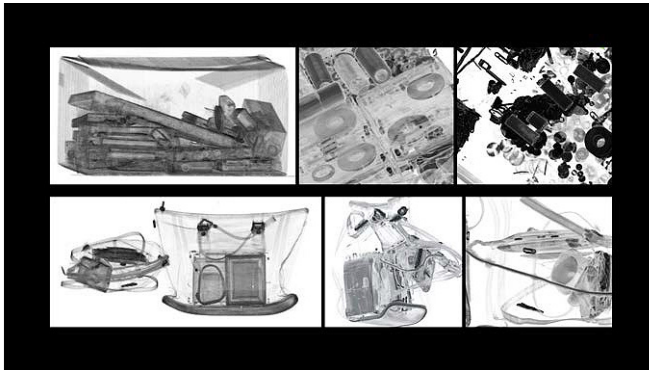


Fig. 6. Destruction of matter. Tomograms. Author of the tomographics: Bronka Nowicka

CT software has a number of functions used to diagnose individual parts of the human body. Using these functions to shape images of inorganic matter, I was able to achieve a variety of image poetics: from those evoking



*Fig. 7. Things doomed to destruction. Tomograms. At the top: a box containing, among others, tape recordings, fairy tale films. Downstairs: a bag belonging to a dead mother. Author of the tomographics: Bronka Nowicka*

associations with multicolored, strongly contrasting pop-art, to delicate, sketchy ones, evoking associations with classical illustration techniques.

The penetration capabilities of the CT scanner also contributed to the expansion of my collection of memories collected from the owners of the scanned items. Each group of artifacts to be destroyed was transported to the radiological laboratory, scanned and returned to the owner, who, as was intended, destroyed them. The characteristic feature was that the owner no longer wanted to have contact with things in their physical dimension, but they did not mind looking at their scans. It was as if the corporeality of things, for example things left behind by the dead, would cause more pain than images of the same things. Thanks to the possibility of visualizing the interior of objects that stored things (packs, bags, drawers, crates, suitcases, etc.), the owners viewed the contents of boxes hiding childhood artifacts or the contents of suitcases belonging to deceased relatives for the first time in many years. The scope of moving memories expanded as a result of contact with the image of things – forgotten and now remembered crayons, tapes with favorite songs, film with fairy tales once projected onto a screen by means of a projector, toiletries found in the bag of a deceased mother who, carrying them with her before her death, had to be aware that she could be hospitalized at any moment.

Thanks to putting the owners in contact with images of destroyed things I documented further memories. The words expressing them are (as an audio recording and graphically transcribed text) one of the layers of my works.

## TOMOVIDEO<sup>4</sup>

The chances for a suggestive depiction of the thing's path from matter to memory became even greater when I discovered the cinematic possibilities of a CT scanner, which in medical diagnosis is used sporadically and for purposes other than narrative building. With a CT scanner and accompanying software, moving images of scanned matter can be obtained: their smooth rotation around any axis, removal and overlapping of individual layers corresponding to the layers of the scanned objects can be recorded. Some of the operations that can be performed within a scan are similar to cinematic staging: invasion of an object by a camera, use of a zoom, movement accompanying an object in motion, horizontal, vertical and transverse panoramas, recording an object with booms or a steadicam.

A moving image captures the transformations that occur over time better than a series of static images. This is because it contains the recorded time, which is one of the components of such an image. A sequence of moving images also seems adequate to convey what is remembered – images in motion or film are the current metaphor for memory. Current, because these metaphors have changed over the centuries: a clay tablet, a wax tablet, a magazine, a phonograph, a photograph, etc. (see: Draaisma 2000)<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to the movement of the image (and inside the image) I was able to create stylistic means inspired by the processes taking place in memory: the repetitiveness of a moving motif while introducing some variables into its area can refer to the principle of evoking memories. Most psychologists who study memory claim that when we remember something, we do not refer to the prototype of the recalled image, but to the last copy that was created by the remembrance.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Tomovideo’ – a neologism I created for the purpose of describing moving images and sequences of images obtained through appropriate processing of scans (by means of a CT computer program).

<sup>5</sup> Douve Draaisma dealt with the issue of the variability of metaphors in the book *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind* (2000).

Remembering something, we create a neural trace, and the next time we seem to remember the same thing, in reality we activate the latest trace. Memories, including the oldest ones, travel in our cerebral tissue as time goes on, but they are always accompanied by new copies. According to this theory, when we think back to the first memory, we make the neurological circuit of our memory close in a peculiar way – for a moment, the oldest one becomes the newest, the first becomes the last (Draaisma 2010: VIII-IX).

So if someone has thought 200 times about a childhood doll, their next memory of this toy will be the 201<sup>st</sup> copy of the originally recorded image, which with each memory has undergone some kind of modification, depending, for example, on the emotional state in which the reminiscent person was at the time of remembering.

Having a moving image with a poetics evoking associations with the image of memory, the act of remembering, and what is remembered, I was able to introduce into the tomovideo monologues of the owners who remembered their things in a way based on a logical basis.

The use of language as a principle organizing the sequence of images corresponds to scientific facts confirming the coincidence between language and memory. When a person (a child) becomes a linguistic being, memories begin to take on a different character, closely related to the inner monologue and verbal communication. Memories are no longer just images, they begin to take the form of scenes and episodes (the terminology related to the psychology of memory is identical to the nomenclature used in the field of cinematography) (see: Draaisma 2015).

## **THE IMAGE OF A THING REVERSES TIME**

Thanks to my research and my interest in computed tomography, I was able to pass between matter and its image in memory in the opposite direction than the one discussed above. For my first CT session I brought my old toy – a teddy bear. X-rays showed sand in its ear. This sand could only come from two places – the yard of my grandparents' house or the yard of my parents' house.

I thought: These houses are gone. And most of the people who lived in them aren't there either. Those sands are gone, but in the ear of my 30-year-old teddy bear, there are grains from one of them. Getting them back is



Fig. 8. At the top: a teddy bear with sand in its ears (photographed by the author). At the bottom: the author with the teddy bear; household sandboxes (photography from family collections)

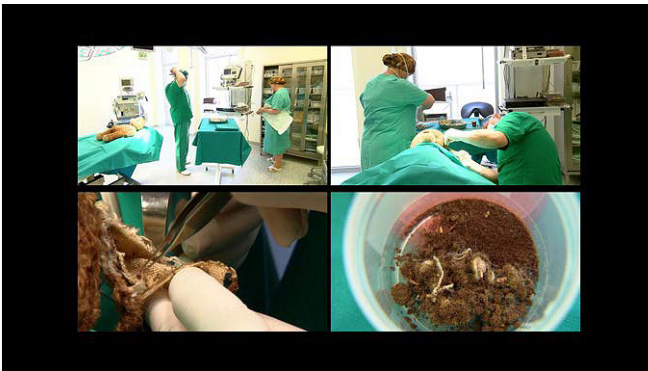


Fig. 9. Teddy bear operation. Frames from the video I Found My Sand (photography by the author)

like going back in time. I had surgery performed on the teddy bear by a professional plastic surgeon. The doctor extracted solidified dust from the teddy bear's ear, wood – probably coming from a sharpened crayon – and a dozen or so grains of sand. In this way, what existed only in memory was again manifested in the form of matter.

Learning about the possibilities of the CT scanner, having the ability to prepare tomograms independently thanks to mastering the specialized medical software, looking for inspiration in the field of memory psychology

and neurology, I discovered a new medium in the field of video art<sup>6</sup> and poetics adequate to narrating about the transition from material to memory.

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### **Summary**

I study the relations between people and things: *sentimental, embodying the dead, kept in mind* – nonexistent as matter, merely as its image; *still existent*, but condemned to annihilation by their owners. In my studies, which serve as a basis for my videos, I pay particular attention to the last category of things. I attempt to illustrate their way from mater to reminiscence. In order to do that, I use a CT scanner, X-rays.

CT allows me to obtain moving images of the scanned matter that will soon undergo destruction. The operations that are possible to perform within the scan resemble film production techniques: tracking in towards an object, using the zoom, panning. Moving images perfectly illustrate transformation processes that take place in time because they contain the captured time. It's their component. Images in motion are appropriate for expressing *the remembered* – the film is one of the current metaphors of memory.

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<sup>6</sup> The following artists, among others, use X-rays in the area of art: Nick Veasey – British photographer, who X-rayed over four thousand objects, including a car, a bus, a Boeing 777 (currently the largest X-rayed object); Satre Stuelke – an American, who X-rays everyday objects and organic matter with a CT scanner: a toaster, a razor, a chair, a lamp, a hamburger, a fast food dinner set, etc. In Poland, Grzegorz Banaszkiwicz uses this method of imaging in his stereoscopic works. None of the above artists, however, uses moving images obtained with a CT scan to build complex narratives of a cinematic nature. Because of this fact, I feel entitled to say: 'I have discovered a new medium in video art'.

I can obtain 3D reconstructions of the X-rayed item from the master scan. The images testify not only to the appearance of things, but also to the authenticity of their existence proved by a test with a medical device. They are the thing's ID.

X-rays pass through matter. Their penetrating abilities enable each CT image to be stratified. By removing the layers, I form associations connected with memory: the deterioration of recollections, the process of forgetting.

A CT scanner has numerous functions applied for diagnosing particular body parts. By using these functions to shape images of inorganic matter, I can obtain various poetics: from ones having associations with hyperrealistic drawings to ephemeral ones, reminding the fleeting, thus *the recollected* too.

I edit the tomograms myself – I have mastered the ability to operate a CT scanner. In this way I have discovered a new medium in the area of video art, and a poetics that is appropriate for spinning a narrative about going from the material to the recollected.

**Keywords:** X-rays, 3D reconstructions, reminiscence, memory, things, matter





## I PAINT THE BUG RIVER

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*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 2009, oil on canvas, 150×200 cm*

Bug – a natural phenomenon, an element of flowing water, the natural boundary of the division of Earth in the physical, ethnic, cultural, political and national terms. The flow of the river is a symbol of change, passing of time, human existence and constant renewal. It has been an important communication route for centuries, bearing in mind the difficult land conditions. Hence, the banks of the river reveal various remnants of the presence of men who settled there, built settlements, temporary camps



*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 2015, oil on canvas, 100×120 cm*

while wandering along the river. The banks reveal archaeological finds from the most distant cultures.

The Bug River is a place of intermingling between the East and the West, and also between different religious denominations. The area around the river forms a unique cultural crossroad. This powerful element of water, uncontrollable, dramatic and peaceful at the same time, can be presented in art in a romantic, lyrical, symbolic and metaphysical way...

The water flowing in the Bug River has its unique and characteristic light and color, usually green-brown, different in different seasons of the year: intense in late autumn or in the evening – when it becomes almost ideally black. Even if the water is calm, the surface is always slightly moving, which means continuous movement. This delicate movement, vagueness, even blurring, of the forms reflected in the water forms a dreamlike reality, which in combination with the lush and vibrating structure of the bank vegetation provides excellent painting pretexts. The blurred surface contains mysterious dark ‘braids’ of reflections of various shapes, on the edges of which, especially the sharp ones, one can notice unusual emanations



*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 2015, oil on canvas, 100×140 cm*

of highly intensive light and unbelievable, delicate traces of dispersion of light. The unreal water structure is always vertical. It is an important inspiration for a painter working in oil technique – to repeat the rhythm of the water, but completely anew, with the suitable arrangement of paint on canvas, making use of its consistency, thickness, and texture. The oil technique is probably the only one that allows to achieve the effect of flowing water. But the vertical structure of the painted water surface is only part of the final result. The most important thing is to create an illusion or an impression of movement of water on the painted canvas. After many years of attempts, it turned out that this ‘flow’ is achieved by the opposite movement, i.e. a horizontal wrinkle on the water, sometimes just one line – a trace of disturbance of the water flow caused by an invisible obstacle, a branch.

The flowing vertical lines of soft structures – from deep, vast blackness to bright streaks of light, crossed by a horizontal line – create the image of flowing water in a painting, its painterly essence. The position of this line must be always fresh, firm, and one-off, without repetitions, the only one that is accurate, in the most suitable place within the composition, with one stroke of a flat brush. This is the most difficult moment when painting the flow of water because it is a combination of many factors. Apart from the physical predispositions of the painter’s hand, the perfect location and experience, it also requires concentration and focus. This is where



*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 2015, oil on canvas, 170×110 cm*

two opposing structures meet: vertical and horizontal. If the horizontal line is painted in the wrong place, even slightly, almost the entire surface of the painting needs to be painted from the beginning. This is sometimes achieved by oil painting technique, through painting for a longer period of time 'wet in wet'.

These actions are repeated many times until the right effect is achieved; sometimes they fail. Ultimately, when painting the flow of the Bug River, the point is to find the most concise, simple expression that would mean as much as possible, be a universal value, and a unique interpretation of the vision of nature. Inspirations from other authors such as masters of Chinese watercolor, masters of sign writing and the aura of Japanese woodcuts are also important.

I have known and carried the Bug River in me since I was a child. I have been trying to paint it for over twenty years. I started scrupulously, copying the view: the river meanders, the water, the reflections of thick bushes. This section of the river is the border between Poland and Belarus, the edge of the European Union and the Schengen area, and that is why, fortunately,



*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 1998, oil on canvas, 80×100 cm*

it is still wild and uncontrollable. I often leave my riverside studio and visit my 'Styx', at any time of the year, any time of the day, often at dawn or dusk, and that is when I like it most – when it is calm, swollen with mystery, serious, dangerous, timeless. The river probably does not know about my presence; it is indifferent to me; it is ruthless in its existence, and it is exactly the unbridledness that attracts me the most.

The river as flowing water, a natural phenomenon, performs many functions. Since ancient times, Bug, like many other rivers in the world, such as Ganges, Nile or Jordan, is also a symbolic, magical place, a space of religious worship. Near my studio in the village of Sławatycze, every year, on January 19<sup>th</sup>, a ceremonial blessing of the river, or the holiday of Jordan, *agiasma* or *wodooswiaszczenie* takes place. A colourful procession starts at the Orthodox church and moves towards the river, which at this time of the year is covered with thick ice. There is a cross-shaped ice hole cut in the ice, and the dark, living water resembles a negative. The two-metre ice cross is then placed in the central position. There is also an ice altar next to it. Above the ice hole in the shape of a cross, the ritual of the blessing of the water takes place, which is an extremely solemn ceremony and consists



*Stanisław Baj, Rzeka Bug [Bug River], 2015, oil on canvas, 170×110 cm*

of several symbolic elements: first a prayer, then the cross is immersed in the water three times, and the holy drops from the cross fall into the vessels; the priest, then, releases white pigeons as a sign of the Holy Spirit, the faithful wash their hands and faces in the ice-cold river water. The ice cross stands for days or even weeks, until the thaw and the ice floe on the river is set in motion. It happens that the cross, in a solid form, flows on the ice floe through the meanders of the River Bug.



*The author during work on the Bug River, 2013 (photo: Marek Szymański)*

## Summary

This draft is a record of the aesthetic and creative experiences associated with the Bug River. The author, who is a painter himself, proves that the oil technique is unique in terms of the possibility of achieving the effect of flowing water. In the faint panes of the river, you can see unusual emanations of light and improbable, delicate traces of distraction of light. This unreal water structure of the Bug River is always vertical. For an oil painter, it is an important inspiration to reflect that rhythm of water in a suitable pattern of canvas paint, using its consistency, thickness, and texture.

**Keywords:** Bug River, oil painting, aquatic motifs, aesthetic experience